

TOWSON UNIVERSITY  
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FRAMING THE FREDDIE GRAY INCIDENT: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE  
BALTIMORE SUN AND THE WASHINGTON POST NEWSPAPERS

by

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## Abstract

### Framing the Freddie Gray Incident: A Content Analysis of The Baltimore Sun and The Washington Post Newspapers

Marvin Jones

The month of April 2015 will forever be etched in Baltimore history as a time of opinion, sadness, and soul-searching as the Freddie Gray incident occurred, along with the protests that swiftly followed. For the purpose of observing the framing done of the incident by newspaper outlets, a qualitative content analysis of The Baltimore Sun and The Washington Post was performed for the time period after his death and before the protests. Understanding that framing is virtually unavoidable, it is important to recognize the slants presented to the public about the incident. The findings suggested there are minimal differences in how media outlets in two different cities framed the same incident as evidenced by the majority of framing being sympathetic toward Freddie Gray. In addition, the majority of framing took place in the body of the article as opposed to the headline, lead, or closing paragraph.

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## Introduction

### Purpose of Study

Hundreds of millions of people around the world bore witness to the catastrophic damage done to the city of Baltimore by the demonstrations that took place in April 2015. The cause of the demonstrations was the unfortunate death of Freddie Gray as a result of what transpired once he was in police custody. An incident of this magnitude garners significant attention from the media, who will then present the information to the public through a certain frame. Gross (2008) stated that frames provide a specific way of interpreting or understanding an issue. Another way to describe a frame is to call it a “slant” because it contains a certain amount of bias in order for it to provide a way of thinking about an issue. The use of the term slant is not meant to be negative.

Entman (1993) thought that “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text...” (p. 52). Newspapers (print) are one form of text that the media uses to communicate with the public. The Freddie Gray incident has caused a clear divide with some people feeling sympathetic towards Gray in the situation. Others (though seemingly less outspoken and fewer in number) have been critical of Gray by suggesting his criminal background played in part in the incident among other things. This study will probe into the media’s characterization of the incident in how they framed it to the public. The framing matters because they are giving the readers of the article a specific perspective stance on the incident and how it should be viewed. It is also important to gain understanding on the differences between framing by a local vs.

“out of city” outlet because the evidence may shed light on the realities of bias of writers who are too close to the situation at hand to provide a balanced viewpoint.

Therefore, the research question for this study is:

- Does a media outlet in the city of a police-related death incident frame this major news event in the same way that a media outlet outside of the city would?

### Background of Freddie Gray Incident and Consequences

On the morning of April 12, 2015 at approximately 8:30 a.m., three Baltimore City Police Officers were patrolling through a West Baltimore neighborhood and made eye contact with Freddie Gray and another individual. After this momentary interaction, Gray fled unprovoked and the police began to pursue him. (Gray did have prior criminal background and the officers knew who he was.) Within minutes Gray was subdued without force, as was observed via cell phone footage of a bystander. It is important to note that only a portion of the encounter was taped. As he was placed in the back of a police van, he was heard screaming as his legs went limp. Despite this, the officers proceeded to place him in leg chains. Over the course of the next half hour the police van made two more stops. Once he arrived at the station, a medic came, provided aid and ultimately decided to rush him to shock trauma. Gray had suffered significant back injuries and other traumas. That evening officers issued a summons, for Gray, for possession of a switchblade at the scene of his earlier arrest (Fantz and Botelho, 2015).

Over the next few days the Baltimore City Police Department (BPCD) made general statements regarding the case, saying that there wasn't any evidence of

wrongdoing. During the same time period, Gray had double surgery on his spine and remained in a coma. A non-violent protest was held in front of a police station on the 18<sup>th</sup> followed by his death, as a result of his injuries on the 19<sup>th</sup>. The officers were suspended and a federal investigation was opened by the Justice Department (Fantz and Botelho, 2015). The number of protests grew in frequency between April 21 and April 24. On April 24, the BPCD acknowledged that Gray didn't wear a seatbelt while being transported and that the officers should have gotten medical help for him much sooner (Fantz and Botelho, 2015).

On April 25, protests turned violent and in the aftermath of Gray's funeral on April 27, Baltimore exploded in chaos. Violent demonstrations continued on this path for two horrific days, causing millions in damage to the city of Baltimore. A state of emergency was declared and a curfew placed into effect (Fantz and Botelho, 2015). On May 1, Marilyn Mosby, state's attorney for Baltimore City, announced charges against six officers involved in the arrest and transportation of Freddie Gray. This incident placed Baltimore into the domestic and international spotlight (Fantz and Botelho, 2015).

#### Agenda Setting within the Media

McCombs and Shaw (1972) suggest that the media tell the public what to think about. Over the past several years in the United States, there have been multiple instances of "perceived" police brutality that have received national coverage. The term "perceived" is used because in all instances the police were not found guilty of misconduct or have yet to undergo trial. Even though these sorts of incidents occur on a regular basis, there are times (for whatever the reason may be)



that they surge onto the media's forefront and stay in the public's eye as a result. Three other major incidents resulting in death that received national coverage include the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri (had an fatal altercation with cop though he was unarmed) (Pearce, 2014); Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York (subdued in chokehold position despite pleas of being unable to breathe) (Horowitz, 2014); and Walter Scott in North Charleston, South Carolina (killed after a routine stop for a broken tail lamp) (Schmidt and Apuzzo, 2015).

There is a certain underlying factor in all four of the incidents that have garnered media coverage and to disregard it would be irresponsible and myopic. All of these incidents involved the death of a black male at the hands of a police department. This makes the study that much more valuable. Gross (2008) acknowledged that "...media coverage of race and poverty should matter precisely because many Americans have relatively few alternative sources of information about these issues" (p. 4). If this is indeed true, then it is healthy and necessary to understand the slants the media are providing when bringing forth this information.

## Literature Review

### Framing Theory

"When the individual in our Western Society recognizes a particular event, he tends ... to imply in this response (and in effect employ) one or more frameworks or schemata of interpretation of a kind..." (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). Erving Goffman found that individuals naturally interpret events as a response mechanism. This interpretation is known as framing and makes up the central core of framing theory

or “news” framing theory. The idea is that it is virtually impossible to see something and not to put a “slant” (frame) or perspective on it. McQuail (2010) states that it is almost impossible for journalists to report with pure objectivity and not to introduce some form of unintended bias. McQuail (2010) further builds the argument that when news information is supplied by sources to the media, it already has an established built-in frame serving the purpose of the supplier and therefore most likely is not purely objective. In addition to McQuail, Gans (1979) stated “...the assumption is distorted news can be replaced by undistorted news; but that assumption is untenable...objective or absolute nondistortion is impossible” (p. 304, 305). This is a crucial when looking at news framing because it implies that the media may be manipulated by the sources necessary to complete a story and that there is potentially no way to avoid it. This study does include the recognition of quotes from sources as part of the frame set by the media in one of two directions. Revealing this shed lights on the idea that the media may be used as an instrument to “sell” certain views on hot-button issues such as race & discrimination or politics.

All of the aforementioned ideas from Goffman and McQuail lead to the prevailing idea, that the media not only tell us what we should think about (agenda setting theory – to be covered later) but also how we should think about it. Kim (2015) beautifully characterizes Entman’s idea of the function of framing as “framing functions to shape the way the public thinks about an issue by suggesting what the issue is about, who the cause is, and what should be done as a solution” (p.1).

However, it is important to consider what Entman (2007) realized later, as noted by McQuail (2010), that the media telling us how to think about something can be intentional or unintentional. Entman (2007) went on further to say that frames also introduce or raise the salience or importance of certain ideas. Entman (1993) defined salience as making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences. This is crucial as we look at framing because it is through this salience that target audiences are encouraged to think, feel, and decide in a particular way. (This study will look at salience through the lens of frequency or repetition in slants as well as where they are placed in article, i.e. headline, lead, body or closing paragraph.) Though not to be discussed in any capacity during this study, it is imperative to know that Entman (2007) noted that if patterns of slant (framing) persist across time, that the media might be systemically helping to induce certain preferred behaviors in others on behalf of someone influential.

This study places its sole focus on studying print media, specifically newspapers. It's common knowledge that Baltimore has been a predominantly liberal or Democrat-party city for decades as evidenced through its election of city mayors and other officials (Perazzo, 2015) and that The Baltimore Sun newspaper follows in similar fashion (Vatz, 2013). With that being said, Kim (2015) makes the strong assertion that "liberal newspapers were found to focus more than conservative papers on societal responsibilities, suggesting that political orientations of newspapers could affect the media's attributions of responsibility... to encourage news writers to frame a story with a human-interest..." (p. 2). Kim

(2015) echoed a similar sentiment to Entman's (2007), suggesting news framing could induce a number of emotional responses. Again, the idea that framing can produce actions from the audience cannot be undersold. It brings to mind the potential power that the media have when framing topics and that makes the study of framing essential. Kim (2015) continues that the uses of certain frames, specifically death metaphors, gain vs. loss frames, etc. could bring about different levels of responses. In other words, certain types of slants have the potential to make more of an impact than others, however this cannot be studied using a content analysis.

According to de Vresse (2005), frame setting refers to the interaction between media frames (slant) and the individual's prior knowledge and predispositions. This means that the audience isn't strictly influenced by the slant presented by the media. Their background and other prior experiences come into play (such as race or economic status as mentioned in the introduction). The slant has the potential to feed off of those prior experiences, which further accentuates current beliefs. As de Vresse (2005) noted "an individual level consequence may be altered attitudes about an issue based on exposure to certain frames" (p.52). He also suggests that the consequences of frame setting at a societal level has the ability to lead to processes that include "political socialization, decision making, and collective actions" (p. 52). Collective actions are those that are taken by an entire group as a whole. Again, this further supports the point that studies on framing are necessary because it is known that they yield the power to not only influence individuals, but also to affect entire groups.

As stated earlier, it is difficult and somewhat irresponsible to discuss framing without acknowledging that bias is a major contributor to it. It must be noted that bias as it relates to the media comes in many definitions, as the scenarios in which it surfaces differ dramatically. Common types of bias related to the media that are regularly mentioned include but are not limited to omission, source, selection, labeling and spin (Dugger, 2015). On a scholarly level it is easy to find studies that deal with bias as it relates to politics especially on elections and campaigns and to issues of race/ethnicity.

Niven (2003) said, “although attention to claims of media bias has certainly exploded in recent years, it is by no means a new source of concern” (p.312). The idea that media are intentionally biased (outside of what is natural in how we view things) will always be around; however, this study doesn’t focus on it, but wants to acknowledge the possibility of it.

Entman (2007) not only claims that agenda setting theory and framing relate to each other (which will be discussed later), but he also provides perspective on how bias interrelates as well. He noted that in terms of framing, bias takes on meaning in three distinct forms, which are: (1) distortion bias (news that falsifies or distorts reality unintentionally); (2) content bias (news that favors one side rather than having equal treatment to both parties in...conflict); and (3) decision-making bias (journalists who have motivations to intentionally produce biased content). This study examines media coverage through the lens of content bias. Using the lens of journalistic integrity and distortion bias are both, highly subjective and complex processes that do not serve this study. Content bias, however, fits seamlessly

because the Freddie Gray incident, even at a glance, is obviously slanted by the media, which include both newspapers selected for this study.

Looking at bias and how it relates to framing and ultimately agenda setting, which is the foundation necessary to frame or slant, provides another opportunity to show cause for the importance of the study because of the power wielded.

Entman (2007) states “systematically employing agenda setting, framing... under the conceptual umbrella of bias would advance understanding of the media’s role in distributing power, revealing new dimensions and processes of critically political communication” (p. 164). Again, this is not to say that the Freddie Gray case is political (although one can easily argue its political ramifications), but it illustrates the influence media have to spark public action.

#### Agenda Setting

Though framing theory supports the backbone of this study and directs how it is completed, it is necessary to mention agenda setting theory as well. Entman (2007) says that “agenda setting can thus be seen as another name for successfully performing the first function of framing: defining problems worthy of public and government attention. The distinction misleads because, short of physical coercion, all influence over what people think, derives from telling them what to think about” (p. 164). It has been a common occurrence over the past eighteen months to hear about every prominent story of “potential” police misconduct, especially if the ending result is fatal for the person subdued. As mentioned earlier, whether it’s a police officer in South Carolina who shoots a man in the back after a routine traffic stop or law enforcement in Missouri shoots to kill at someone who is unarmed, the

media have saturated our society with these types of stories, thereby keeping them in the forefront of our minds. Obviously, the Freddie Gray situation's prominence in the media does that as well.

Interestingly, McCombs and Shaw (1972), the originators of agenda setting theory, acknowledge that evidence of the media's ability to change attitudes is inconclusive but admit that consumers of media learn from the immense quantity of information provided. Having information does influence our attitude on subjects, as we naturally will make a choice on how to feel about the information that has been given to us. Therefore, the conclusion can be made that agenda setting while different from framing is very closely associated with it.

Throughout this literature review, references have been made to the importance of understanding framing because of the potential power it wields. The same can be said of agenda-setting because of how closely the two are inter-related. Earlier in the review, reference was made to the Entman (2007) that the media systemically help to induce certain behaviors that are preferred in others on behalf of an influential party. Walker (1977) also noted that agenda setting is of central importance to any political system. Why does this matter? As stated earlier, the media can be used to "sell" certain views on hot button-issues that are typically of a political nature. This means leaders "may" want to influence how the public views these issues.

Boydston, Glazier, and Pietryka (2013) also show the relationship between agenda setting and framing. Their study focused on agenda control in presidential debates and they stated "candidates have strong motivations to agenda set and

frame strategically by focusing their discussion on a certain set of topics” (p. 255).

While the focus of their study was presidential candidates, this idea can be applied to anyone who wants to shed light on a topic, including journalists in the media. But more importantly, we see that in order to have one, the other must be had as well. Intentional or unintentional framing or slanting of a topic is less likely to be a factor if the audience isn’t totally dialed in to the topic that is desired be at the forefront of their attention.

### Methodology

The purpose of this study was to answer to the following research question:

- Does a media outlet in the city of a police-related death incident frame this major news event in the same way that a media outlet outside of the city would?

To streamline the study and keep the number of variables limited and focused, the decision was made to use only print media. It is realized as a limitation in the study because of the vast number of media channels that could have been chosen that includes but is not limited to radio, television, and online content. Print media is a prime candidate for study because it allows for a more narrowed focus due to factors such as nonverbal communication cues that are unnecessary for this study.

To answer the above-stated research question, it was decided that a qualitative content analysis would be the most valuable and accurate tool. Berelson (1952) suggested the main purposes of content analysis are: (1) to describe characteristics of substance in message content; (2) form characteristics of message content; (3) make inferences on the producers and audiences of content; and (4) to



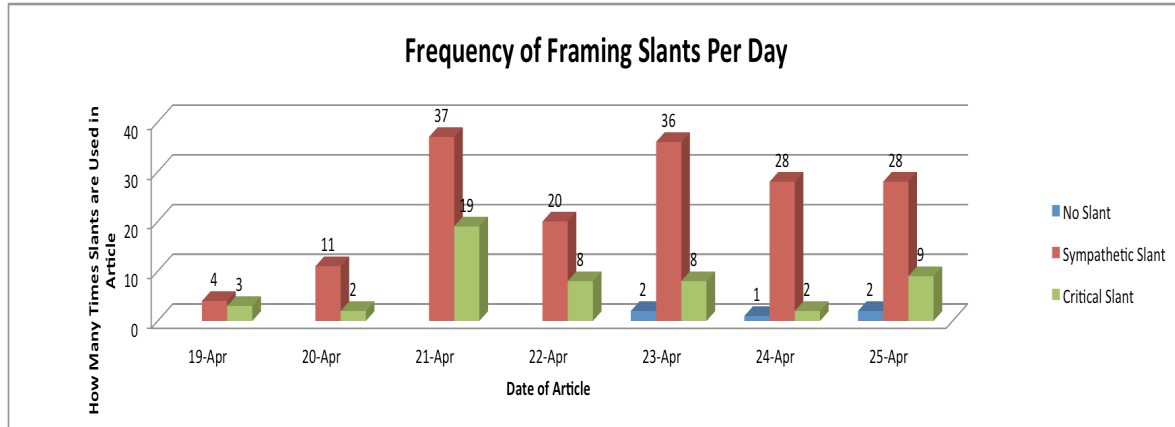
predict the effects of the content on audiences. The flexibility offered by content analysis provides many benefits and this study prioritized substance and form characteristics in message content.

The decision to use two newspaper outlets stemmed from the question of whether there would be a difference in framing as a result of one entity being in the “heart of the action” as opposed to another newspaper that would be on “the outside looking in.” The Baltimore Sun was chosen because it is not only the dominant paper in the metropolitan area where the Freddie Gray incident occurred, but also because it reaches the most residents, produces the largest amount of content, and dates back to the nineteenth century. Dating back to the nineteenth century is significant because it shows longevity in the relationship between the outlet and its audience. It is estimated that The Baltimore Sun reaches one million readers each week ([www.baltimoresun.com](http://www.baltimoresun.com)). The decision to use The Washington Post was due to the fact that it also reaches a million or more readers each week and dates back to the nineteenth century ([www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)). In addition, the location of the Washington Post is critical as it resides in the closest major city to Baltimore. The study was also interested in the perceptions of an outlet that was in close proximity to the incident, but not actually in the middle of it.

The articles selected were found using the research database ProQuest that is available as a library resource through Towson University. It contains sections exclusively for The Baltimore Sun and The Washington Post, respectively. A search was completed for any article containing the name “Freddie Gray.”

Articles chosen for this study fell within the timeframe of April 19, 2015 through April 25, 2015. This timeframe is significant because the beginning date is the day that Freddie Gray died from his injuries and the ending date is the first day of protests. This is a critical timeframe because this analysis found that the majority of the articles before his death typically contained mostly factual information about the case. His unfortunate death pushed the case into the limelight and opinions began to be framed as to how Freddie Gray should be viewed in the incident. In addition, the first day of protests changes the focus and opinions somewhat away from the actual incident and brings into the situation questions, opinions, and summaries on the damage to the city, who committed it, and how does the city ultimately recover from it? The first day of protests still fit into the timeline because in the case of print media, it wouldn't reach audiences until the following day. This small window is a critical time to investigate the two major slants of sympathy for Freddie Gray vs. criticism against him. Unintentionally, it was discovered after completing the content analysis that the choice was correct by the spike in framing that is present in articles after his death. The table below shows the rise in slants from articles in The Baltimore Sun and The Washington Post combined.

Table I.



Articles were verified to be the only ones available in print by matching them up with what The Baltimore Sun and The Washington Post had listed in their respective archives.

Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) present the idea that “categories and a coding scheme can be derived from three sources: the data, previous related studies, and theories.” For this study, the categories and coding scheme were derived directly from the data. Such a polarizing incident as this one naturally slants the public. The study wanted to focus on whether Freddie Gray was being framed in a sympathetic or critical light. Randomly selected articles were read and slants as well as the framing type they came in were noted (examples seen below). From there, a coding scheme was generated so the data could be fully analyzed.

Each article was categorized by the newspaper, in which it was published, along with the date and its authors. In addition, each article was given a number based upon the date and time it was released. Coding was broken down by looking at the slants presented in each article. Each article could contain both slants and in

that scenario, all slants were recorded with notation being made through frequency as to which slant appeared the most. Slants were broken down as follows:

(See Appendices A and B for copies of Coding Instructions and Coding Sheet)

Sympathetic Framing Type:

- A. Human Sentiment = 1 (mentions of his personality, personal background, or anything that provokes feelings of sympathy, empathy or sorrow for his death.)
- B. Violent treatment = 2 (mentions of excessive or unnecessary force, the brutality by the police, conspiracies.)
- C. Multiple Mentions of Race = 3 (more than one reference to his race as it relates to discrimination, prejudice, or other forms of unfair treatment.)

Critical Framing Type:

- A. Reference to Criminal History = 1 (mention of his prior criminal background.)
- B. Justification of Pursuit = 2 (reference to his fleeing for no reason, anything that gives the police logical cause for their actions, or shows that they followed proper procedures.)
- C. Providing Clarity on Arrest = 3 (clear facts as to what happened that paint law enforcement in a responsible light.)

It was also required that the form of each example be recorded whether it was a term, phrase, or part of a quote. The location of the slant was to be recorded as well (headline, lead, body, or closing paragraph). The study included the location of the slant because Herman Ebbinghaus proposed the idea of Serial Position Effect, which is composed of primacy and recency effect as noted by Azizian & Polich (2007). The idea relates to lists but further research has used it in relations to bodies of text. This means that people are more likely to remember things at the beginning of and ending of a source, making it an essential factor to review.

This study used two coders (one African-American male and female, respectively, both under the age of 30 who are from the Baltimore area) comprised

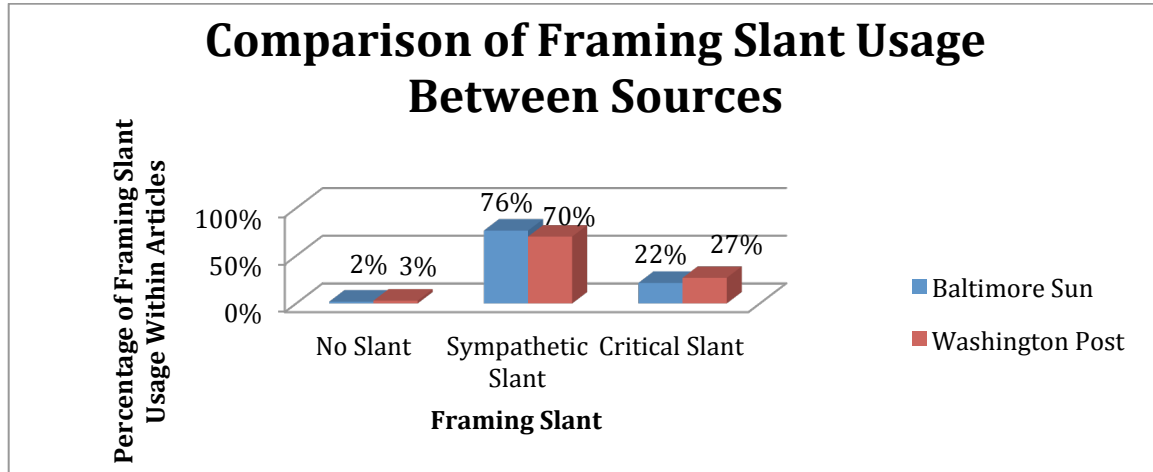
of the researcher (experienced coder) and one individual who had no prior experience coding or writing research projects. The individual with no experience was given an overview of the topic and it was explained that in this situation there were no favorable or right answers. The coding sheet was discussed and the trainee was allowed to ask questions for clarification purposes only.

To test for inter-coder reliability, a training session was conducted using eight articles that fell outside of the date range specifically assigned to the topic of study. Using Holsti's (1969) formula  $(2M)/(N_1 + N_2)$  inter-coder reliability was established. M stands for the number of decisions agreed upon by the coders and  $N_1$  and  $N_2$ , respectively, stands for the amount of decisions made by each coder. Within those eight articles the coders agreed on a total of thirty-five of the decisions with one coder making thirty-seven decisions and the other coder making thirty-nine decisions. Through this method,  $(2 \times 35)/37 + 39$ , it was found that the inter-coder reliability stood at 92%, which is acceptable. Neuendorf (2002) states that "nearly always acceptable" reliability needs to be at least 90% (p. 143).

### Findings and Implications

Below are the results and corresponding implications of the content analysis that was done. The data have not been altered or manipulated in any way to present a certain slant in how it is interpreted.

Table II.



The findings of the study suggest that there are minimal differences in how the media outlets in two different cities framed the same incident. They were both overwhelmingly more likely to be sympathetic towards Freddie Gray as opposed to being critical of him. This is an interesting finding because Kane and White (2009) stated that blacks are more likely to be the victims of police brutality. Couple this with the previously acknowledged degree of agenda setting by the media in regards to the “appearance” of police brutality against blacks and it becomes apparent why it is possible for the media, regardless of whether they reside in the same city as the incident or not, to frame Freddie Gray in a sympathetic light at a 3 to 1 ratio. (It is still important to acknowledge that officers involved in Freddie Gray incident have not had their trials.) The margin of difference in ratios of the use of each type of slant stands at 6% and 5%, respectively. The difference in the percentage of not using a slant at all in articles only changed by 1% based upon the outlet. The use of slants overall in articles is clearly overwhelming which proves McQuail (2010)

statement that it is almost impossible for journalists to report with pure objectivity and not to introduce some form of bias, unintentionally.

In addition, it was discovered that none of the articles in either outlet used a critical slant without the presence of a sympathetic slant as well. The research found 90% of the combined articles of both outlets contained at least one sympathetic slant while only 47% of the articles contained a critical slant. 45% of all the articles contained both a sympathetic and critical slant. However, each of those articles had an equal amount or more of sympathetic slants than critical.

Table III.

Differences in Use of Various Types of Slants by News Outlets

Framing Slant		Sympathetic		
Baltimore Sun	Framing Type			
Source	Human Sentiment	Police Brutality	Mentions of Race	Grand Total
Baltimore Sun	29.06%	46.15%	24.79%	100.00%
Washington Post	25.53%	48.94%	25.53%	100.00%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>28.05%</b>	<b>46.95%</b>	<b>25.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Framing Slant		Critical		
Baltimore Sun	Framing Type			
Source	Reference to Criminal History	Justification of Pursuit	Providing Clarity of Arrest	Grand Total
Baltimore Sun	33.33%	36.36%	30.30%	100.00%
Washington Post	22.22%	27.78%	50.00%	100.00%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>29.41%</b>	<b>33.33%</b>	<b>37.25%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Table III provides clarity as to how each newspaper outlet channeled their use of sympathetic and critical slants of Freddie Gray. The data that stands out the

most is the use of the idea of police brutality when making Freddie Gray appear to be a sympathetic figure. Phrases such as “unnecessary or excessive force” were commonly used to frame the incident in a way that translates to Freddie Gray shouldn’t have gone through that experience and it was undeserved. It makes sense to find this is the most commonly used type of slant as the media has constantly kept the idea of police brutality in the forefront of our minds over the last eighteen months. Another key statistic is that The Washington Post took the opportunity to provide clarity on the arresting procedures used as the dominant way to be critical of Freddie Gray and to not paint him as a sympathetic figure. Below are random excerpts of each framing type taken directly from an article:

#### Sympathetic:

- A. Human Sentiment: “He was so loyal, so kindhearted, so warm.” (Excerpt from an article in The Washington Post on April 25.)
- B. Police Brutality: “What happened to Freddie was unnecessary and uncalled for.” (Excerpt from an article in The Baltimore Sun on April 19.)
- C. Mentions of Race: “...they had no justification for making the arrests except he was a black man running.” (Excerpt from an article in The Baltimore Sun on April 20.)

#### Critical:

- A. Reference to Criminal History “Freddie...a young man so frequently in cuffs...that officers could identify him by name from surveillance camera video.” (Excerpt from an article in Washington Post on April 25.)
- B. Justification of Pursuit: “they had reasonable suspicion because he was in a high crime area, had a knife and ran from them.” (Excerpt from an article in Washington Post on April 23.)
- C. Providing Clarity of Arrest: “There was no indication of any physical assault or any use of force...no interviews, no cellphone video, no indication of a use of force.” (Excerpt from an article in The Baltimore Sun on April 21.)

Tables IV and V to follow show that the overwhelming majority of slants were placed in the body of the article as opposed to the lead, closing paragraph, or headline. In the methodology section, it was noted that primacy and recency affects



how deliberately frames were being placed in the article. Signs of this deliberate placement would show intentionality on the part of the writers. Clearly, no such correlation was found. It also sheds light on the fact that there was no difference in where the frames were placed by the two newspaper outlets. This data supports McQuail (2010), who claims that it is impossible for “unintentional” bias not to happen on the part of media. Earlier data shows the clear sympathetic slant but this detail reveals the lack of intentionality based upon strategic placement in the article.

Table IV.

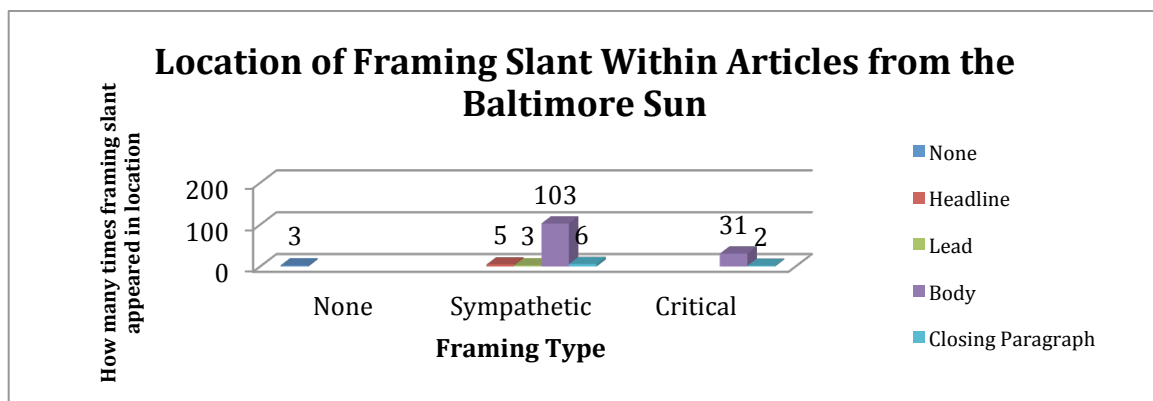
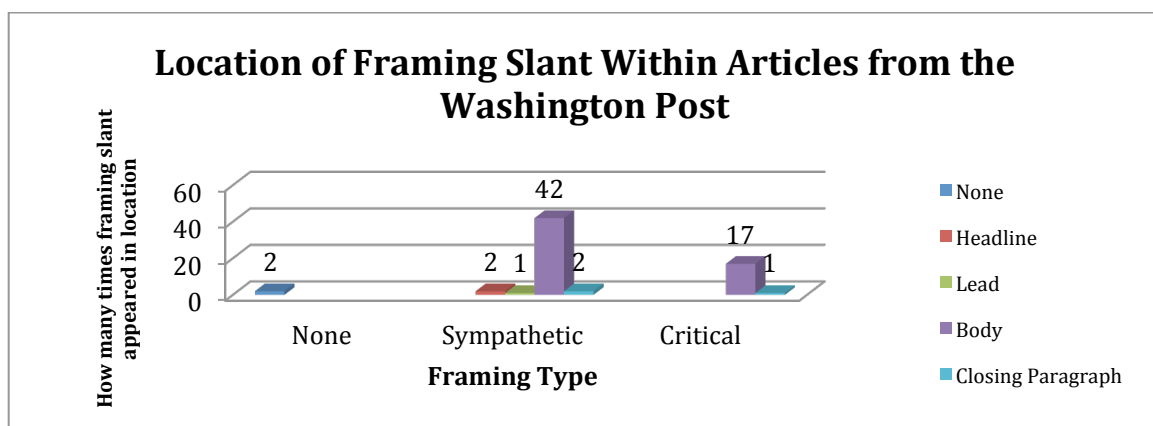


Table V.



## Conclusions

No real differences were found between The Baltimore Sun and The Washington Post's framing of the Freddie Gray incident. The opportunity was there for differences because The Baltimore Sun was in the heart of the situation, while The Washington Post was on the outside looking in. This study illustrates the overwhelming sympathetic framing of Freddie Gray showing that bias is unavoidable on the media's part but also more than likely unintentional because it didn't typically take place in an area where it would stand out or be highlighted such as the headline, lead, or closing paragraph.

### Limitations of Study

As with any study there are various limitations that must be considered when digesting the data presented. In this study, the first of these limitations was the decision to only use print media. Media come in many forms, including but not limited to, radio, television, social media, and online media. With this fact, it is with no certainty that this study can conclude that it is a representative sample of the media in general.

Another limitation in this study is that only two newspaper sources were selected and they both are within a fifty-mile geographical distance of each other. The more newspaper sources chosen the more solid the research becomes because, again, it represents a larger sample. The same could be said of the two outlets in close proximity to each other. It makes for a strong case of regional framing, but doesn't provide any true perspective at the national level.

This study only looked at headlines and bodies of text within the newspaper articles. However many newspaper articles also contain photographs and captions that would allow media opportunities to frame the incident. Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) stated “visuals, like text, can operate as framing devices insofar as they make use of various rhetorical tools...” (p. 51). Understanding this means that pictures can be framed as well. Furthermore, citing Iorguveau and Corbu (2012) it was noted that the media present more than just verbal messages, but visual messages as well. By not including these in the analysis, the ability to understand the framing techniques of media writers is limited because, though plausible, there’s no guarantee that the use of pictures and captions would follow the same patterns as what was observed in headlines and general bodies of text.

Lastly, Hsieh & Shannon (2005) describe content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns.” (p. 1278). It is noted that the even the coders of this study naturally and unavoidably have bias in the subjective interpretation of the data that was analyzed. If two coders from a small town in the Midwest of a different ethnicity, age and economic class were to analyze the same texts with the same rules and conditions, there is no guarantee that their results would be the same. This point is made to add perspective to the results and findings yielded in this study.

#### Opportunities for Future Research

This study opens up the opportunity for multiple follow-up studies, because this content analysis kept its focus narrowed. Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas

(2013) were mindful that “qualitative methodologies consist of the philosophical perspectives, assumptions, postulates, and approaches that researchers employ to render their work open to analysis, critique, replication, repetition, and/or adaptation and to choose research methods” (p. 398). This is significant to the fact that no study is ever truly isolated and there is always room to expand and further discover since, as stated earlier, that content analyses can be highly subjective.

As stated in the limitations of this study, an opportunity for future research includes conducting a content analysis for all different forms of media and using media outlets from across the country. The Los Angeles Times or Chicago Tribune (as examples) may not have framed the incident the same as outlets on the east coast. Additionally, the violent protests put an international spotlight on the Freddie Gray incident, so it could prove beneficial to see how international media outlets framed the incident. Conversely, it would also provide the opportunity to probe how publics in cultures outside of the United States absorbed the frames presented by media in this country. Lastly, it may prove beneficial to do an extensive study on the influence that media slants of the Freddie Gray incident may have played in individuals who took place in the violent demonstrations within the city. As Entman (2007) suggested, news framing could induce a number of emotional responses. So the idea that violent demonstrations could have been influenced by the sympathetic frames of the media cannot be overlooked without further study.

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## Coding Instructions

### Background Information (all articles are print media)

Article Title: Enter complete title.

Allowed Dates for Analysis: April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015 – April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

Date: Enter complete date including month, day, and year.

Authors: Enter first and last name of all authors listed.

Source (independent variable):

- The Baltimore Sun = 1
- The Washington Post = 2

### Article Specifics

Framing Slant (dependent variable):

- Sympathetic = 1
- Critical = 2

Sympathetic Framing Type:

- D. Human Sentiment = 1 (mentions of his personality, personal background, or anything that provokes feelings of sympathy, empathy or sorrow for his death.)
- E. Police Brutality = 2 (mentions of excessive or unnecessary force, the brutality by the police, conspiracies)
- F. Multiple Mentions of Race = 3 (more than one reference to his race as it relates to discrimination or prejudice.)



Justifiable Action Framing Type:

- D. Reference to Criminal History = 1 (mention of his prior criminal background.)
- E. Justification of Pursuit = 2 (reference to his fleeing for no reason, anything that gives the police logical cause for their actions)
- F. Providing Clarity on Arrest = 3 (the clear facts as to what happen happened that paint law enforcement in a responsible light)

Framing Example: write out the word, phrase, or partial quote representing slant.

Framing Location: Note where frame happens in article.

- Headline = 1
- Lead = 2
- Body = 3
- Closing Paragraph = 4

Frequency of Framing Type: Note how many times each framing type is utilized. (If a certain framing slant isn't used fill in a "0" under the frequency section.) In parenthesis indicate frequency of framing type.

## Coding Sheet

Background Information

Article Title:

Date:

Authors:

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| 1. | 4. |
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Source:

Article Specifics

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 Framing Example(s):  
 Framing Location(s):

Frequency

Sympathetic:

Critical:

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