

*Interpreting Racism: Framing of the Zimmerman case by the American media*

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Onderzoeksseminar III voor TCS  
Resit Bachelor Thesis  
June 12th 2014  
Word count: 9590

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## Introduction

“It remains unclear which of the two cried out for help. All the callers now believe the person who cried for help is the one who ended up dead; the parents of Zimmerman and Trayvon are each convinced that it was their son screaming for help” (Robles:2012:4).

On the night of February 26<sup>th</sup> 2012 a man of the neighbourhood watch shot a seventeen-year-old boy with a hoodie. The boy’s name was Trayvon Martin and the man’s name is George Zimmerman. Zimmerman is a 28-year-old Hispanic living in Sanford, Florida. At the night of the shooting he drove around to keep watch in his neighbourhood. Zimmerman stated later that he was extra alert that night because there had been several robberies by black men in his neighbourhood in the past few weeks (Robles:2012:2). He spotted the African -American Trayvon Martin and pursued him because he was looking suspicious. They got into a fight that ended fatally for Martin. Zimmerman claims self – defence but the police have not given out a conclusion on who struck first. Zimmerman claimed to have a bloody nose and a wound in the back of his head (Robles:2012:4). Still, outsiders can only speculate what happened that night. Zimmerman was found not guilty and was acquitted of manslaughter in July 2013 on the account of the “Stand Your Ground Law” that is effective in Florida (Alvarez&Buckley:2013:n.p.).

The American media speculated a lot about the case. Trayvon Martin’s shooting got noticed by a large group of Americans. He was unarmed and has been known to only carry Skittles and a bottle of Arizona Iced Tea. His name was tweeted more than 2 million times in the following month (Robles:2012:1). Many American newspapers and websites reported the incident. According to a journalist “It began as a routine police – blotter item, a journalistic afterthought” (Farhi:2012:n.p. in Andrus:2012:1). It became the top mainstream news story, leaving the elections behind (PEW Research Center:2012 in Andrus:2012:2).

Part of the reason why the media elaborately looked at the story was the issue of race. Debates about race in America have been going on for years. Some, such as Civil Rights leader Al Sharpton, believe there is still a lot of work to do on the subject of equality for African - Americans (The Admin: 2013: n.p.). Race remains a touchy subject in America and that is partly why particularly this case sparked the interest of so many Americans.

Many media sources touched upon the question of race - relations. Several aspects of the incident, such as who provoked whom, remain unclear to the public resulting in different versions of the story told by the media. In these stories, the difference in ethnicity of Martin and Zimmerman plays an important role. Martin’s ethnicity is often clear in media coverage, he is of African - American descent, but Zimmerman is reported to be white, Hispanic, Jewish, and that he is of mixed descent.

The case was even the subject of riots and protests in America. The subjects of the protests were race - relations and gun laws, particularly the Florida “Stand Your Ground” law. This law states that force can be used in self – defence even if the force is deadly (Weaver: 2008: 395). The question arose whether the law should be reconsidered. Civil rights leaders such as rev. Jesse Jackson led some of the protests. They believed the case was race – related and considered the acquittal of Zimmerman to be a violation of American Civil rights (Andrus: 2012:2).

However, the fact remains that Zimmerman was acquitted based on empirical evidence gathered during the trial. Also, the media websites reporting what is known about the night Martin died do not include racial aspects (Robles: 2012, Toobin: 2013). Furthermore, some of the people that were closely involved with the case and Zimmerman or Martin, such as Zimmerman's father and Martin's stepmother, denied racist motives in the killing (Chasmar: 2013, Cadet: 2012, Blow:2012). Therefore, the facts make it plausible that the empirical evidence dismisses racism in the case. The research question of this paper rises, how did certain media sources inject interpretations of racism in the Zimmerman case, while the empirical evidence contests a "racism angle."

The media can play an important role in how these debates are portrayed to the public. Much research has already been done on Framing, Media framing and race and stereotypes in the media (Benford&Snow: 2000, de Vreese: 2005 and Roskos&Monahan: 2012). Former research suggests that the media can strengthen and sustain prejudice and racism by stereotypes and frames (Roskos&Monahan: 2012 in Andrus: 2012). Adorno argued that media inject ideas into society without interaction (Adorno: 1957). However, framing theory suggests that media is part of multi – organizational field, which contests the constructivists approach of, for example Adorno (Benford&Snow: 2000: 617). Therefore, although the formulation of the research question uses the word "inject," this paper will use framing theory to illustrate how media and society interact in a discourse and that the interaction is not linear but multi – dimensional.

In this thesis, I will use framing theory to unpack the research question. Continuous study on framing is valuable because new subjects can provide new information. There is still more to learn about how framing takes place. Furthermore, it is interesting to see in this paper how framing theory is used as theoretical framework and as method to answer the research question. Moreover it can gain new insights on each individual case. In the Zimmerman case, framing theory is interesting to use because it can show how and in which way media sources frame a news story without having actual evidence to support their claims. Furthermore, this paper aims to show how a certain framework can lead to collective action or even violence. In short, it looks at the imagined realities media sources create and how they become social facts such as collective action.

The Zimmerman case is relevant for various reasons. It sparked the interest of the American media to the extent that it became the top media story. Remarkably, media sources reported very different interpretations of the story. Moreover, it led to demonstrations, protests, and riots and renewed the debate on racism in America's justice system and society. Therefore, the Zimmerman case will be used as an example of how framing shows the interaction between media and society. Using framing theory to explain how and why all this happened makes for an interesting approach.

## **Chapter I: Relevance**

To answer the research question of this paper, how did certain American media sources inject interpretations of “racism” into the empirical evidence concerning the Zimmerman case, the paper looks at framing theory, as it’s analytical framework as well as method. Much research has already been done on framing and it’s components. Many definitions of framing exist but they all share some characteristics. Framing theory is a construction of related methods to analyse discourses. It is essentially a way of looking at how people give meaning to and justify a certain period of collective action (Benford and Snow: 2000: 614). “Frame” refers to “schemata of interpretation” that participants use “to locate, perceive, identify and label” events in the world and personal surroundings (Goffman: 1974:21 in Snow, Burke Rochford et al: 1986: 464). Individuals give meaning to events and therefore use frames to organize collective or individual action (Snow, Burke Rochford et al: 1986: 464).

“Collective action” is action that aims to change a group’s position for the better (Heckathorn: 1996: 250). Collective action is given meaning to by connecting it to certain goals that are presented to the audience (Benford&Snow: 2000: 614). For example, in the Zimmerman case the episode of collective action would be the protesters and rioters that went to the streets in America in 2013 after hearing about the release of Zimmerman. The objects and goals are presented to them by agencies such as the newspapers, news websites and other forms of media. Therefore, framing theory can be used to describe how the media interpreted the Zimmerman case.

Framing theory is used in different science fields such as sociology, discourse analysis and conflict studies. This chapter reviews some of the core ideas and different formulations of framing theory in sociology and looks at articles of scientists who provide the most important views. It will also give a critical view on some of the dominant definitions and explain aspects that are important to analyse the research question, such as the core framing tasks, discursive processes and frame resonance.

### **I.A. Framing theory**

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, framing has many definitions and components but most theories on framing are unified by Goffman’s definition (1974). Goffman explains that framing describes reality through unconscious cognitive structures and that frames decide the events that form a reality: “I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principals of organization which govern events [...] and our subjective involvement in them” (1974: 10f). He refers to the selected events of reality as interpretation schemes. Although Goffman’s theory is still commonly mentioned, his method was not yet completed and many scholars adapted and refined framing theory. For example, Goffman did not define how to measure and identify frames using empirical evidence.

Gamson et al criticized Goffman’s definition of “schemata’s of interpretations.” They explain what distinguishes frames from schema’s: “collective action frames are not merely aggregations of individual attitudes and perceptions but also the outcome of negotiated shared meaning” (Gamson:1992a:111, in Benford&Snow: 2000: 614). Gamson et al also give a valuable contribution to the definition of framing. They suggest that a frame “is a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events [...] The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue”

(Gamson&Modigliani: 1987:143). However, Gamson and Goffman did not identify and define different kinds of frames or their framing tasks.

David Snow et al also give an important supplement to framing theory and defined types of frames. They use Goffman's theory but adjust it to their needs. According to them, framing helps to guide collective action, which means that "frame alignment is a necessary condition for movement participation" and therefore they identify four "frame alignment processes" (Snow, Burke Rochford et al: 1986: 464). They also give an overview of mistakes scholars made in the past. According to them, scientists researching framing theory often make the mistake of giving too much attention to grievances without keeping in mind that grievances are often open to interpretation. Before framing can lead to collective action, participants must find their problems not to be a grievance but rather an injustice; "the social arrangements that are ordinarily perceived as just and immutable must come to seem both unjust and mutable" (Piven & Cloward: 1977: 12, in Snow, Burke Rochford et al: 1986:466). This leads again to the way grievances or problems are interpreted, which will be looked at in this paper. Although Snow et al do define four frame processes, they have not defined the factors that contribute to the success of a frame process or framing tasks.

To understand social movements and to see their course, the use of framing theory has become a core task, according to sociologists Robert Benford and David Snow (2000:615). They give an overview of methods of framing and define framing tasks the most elaborately. Their theory includes "Collective Action Frames," frames that give meaning to collective action events and give an interpretation for what is currently happening in the world (2000:613). That means collective action frames "are action – oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimize the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization." A "Social Movement Organization" (SMO) is a set of formal organizations striving toward the same goal (Benford&Snow: 2000:614).

With the help of Gamson and others, Benford and Snow distinguish features of framing theory called "core framing tasks." These tasks are "diagnostic framing," identification of the problems and attributions, "prognostic framing," a possible solution to the problems, and "motivational framing," justification to proceed to collective action (2000:615 – 618). These core framing tasks will be used to answer the main research question.

Benford and Snow distinguish between four variable features of their frames: "problem identification and direction/ locus of attribution," which problems are highlighted and how do they relate to direction, "flexibility and rigidity, inclusivity and exclusivity," of the ideas that they use, "variation in interpretive scope and influence," with "master frames" that are large in scope and influence and therefore non – specific to movements, and "resonance" (2000:618). Resonance is about which frames lead to collective action and which are not effective enough. Resonance involves "frame consistency", the more frames are inconsistent the more contesting frames appear, "empirical credibility," which points to the relation between empirical evidence and interpretations or frames, and "credibility of the frame articulators or claimsmakers," speakers who are more credible are most likely more effective (Benford&Snow: 2000: 619 – 622).

Besides the core framing tasks, collective action frames also consist of interactive processes, which Benford and Snow generally describe as "framing processes and dynamics," that generate the frames. These are the "Discursive processes," "Strategic processes" and "Contested processes." Strategic processes are frames that are created to pursue a specific

goal such as acquiring resources or members or mobilize participants. Benford and Snow distinguish four “frame alignment processes [...] frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension and frame transformation” (Benford&Snow: 2000:624). Contested processes show that an organization is not able to create a reality without challenges, “rather there are a variety of challenges confronting all those who engage in movement framing activities.” These challenges are “counterframing by movement opponents, bystanders and the media; frame disputes within movements; and the dialectic between frames and events” (Benford&Snow: 2000: 625).

The last important framing processes for this research puzzle are discursive processes, which refer to speech and written language in relation to collective action. Discursive processes are about the language around an event or movement, which is always developing further by contestation, replacement and reproduction. Agencies are constantly looking for ways to explain why a certain event is more important and significant than the other, to incite collective action (Benford&Snow: 2000:623). Discursive processes consist of two interactive processes: “frame articulation and frame amplification or punctuation” (Benford&Snow: 2000: 623). Frame articulation is a connected series of events that is put together and organised. Experiences of “reality” are assembled to articulate a new angle or interpretation of the events. Frame amplification involves pointing out the events or problems that are more important than others. Articulating the most salient issues often works as a way to show what the movement organization is mostly about (Benford&Snow: 2000: 623).

The question then rises, what has been said about media in framing theory. Framing theory is often used in media studies and most theories are deduced from Entman’s method (1993). Entman goes into the measurement of frames, neglected by Goffman, and defines them as a more actively manufactured and created, by saying: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality [...] as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (1993:52). In other words, he suggests that journalists more consciously select frames. Gitlin agrees with this shift. According to Gitlin, “framing refers to patterns that emerge in the way the media select, organize, emphasize, present, and ignore certain aspects of words and/or images over others” (Gitlin: 1980:n.p., in Schwalbe: 2006:268–269). This shows how media help amplifying a problem and part of a frame.

However, in sociology framing, frames are still seen as more unconscious processes. Benford and Snow see media as part of a “multi – organizational field” that influences a frame and in particular the core – framing tasks prognostic framing. Media often looks at the framing of movement organizations and contests or strengthens the frame (2000: 617). Therefore, media is also part of contested framing processes, or counter – frames that are given to an existing frame, which takes place in the same field (Benford&Snow: 2000: 626). In other words, media is part of the discourse surrounding interpretation of events and creating a collective action frame.

## **I. B. Analytical framework and method**

### *I.B.1 Analytical framework*

The research puzzle in this paper is divided into several analytical sub – questions. The analytical parts of framing theory, given by Benford and Snow, form the questions. Their theory provides the analytical framework for this research puzzle. They have identified three main tasks for framing. The first task is diagnostic framing, which identifies problems participants of collective action have with an event. In this case, the event is the shooting of Trayvon Martin and the following trial of Zimmerman, which together is called the “Zimmerman case.” The goal of the first question will be to identify what “racial” problems the American media injects into the empirical evidence in relation to the Zimmerman case. This part also covers the different kinds of diagnostic framing, the “injustice frame” and the “blame frame,” and which one can be seen in the media.

The second task is prognostic framing, which looks at the solutions that participants present in the American media, given to the earlier identified problem. For example, did American reporters call upon their readers to go to action or did they give suggestions on how the Zimmerman trial should develop. This second question looks at counter – framing as well: what opinions did reporters or persons interviewed express and how did others oppose them.

The third task is motivational framing, which covers the justification of collective action. It gives attention to the reasons collaborators in collective action give for their actions and how they justify them. During the Zimmerman trial in the summer of 2013, people went to the streets in New York and hundred other American cities and demonstrated against Zimmerman and for equal rights for black people and even small riots broke out (EFE FoxNews: 2013: n.p.). The third question is how did the inserted racial problems provide motivation for collective action.

### *I.B.2 Method*

To answer the sub – questions and therefore the main research question, this paper will use different kinds of academic sources. Sociologists and political scientists such as Benford and Snow provide the theories for the theoretical and analytical framework. To find theories on framing and search systems such as Picarta and Google Scholar have been looked at. The UU library website also provided links to websites dedicated to a specific academic field such as social and political science.

Empirical data and evidence has been collected in order to answer the sub – questions. Archives of well-known American newspapers and websites provide such data. This paper will look at articles from the New York Times, the Washington Times and other American newspapers, to collect empirical evidence and articles that can be analysed for the sub – questions. Opinion articles as well as interviews will be used. The opinion articles provide insight into a journalist’s interpretation of the case, while interviews illustrate interpretations of those closely involved, such as family members, or bystanders, such as movement organizations. Articles analysed are written between February 2012 and May 2014.

In doing so I will gain insight into how theory can be applied to real and current events. By using theory in practice I expect to get new insights on the framing of the Zimmerman case and the occurrence of collective action during and afterwards. The paper also aims to be an extension of empirical evidence gathered around framing theory and test its limits as method.



## **Chapter II: Racial injustice and the Blame frame: Diagnostic framing**

Diagnostic framing is one of the core framing tasks according to Benford and Snow. Diagnostic framing identifies the problems that movement organisations have with an event. The movement frames what their critique is and makes it clear to the public and to their own group (Benford&Snow: 2000:615 – 616). Diagnostic framing is one of the core tasks because it is an important factor in helping an organisation to draw attention on an event and problematizing it. It shapes the perception of the issue and points out the ones that are responsible for the problem (Cress&Snow: 2000:1071).

Diagnostic framing has two components. The first is called the “injustice frame.” In an injustice frame, a movement organisation identifies one or multiple victims of the issue or problem they articulated. They then emphasize their victimhood. They amplify the injustice that made the person a victim (Benford&Snow: 2000:615- 616). The second component is the “blame frame.” Collaborators of collective action, or movement organisations, seek to blame someone for the injustice or the problem they have with an event. The blame frame focuses on finding agents to blame or put responsibility on (Hanson&Hanson: 2006:415).

In this chapter, I will focus on the question what racial problems the media injected into the empirical evidence and find an answer by using diagnostic framing. I will look at the possibility of an injustice frame as well as a blame frame. Although Benford and Snow dismiss the existence of an injustice frame in all forms of collective action, they agree that Injustice frames can often be seen in organisations wanting change politically or economically. They also agree that diagnostic framing focuses on blaming or putting responsibility on an agent (Benford&Snow: 2000: 616). Therefore, I will use both components of diagnostic framing.

Charles Blow, an opinion columnist, wrote an article for the New York Times Opinion Pages on Trayvon Martin three weeks after his death. He starts his article by writing about the day of Martin’s death from the point of view of Martin’s parents. After that, he writes about what happened from Zimmerman’s perspective. He goes on to ask questions about Zimmerman’s motive and specifically points out that “Trayvon is black. Zimmerman is not” (Blow: 2012: n.p.). He concludes his article by sharing some of his own experiences as a “black” father and by suggesting racial sensitivity and stereotypes are involved in the case.

The journalist expresses a certain opinion on the case of Trayvon Martin. That becomes clear in several passages of the article. Firstly, he says that it is a tragedy for Martins parents and that the event itself leads to a lot of questions. Secondly, he expresses the fear that his boys, his sons, will be found “suspicious” because they are black and says that this is a burden all black boys have to bear. In his last sentence he says that this case can make that burden easier or worse. Thirdly, he writes that the “racial sensitivity of this case is heavy” and that sparked the discussion about “racial – profiling” (Blow: 2012:n.p.).

The opinion of the journalist shows a problem with the Zimmerman case. The problem in this case is “racial” according to Blow. He does not literally say so, but he heavily implies it in a few paragraphs. In one paragraph he suggests that the fact that Zimmerman was released after the shooting and Martin was dead has to do with the fact that Martin was black and Zimmerman was not, by saying “One other point: Trayvon is black. Zimmerman is not” followed by “Trayvon was buried [...] Zimmerman is still free [...]” He also speaks of the burden of African – American boys and implies that therefore Martin and his parents had the

same burden of racial intolerance (Blow: 2012:n.p.). Therefore the problem, that Martin is dead, shows a “racial” component.

The question that this raises is does Blow use an injustice or a blame frame? Blow enlarges Martin’s victimhood by emphasizing that he is dead and Zimmerman is not, among other things. With his statements he seems to suggest that the fact that Zimmerman is still free despite the fact that Martin is dead by his hands is injustice and the injustice has a connection to the fact that Martin is black and Zimmerman is not. He interprets the release of Martin by the Florida Police as unjust and racially motivated. Moreover, he involves his personal emotions regarding his sons, which he relates to the emotions of the parents of Martin. In this way, he amplifies the victimization of Martin and his family. By placing more emphasis on the victim, Blow tries to show that it is wrong that the offender (Zimmerman) was released. This corresponds to the theory of injustice framing.

Blow is not the only reporter to use an injustice frame in describing the Zimmerman case. After Zimmerman was acquitted in 2013, John R. Wood says in an article in the Washington Times that “for black Americans generally, as well as for many others, there is a sense that justice was avoided in the trial of George Zimmerman” and that the case shows what is wrong in general with race, inequality and crime in America (Wood: 2013: n.p.). Therefore, he amplifies the injustice on a base of racial problems, and provides an example of using a racial injustice frame.

Wood includes a poem to help all Americans get over the event, which he calls a “national trauma.” In the poem, he identifies with Martin as a black male and states that many African – Americans are also “Trayvons.” He says he is “distrusted cause I’m black.” Moreover, he is calling upon every American to forgive Zimmerman so that they can save all the other Trayvon’s. In this poem he is relating every African – Americans to the case, stressing that they are misunderstood by the police and always less trusted because of their skin – colour. He is not only calling it a problem but refers to it as a trauma based on discrimination against race. However, he is dismissing a possible blame frame by saying that Zimmerman should not be blamed. Instead of putting the blame on someone, he asks the American people to take action and work on the bigger issue of racial discrimination in America (Wood: 2013:n.p.).

These are all opinions of reporters and journalists. The question follows, what happens when an interview is involved in the article. An article on the CNN website contains fragments of an interview after the trial with the mother of Trayvon Martin, Sybrina Fulton. She is quoted calling upon others not to let anyone else suffer the same tragedy as she has as a mother. She also emphasizes that Martin misses out on all the great things normal teenagers get to do, such as graduate and go to prom. She then goes on to say that she blames Stand your Ground Law, which is effective in Florida, for acquitting Zimmerman and not letting him pay for his crimes (CNN: 2013: n.p.).

At first, it looks as though she is using an injustice frame by emphasizing her sons and her own suffering. However, the point she is really trying to make focuses on where to put the blame for the tragedy, the Stand Your Ground Law. She calls upon others to “boycott” Florida and to abolish the law and blames the law for not getting justice for her son’s death. The Stand Your Ground Law is the agent Fulton puts the responsibility on. Therefore, Fulton is illustrating more of a blame frame, rather than an injustice frame (CNN: 2013: n.p.).

The question now rises; does she add a “racial” or “racist” component to her blame frame? The answer to that question is no, in this interview she does not. In the quotes, she does not mention race or racism. She merely blames a flawed justice system in Florida and not race-biased actions of Zimmerman. She also says that Americans have to prevent this from happening to a mother and a child, but she does not say anything about the colour or race of the mentioned “mother and child.” She did ask to make sure there were “no more Trayvon Martins,” but since she does not mention his colour it looks like she means no more killing of sons (CNN: 2013: n.p.). This is up to the interpretation of the reader.

If the mother in the interview does not express a “racial” interpretation of the event, does the journalist inject a racial component? In a quick summary of what happened between Zimmerman and Martin, the journalist mentions the race of both, Hispanic and African - American. He or she also mentions that the case became a “flashpoint in debates over racial profiling.” If he had just reported the interview without inserting these points in the article, the reader would not have known that the events sparked issues of race. Therefore, this is an example of how a media source injects the racial issues surrounding the case (CNN: 2013: n.p.).

The journalist does not use a specific racial diagnostic frame. However, he or she uses the blame frame of the mother and injects issues of race into the existing frame by adding a couple of sentences. The reader might link the issues of race with the issues the mother has with the Florida Law. Therefore, it is arguable that he adds to the blame frame and creates his own.

On the other hand, interpretations of events are an important part to framing, as shown in the theoretical framework. The question is whether the media source gives an interpretation of racism as a problem with the Zimmerman case and therefore how an interpretation is constructed. Although he is adding a racial component to the story by informing the reader about the debate on racism surrounding the case, he is not giving his personal interpretation of the events. That is why it is debatable that he interprets the case as a racial problem. The interpretation of the reader can be constructed by incorporating the racial debate but what that interpretation is cannot be found in the text.

The preceding articles illustrate how interpretations of problems are constructed. However, some media remained more distanced from formulating a problem themselves but instead looked more at the course the debate took. Jeffrey Toobin writes in his article in the New Yorker about the facts and interpretations of the phone call Zimmerman made before the fatal encounter with Martin. He starts his article by saying that if all the facts were clear, different interpretations of the case would not be possible. He states that the interpretations that exist now say more about the people who made them than the facts. He describes the phone call between Zimmerman and the non – emergency police – response line and explains why it is open to different theories. For example, “the dispatcher asks [...] the subject’s race, and Zimmerman answers, ‘black’” (Toobin: 2013: n.p.). This is just a fact, the interpretation could be that Zimmerman was fixated on the colour of Martins skin.

Toobin does not say which interpretations were currently given to the Zimmerman case but states that people are having different theories about the facts that will always be unknown. He does not problematize this but says that it is something to keep in mind while reading about the case. He makes an objective argument. He is essentially interpreting the case as an event with many frames and describes the discourse of the case.

Going back to the question, what racial problems did the media inject into the empirical evidence, the empirical material shows how the journalists provide different interpretations of the Zimmerman case. Toobin illustrates this by separating the different interpretations in the debate from the facts. Both Wood and Blow interpret the killing of Martin as a bigger issue that has to do with the history of discrimination against African – Americans in the United States. They identify themselves and other “black” people and children with Martin. In that way, they add an interpretation of “racism” to the empirical evidence of what happened that night. This illustrates a discursive process: how interpretations of problems are constructed and placed in a certain context.

Blow shows an example of an injustice frame by amplifying the loss of the Martin’s and his own fear for his children. Wood also shows components of an injustice frame but also dismisses a blame frame by calling upon the Americans to forgive Zimmerman. The interview with Fulton illustrates a blame frame that does not have a “racist” component and where the journalist injects issues of race into the article afterwards. However, it remains open to interpretation of the reader whether racism was indeed involved in the Zimmerman case. This shows difference of frame construction in opinion - based articles and interviews.

### **Chapter III: A call to arms: Prognostic framing**

According to Benford and Snow, the second core-framing task is “prognostic framing.” Prognostic framing includes looking for a solution to the problem identified in the diagnostic frame and deciding what has to be done. In other words, the movement organisation looks for the best strategy to tackle the problem. Benford and Snow state that it is possible that prognostic and diagnostic framing are connected, because the identified problems influence the number of plausible solutions. Prognostic framing also involves looking at the possibility of “action mobilization” (Benford&Snow: 2000: 616).

Prognostic framing is constraint by a number of factors. Framing consists of different fields such as opponents, other movement organizations and the media, for example. Therefore, a lot of time goes into deciding plausible and logical solutions. The solutions are often rejected or reformulated by opponents or others within an organization, making the framing more defensive and more clearly articulated. This aspect of Prognostic framing is called “counter – framing” (Benford&Snow: 2000: 617).

Media influences the framing of an event because journalists choose to emphasize certain stories or not to cover some of them at all. They also have influence over the representation of the claims activists present. By phrasing claims in a certain way or leaving parts of the claim out they can alter the interpretation of the public (Benford&Snow: 2000:616). In this chapter I will look at the prognostic and counter – framing of journalists and movement organizations of the Zimmerman case mainly using articles written after the acquittal of Zimmerman, during which time the collective action started. The core – question will be what solutions were given to the supposed “racial” problems.

An example of a solution presented in the media can be found in an article of the Guardian. The article includes statements from the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) in which they call upon their listeners “to act.” The spokesman for the NAACP explains that the best course to take would be to “call for the Justice Department to conduct an inquiry into the civil rights violations committed against Trayvon Martin.” (Luscombe: 2013: n.p.). The “call” would be given by demonstrating on the streets. Therefore, the NAACP provides a “call to arms” for their listeners and presents a clear solution to the racial injustice in the Zimmerman, which is to gather as many people as possible to demonstrate and ask for justice at the Justice Department.

Jehmu Greene from Fox news argues that another solution to the racial injustice would be better. Greene wrote an opinion article about Zimmerman saying that the focus should not only lie on getting justice for Martin but also on protecting other African –American children. She states that Martin’s killing uncovers a broader problem in American society, the amount of race-based murders in the United States. She believes the problem lies with a race – biased American justice system and poses the question whether “due to unconscious bias, do jurors value the lives of black men less than others” (Greene: 2013: n.p.). She calls upon the readers to revoke the Stand Your Ground law and to start valuing each life the same as Martin’s. She states that every killed African – American should get the same attention from public figures, such as the American president and celebrities Jay Z and Beyoncé, and the American people in general (Greene: 2013: n.p.).

It can be concluded from several statements in Greene’s article that although she is supporting the idea of a racist issue with the shooting of Martin, she is counter – framing. First, she states

that demonstrating for justice only for Trayvon Martin is not the right solution because his death is an example of a bigger problem. Second, she brings her own solution to the table, which is to get famous people and people in general to invest as much in the bigger racial issue as they are investing in justice for Martin (Greene: 2013:n.p.)

Greene is injecting racist notions into the Zimmerman case by relating it to the racial issues in America that have been debated for many years. She explains that, because of America's history of racism, people that work for the Justice system are most likely unconsciously racially biased. That is why there are so many race – related murders and Martin's killing is only one example. Moreover, her solution to the injustice of killing Martin is to tackle the whole problem of racially – biased America.

News articles opposing the involvement of racism also exist. Going back to the time of the trial, stepmother Alicia Stanley gave an interview with CNN, which the Washington Times reported on, targeting the issue of race. The headline states the most striking quote: "I don't think George Zimmerman 'picked him out because he was black'" (Chasmar: 2013: n.p.). She does believe that Zimmerman is guilty of killing her son, however, she dismisses the possibility of a race crime. Stanley claims the reason Zimmerman picked Martin was because of his hoodie or suspicious behaviour (Chasmar: 2013: n.p.).

How can we see that Stanley is dismissing a racist component in Zimmerman's actions? Firstly, she dismisses a "racist" problem altogether. That means that she is not using a diagnostic frame with a racist issue. Secondly, racism is not involved in her prognostic frame either. It can only be argued that her prognostic frame includes the solution where Zimmerman is convicted.

The question then rises if she uses a counter – frame. It can be argued that Stanley is because she is giving a counterargument to the claim that a racial problem is involved in the Zimmerman case. The solution she gives, is the conviction of Zimmerman and does not have to do with improving racial issues. Therefore, her quote means that proponents of a racist problem have to rethink the credibility of their solutions and therefore their Prognostic frame. It can also be argued that she is not part of a counter – frame. She is not part of a movement organization but expresses her personal feelings and opinion. Furthermore, she shares the belief of movement organizations such as the NAACP that Zimmerman should be punished for killing her son. In that matter, she agrees partly that the solution would be to commit Zimmerman. However, the fact that she does not believe in a "racist" component means she weakens the vocabulary of solutions with interpretations of "racism" and therefore this illustrate how a counter - frame can be created.

Martin's stepmother is not the only one who denies racism. The Huffington Post published an article that contained an interview with a colleague and friend of Zimmerman, Frank Taaffe. In the article, Taaffe defends Zimmerman in several ways. He expresses that Zimmerman has many admirable traits, including his passion for safety. He also says that safety was the main reason for Zimmerman to confront Martin because he wanted to ensure the safety of his neighbourhood, which lately had been plagued by robberies. According to Taaffe, racism had nothing to do with that. Lastly, he states that Martin also had a part to play in the incident and that if Martin would have been "up front and truthful" the shooting could have been avoided. (Cadet: 2012: n.p.).

This article also shows counter – framing. Taaffe is denying the involvement of racism and pleading safety reasons. Furthermore, he is saying Martin could have taken control over the situation by acting accordingly. He also says that he believes that the facts will decide the outcome of the case against Zimmerman. He believes that the justice system is the only thing that can decide the outcome of the case and that the media is untruthfully convicting Zimmerman already. Therefore, he is contesting racial problems and at the same time giving a contesting solution, to let “justice do it’s job.” (Cadet: 2012: n.p.).

Several similarities and differences can be seen between the articles about Stanley and Taaffe. Firstly, they are both contesting a racial problem with the case. Secondly, they both believe that the justice system can decide the right outcome of the Zimmerman trial. However, they have another idea of what the “just” outcome would be and therefore what the best solution is. Stanley believes Zimmerman killed her son and should be punished for that by law, while Taaffe believes that Zimmerman was defending himself and therefore thinks that he should be acquitted. This shows how two different kinds of counter – frames can be created.

Strikingly, a year later, Taaffe came back on his word a year after the case and the acquittal of Zimmerman. He apologized to the Martin family and said that he believed that Zimmerman was indeed guilty. He said he had been wrong in defending Zimmerman. He also states that racial motives were indeed involved in the shooting of Martin. He is now certain that Zimmerman “racially profiled” Martin. He changed his mind after his sons and brother died. Taaffe said he now knew what it was like to lose a son. He identifies with the loss of Martin’s parents and is therefore agreeing Zimmerman should have been punished (Wagner: 2014: n.p.). This shows how context can strongly affect individuals and their formulations of solutions.

This chapter illustrates the answer to the question what solutions were given to the supposed racial problems. Aside from the solution to demand justice of the movement organization the NAACP, the interviews with Stanley and Taaffe show how individuals that are closely related to the case can influence the construction of a frame. In that case, the news article is just a medium to bring these contesting opinions to the attention of the broader public. However, by choosing the interviews of Stanley or Taaffe the newspaper or journalist decides that those opinions are an important part of reality and must be emphasized. They pick out part of reality to bring under the attention of a public and therefore make that part more important. The same goes for Greene, who chooses to put emphasis on her interpretation of a bigger problem and is therefore constructing another solution. That shows that interpretation of an event or problem plays an important role in phrasing a solution. Furthermore, the interviews illustrate the interaction between media and society in the construction of a frame. When Taaffe changed his mind about Zimmerman his role in the construction of an interpretation in the media also changed. Instead of being used as a counter – frame in the media to the solution of punishing Zimmerman, his later interview confirmed that solution and a racist component.

## **Chapter IV: The Power of motivation: Motivational framing**

Motivational framing, the third core-framing task, involves articulating motives to compel participation in collective action and to keep people from quitting participation. According to Benford and Snow it “provides a “call to arms”” (Benford&Snow: 2000: 617). Motivational framing allows movement organizations to formulate motives in the right way. This includes developing specific words or language for the reasons to go to action.

According to Benford and Snow, studies have shown four “vocabularies of motive” that were used by participators in movement organizations: urgency, propriety, severity and efficacy (Benford&Snow: 2000: 617). Collective action members use these vocabularies to phrase their motive so that others will join them and to make their motive clear for themselves. For example, recruiters for a movement have to think about how to frame the severity of the problem and why it is urgent to go to action. The study also showed that these vocabularies when used in certain combinations were not complementary but worked contradictory.

Benford and Snow believe that the impact of the vocabularies on movement organization and framing needs to be researched more. The same goes for how organizations use these vocabularies and which conditions have an effect on them. However, I will be using the vocabularies in my question because recent studies have already the importance and use of the four vocabularies. The main question of this chapter is how did the inserted racial problems provide motivation for collective action?

An article in the Guardian is about the demonstrations that took place in 100 cities across America as a result of the acquittal of Zimmerman. Among the organisers were Martin’s mother and father and civil rights leader Al Sharpton. Sharpton expressed the hope that the demonstrations and protests will lead to “a civil rights case against Zimmerman” by the Justice Department (Williams: 2013: n.p.). Furthermore, the article explains that lawyers are looking into the violation of civil rights because of the pressure of the demonstrators and general public. However, most believe that a next trial is highly unlikely (Williams: 2013: n.p.).

Sharpton chooses to use violation of civil rights as the main motivator to go to action in this article. This illustrates an interpretation of racism used as a problem with the Zimmerman case. His interpretation of racism is that the killing of Martin and the release of Zimmerman are a violation of the Civil Rights, which is instated to prevent the discrimination of African - Americans. This shows that Sharpton believes that Martin’s killing can be seen as discrimination of not only Martin but also all African – Americans.

Considering a framing dynamic Benford and Snow point out, resonance, Al Sharpton can be seen as a credible claimmaker. Sharpton has been the spokesperson for Civil rights in America for several years. He has protested in light of other killings of African Americans such as Sean Bell and Amadou Diallo and has taken the responsibility of leading the protests for Martin as well (Williams: 2013:n.p.). Therefore, he is a well – known public figure to many Americans and is more likely to convey a racial problem to a broader public. This is an illustration of how credibility of a person can help provide motivation for collective action.

In conclusion, Sharpton inserts an interpretation of a racist problem by using violation of the Civil Rights act as motivator to demonstrate at the Justice Department. His goal is to sue Zimmerman for violating the act. Not only do the goal and problem provide motivation for



collective action, Sharpton himself contributes to this. Because he is a publicly well – known figure, it is more likely that he will move participants to action.

In an article in the New Yorker reporting on the demonstrations after the acquittal of Zimmerman, several of the protesters spoke out on the Zimmerman case. Father Tracy Martin promised to seek justice for Martin and other children like him. A sixteen-year-old participant declared that Martin could have been her brother and that the killing made things worse for everyone. Furthermore, the crowd's main cry was "we're all Trayvon Martin." Al Sharpton, one of the organizers, also spoke and encouraged the growth of a larger movement in light of Martin's death. He asked the crowd to protest with him in New York on the day of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream speech." He also compared the Stand Your Ground Law with Americans right to demonstrate and therefore stand their ground (Joseph: 2013:n.p).

Again, Sharpton is partly a motivator to go to collective action. However, this article also contains an interview with Martin's father and someone unknown. The question rises how the sixteen – year – old could provide motive. Firstly, she is as a younger person appealing to a broad public. She could inspire children her age and people older than her could be inspired by the need to protect someone like her. Secondly, she relates strongly to the case by comparing her brother to Trayvon Martin. Therefore, it can be argued that she makes his death more relatable to others. Martin's father also shows a relatable motive. By saying to fight for justice for his son and children like him he is relating his son to the children of others. This illustrates not only a motive of justice but also an appeal to the ones who love someone like Martin.

This article shows Sharpton using a different motivator for collective action. He relates the Zimmerman case to a bigger movement in light of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kings' famous speech. This illustrates that Sharpton uses the speech as an extra motivation to go to collective action, protest on that day, for Martin. He is suggesting that King and the Zimmerman case are related. Furthermore, he is relating the Stand Your Ground law that acquitted Zimmerman to the right to protest.

An opinion article in the Washington Times shows a different view than Sharpton's on the Zimmerman case. In the article, an anonymous reader poses a question to the journalist, Hicks, about their concern that the media is biased about racism and does not take into account the importance of the American justice system. They specifically ask the best way they should teach their children how the system works and to not believe every image the media gives. The journalist replies by saying that there is a "disconcerting level of ignorance on the part of American citizens" about the justice system. She refers to the people that took action and demanded the case to be taken to the Supreme Court. She also explains: "When societies are ruled by emotion, or public opinion, or the whim of majority, justice will quickly be defined by the agenda of those who decide what is "just"" (Hicks: 2013: n.p.).

This article illustrates an opposing view to Sharpton's and others. The journalist does not agree that justice has not yet been served in the case but rather explains why it is. According to her, the justice system in America is not flawed but just. Therefore, demanding further investigation is not just but ignorant. She also warns the reader about the dangers of media exposure and the opinion, or emotions, of the majority. Media can show a one sided image of the majority. Moreover, that majority does not act objectively but emotionally.

This shows a counter – frame of propriety. The journalist expresses that demanding justice is not the proper way to go and that accepting the acquittal of Zimmerman is necessary. The media and many other Americans are not correct in calling the justice system racially biased rather they are biased themselves.

The question then rises, why does Sharpton provide such a believable motivation for collective action? Firstly, there is the matter of resonance. Sharpton is a believable leader while this journalist is unknown and expressing the view of a minority. Secondly, Sharpton’s argument is efficacy because of the resonance aspect but also because of his relatable arguments. Martin’s father and the sixteen – year – old girl strengthen the argument of relating to Martin. Furthermore, it can be argued that Sharpton uses a motive of urgency by connecting the Zimmerman case to the anniversary of Martin Luther King’s speech. By naming the importance of the date he is providing a motivation to act now.

This chapter illustrates how the inserted racial problems provide motivation for collective action. The motivational frames created around the protests are strengthened by the resonance of the speaker, Al Sharpton, and by the relatable father of Martin and the idea of Martin as a reflection of sons and African – Americans. Sharpton also uses urgency framing by saying the time is right to act because of the anniversary of the speech. The opinion article in the Washington times opposes a motivational frame for collective action on the account of efficacy. This shows that vocabularies of motivational frames can also work contesting. Furthermore, looking at Benford and Snow’s idea of “empirical credibility” in resonance, it can be seen that Hicks also uses a frame contest based on this part of frame resonance. She believes that the Justice Department makes an objective decision based on empirical evidence. Therefore the Department is just contrary to media or Civil Rights movements that act on emotions.

Al Sharpton does indeed use more emotional based motivation than empirical evidence based motivation. He calls upon feelings of sympathy for Martin and family and of injustice of racial discrimination in America generally. However, his frame is stronger because of the urgency and credibility of him as a claimmaker. This shows that empirical credibility can sometimes get a supporting part if needed.

## Conclusion

To answer the question, how did certain American media sources inject interpretations of racism into the empirical evidence, I have analysed media sources using three sub – questions based on Benford and Snow’s overview of framing theory. Firstly, the answer to the question, what racial problems did the media inject into the empirical evidence, showed that some opinion journalists interpreted the Zimmerman case as “racist” by relating it to a “bigger problem” of injustice and discrimination against African – Americans in America. They saw it as part of the on-going inequality and suspicion and therefore related to the Zimmerman case from own experience. They focused on the injustice of the killing of Martin. The interview with Martin’s stepmother showed that the blame frame did not specifically contain “racist” components but that the interviewer added that the case was part of debates about racism in America. This illustrates how journalists choose to create an interpretation by adding words or sentences. In this way, the journalist creates a certain reality by choosing what is important to mention after the interview.

Secondly, what solutions were given to the supposed “racial” problems becomes clear from the chapter on prognostic framing. There were examples of solutions that contained collective action, such as the solution of the NAACP but also solutions that did not use action. Counter – frames made by people that were heavily involved in the Zimmerman case, such as Martin’s stepmother and Zimmerman’s close friend, are part of the reason why movement organizations have to keep refining their frame phrasing. This shows that interpretations of “racism” are constructed but also contested. Therefore, the solutions varied from asking for a Civil Rights case to acquitting Zimmerman. The media played a role in the construction of the solutions, with or without a racist interpretation, by emphasizing opposing or participant views.

Thirdly, the sub – question, how did the inserted racial problems provide motivation for collective action, showed the importance of credibility of empirical evidence as well as claimsmaker. The racial problems provided motivation by relating the problems to a group of people using sympathy for Martin’s family as well as fear that the same might happen to similar people. Although these motivations were contested on empirical credibility, it is probable that the resonance of Al Sharpton outweighed the issues that the empirical evidence might cause. Therefore, interpretations of “racism” contain of different compartments that have to be emphasized or neglected in order for the frame to work. The media, again, help contest, point out or emphasize the compartments.

The analysis of the Zimmerman case illustrates how imagined realities become social facts by interaction between the media and society. The realities are, among others, created by media sources by injecting certain interpretations into the empirical evidence, contesting or identifying “racist” components. The sources create, participate and sustain a debate on “racism” in America. That creates an imagined reality in which the Zimmerman case has a “racist” part and contributes to an older debate. This reality becomes a social fact as soon as collective action takes place. The collective action was in the case of the Zimmerman trial the demonstrations and protests that occurred during and after the acquittal of Zimmerman. The solutions, the demonstrations, showed “racist” interpretations because the demonstrators demanded a Civil Rights case and the motivation also illustrated “racist” interpretations by connecting it to for example Martin Luther King’s speech. The media sources choose to report on aspects or give solutions or motivation themselves. Therefore, the social facts are a consequence of the imagined realities in which the Zimmerman case is part of a “racial”

debate in America. However, the social facts influence the imagined realities as well. The demonstrations that resulted from the imagined realities were again reported on and interpreted by the media, which altered the realities. Therefore, the media is not only creating a reality but the social facts influence the media's reality. That confirms the statement made in the introduction that media "injections" are no longer to be interpreted as linear but rather as interactive with society.

The study of framing theory proved to gain new insights into an extensively covered subject such as the Zimmerman case. Therefore, it is important to keep evaluating and renewing the theory of framing. By applying Framing theory to current events the theory will keep evolving. The method of framing can be applied even more effectively if the role of discursive processes and the four vocabularies of motivational framing would be specified by more extensive research. The same goes for the Zimmerman case. By looking at it from a different perspective and looking critically the media hype around it can be relativized and interpreted differently. It is valuable to keep in mind that the media can also shape reality in a certain way when reading or watching the news. This is also shown by this examination of the media coverage of the Zimmerman case. However, the case can also be studied more thoroughly. A valuable contribution to this research could be covering more news articles to give an even more detailed view of the media coverage of the subject of "race."

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