

Media Analysis of Racism & Gender Discrimination

Natalie Maloy

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Race, Class and Gender in the Media

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To study race and gender you should have three things. One is patience. There will be people who say they know there is a problem but, “I don't want to get involved,” or “My friend went through that once, wish there was something I could do to help her.” Those statements might make you lose your patience but keep it because that is what keeps this research alive. Number two, an open mind. There will be things that you just might not want to believe when researching race and gender in the media. Some things you can't put your finger on or something that is just so blatantly wrong you feel sick to your stomach. Some ideas might just not align with what you originally thought but remember to have an open mind. Number three, determination. There will be setbacks and people trying to convince you otherwise. There will be liars and selfish people who wish this “Just wasn't talked about anymore. But you must, despite all the banter and manipulation to stop trying, keep going. While researching I had to remind myself of all three of those aspects. I analyzed media reports of missing persons, setbacks that women have in media careers and disrespectful and racist advertising. Without patience, an open mind and determination, three key elements of a discerning mindset, effective analysis of rampant racism and gender discrimination in the media is futile.

Missing Persons Coverage in Media Black vs. White Female

I'd like to begin my research analysis on missing person reports in the media. Specifically, the recent case on Gabby Petito, a white female traveler who went missing on September 11, 2021. As well as the not so recent case on Destini Smothers, a black female and mother. She went missing around November of 2020. These two cases look like they would not make sense to compare but here's why they do. Gabby Petito went missing in 2021 and Destini

Smothers went missing in 2020. Although Gabby's search party was much more elaborate than Destini Smothers was. To cut to the chase before I show you the proof, Gabby Petito's body was found only 8 days after she went missing. Her body was found at the Grand Teton National Park, on September 19, 2021, where she had been camping with her fiancé when she disappeared. Destini Smothers was found over 110 days later on March 10, 2021. An entirely new year and almost 4 months later. The two women were both victims and this analysis is not to disrespect either case. My point here will be to show how the media and law enforcement shapes the case and its outcome. Both Gabby Petito and Destini Smothers deserved so much more and before I get into too much detail, I'd like to give my condolences to both families.

I began my research directly on Google. I acted as if I were to be a curious individual about the Gabby Petito case and wanted to search information. My first observation was that the search led to popular news outlets like CNN, CBS News, and ABC 7. The information was endless. Specifically on CBS News there was a timeline of her disappearance (Narvaez & Weitzman, 2021). The video embedded in this article was a well laid out video of all the individuals who helped her body become found. She had over a million people looking for her. These people were not only her parents but her best friend Rose Davis amongst social media influencers. These influences had reported updates on her disappearance every day. Even a YouTuber by the name of Jen Bethune and her Husband had noticed Gabby Petito's van in their footage. They went to the extreme and zoomed in on their van to get the license plate and they took the time out of their day to report this. When this was reported her body was not found far from that van. On the famous social media platform Tik-Tok, many renowned influencers like Miranda Baker, Jordan Berman, Haley Roband as well as many others had made countless videos each day reporting on her case. The embedded video in the article continues to explain

that the FBI immediately showed up to Gabby's Boyfriend Brian Laundries house, as that was who she had been traveling in the van with. The video had mentioned they were in the house for more than six hours collecting evidence. Everyday a massive manhunt was in play to search for Gabby Petito and/or her boyfriend Brian Laundrie. They were able to find that he had made an unauthorized bank withdrawal and put out an arrest warrant. This gave the FBI the opportunity to arrest anyone that was holding him hostage. Police records emerged showing that they pulled Petito's van over in Utah when the couple was traveling through. They pulled them over for speeding and driving recklessly. Gabby was crying and Brian was calm. He put on a good act for the police officers. This situation brought up another issue in which women are often not believed by the police or the media, fueling false assumptions. They explained the incident to the cops and the police body camera footage was shared on YouTube (FOX 13 Tampa Bay, 2021). In this video both Gabby and Brian were interviewed. Brian had mentioned Gabby slapped him in the face and when Gabby was asked about this incident she broke down in tears. She was obviously distressed, yet they really didn't believe her side. She had said Brian grabbed her face roughly and that was it. The couple was separated for the night, and this is about the time when things went downhill. Through my observation of this case Gabby and Brian were arguing about something when they were pulled over, but they had already been in a rocky spot according to her best friend's testimony. After they were allowed to see each other again. Brian was not happy they got pulled over by the cops. He blamed Gabby for it, and it ended in his release of anger on her, and apparently murdered her. All of this effort went to find one woman, one missing white woman.

By contrast, here is what I found in the search about Destini Smothers. I began again my Googling her name. What came up was very minimal and from websites and vlogs I've never

heard of before. There was one article from the NY Post and one article on NBC News about her mother and aunt frantically looking for her after her disappearance from her birthday party (Cavallier, 2020). They hadn't tried on multiple media platforms like they did with Gabbi's case. It was very difficult for me to find details on her case, but I already knew why. What I did find was she was a 26-year-old mother who lived in upstate New York. She traveled to Queens to attend a funeral and birthday party in early November but never made it to the funeral. She left with her boyfriend, Kareem Flake, the father of her children, from a birthday party in Queens at a bowling alley. The boyfriend had reported to the police they had gotten into an argument while driving Destini's black Toyota 2011 Camry. He said she walked out of the car leaving all her things behind including her purse with her wallet and ID behind. Her mother had mentioned she would never leave her things behind and that was the first red flag. This article though was written only 27 days after her disappearance and remember she was found over 110 days after that. Destini was supposed to meet her mother to go shopping the next day before the funeral but never showed. The funeral was for Flake's grandmother, but the mother said Destini and her were very close and she would not have missed that funeral. For months her mother and family searched for her in Queens and Troy, New York. Until a tow truck was called to remove a 2011 black Toyota Camry with no plates from a neighborhood at near 134th avenue. The tow trucker realized the car had a flat tire and popped the trunk for a spare. But to his surprise there was Destini Smothers body, four months decomposed inside the trunk of her car. The person who called to tow the vehicle called 311 every day for a week until they came to tow it. It was winter and the car was buried under snow. Her mom couldn't even see the body to say goodbye because it was so decomposed. Flake even showed up to that funeral and was asked why he was not driving her car. He claimed it was in the shop. Reports showed the 13-year relationship had

reports of domestic violence disputes and each of their two children had to witness this. Flake was never arrested or accused of her murder and her mother still to this day is fighting for justice.

Here is where it begins to show the media and the police are corrupt. Once her mother, Loretta King called NYPD about her daughter's disappearance they had said they needed her to contact the police in Troy, New York where she lived, although that department was who transferred her to the NYPD. In another article I found, her mother had spoken about how since the incident had occurred the NYPD had not reached out to her once. She always had to call them. She called the detective and every time they said "He's not in." When Daily News contacted NYPD, they refused to report on any information and said the case is ongoing with no arrests made. (Kriegstein ,2021). These two cases are very similar in nature except Destini Smothers was a black female and Gabby Petito was a white female. The world was in an outcry for the fact that Gabby Petito had so many people searching for her, and the media attention was all about her.

While millions of other missing persons reports rolled in, the only case that received major attention by the national news for months was that of Gabby Petito. The media is calling this "Missing White women syndrome." According to the Los Angeles Times, this term was made by Gwen Ifill when in a panel discussion that media selectively chooses criminal cases based on race (Pearce, 2021). In the SPC 333 readings on week six, the article by Christopher O. Campbell explains how the media portrays different races. He had mentioned how the media should "re-examine their common sense" when it came to covering African Americans (SPC 333 Reading Pack). If only NYPD had that common sense in the search for Destini Smothers because the fact that both these cases were so similar tests my patience. Both Gabby and Destini were in

their 20's. Both had been traveling with their boyfriends. Both had been in a domestic violence relationship. Both had been reported and yet both ended up dead. This situation strikes my interest, and I got the opportunity to speak to seven eyewitness news editor, Aaron Mason. I asked him how the media goes about choosing a story. He answered, "It is based on human interest." That's it. It is not based on anything else. This answers why Gabby Petito's case was "so popular". The media isn't interested in a young black woman who lived in Queens and was in a domestic violence relationship traveling. They are interested in a young white woman who lived in Long Island and was in a glorified domestic violence relationship who was traveling in her newly renovated van. What will stop this systematic racist "brand of reporting"?

Glass Ceiling

People want superiority not equality. What can that possibly mean? It means men say they want us to have equality and the open ability to do anything they do. Although when it comes to making the decisions like who gets the job that becomes invisible. The glass ceiling phrase was made up by Marilyn Loren about 40 years ago. The term "glass ceiling" refers to the sometimes-invisible barrier to success that many women come up against in their careers (No Author, 2017). There is an economy called the "she-economy" which is where women succeed in government. In the "she-economy," women are frequently referred to as the household chief purchaser. They reportedly make more than 85 percent of household spending decisions, including big ticket items such as investment decisions and car purchases, accounting for for trillion dollars annually in discretionary spending (Johns, 2013). Women are always striving and always moving forward. Unfortunately, though when women are the ones making the money, men just might take advantage and be lazy. Or they will see it as "intimidating" their male

nature, as we see later this is a big issue. Although, women can and will make more money, there are always limitations because of the government or workplace decisions.

We see this in media as well. Gender discrepancies become more pronounced at the professional level (Amon, 2017). Women in a media career such as public relations, who are the face of the company become obligated to feel, look and act a certain way. Elizabeth Krugler conducted 10 interviews with women in public relations jobs. Her research found things like, promotional barriers, double standards for women, pressure of stereotypes, leadership styles, female competition, bullying, and optimism about the future to be a struggle for these women (Krugler, 2017). The research began to describe that it was not until 1971 that a committee on the Status of Women in Public Relations was created. (Krugler, 2017) In 2016 women made up over 62,000 of the jobs in the media, which is over half and still got paid less than men (Krugler, 2017). Specifically, it was \$984 for men and \$784 for women salary.

Our hope is to break the ceiling and throughout the years we have seen the gender wage discrepancy get better. The proportion of women in the workforce has grown from just over a third of all workers in 1970 to almost half of the total workforce in 2012 (Johns, 2013). With this increase in female positions we still see women being pushed lower in the line. Is this because they are too pretty? Or is it that they just wouldn't have sex with the manager? Or even better. Is it because your boss is a woman? And you just might feel, I don't know, intimidated? So, women dominate the industry yet only 30% of all global PR agencies are run by females (James, 2018). Public Relations, as mentioned above, is a career that attracts women because you are working directly with the community client. Essentially the face of the client. Although this also speaks on beauty standards. I see many media anchors and reporters who are on TV every day changing who they are too "fit" what they think they should look like.

One last observation I would like to mention is the latest news that both Chris and Andrew Cuomo resigned from their careers. Chris Cuomo was on CNN and Andrew Cuomo was the governor of New York. They both resigned due to the findings of their sexual harassment towards multiple women. It was found that Andrew Cuomo sexually harassed over a dozen (Ferré-Sadurní & Goodman, 2021). Now his brother Chris Cuomo was also fired from CNN because evidence was found that he assisted his brother in defending against the sexual harassment allegation by giving him advice, which was against CNN's rules (Grynbaum & Koblin, 2021). Chris claimed he would always be there for his brother, and he thinks he did not do anything wrong.

There is now information I found on SUNY chancellor Jim Malatras in his relationship with this case. After the documents were released, it was found that Malatras was verbally attacking Lindsey Boylan. This woman had claimed she was unjustly treated for becoming pregnant as she was an employee of the governor's office. Malatras' texts found him telling Boylan she could "go fuck herself," for complaining about her mistreatment. Boylan was also one of the women that accused Andrew Cuomo of sexual harassment (Silberstein, 2021). So, a woman tried to stick up for herself in the workplace for being mistreated and got called crazy by Malatras. This is our SUNY Chancellor.

Popular characterizations portray male supervisors harassing female subordinates, but power-threat theories suggest that women in authority may be more frequent targets (McLaughlin et al., 2012). Over all we see this play out all over the world. The punish these entitled men by giving them the privilege to resign and get fired? The media is a very strong platform to make sure the three men get what they deserve and I'm a strong believer in Karma.

Advertising

Finally, I will show you my findings on the disrespectful racist and false promising advertising I was able to find. These included ads that were posted on clothing sites with racist wording on the shirts being modeled. It also included ads that contributed to the male discrepancies and expectations we have in society today.

Below is an image that was originally listed on the H&M website.

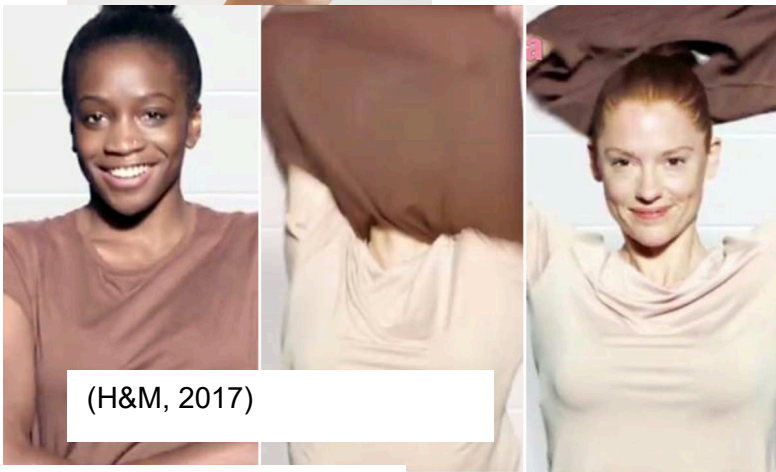


(As sited in Stack, 2018)

This ad was posted in 2018 on the H&M website. A black child wearing a sweatshirt saying, “Coolest Monkey in the Jungle.” This is so blatantly disrespectful and demeaning to the child and African American Community. The child probably didn’t understand what he was wearing. Or he did understand the shirt and had to stand in front of the camera embarrassed. I noticed he's



not smiling and normally with kids’ advertisement for clothing they are happy and smiling. Take for example, this white child who is modeling a pineapple shirt.



(H&M, 2017)

(Proulx, 2017)

He isn't portrayed as serious like the black child was in the previous ad.

According to The New York Times author, Liam Stack, H&M apologized for their ad and said they were going to take the hoodie away from all stores around the world (Stack, 2018). In this

(H&M, n.d.)

article I found another ad on The New York Times with Dove body soap. In October of that same year Dove made a Facebook ad with a black woman removing her shirt that was “ironically” brown. After taking her shirt off a white woman was underneath in a white shirt (Astor, 2017). The picture to the left shows the ad that was taken down. This ad was a 3 second GIF angering so

many for its blatant disrespect. That ad is racist because it signifies that a black woman is “dirty”, and she cleans up to be a “clean” white woman. This is a soap ad, how else would you be able to take this ad?

Another ad that I found was through the image on the front of Professor Niman's syllabus. It pictures a woman standing in front of three police in a Black Lives Matter Protest. A Pepsi commercial was accused of using what is called as co-opting. This means it used a role different from the original and in an offensive way. Below are the two images put side by side, with the



Pepsi ad on the left.

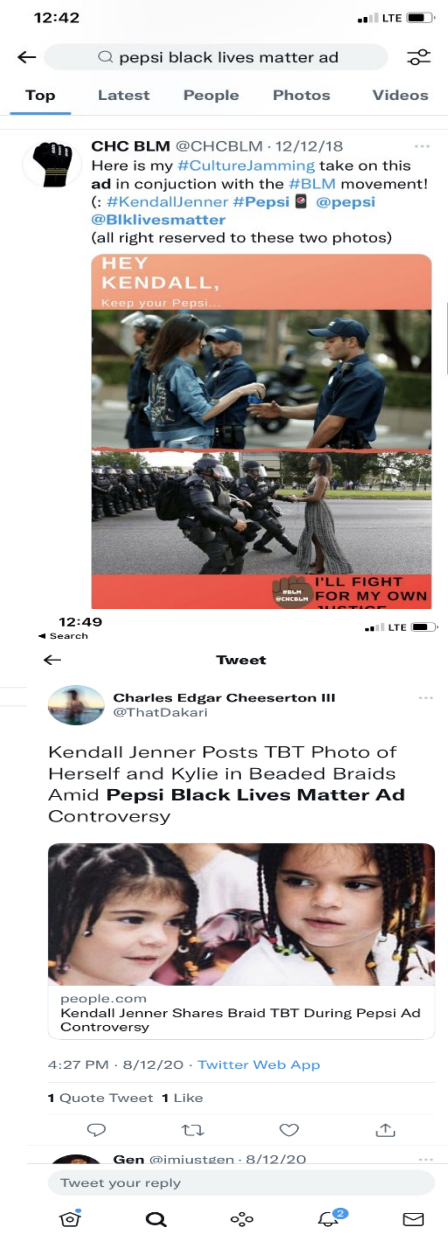


(Victor, 2017)

(Laurent, 2016)

Look familiar to you? The full Pepsi Superbowl Commercial from four years ago is on YouTube (Yash Yadav, 2017). Evans was the women pictured in the photo on the right. Kendel Jenner is pictured on the left. Social media went crazy over this similarity especially during the time of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

To the left is an image from my Twitter account.



In this post it shows account CHC BLM mentioning “Kendell Jenner can keep her Pepsi; I’ll fight for my own justice.” This was one of many Twitter posts regarding this racist commercial. How did Kendall Jenner react you may be asking? She did acknowledge her white privilege and said she would continue to educate herself on Black Lives Matter. Although she decides posting a throwback picture of her and her sister in braids would really help her apology. Twitter account @ThatDakari posted this image below. My research showed the racist advertisement in popular brands like Pepsi and H&M. These were made with complete disregard to the outlash they were going to get. Completely ignored the racist advertising as if it would help them gain consumers. The Weekend, a popular music artist used to be a sponsor for H&M, and he posted the image below on his twitter.

(@ThatDakari, 2020)



(@theweeknd, 2018)

To continue analyzing advertising I will address the gender norms for men that the media portrays. In the week 10 SPC 333 readings it talked about how advertising is a “commodity driven culture” (SPC Reading Pack). Therefore, it’s a culture that is “Precious” or “important” but not in a good way. Men have always been in society obligated to put on this no emotion, serious, and strong face despite anything they may be feeling or going through. What I have found is that the media provides stereotypes for men. The media is a strong influencer because men think this is “just how it's supposed to be”. Particularly ads for things like cologne, clothing, or products. The reading pack mentioned that these gender expecting ideologies have provided “genetically programmed male behavior (SPC reading pack). To be specific these ads have enforced the idea that men are violent. The ads exploit the idea that men aren't strong enough or manly enough and those products will make that happen (SPC Reading Pack). I did some of my own research on this notion and what I found was exactly that, the expectations were there.



(AXE Body Spray, 2018)

Axe has a reputation to be the body wash that “gets the girl”. Although it not only provides women with the stereotype of being easy but also informs younger men, which is their audience, that if they smell good, they get the girl. What happens when they don't get the girl? Who are they going

to be angry at? Not the Axe commercial that manipulated their minds into thinking their smell automatically gets the girl. Then once they are mad at the wrong person the men look bad for doing what they were so for long “taught” to do.

Below are two AXE ads that provide men with more expectations.



(As cited in Newton, 2018)



(As cited in Dylsch, 2017)

The ad on the left implies that now you can't be friends with a woman and not sleep with her or else you're a woman? The axe spray advertisement to the right implies that the "AXE Effect" makes a "Fat" man skinny. This also implies men must look a certain way to get women, as that is what AXE portrays in all their ads. These are the kind of things that are being taught to younger kids minds. These ads provide men with the expectation that if a woman are friends with them, then that means they want to have sex. These ads don't only affect women but also shape men's mindsets early on.

Advertisement also provides men with the stereotype of being violent. The reading pack mentions how, “Persisting images of masculinity hold that “real men” are physically, strong, aggressive and in control of their work” (SPC Reading Pack). Below are a few ads I found that outlined these ideologies.



(Gucci, n.d.)



(Robinson, 2011)



(Maxi Milk, 2012)

In the first add for Gucci, the man is spanking the women which entails he's in charge and punishing the women. In the second ad it shows the violent, aggressive, and abusive stereotype the media lays on men by showing a man behind the female with a bruised eye. This is also from a hair company named fluid hair that is basically implying that a hairstyle will help you in your domestic violence home. This then makes the violence stereotype stronger. The final ad shows a brand of muscle milk. It states that only “real men”

drink this milk. Implying that if you don't, you're less of a man or not a man at all. It also shows the stereotype of to be a real man you must be strong.

In my research I maintain the three necessities I mentioned earlier. One is patience, two is an open mind and three is determination. The extent to which the media inputs racist and gender inequalities so effortlessly is sickening. The companies do it without any regard for the consequences. The first step to change is noticing the problem, but I think we are way past that finding. We are now at the fight and the only thing we can keep doing is saying Destini Smothers name repeatedly. We must fight back against racist clothing companies and make sure they are taken down and we make their reputation known. We then fight against the stereotypes that certain ads provide for men. We can do all of this by using the social media platforms that we know are powerful, after looking at Gabby Petito's case. If we all keep the three necessities; patience, an open mind and determination and we continue to do our part, fate will take over the rest.

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