

Victim or Criminal? News Representations of Black Men as Victims of Gun Violence in Toronto

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Abstract

Sixty-seven percent of gun violence victims in Toronto between 2016 and 2020 were Black men. Yet, local media coverage of gun crime has tended to downplay their victimhood. Instead, these media representations have ranged from emphasizing the victim's criminal associations to reducing Black men who succumb to gun violence to a statistic. How do Toronto news outlets represent Black men as victims of gun violence? What representational tactics do they use? What role does race play in the representation of victimhood? To examine how Black male victims of gun violence are represented in Toronto news media, I conducted both quantitative and qualitative analyses of crime stories with Black male victims over a four-year period (2016-2020). For these analyses, I selected the *Toronto Star*, *The Toronto Sun*, and *CP24* as three major news outlets in Toronto. Drawing on insights from Critical Race Theory and victimology, this paper argues that the devaluation and dehumanization of Black male victims in Toronto news coverage can contribute to broader structural inequalities that produce and perpetuate anti-Black racism and classism. Such media coverage can jeopardize the welfare and safety of Black men across Toronto. The paper concludes by discussing the findings of the analyses and considering how the construction of Black men as unworthy victims has been met with resistance on social media. Ultimately, news stories produced in Toronto reflect how Black men's lives are not celebrated and their deaths are not grieved, reflecting a larger North American pattern of representing Black men as unworthy victims.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On Wednesday, July 4, 2018, the *Toronto Sun* reported the death of popular rapper Smoke Dawg with the front-page headline, “Smoke Dawg Had a Gun.” The article was accompanied by a colour photograph of the late musician smoking cannabis. The central message of the story is that the rapper was found to be armed when he was taken to the hospital where he died. The *Toronto Star* also published a story on Smoke Dawg’s death, though their reporting posed a stark contrast to that of the *Toronto Sun*. On their front page, the *Toronto Star* featured the signing of Toronto Maple Leaf’s Centre, Johnny Tavares as their main story with the news of Smoke Dawg’s death in the margins. “Two rappers killed in Queen St Shooting” is the erroneous headline placed in periphery to the prominent sports story, as one of the Black male victims is described as a rapper despite not being one at all. These two stories by the *Toronto Sun* and the *Toronto Star*, seen in Figure 1, both reflect and illustrate a broader pattern of anti-Black news reporting perpetuated by Toronto media outlets. Though they use different representational tactics, the two news outlets present similar narratives about Black male victims. That is, Black men who succumb to gun violence are portrayed as unsympathetic victims that can be blamed for their victimization.¹

The portrayal of Black men as unsympathetic victims is inextricably linked to anti-Black racism as this phenomenon works to construct Black men as less valuable in society. As such, this study explores how anti-Black racism, in a multicultural city like Toronto, manifests through news representations of gun violence victims. How do major Toronto news outlets represent Black men as victims of gun violence? What role does race play in representations of victimhood? Taking an intersectional approach, I highlight the ways that racism, sexism, and classism intersect to construct Black male victims as undeserving and blameworthy victims. First, I draw on literature by victimologists, criminologists and sociolegal scholars to outline notions of victimhood and how representations of victims are highly gendered and racialized. Next, I present findings from my quantitative and qualitative content analyses revealing the differential ways Black and White men are represented as victims. I demonstrate how the discourse of three major news outlets in Toronto represent Black men as unsympathetic victims deserving of their plights. These news representations of Black gun violence victims can help shape perceptions of who is considered a deserving victim in society. Ultimately, dehumanizing representations of Black male victims of gun violence can contribute to and reproduce broader and structural anti-Black racism in Toronto.



Fig. 1. “Smoke Dawg had a gun: Murder victim armed when taken to hospital, sources say”
“Rappers killed in Queen St. Shooting”

¹ Unsympathetic or undeserving victims refer to those crime victims who never acquire legitimate status or receive little if any media attention and pass virtually unnoticed in the wider social world (Davies et al., 2017). This can include victims who are ethnic minority groups, the homeless, and those who are associated with criminal activity such as drug users, sex workers, gang members and ethnic minorities (Gekoski et al., 2012).

Background

To understand the construction of Black men as unsympathetic victims in the context of gun violence, it is necessary to first provide an overview of Toronto as a city. The existence of anti-Black racism in Toronto will be briefly summarized with particular attention then paid to the nature of gun violence in the city and how the burden of gun violence victimization falls disproportionately on Black men. Although Toronto is often imagined as a multicultural city, anti-Black racism is ever present, and its existence is amplified in the context of gun violence.

Home to over 180 languages and 200 ethnicities,² Toronto is internationally known as a racial mosaic and one of the most diverse cities in the world. In fact, with over 51 percent of its population being foreign-born, Toronto is often said to be *the* most diverse city in the world (Harford, 2016). Over the last three decades, Toronto has experienced profound social change in its racial composition as the Black population has more than tripled, both in size and diversity. According to Statistics Canada (2019), Toronto has 442,015 Black people, or 36.9% of Canada's Black population, making Toronto the city with the largest Black population in Canada. As Jamaicans come together in Black Creek, Nigerians in North York, and Somalis in Rexdale, Toronto's Black population is indeed diverse and remarkable. However, despite its sizable Black population, Toronto's reputation as a multicultural city has obscured the existence and effects of anti-Black racism. Underneath the narrative of diversity, a growing number of Torontonians view Black people as second-class citizens. Anti-Black racism is ever present around the world, and Toronto is no exception (Foster et al., 2021).

Multiculturalism, anti-Black Racism and gun violence in Toronto

Beneath Toronto's multiracial and harmonious exterior lies anti-Black sentiments and attitudes. Such bigotry has become illuminated in the political arena on multiple occasions as politicians have described Black people as inferior citizens that contribute to Toronto's social woes. One such politician, city councillor Giorgi Mammoliti, referred to residents of the Jane and Finch community, a predominantly Black neighbourhood, as "cockroaches" who must be "sprayed" when discussing his plan to deal with criminals living in the area (Rieti, 2018). This type of anti-Black rhetoric is especially apparent in conversations about gun violence in the city. For example, Community Safety and Corrections Minister Michael Tibollo recounted going out to Jane and Finch with "a bulletproof vest on" during a ride-along in the neighbourhood after a double shooting (Ferguson, 2018). Mayor John Tory has also used racially coded terms such as "thugs" and "sewer rats" to describe perpetrators of gun violence (Draaisma, 2018). "Thugs" and "sewer rats" work as racially coded descriptors for people of colour who engage in criminal and deviant behaviours. Furthermore, the media, too, have played a role in creating and circulating anti-Black rhetoric in Toronto. From a 2002 *Toronto Star* headline "Black crime rates highest" to a 2018 *Toronto Sun* article referring to Black men as "gun-toting gangbangers" and "thugs", local media narratives help reproduce the idea that Black people are uncivilized and criminal. These narratives can facilitate public perceptions of Black people as the undeserving, urban Other, affecting how people react to news of gun violence.

² Ethnicity is a broadly defined term to describe "large groups of people classed according to common racial, tribal, religious, linguistic or cultural background". Race can be defined as a "groups that humans are often divided into based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry." Neither ethnicity nor race have genetic basis; rather, they are both social constructs used to categorize people. This paper will explore how victim status is influenced by the social division of race.



Fig. 2. “2005: Year of the Gun”

In the context of gun violence, the devaluation of Black lives – particularly in cases with Black men – is especially evident. In the last 4 years, 67% of gun violence victims have been Black men, seen in Table 1, despite making up less than 8% of Toronto’s total population. Black victimization from gun violence is not a new phenomenon. In 2005, infamously known as the “year of the gun”, 52 people died from gun violence, the most in Toronto’s history. As seen in Figure 2, the December 31st issue of the *Toronto Star* published many of the names and faces of those who were killed on their front-page. Of the 36 victims of gun violence pictured, more than half of them were Black men. Evidently, Black men have been the group most victimized by gun violence for years and yet, action has not been taken to protect their lives. Optimistically, the Coalition of African Canadian Organizations was formed in response to the significant impact gun violence was

having on the community and the fact that a large proportion of the victims being killed were young Black men. While the formation of this coalition indicated a strong desire to bring attention and seek a solution to this crisis of violence, the mainstream media have in some ways hindered such efforts by suggesting Black men are not deserving or worthwhile victims. For example, Mike Strobel, a *Toronto Sun* columnist, wrote the following after the 2012 Eaton Centre shooting that killed two and injured several others:

Frankly, I don’t much care if hoods want to bump each other off... saves the rest of us a lot of trouble. But leave the rest of us out of it... Hell, I'd even jail the targeted “victims” of gang hits, should they survive the attempted rub-out. Usually, they asked for it. (Strobel, 2012)

Such dehumanizing rhetoric by the media has the power to impact the kind of sympathy and assistance Toronto gives to Black male victims of gun violence. By encountering the news routinely, constant exposure to the news can shape attitudes and public perceptions of Black people in subtle and unconscious ways. The aim of this study is to demonstrate how major news outlets in Toronto represent Black male victims of gun violence as undeserving. Three major news outlets — *The Toronto Sun*, *The Toronto Star*, and *CP24* — have been chosen to paint a vivid picture of the devaluation of Black male gun violence victims by the Toronto media. Through a quantitative and qualitative content analysis, I will unravel the ways in which patterns of news representations construct Black men to be undeserving victims in Toronto.

TABLE 1. Male Gun Violence Victims in Toronto

Year	Total Homicides	Shooting Deaths	Black	White	Other
2016	75	38	28	7	3
2017	61	37	25	8	4
2018	97	47	32	5	10
2019	79	43	30	5	8
2020	71	37	21	6	10

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Despite crime being an ever-present phenomenon, researchers have slowly shifted their focus towards victims of crime. For years, attention has predominantly been on the offender while victims of crime have long been ignored and forgotten by criminologists and sociologists (Rock, 1994). In the late 1940's, some researchers began to centre crime victims and as such, the discipline of victimology emerged, marking a shift in criminological research.

Tracing victimology: The social construction of victimhood

Victimology is the study of crime victims that explores how victims are defined and imagined in society. In its beginnings, researchers were not entirely sympathetic to the victim. Rather, they focused on how victims contributed to their own victimization and to what extent they could be held responsible for the crimes committed against them. Works by Mendelsohn (1956, 1974) and von Hentig (1948) suggested the victim was different from the average person such that, when the victim was measured against them, the victim fell short (Walklate, 2006). Von Hentig (1948) argued some individuals were more likely to be victims of crime by virtue of their structural characteristics. For example, children, women, the elderly, and racial minorities were among 13 groups of people with characteristics (age, gender, race, etc) that increased their vulnerability to crime victimization. Similarly, Mendelsohn (1963) developed a sixfold typology that suggested victims to be culpable for their victimization. These six types of victims ranged from a completely innocent victim to a most guilty victim who started as a perpetrator but later became the victim. This line of thinking by both scholars illustrates a “positivist” victimology; that is, a victimology that assumes a consensus of norms and values which readily allows us to identify victimization (Miers, 1989).

Positivist victimology reminds us that perceptions of victimhood are complex; although individuals may imagine themselves to be victims of crime, they are not always able to acquire the social status of victimhood. Criminologist Nils Christie addressed how and why this is the case with his construct of the ideal victim, a profound contribution to victimology. First introduced in 1986, Christie conceptualized the figure of the “ideal victim” in his seminal piece, *The Ideal Victim* where he suggested that victimhood is a social construct. In his paper, Christie essentially teases out the types of individuals that are most readily viewed as legitimate and sympathetic victims in the eyes of the public. According to Christie, the ideal victim is characterized by five key attributes: (i) the victim is a weak person; (ii) the victim was carrying out a “respectable project”; and (iii) the victim cannot be blamed for their harm. The victim is also coupled with (iv) a large and evil offender who is (v) unknown to the victim. As an example of a scenario involving an ideal victim, Christie describes a little old lady on her way home who is robbed by a drug addict in broad daylight. His characterization of an ideal victim has become a common-sense understanding of victimhood that is generally accepted and unchallenged by society.

Christie’s ideal victim construct speaks to how some victims in society are viewed as deserving and legitimate while others are regarded as undeserving and unworthy. This distinction fuelled Carrabine et al. (2004) to argue that a hierarchy of victimization exists that distinguishes between innocent and blameworthy victims. Occupying the top of the hierarchy would be children and the elderly while the bottom of the hierarchy consists of the homeless, those with alcohol and drug problems, and prostitutes among others. Carrabine et al.’s hierarchy of victimization is often reflected in the way the media centres certain victims in society as legitimate victims that are worthy of collective mourning while representing others as undeserving victims that are unworthy of media attention. While the work of Christie and Carrabine et al. is undoubtedly influential, neither of them explicitly note the racialization of the victims they conceptualize. Arguably, the characterization of innocent and blameworthy victims can be further contextualized through the lens of race. Is there a racial pattern to the types of victims that are portrayed

as innocent and those who are seen as blameworthy? Existing work is in fact clear that race plays a significant role around constructions of worthy and blameworthy victims.

The criminalization of racialized victims in the news

Several studies have concluded that victim blaming is related to the criminalization of race in news stories. This victim blaming approach by the media is highlighted by Razack (2000) who examined Canadian newspaper records in the nineteenth century. She found Indigenous female sex workers to be accompanied with the belief that they “got what they deserved” when they encountered violence, due to their race and line of work. Similarly, Jiwani and Young (2006) also argued that news coverage of sixty missing and murdered Indigenous women in Vancouver constructed them to be blameworthy for their deaths due to their Indigeneity and occupation. And in a more recent study, Gilchrist (2010) examined the differential coverage of White female victims versus Indigenous victims and concluded that Indigenous women are suggested to be unimportant in society and partially responsible for the violence against them. When Black women are represented as victims, they, too, are often invisibilized and placed in the back of Toronto newspapers (Wortley, 2002).

Evidently, an overwhelming (though important) amount of existing research has examined news representations of racialized *women* as victims in Canada. However, there appears to be a lack of attention towards racialized *men* as victims. More specifically, Black men appear to be left out of most analyses of victimhood. To be clear, there are studies of Black men where researchers have highlighted race in their studies of victimhood. Such studies include Black men as victims of domestic violence (West, 2008), sexual assault (Curry, 2019) and police brutality (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Still, much of the criminological literature reveals little around *news representations* of Black men as victims.

While the studies mentioned make it apparent that victims are highly gendered and racialized, how Blackness and masculinity enter victim blaming practices remains neglected. In exploring this gap, anti-Black racism must be considered as it works to determine who is considered valuable in society. More specifically, anti-Black racism works to deny the humanity of Black people; it enables institutions to ultimately dismiss Black life as less valuable. This leaves Black people less likely to be considered full members of society; instead, they are represented and perceived as second-class citizens. One potential outcome of anti-Black racism is that it can ultimately inform how society responds to Black victims. It can serve as a rationale for blaming Black people when they are victims of crime leaving them less likely to be protected and assisted when in need of help. Anti-Black racism also means the lives of Black victims are not celebrated or grieved by the greater public.

Although the scholarly literature is limited, there are some existing studies about the relationship between anti-Blackness and news reporting in Canada. For example, Crichlow and Lauricella (2010) explored how the *Globe and Mail* covers issues relative to Black people and the police. They examined the tone and news frames present in news stories and ultimately concluded that Toronto news stories framed Black people as inherently violent with news frames revolving around guns and gangs. Additionally, Ezeonu (2005) explored the discourse of “Black-on-Black” violence in local Toronto newspapers. He found that local newspapers framed their stories in ways that tended to blame Black youth for violence taking place in the city. Still, minimal research has been done on news representations of Black men as victims of crime. Given that Black men are marginalized along the lines of race, coverage of their victimization would differ from that of White men, yet this has not been adequately explored in the existing research. An exploration is needed given that Black men may not garner the same sympathy that other victims receive.

Considering race in theories of victimization

While specific research on representations of Black male victims of gun crime is minimal, theories of victimization could potentially clarify how victim blaming appears in relation to the criminalization of Blackness. Exploring the relationship between representations of victimhood and criminality could help to better understand how a victim-blaming approach may be related to the criminalization of Blackness. For example, lifestyle theory suggests the actions or patterns of the “lifestyles” of victims may contribute to crime victimization, leaving individuals more likely to be victimized (Hindelang et al., 1978). It has also been proposed that certain lifestyles of victims can influence the number of potential offenders they are in proximity to, also known as the proximity hypothesis (Van Dijk, 1983). Furthermore, equivalent group hypothesis, assumes a victim-offender overlap where people with criminal lifestyles are more likely to be at risk of victimization.

However, these theories of victimization fail to account for race in victim-blaming practices. As such, what is often missing from these positivist theories is an application of an intersectional approach. Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term “intersectionality” in contending that race and gender should not be treated as mutually exclusive categories of analysis. Rather, it is vital to acknowledge how these social characteristics multiply oppression and combine to form distinct experiences. Taking an intersectional approach to lifestyle theory is a departure from its positivist roots that could more meaningfully highlight the ways in which race, gender, and class come together to affect the lifestyle and choices of Black men. Given that news stories may be implicitly taking this lifestyle approach to understanding and representing Black men as victims, an intersectional approach, or more generally a critical race approach, could be helpful. Such an approach would not only amplify understandings of how theories of victimization neglect race in victim-blaming practices, but more importantly, how anti-Black systems of oppression operate by (re)producing victim-blaming representations.

Critical race theory, or CRT, is an integral framework used in this study to demonstrate how the interlocking race and gender of Black men may make them vulnerable to victim-blaming practices and thus, constructed to be unsympathetic victims. CRT is a theory that notes race as central to understanding our current systems of privilege and inequality. The beginnings of CRT saw important contributions from legal scholars like Derrick Bell (1980), Richard Delgado (1984) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). The theory rests on many key tenets such as the existence of racism being an ordinary feature of society. CRT identifies White supremacy as a structure of domination and scholars note the social construction thesis which holds race to be a product of social thought rather than genetic reality. CRT scholars also challenge colour-blind notions by arguing that racism is difficult to address when race is not acknowledged. It is emphasized that the neutral line of thought of colour-blindness helps keep racial hierarchies in place and prevents efforts of achieving true racial justice. By using a critical race framework, this paper will centre race in the examination of news representations of Black male victimhood. Explicitly discussing race and racism will help to better understand how anti-Black racism is deeply woven in society and how it continues to thrive in various ways in a multicultural city like Toronto.

Aim of study

As discussed, the existing literature demonstrates that victim status is not random, but rather based on a multitude of social factors including race and gender which will be assessed most closely in this study. Although much important research has examined race and gender in the construction of victimhood, few studies, to my knowledge, have investigated how the social characteristics of Black men construct them to be undeserving victims. The purpose of this study is to examine the role race and gender play in the context of gun violence victims in Toronto news stories across different media outlets. In particular, this study will focus on the race of male gun violence victims to understand how it can determine sympathetic

and unsympathetic victims. This study adds to prior Canadian research by examining how Black men are represented as crime victims as the question of how Black men fit into Christie's classical construct of the ideal victim is less often addressed. Understanding the complexity of race and masculinity is important to ensure Black men as crime victims are represented in a humane and dignified way.

Chapter 3: Methods

For this study, an investigation was undertaken exploring how local media outlets within the area cover victims of gun violence with a particular focus on the news portrayal of Black men as victims. News stories were examined from three major news outlets — *The Toronto Sun*, *The Toronto Star*, and *CP24* — which were purposively selected. Both the *Toronto Star* and *The Toronto Sun* are among Toronto's two most circulated newspapers (*Toronto Star Media Kit*, 2019) while *CP24* — Canada's first and only 24-hour local news channel — reaches more than 3.1 million viewers a week in Toronto (*CP24*, 2021). Data was collected by conducting both a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of news stories published within a four-year period. The dataset consists of news stories published by *The Toronto Sun*, *The Toronto Star*, and *CP24* that feature every male gun violence victim between 1 January, 2016 and 31 December, 2020.

For the quantitative analysis, the most detailed story within 10 days of the incident was chosen. For the closer qualitative analysis, various stories published no more than 10 days after the incident were chosen to explore how each victim's story was framed. News stories that reported on a victim's past criminal charges before their death were excluded as well as stories that were published more than 10 days after the victim's death. News stories were found using a Google search as well as through a search of the Factiva database. The majority of articles were retrieved using Google search, where search terms included the name of each deceased victim and the names of each of the three chosen outlets. Factiva was utilized to access *Toronto Star* news stories that were blocked by a paywall and articles that did not appear through a Google search. Three news stories were collected for each victim (one from each news outlet). In total, 591 news stories were analyzed. Fifteen stories were missing as victims' deaths were not reported by some news outlets.

TABLE 2. Number of News Stories

<i>Toronto Star</i>	<i>Toronto Sun</i>	<i>CP24</i>	<i>Overall</i>
196	195	200	591

Quantitative content analysis

A quantitative analysis was undertaken to investigate whether Toronto news stories reflect and (re)produce a larger pattern of representing Black men as unworthy victims. For this analysis, the cases of all 202 men killed by gun violence between 2016 and 2020 were explored. The majority of these victims were Black men. To analyze representations of gun violence across the *Toronto Star*, the *Toronto Sun*, and *CP24*, a quantitative analysis was conducted where a total of 591 news articles were examined. All articles were coded in a comprehensive Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet included a cataloguing of (i) demographic information about each victim, (ii) length of each news story, and (iii) who was used as a source of information about the news incident. The quantitative analysis of this research also consisted of counting and comparing victim blaming practices by news outlets. The following victim-blaming variables were explored: (i) inclusion that the victim was known to police/had a criminal history (ii) inclusion that the victim was associated with gangs (iii) inclusion of a mugshot (iv) inclusion of neighbourhood and (v) inclusion of the victim's lifestyle.

For each article, information was coded according to the following variables. **Demographic information** about the victims were collected: their race and age. Race classifications in this study identified victims as Black, White or Other. The approach to identifying race was consistently based on an examination of the victim's image selected by outlets. As such, both Whiteness and Blackness were operationalized. Whiteness was based on perceived Whiteness; this includes White-passing individuals

with privileges that are often denied to those who cannot pass as white. It is acknowledged that such representations of Whiteness in media stories might not align with the victims' (or their families') self-identification. Racially ambiguous people where race could not be ascertained were categorized as Other. As well, victims without an accompanying photograph where race could not be identified were categorized as Other. Another variable, the inclusion of a **photograph** of the victim was also noted. The type of photograph was coded as mugshot, selfie, family photograph, crime scene, video or other. Photographs that were taken by the police after an arrest were categorized as mugshots. Photographs that were taken by the victim themselves were categorized as selfies. Family photographs were images provided by the family or taken with family and/or friends. Photographs of the crime scene were listed under crime scene and police footage of any incidents were classified under video. The "other" category consisted of stock photographs of crime scenes, photographs of press conferences in response to the crimes, vigils held after deaths, and photographs of suspects.

Additionally, the **length of the article** was determined by word count. Stories under 500 words were categorized as short while stories more than 800 words were categorized as long. Stories in between 500-800 words were considered to be medium length. Specific **words and phrases** used in articles (e.g., targeted, known to police, gang affiliations) were also documented to examine whether victims were blamed for their deaths. Lastly, **sources of information** were collected to determine who defined the story (police, family). As described by Ericson et al (1991) in their analysis of news coverage across Toronto newspapers, news outlets use a variety of sources of knowledge. Based on their work, four general types of sources in crime news were employed here. The sources are as follows: (i) journalists, (ii) criminal justice officials, such as police officers, lawyers, and judges, (iii) individual citizens, such as neighbours, friends, and family of crime victims, and (iv) unspecified sources, such as experts, authorities, and critics. Ultimately, these variables were logged to understand how Black men are portrayed by news outlets as victims of gun violence, and how their stories are framed and by whom.

Qualitative content analysis

A qualitative content analysis on news stories about five gun violence victims was also conducted. These five cases were deliberately selected to represent three different frames. The three major frames are as follows: (i) a narrative focus on the victim's past or ongoing criminal behaviour (ii) emphasis on the neighbourhood the victim was from or died in and, (iii) a description of the victim's lifestyle, which can include their behaviour as well as those of family members, friends and associates, the victim's career, hobbies, etc. The closer textual analysis explores two White and three Black male victims of gun violence to highlight how media narratives can obscure and trivialize instances where Black men are victims. Together, both the quantitative and qualitative analyses produce a rich picture that illustrates how Black men are constructed as unsympathetic victims across different media outlets.

Chapter 4: Results

This study examined how major news outlets in Toronto construct Black male victims of gun violence over a four-year period (2016-2020). Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses illustrate that Black men are constructed to be unsympathetic and undeserving victims.

Quantitative content analysis

First, a quantitative content analysis was undertaken, examining news stories, photographs, and language. This examination found that although most gun violence victims were Black men, only 47% of them were represented as victims in comparison to 61% of White men who were represented as victims. In other words, White male victims were less likely to be subjected to victim-blaming practices. Other meaningful statistical differences were found in the choice of wording and photographs. Specific attention was paid to the language used to describe the incidents and the victims involved.

Victim-blaming language

Overall, 91 victims were subjected to victim-blaming language in news stories across all three news outlets. Of those 91 victims, 71 were Black, 12 were White, and 8 were considered Other. 71 Black victims being blamed for their deaths means just over half of the Black victims of gun violence in the last four years were victim blamed. Many of these victims were subjected to victim-blaming language more than once. As seen in Table 3, victim-blaming language was recorded under the following five categories: known to police, the utilization of a mugshot, gang affiliations, negative inferences around the victim's lifestyle and lastly, negative connotations about the neighbourhood in which the victim was from or died in. In relation to the neighbourhood variable, victims were blamed due to "turf wars", "neighbourhood rival feuds" as well as being killed in communities that were explicitly described as sketchy and known to be crime hotspots. In relation to the lifestyle variable, victims were constructed to be unsympathetic through two different ways. One set of factors relates to the time of death, where news stories mentioned that victims were armed at the time of their death or engaged in a "gun battle" at the time of their death. A second set of factors were used by news outlets to describe the victims (poor) moral character: victims who were negatively described as rappers, engaged in drug use, described to have had their "ups and downs" or were said to have "fell down the wrong path".

TABLE 3. Victim Blaming Language

Variable	Black Victims	White Victims	Other Victims
Known to police	20	8	4
Mugshot used	17	3	4
Gang affiliations	23	3	2
Lifestyle	19	8	4
Neighbourhood	8	0	0

Criminality and gang associations

28 victims were described as having gang affiliations with 23 of those victims being Black. There was also a slight pattern of news stories explicitly writing that 14 victims did *not* have any gang affiliations, despite it not having any real relevance or adding anything meaningful to the story. All 14 of these victims were Black. Recent patterns of gang related violence were also used to explain the deaths of 6 other victims, despite there being no evidence proving that to be the case. Furthermore, of the 32 victims that were

stated to be known to police, 20 of them were Black men, again creating a distance between the victim and the presumably middle-class, law-abiding reader.

Photographs

As stated by Ericson et al. (1991:219), “photographs bring events and those involved in them to life... it bears witness to the people involved in the event and their moral character”. Upon examination of the types of photographs found in gun violence coverage, most victims of gun violence over the last four years were found to have had humanizing photographs accompanying their news stories. Humanizing photographs are those that cast the victim as human and showed them in the better, happier moments of their life. However, 24 victims had mugshots utilized and 17 of those 24 victims were Black men. This visual imagery signalled for readers to withhold their sympathy as mugshots help readers visualize the victims as primarily criminals rather than victims. Furthermore, totalling the victims who were described as known to police, having gang affiliations and having their mugshots used, 60 Black men, or 44% of Black gun violence victims examined in this study, were conceived as criminals rather than victims.

Sources

The sources used in news stories for Black, White and Other victims statistically differed. To write their stories, journalists often rely on various sources of knowledge, some of whom become the primary definers of stories. These primary definers are authoritative voices who frame the story and are used to provide understanding of the event (Ericson et al., 1991). Police officers were the primary definer of the stories of 105 Black victims. The stories of the other 31 victims were primarily defined by their friends, families, or community. In comparison, out of the 31 White victims, 16 of them used police officers as a primary source while 14 of their stories were defined by their friends, families and/or community. In other words, 77% of Black men had their stories defined by the police while 51% of White men had their stories defined by police. Overall, police officers were an important definer of stories across both groups as they were utilized in 445 of the 591 articles analyzed.

Summary of Quantitative Analysis Findings

In sum, disparities were found in terms of language, sources, and photographs utilized between Black and White victims of gun violence. Black men were more heavily associated with gang violence, even when gang activity played no part in their deaths. Additionally, 62% of victims said to be known to be police were Black men. There was also a trend of Black men having their mugshots utilized and accompanying their news stories. Lastly, criminal justice officials such as police officers were overwhelmingly used as the primary source of stories involving Black victims. Ultimately, such victim-blaming tactics overwhelmingly utilized in the news stories of Black men victimized them twice: once when they died, and twice when media coverage blamed them for their deaths.

Qualitative content analysis

Data was also collected to conduct a qualitative content analysis of news stories published within a four-year period. For this in-depth qualitative analysis, the focus was on media coverage of the deaths of five men who were victims of gun violence between 2016 and 2020. These five selected cases reflect larger patterns of how gun violence victims are represented in the news. Of the 591 news stories examined in this study, 18 of the articles were selected for an in-depth analysis. In addition to the 18 news stories, 6 other news stories were also examined to support the analysis and explore the deaths more closely. For this analysis, I examined differences between language, photographs, and sources involved in all cases. The cases chosen for this closer qualitative analysis are as follows:

- Marcus Gibson

- Rocco Zito
- Everone Paul Mitchell
- Simon Giannini
- Dimarjio Jenkins

Key themes

In addition to the operational classification of race, the representations of gun violence victims fell under three major categories:

- Criminal Behaviour – the criminal history of the victim
- Neighbourhood – the neighbourhood where the victim resided or in died
- Lifestyle – the behaviour of the individual, friends, and family they associated with, the victim's career, hobbies, etc.

Case Analysis #1: Marcus Gibson & Rocco Zito

The following two victims were compared to explore the racial connotations of “gangsters” who were killed in their homes. Marcus Gibson was a 24-year-old Black man who was killed in his home, a Rivertowne building, on November 27, 2016. Rocco Zito was an 87-year-old Italian “mob boss” who was killed at his family home in North York on January 29, 2016. Representations of both men focused on their criminal histories and lifestyles.

Criminal behaviour

Representations of both Marcus Gibson and Rocco Zito revolved around notions of criminal culpability through the inclusion of their criminal histories. However, this tendency was amplified in Gibson's coverage. Marcus Gibson's criminal history takes precedent in the framing of news stories. This is especially notable in the headlines of news stories that reported his death. As Jiwani (2014) notes, “news headlines are important as a cognitive organiser as they prime the reader to make sense of the story that is to follow”. Headlines by the *Toronto Sun* and *Toronto Star* conceive Gibson to be, first and foremost, a criminal rather than a victim:

SHOT DEAD AT HOME: Man may have had ties to street gang (Doucette, 2016)

South Riverdale shooting victim was suspect in 2014 slaying (Gillis, 2016)

These dehumanizing headlines blame Gibson for his victimization in not-so-subtle ways. Supposed gang ties and a criminal charge from the past are used to define Gibson and measure his value as a human being. Conversely, headlines reporting on the death of Rocco Zito by the *Toronto Sun* and the *Toronto Star* pose a stark contrast to that of Gibson's:

The Life and Death of Rocco Zito (Lamberti, 2016)

Longtime Mobster Rocco Zito shot dead in his home (Edwards, 2016)

As opposed to the impersonal references to Gibson, Zito is referred to by his full name. Referring to Zito by both his first and last name in headlines attaches an importance to his life and celebrates his life as having meaning. In contrast, detached and distant references to Gibson such as “South Riverdale shooting victim” suggest his life was not as important. Looking more closely at the *Toronto Sun*'s headline, Zito's

biography appears to be the focus of the story while Gibson's supposed gang ties and criminal history are the focus of his stories.

Looking beyond the headlines and closer at the stories, it becomes apparent that Marcus Gibson's first-degree murder charge in connection to a 2014 shooting at a Dundas Street West restaurant was stayed after footage proved he had not done anything criminal. Still, the charge is utilized in the framing of news stories to communicate culpability for his own victimization, despite Gibson being cleared. In news stories, Gibson's murder charge in 2014 is the first piece of information introduced by the *Toronto Star* and the *Toronto Sun*:

The man shot dead inside a home in South Riverdale on Sunday afternoon has been identified as Marcus Gibson — the same man charged, then cleared, in a 2014 fatal shooting in a downtown Toronto restaurant. (Gillis, 2016)

A 24-year-old murder victim who was gunned down in his River Town home over the weekend had suspected ties to a notorious Regent Park street gang and was once accused of murder. (Doucette, 2016)

The continued utilization of this charge by the *Sun* and the *Star* inflates Gibson's presumed criminality to make him appear more criminal than he is; it is the primary piece of information used in representations of Gibson and is potentially used to make a link between both incidents, implicating Gibson for his death. In contrast, Rocco Zito's criminality is not as amplified. While Zito is introduced to readers as a powerful mobster by the *Sun* and a longtime underworld figure by the *Star*, Rocco Zito is said to have been a man of "great influence and respect" among mob bosses (Lamberti, 2016). This language glorifies Zito's criminality in subtle ways as opposed to the demonizing tone in language used to describe Gibson. Zito is also said to have since been retired from the underworld by the police, communicating his innocence to readers by implying he is *no longer* committing crimes. Details about Zito's criminal history including a mafia-bootlegging scheme and a manslaughter conviction do not enter the stories until much later; they are peripheral details to news stories focusing on Zito.

Furthermore, Zito's appearance is used to downplay his crimes. Rocco Zito's physical appearance and old age is included across all three outlets to explain that Zito did not look the part of a criminal. For example, CP24 reported the death of Zito with the headline, "Elderly man shot dead had ties to Calabrian mob". While his mob ties are mentioned in the headline, he is also described as an elderly man who lived in a home with his children and grandchildren, constructing him to be both vulnerable due to his old age and sympathetic due to his role as a family man. Additionally, the *Toronto Sun* describes him as a "diminutive nonno" (extremely small grandfather) who lived quietly with his family in North York. The *Toronto Star* also makes several references to his physical stature that supposedly made him appear as if he didn't belong in the underworld:

Zito didn't look the part of a mob boss or a powerful man, and a police officer who knew him described him as polite and respectful. He stood just 5-foot-2... His unassuming appearance belied the fact he was considered by police to have been a leader of the local governing body of the 'Ndrangheta, called La Camera di Controllo or the Crimini. (Edwards, 2016)

By including details about Zito's size and age, his vulnerability is emphasized to readers. Descriptions of being polite and respectful along with references to his elderly age and small stature characterizes Zito to be a sympathetic victim. The fact that he "did not look the part of a mob boss or a powerful man" downplays the fact that his roots in organized crime ran deep and stretched to New York, Montreal, and Italy and that Zito is believed to have been involved in five or six murders dating back to the 1970s

(Lamberti, 2016). Though Gibson's appearance is not explicitly outlined, the selection of photographs by news outlets further invalidates his victimhood. While the *Toronto Sun* used a photograph of Gibson answering to the media outside a courthouse after his 2014 charge to accompany their story, *The Toronto Star* and *CP24* take it a step further by using a mugshot of Gibson. The usage of his stayed murder charge and mugshot in tandem does not allow readers to sympathize with Gibson; rather, it further creates distance between Gibson and presumably middle-class, law-abiding reader. Photographs that accompanied Zito's stories include a photograph of a younger Zito, a photograph of the suspect, and a photograph of the crime scene. The photographs included across all three news outlets present Zito in a humanizing and dignified fashion. Despite the fact that Zito had a more lengthy criminal record than Gibson (who appears to only have a dropped murder charge), mugshots of Zito were not used, or perhaps not made public for journalists to utilize. Ultimately, Zito is described as a human being with flaws while Gibson is portrayed to be a criminal rather than a victim.



Fig. 3. Photographs used to accompany the stories of Rocco Zito and Marcus Gibson.

Lifestyle

Along with his criminal history, representations of Marcus Gibson focused on his lifestyle. In particular, the *Toronto Sun* primarily featured his lifestyle, highlighting that Gibson was a rapper who may have had gang ties based in Regent Park:

Gibson was once one half of a rap duo known as Tyke and Turk, aka TnT Sick Thugz. Sic Thugs is also the name of a well-known Regent Park gang that has feuded with other downtown gangs over the years, such as the Asian Assassins and Project Originals, and was tied to a high profile 2012 Eaton Centre shooting. (Doucette, 2016)

By including details about Gibson being a rapper who had alleged ties with an infamous gang based in Regent Park, Gibson is heavily associated with criminality and violence. The inclusion of Regent Park evokes certain negative connotations. Regent Park is often referred to as an urban ghetto that is plagued by crime, violence, poverty, and other social ills. With a reputation of being a highly dangerous and disadvantaged neighbourhood, the area has undergone processes of revitalization. However, the area continues to attract negative attention and is still depicted as an area ruled by gangs, drugs, and guns (Warmington, 2013). Also, the inclusion of the 2012 Eaton Centre shooting that killed one and injured several others demonizes Gibson for a crime he likely played no part in and works to further inflate his supposed criminality. Furthermore, including the 2012 Eaton Centre shooting in this news story is arguably an irrelevant detail that suggests Gibson to be somehow responsible for gang-related violence in the city and further constructs him to be an unsympathetic victim. The amplification of Marcus Gibson's lifestyle by local news outlets makes his existence synonymous with violence and crime and ultimately suggests he is responsible for his own victimization.

The *Toronto Star* also focuses on Zito's lifestyle and while they invoke notions of criminality by referring to Zito as a "longtime mobster", the term "mobster" has connotations attached to it that glamourize, rather than vilify, criminals associated with mobs. With films like *The Godfather* (1972) and *Goodfellas* (1990) that romanticize mafia families and their crimes, mafias have long been cinematically glorified and glamourized in Hollywood. Along with the romanticization of their criminal lifestyle, men within the mafia are typically humanized and depicted as family men within pop culture and films. The Italian gangster lifestyle depicted in films has resulted in a distorted view that constructs mafias to be respectable masterminds while "street gangs" have taken on racial meanings, commonly used to stereotype and demonize Black men. Street gangs are commonly perceived as a threat to public safety while mafias are do not invoke the same fears. This moral distinction between mafia members and gang members is notable in the news representations of Zito and Gibson. Next, in another attempt to victim-blame Gibson, the *Toronto Sun* includes details of his family members to make a connection between them and Gibson's plight:

Gibson's older brother, Michael Teddy Gibson, is allegedly tied to the Sic Thugs and is currently wanted on a Canada-wide warrant for first-degree murder in the death of Julian Weekes. Gibson's other brother, Glenton Gibson, 23, was stabbed to death at a St. James Town apartment building in 2012. (Doucette, 2016)

The inclusion of details around his brothers suggests Marcus Gibson to be living in a family associated with crime and violence. The *Sun*, too, includes details about Zito and his family describing Zito as born into the "Ndrangheta", an Italian crime family. Zito's father was a member of a clan in Italy that was involved in smuggling, rustling and extortion. Still, such details read as an autobiography rather than details of Gibson's family mentioned to paint Gibson as associated with crime and violence.

Across all three news outlets, stories about Rocco Zito essentially amount to a detailed biography of his life. From the exact street he lived on to the particular car he drove, readers are made familiar with who Zito was, despite such personal details not being particularly newsworthy. Additionally, the *Star* and *Sun* both include details about Zito's immigration journey to Canada. They note that it took Zito almost a decade to move to Canada and once he did, he worked as a waiter. The inclusion of his specific immigrant identity constructs him to be relatable and admirable to readers. Despite his crimes, he "always kept a low profile" and was a "man of great influence and respect". Ultimately, Zito's personal life and influence as a mob boss take precedence over his crimes. New stories reporting on Zito provided intimate details about his life. On the other hand, readers are not given any personal details about who Gibson was, aside from details meant to criminalize him. Though, in a news story published by *CP24*, Gibson is described by a local woman to be "a very nice guy, very kind". Still, the potential impact of such words is neutralized by appearing towards the end of the story and after details about his stayed murder charge that accompany *CP24*'s story. Given that these words appear towards the end of the news story, her voice is peripheral to the overarching frame of the story; she is not a primary definer of the story.

Case Analysis #2: Everone Paul Mitchell & Simon Giannini

The following comparison explores the differential news coverage between two victims who were killed on the same day. Paul Everone Mitchell was shot and killed after a double shooting near Regent Park on September 16, 2017. Simon Giannini was shot and killed at Michael's on Simcoe Restaurant in Downtown Toronto on September 16, 2017. Both victims were 54-year-old fathers who were targeted and killed on the same day, though Mitchell was Black and Giannini was Lebanese. Though he was not White, it is contended that Giannini's skin tone can be associated with White privilege. His White-passingness and social class situated Giannini in a position of privilege that separated him from Mitchell.

Criminal behaviour

While both Mitchell and Giannini were described to have been victims of “targeted” shootings, the narrative around Mitchell was notably different. The *Toronto Sun* published an article the day after Mitchell’s death that highlighted Mayor John Tory’s statements after the shooting. Tory’s response emphasized that ongoing violence in the area reinforced the need to revitalize Regent Park. The *Toronto Sun* would go on to quote Tory who said the following:

“The fact of the matter is — and these are facts coming right from the police — that the majority, significant majority, of these incidents that are happening of this kind are gang-related or have some suspicious relationship to gang activity.” (Artuso, 2017)

The news story concludes that gang warfare has plagued Regent Park and has spread to other areas of Toronto as well. This particular story frames Mitchell’s death to be a gang-related incident, linking him to be a gang member or affiliated with gangs, despite this not being the case. As well, Mayor John Tory is utilized as a primary source to define the story, rather than friends and family. Although Tory would be criticized for his statements and later apologize, the narrative about a Black man who was killed in a targeted shooting in Regent Park at two in the morning had already circulated. The *Toronto Sun* would come out with a news story ten days later titled, “Regent Park man killed in targeted shooting was no thug” that would allow the voices of Mitchell’s friends and family to be heard. The main sources for the initial article were police officers who described Mitchell’s death to be targeted, and Mayor John Tory who implied Mitchell’s death was gang-related. Even though Giannini was also a victim of a targeted shooting, his family did not need to argue that Giannini was worthy of justice as the *Toronto Star* explicitly stated that Giannini was not known to police and had no enemies in the world. For Mitchell’s family, his interlocking race and gender made it necessary to refute Mitchell’s presumed criminality and gang relations to vouch for his right to be alive.

Neighbourhood

TABLE 4. News headlines reporting on the deaths of Everone Paul Mitchell and Simon Giannini

<i>Source & Date</i>	<i>Headlines</i>
<i>Toronto Star (09/17/2017)</i>	Toronto Police ID man killed in shooting near Regent Park
<i>Toronto Sun (09/19/2017)</i>	Deadly Shooting in Regent Park ‘extremely discouraging’
<i>CP24 (09/17/2017)</i>	Police ID man shot and killed in Regent Park
<i>Toronto Star (09/17/2017)</i>	Witness at Toronto restaurant feared gunshots were terror attack
<i>Toronto Sun (09/17/2017)</i>	Real estate broker gunned down in Toronto steakhouse
<i>CP24 (09/17/2017)</i>	Man fatally shot Inside downtown restaurant was Toronto real estate broker

The headlines of news stories that reported on the deaths of Mitchell and Giannini both focused on the location of each incident. Regent Park was the focus for headlines around the death of Mitchell while headlines involving Giannini revolved around the downtown Toronto steakhouse he was killed in. Across all three outlets, Regent Park is explicitly mentioned in the headlines of news stories involving Mitchell, as seen in Table 4. As previously noted, Regent Park, a predominant Black neighbourhood, has borne the

stigma of poverty, crime, and violence. It has long been the subject of revitalization due to the negative perceptions of the neighbourhood. Because violence in the Regent Park neighbourhood is perceived as normalized, utilizing Regent Park in news headlines sensationalizes the story while simultaneously devaluing the victims of seemingly routine violence. It is in this sense that Mitchell's life was neither important nor valuable. This is especially apparent in the difference between news story lengths reporting on Mitchell and Giannini. Figure 3 demonstrates the perceived importance of each victim through the length of news stories published by the *Toronto Star*. Additionally, Table 5 shows the difference between the number of words used in news stories by the *Toronto Star*, *Toronto Sun* and *CP24* when they initially reported the deaths of both Mitchell and Giannini.



Fig. 4. News stories reporting on the deaths of Giannini and Mitchell, both published in the September 18, 2017 issue of the *Toronto Star*.

TABLE 5. Comparison of number of words in new stories about Everone Paul Mitchell and Simon Giannini³

Victims	<i>Toronto Star</i>	<i>Toronto Sun</i>	<i>CP24</i>
Everone Paul Mitchell	94	312	236
Simon Giannini	1157	537	658

In contrast to the stigmatized Regent Park neighbourhood, Simon Giannini was shot and killed at an upscale downtown restaurant, Michael's On Simcoe. The location of Giannini's death constructs him as a deserving and worthy victim. As noted by *CP24*, Michael's On Simcoe was a busy upscale steakhouse that enforced a formal attire; prominent individuals, such as Bill Gates, have dined there in the past. The *Toronto Star* also reported that steaks at this restaurant sell for as high as \$768, further constructing Giannini to be a man of a certain class who was carrying out a respectable project. That is, Giannini was a wealthy man who was dining at an upscale restaurant at the time of his death. Conversely, Mitchell was killed in a stigmatized neighbourhood while he was visiting friends. Along with the fact that Giannini was a well-known realtor who hosted a local television program about real estate and had written several books, the location of his death ultimately speaks to notions around class that construct Giannini to be a more deserving victim, especially when compared to Mitchell.

³ All stories for this comparison were published on September 17, 2017 with the exception of the lone *Toronto Sun* article reporting on Mitchell's death which was published on September 19, 2017.

Lifestyle

While both incidents were described as targeted shootings, Giannini's news stories included much more detail about who he was. Intimate details provided by the *Toronto Star* about the neighbourhood he grew up in, the high school he attended and the real estate agency he worked for places much importance on Giannini's life. Giannini is described as a fun-loving man with many friends who liked to dine in high-end restaurants and had two young sons. Mitchell, on the other hand, was also a father who worked for the government of Ontario and enjoyed playing dominos in Regent Park, the neighbourhood where he grew up, on Friday nights. However, such personal and intimate details are sorely missed by the *Toronto Star*, the *Toronto Sun*, and *CP24*. Instead, readers are left with no insight into Mitchell's life.

Across all three outlets, sources that define news stories about Giannini include his friends, real estate colleagues, a spokesperson for Giannini's real estate agency, the owner of the restaurant, diners at the night of the incident, Mayor John Tory, and police officers. Sources used by news outlets to frame stories of Mitchell pale in comparison as only a police officer and Mayor John Tory spoke on his death, both of which provided no intimate or personal details of who Mitchell was. Ultimately, Giannini received more illustrative and descriptive details in his news stories and was overall portrayed in a more humanizing fashion. Intersecting notions of race and class were amplified in news stories about Mitchell and Giannini, placing more value on the real estate agent and less value on the Black man from Regent Park.

Case Analysis #3: Dimarjio Jenkins

The following case analysis will explore the imagination of Black rappers as criminal. Dimarjio Jenkins, also known as Houdini, was a 21-year-old Black man who was shot and killed in Toronto's Entertainment District on May 26th, 2020. He was a well-known rapper in Toronto.

Criminal behaviour

Although Dimarjio Jenkins did not have a criminal record, Jenkins is framed and suggested to be criminal in subtle and not so subtle ways. First, Jenkins is reported by both the *Toronto Sun* and the *Toronto Star* to have had gang ties; this will be more thoroughly explored in the lifestyle section. Gangs, particularly gangs consisting of Black men, are often conflated with criminality. The presumption of Jenkins having gang ties makes him synonymous with criminality, despite the absence of a formal criminal record. Next, news stories discuss Jenkins in relation to another victim who was wounded in the shooting that killed him, a 27-year-old woman. She is described by the *Toronto Star* to be an "innocent bystander" of the targeted shooting. Subsequent articles would also report on a 6-year-old just barely missing bullets during the shooting. Describing Jenkins as a targeted victim against an innocent bystander and a 6-year-old child frames him to be a culpable victim. Essentially, explicitly describing one victim as innocent but not the other implies that Jenkins was *not* innocent. This binary of good victim and bad victim subtly constructs Jenkins to have somehow caused his own victimization. The idea that Jenkins is to blame for his victimization is also clearly outlined in several headlines by the *Toronto Sun* and the *Toronto Star* in Table 6.

TABLE 6. News headlines of stories reporting on the death of Dimarjio Jenkins

<i>Source & Date</i>	<i>Headlines</i>
<i>Toronto Sun</i> (05/28/2020)	Slain rapper linked to gang

<i>Toronto Star</i> (05/29/2020)	Footage shows rapper's associates firing back at gunman on busy street
<i>Toronto Star</i> (06/03/2020)	Police suspect Toronto rapper Houdini was killed in gang warfare
<i>Toronto Star</i> (06/04/2020)	Police suspect gangs involved in shooting; Officer exploring whether slain rapper's videos were a motive for the violence

Lifestyle

Much of the narrative surrounding Jenkins' death focused on his lifestyle with headlines focusing in on Jenkins' supposed gang affiliations, as seen in Table 6. Looking closer at news stories by the *Toronto Sun*, *Toronto Star*, and *CP24*, presumptions of Jenkins having gang affiliations are highlighted to contextualize and make sense of his murder:

A street gang expert claims slain Toronto rapper Dimarjio Jenkins, aka Houdini, had ties to "the violent Young Buck Killas" ... the Young Buck Killas are no strangers to street violence. (Doucette, 2020)

Police are looking at the possibility that a Toronto rapper killed in a daylight gunfight on a downtown street last week was targeted because of his gang affiliations... "We know that Jenkins aka Houdini was repping the Driftwood community," which has gangs that have "conflicts with quite a few neighbourhoods." (Powell, 2020)

"We are aware of the gangs that are out there. There are many gangs in the city that have conflicts," Det.-Sgt. Singh said. "We are looking at that. (Wilson, 2020)

These gang connections simultaneously and stereotypically associate Jenkins with violence and criminality. Additionally, it works to dehumanize him and reduce him to a gang member, rather than a human being. This association of criminality and violence is even further amplified when considering Jenkins' career as a rapper. Throughout history, rap music, a genre originated in Black roots, has been perceived as a distinctive yet controversial music genre. It has drawn heavy criticism from politicians, the media, and the public at large, becoming synonymous with criminal behaviour, violence and misogyny. Although many have argued that rap music is a form of artistic expression that represents the voice of disenfranchised people who have faced poverty, crime and systemic discrimination, rap music and the culture that surrounds it have ultimately become associated with negative stereotypes of Blacks (Reyna & Brandt, 2009). Such negative perceptions of rap music are reproduced by the *Toronto Star* and the *Toronto Sun* as both news outlets negatively frame rap to be a contributor to crime and violence in the context of Jenkins' death. Rap music becomes the central focus for *Sun* and the *Star* as Jenkins' own lyrics are highlighted to not only suggest Houdini played a part in his own death but, that Jenkins takes pride in his violent behaviour:

Investigators are also exploring whether Jenkins' music videos and lyrics about violent street life - including purported insults directed at rival gangs and dead rappers - were a possible motive for the killing... (Powell, 2020)

...the gangsters shoot and kill as part of a culture that comes with a soundtrack of racist, misogynistic and violent tracks. Even Houdini foreshadowed his future in his hit songs. "Got shooters right behind me, they fully intend to grind me, you see them don't blind me, because they will blow your mind." (Warmington, 2020)

The *Toronto Star* also highlights a pattern of rappers dying in 2020 to suggest Jenkins' death as inevitable.

Another local rapper dead, added to the roll call of hip-hoppers killed in a musical genre that romanticizes violence... The rap scene has claimed at least four aspiring local musicians in the past two years. Get rich and famous or die tryin'! (DiManno, 2020)

This rhetoric about rap music and Jenkins' career as a rapper legitimizes and maintains anti-Black attitudes, further constructing Jenkins to be an unsympathetic victim. By highlighting a pattern of rappers dying in Toronto, the *Toronto Star* connects the death of Jenkins to the deaths of several other Torontonians, suggesting that Jenkins' death is not particularly shocking, but rather bound to happen, as it fits a general trend of rappers being murdered. Furthermore, the news stories above demonize rap music in suggesting the genre romanticizes violence and perpetuate the notion that there is a clear-cut connection between rap music and violence. The *Toronto Sun* further reproduces the conflation of rap and violence by mentioning that Jenkins was friends with Toronto rapper Pressa, who once faced criminal allegations of pistol-whipping a hostage in a 2016 incident. This connection exaggerates and inflates Jenkins' supposed criminality by detailing who he was associated with, ultimately blaming Jenkins, once again, for his death. Married to the theme of his lifestyle and rap career, news outlets construct the death of Jenkins to have been inevitable due to his career as a rapper; his death was unavoidable.

Neighbourhood

Much of the speculation around Jenkins having gang ties revolved around his identity as a Black male rapper. However, speculation also circulated due to the community he hailed from. Dimarjio Jenkins grew up in the Driftwood area, near Jane and Finch, typically seen as a neighbourhood of social disorder. With over 703 shooting incidents between 2009 and 2018 (Kurek, 2019), Jane and Finch is seen as one of the most dangerous neighbourhoods in the city. More specifically, the Driftwood area which Jenkins is from has been highlighted by local media to be an area of drugs, arrests, and gangs. With the *Toronto Star* article 'The Driftwood takedown' and the *Toronto Sun* news story 'Driftwood gang problems won't disappear overnight', news media has associated the area with danger, disorder, and crime. As such, assumptions of Jenkins' having gang ties arose largely due to stigma around the Driftwood area. References to being from the Jane and Finch community were included to inflate ideas of criminality associated with Jenkins' life. Furthermore, because Jenkins was killed downtown rather than the Driftwood area, his death was especially concerning as many felt this was a threat to the city's collective safety, heightening the public's fears around gun violence. In some ways, Houdini may have been seen as an outsider invading downtown Toronto where "innocent" people could get hurt. In other words, urban violence was invading downtown Toronto, posing a threat to the city's collective sense of security.

Across these news outlets, Jenkins' fame, success, and accomplishments are extensively outlined, elevating the newsworthiness of his death. However, such details are not enough to neutralize the negative representations of Jenkins as a Black male rapper from Driftwood. Though described as a rising star who was a very kind and humble young man, readers' sympathy may be withheld due to included details about gang ties and his career as a rapper in news stories. Despite being legally innocent and not having a criminal record, the representations of Jenkins revolved around notions of criminality, and he was subjected to many victim-blaming tactics by news outlets due to his lifestyle.

Chapter 5: Discussion

“It’s doubtful that White Toronto will ever forget the name of Jane Creba. It’s doubtful that most of White Toronto could remember the names of three of the Black youths killed last year... Black Toronto has paid the biggest price for gun violence.” (Coyle, 2006)

Together, the quantitative and qualitative content analyses reflect larger patterns of how Black gun violence victims are represented by Toronto news outlets. The results of this research highlight how the interlocking race and gender of Black men combine to form representations of them as unsympathetic and blameworthy criminals before they are victims. Examining race and representation in news stories in a city known for its diversity finds that news outlets in multicultural Toronto are anti-Black in the way they report news. In addition to these representations of Black men, news stories tended to represent White victims of gun violence as innocent and sympathetic. Therefore, these news stories reveal important insights into how even a diverse city like Toronto perpetuates discourses and perceptions of anti-Blackness, with important implications for Black men living in Toronto. Patterns of news representations suggest Black men are not worthy or deserving victims which can impact the kind of sympathy and assistance people give to Black male victims. Ultimately, unsympathetic representations of Black men as victims of gun violence in Toronto news coverage jeopardizes their welfare and constructs their safety to be an afterthought.

Extraordinary Cases

To be clear, not all news stories represented Black men as blameworthy and undeserving. There has been an increase in more critical, in-depth and intimate stories of Black men as gun violence victims. However, such news stories only offered Black men protection from being represented as undeserving victims if they were able to conform to dominant notions of what constitutes both an ideal victim and a ‘respectable’ Black man. Those who were able to adhere these constructs were more likely to have their victimization reported in a humane and dignified fashion. The idea is that *these* Black men are a departure from the typical criminal and undeserving Black men. For example, 26-year-old Nnamdi Ogba is immediately set apart in news stories from other Black male victims of gun violence. Across all news outlets, it is reported that Ogba did not provoke the attack, know his attackers, have a criminal record, or have gang affiliations. He was killed simply because he was in the “wrong place at the wrong time”, making him an ideal victim, worthy of sympathy, grief, and respect. Other examples include TSN employee Johnathan Gayle-West who was shot and killed in 2018 and Jaydin Simpson, a seventeen-year-old boy, who was murdered shortly after his high school graduation. These victims were occasional exceptions who adhered to notions of the ‘ideal victim’ and the ‘respectable’ Black man.

Such Black male victims who received dignified media coverage are generally deemed to be extraordinary and rare, thus increasing their newsworthiness and potential for sympathy. Ultimately, victims are categorized as good or bad; Alison Young (2008) speaks to this binary idea when looking at the imagination of crime. She notes that oppositional terms, in this context, good and bad, are constructed in a system of value which makes one visible and the other invisible. In this context, those Black men who do not adhere to notions of an ideal victim and respectable Black man would be rendered invisible. Likewise, those that do conform to these constructs would be made more visible, as noted in news representations of victims such as Ogba. This speaks to dominant notions of what it means to be a “good” Black man — those who were not involved in crime or gangs, held respectable jobs, were not known to police, etc. Such Black men have a greater perceived worth in society and for Black male victims, the “respectable” Black men were immediately set apart from the “culpable” Black men. Ultimately, when Black men are victims, they are demarcated between those who deserve our sympathy, and those who

are deviant and culpable for their victimization; these demarcations rely on constructs of innocence and respectability.

Social Media Pushback

Despite the dim findings of this study, hope is kept alive in the solidarity and resistance to representations of Black victims as criminals in news stories. Many passionate individuals have taken to social media to voice their frustrations and reclaim the humanity of those lives lost. Users are utilizing these platforms to seek more positive representations of gun violence victims and fight on their behalf. For example, local artist Mustafa the Poet engaged with CP24 on Twitter to push back against the dehumanizing reporting of his late friend Julian Weekes, who was shot and killed in July 2016. As seen in Figure 5, he wrote in response to CP24's story of Weekes, "You used a mugshot of my bro that's almost 10yrs old. The least you can do is respect us after we pass" which garnered 20,000 retweets and 17,000 likes.

This collective push back against dehumanizing reporting tactics has had a profound impact. As a result, CP24's story of Weekes and many other stories have been updated or rewritten in response to backlash. The acknowledgement of inaccurate and distorted representations of Black men as victims was also made in the cases of Marcus Gibson, Mohamed Sow, and Paul Dunkley. All three of these victims had mugshots removed from their stories and replaced with more humanizing photographs to report their deaths in a more dignified way. At the social media level, users have continued to ask for stories to be more equitable and for the media to be held accountable to a higher standard in response to their racial biases. These expressions offer hope and are a step in the right direction for more humane representations of Black men killed by gun violence in Toronto.



Fig 4. Tweet by Mustafa the Poet denouncing CP24 for using a mugshot to report the murder of his deceased friend.

Future Research

Despite the important findings of this study, there are limitations that must be mentioned. The first potential limitation of this study is that Black men were more likely to be subjected to victim-blaming practices given that the majority of gun violence victims were Black men. Future research should include analyses of a larger number of news stories in conducting a closer examination of differential news portrayals of Black men and White men. Additionally, because this study focused mostly on the

intersection of race and gender, there wasn't as much place to think more closely about class. representations more closely along the lines of class by looking beyond neighbourhoods as a signifier of class. As noted, class can significantly contribute to the way victimhood is represented, perceived, and discussed. While class was explored in this paper when considering how victims from neighbourhoods such as Regent Park and Driftwood are blamed for their plights, future research should explore media. Future research may also wish to explore whether Black men are less likely to be perceived as sympathetic victims by news readers in Toronto in comparison to White men. Such studies may wish to present participants with a variety of news stories involving both racialized and non-racialized victims to evaluate their perceptions of crime victims.

In spite of these limitations, this study contributes to our understanding of how Black men in Toronto are constructed to be unsympathetic and undeserving victims in the news. The findings provide a necessary start for future studies to further explore portrayals of Black victims in Toronto media coverage. More importantly, the findings emphasize that reproduction of anti-Black racism by Toronto media must be questioned and challenged as such damaging representations can jeopardize the safety of Black men across Toronto, whether intentionally or unintentionally. These negative portrayals are harmful to Black men who are victims of gun violence as it can legitimize and maintain anti-Black attitudes, thus having a detrimental impact on the sympathy and assistance Toronto gives to Black male victims of gun violence. Ultimately, it is imperative that we recognize the media's racial biases so that Black men across Toronto can be better assisted and protected in the fight against gun violence.

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