

CRITICAL DISCURSIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE
REPRESENTATIONS OF GEORGE FLOYD AND
DEREK CHAUVIN IN CNN AND FOX NEWS

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UNIVERSITI MALAYA
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CRITICAL DISCURSIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE REPRESENTATIONS OF GEORGE FLOYD AND DEREK CHAUVIN IN CNN AND FOX NEWS

ABSTRACT

The killing of George Floyd, an unarmed civilian African American on May 25, 2020, by Derek Chauvin, a former white Minneapolis police officer who refused to lift his knee off Floyd's neck shone a spotlight on the longstanding police brutality against African Americans in U.S. and reignited the global Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement which began in 2013. To date, there is a lack of studies that provide in-depth insights, from a linguistic and discursive perspective, into U.S. news media's portrayal of George Floyd and Derek Chauvin. Hence, this critical discourse study employed the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) to shed light on how, the left-leaning CNN and the right-leaning Fox News represented the social actors - by looking closely at the use of the five discursive strategies, namely the nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification and mitigation strategies in the news articles. The selected articles were published between May 25, 2020, and May 25, 2023, and the selection was limited to those centred on the key events following Floyd's death. The analysis revealed the positive representation of George Floyd in both sets of data. Although both news outlets depicted Chauvin as a disgrace to the U.S. police force, Fox News went on to humanise Chauvin and mitigated his past misconducts. The findings of this study provide further understanding on how the selected partisan U.S. news media influence its readers' perception of the social actors over the span of three years.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, George Floyd, Derek Chauvin, news, discursive strategies

PERSPEKTIF DISKURSIF KRITIKAL TERHADAP PERWAKILAN GEORGE FLOYD DAN DEREK CHAUVIN DALAM BERITA CNN DAN FOX NEWS

ABSTRAK

Pembunuhan George Floyd, orang awam Afrika Amerika yang tidak bersenjata pada 25 Mei 2020, oleh Derek Chauvin, bekas pegawai polis white Minneapolis yang enggan mengangkat lututnya dari leher Floyd menyoroti kekejaman polis yang berpanjangan terhadap warga Afrika Amerika di A.S. dan menghidupkan semula pergerakan Black Lives Matter (BLM) global yang bermula pada 2013. Sehingga kini, terdapat kekurangan kajian yang memberikan pandangan mendalam, dari perspektif linguistik dan diskursif, ke dalam gambaran media berita A.S. tentang George Floyd dan Derek Chauvin. Oleh itu, kajian wacana kritis ini menggunakan Pendekatan Sejarah Wacana (DHA) untuk menjelaskan bagaimana CNN berhaluan kiri dan Fox News berhaluan kanan mewakili aktor sosial - dengan melihat dengan teliti penggunaan lima strategi diskursif, iaitu pencalonan, predikat, argumentasi, perspektif, dan strategi intensifikasi dan mitigasi dalam artikel berita. Artikel yang dipilih telah diterbitkan antara 25 Mei 2020 dan 25 Mei 2023 dan pemilihan terhad kepada yang berpusat pada peristiwa penting selepas kematian Floyd. Analisis itu mendedahkan perwakilan positif George Floyd dalam kedua-dua set data. Walaupun kedua-dua saluran berita menggambarkan Chauvin sebagai memalukan pasukan polis A.S., Fox News terus memanusikan Chauvin dan mengurangkan salah laku masa lapunyah pemahaman tentang bagaimana media berita A.S. partisan terpilih mempengaruhi persepsi pembacanya terhadap aktor sosial dalam tempoh tiga tahun.

Kata kunci: analisis wacana kritis, George Floyd, Derek Chauvin, berita, strategi diskursif

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In 1865, the 13th amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery in the country (National Archives, 2022), however, police brutality and discrimination against the now newly freed slaves continued. Nearly a century later, the Civil Rights Act (1964) was signed into law to address discrimination against persons of all races and colours (National Archives, n.d.). However, in 2024, U.S. is still a far cry from achieving racial justice and equality as it is still being plagued by police killings, a manifestation of systemic racism (The White House, 2021; United Nations Human Rights, 2021; Watson, 2020b) rooted in the slave trade (Boisseau, 2021). The racially motivated violence (United States Congress, 1984) causes early mortality for people of colour (Edwards et al., 2019), particularly affecting the African American community (Mapping Police Violence, n.d.; Naghavi, 2021). The African American community and some high-ranking politicians called the killings ‘public executions’ (Memoli & Welker, 2020, para. 27) and ‘lynchings’ (Al Jazeera and news agencies, 2022; Anderson, 2023; Morgan & Cowan, 2020). The endless cycles of police violence and the extreme low police accountability are injustice to generations of African Americans (Poon & Patino, 2020). Therefore, trust in U.S. law enforcement (Brenan, 2020; Desilver et al., 2020) and criminal justice systems (Jones, 2022; NCSC, 2022; The White House, 2022) has eroded - especially amongst the African American community.

The actual number of U.S. police killings remains unclear as it was only in 2019 that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began to collect data on police killings, and the effort has been unfruitful due to the lack of participation from law enforcement agencies across the country (Barr, 2021; FBI, n.d.). However, according to Mapping Police Violence (n.d.), the most comprehensive data on U.S. police killings of American

civilians, since 2013 it is estimated that every year in the recent decade at least 1,144 Americans died at the hands of police officers. Amongst people of colour, African Americans are the most disproportionately impacted by police killings given the high rate at which they are being killed (Mapping Police Violence, n.d.; Naghavi, 2021) and their relatively small population of 45 million people in a country of 333 million people where 238 million are white (United States Census Bureau, 2023). To be specific, African Americans are being killed at the highest rate of 7.18 African Americans per 1 million African American population per year followed by the Native Americans at the rate of 7.14, the Native Hawaiians (7.03), the Hispanics (3.23), white Americans (2.62) and Asians (1.02) (Mapping Police Violence, n.d.). Over the past decade, in comparison to white Americans, African Americans are three times likelier to be killed by the police (Mapping Police Violence, n.d.) and the figure is only a slight 0.5 drop from 3.5 during the 1980-2018 period (Naghavi, 2021). According to the data, when fleeing on foot or in a vehicle, black and brown people are more likely than white Americans to be killed by police officers (Mapping Police Violence, n.d.).

George Floyd – Another Unarmed African American Victim in 2020

One of the most high-profile cases of fatal police violence in U.S. is the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed, 46-year-old African American. The development of the widely covered killing was closely followed by Americans (Associated Press, 2021a; Dewan & Bosman, 2021; Douglas et al, 2021). Floyd's encounter with police officers began with the suspicion of using a counterfeit \$20 bill (Chappell, 2021a) but ended tragically after the officers used fatal, unnecessary, and excessive force on him (Chappell, 2021b; Culver, 2020; McGreal, 2021; OHCHR, 2020; Silverstein, 2021). Many other African Americans, like Floyd, were approached and killed by officers for (allegedly) committing low-level crimes. To name a few, 12-year-old Tamir Rice was killed in 2014 for playing with a toy

gun in the park, 25-year-old Freddie Gray was arrested in 2015 for possessing a knife and 22-year-old Stephen Clark was killed in 2018 for allegedly breaking his neighbours' car windows (Hutchinson, 2020). According to Mapping Police Violence's data, a third of the deceased victims were alleged to have committed violent crimes but most fatal police encounters began with police officers either stopping civilians at traffic stops, approaching civilians following complaints on disturbances or non-violent offenses, or approaching civilians who did not commit any crime (Mapping Police Violence, n.d.). Besides using physical restraints, U.S. police officers are also known to kill (unarmed) American civilians by shooting, tasing and causing injuries using police cars (Mapping Police Violence, n.d.). As contact with U.S. police officers often escalate to the officers deliberately causing civilians' death, U.S. police officers' conduct, or rather misconduct has come under heavy scrutiny.

On May 25, 2020, U.S. law enforcement officers' use of violence against unarmed civilians was thrust into international limelight after a bystander video documenting the killing of George Floyd, in Minneapolis, Minnesota went viral. The viral video showed a handcuffed Floyd being kept in a prone position and pinned to the pavement for more than 9 minutes by three police officers (BBC, 2020b; NBC News, 2020; Treisman, 2021) - Derek Chauvin (white American) knelt on the back of Floyd's neck, J. Alexander Kueng (African American) knelt on Floyd's back and Thomas Lane (white American) held Floyd's legs down (CBS News, 2022). Chauvin dismissed Floyd's continued pleas for air and kept kneeling on Floyd's neck even after the arrival of the paramedics at the scene (Culver, 2020; Romo, 2021; Singh, 2020). By then, an eyewitness said Floyd looked purple and "was really limp" (Romo, 2021, para. 1).

As Americans flouted Covid-19 lockdowns and took to the streets to demand justice for Floyd, the news on Floyd's killing spread like wildfire across the globe and erupted one of the largest racial protests in modern history (Buchanan, 2020; Woolerton, 2022). Between May 26 - August 22, 2020, in U.S. alone, 7,750 Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests erupted in 2,400 locations across all 50 U.S. states (Mansoor, 2020). The protests turned so violent that curfews were declared and extended, and at least 75,000 National Guard soldiers and airmen were activated (Arnholz et al., 2020). The protests and unrests are emblematic of Americans' collective frustration with the lack of police accountability as an estimated 15 million (Buchanan et al., 2020) ethnically diverse Americans swarmed the streets across all the states (Cheung, 2020) and demanded the reform of the criminal justice system (Shalal, 2020), which comprises the law enforcement, the courts, and the corrections (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021).

In 2021, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) urged the U.S. government to "vigorously address systemic racism and racial discrimination" and to revise its policing legislation to reflect the established international human rights standards, in other words, U.S. must ensure that its policing law and policies comply with its international obligations (OHCHR, 2020; OHCHR, 2021, para. 1). OHCHR underlined that the existing U.S. policing policies which legalises police officers' use of lethal force, whenever it is deemed 'reasonable,' is not in line with the established international human rights standards (OHCHR, 2021).

While some see police brutality as a form of hate and oppression against African Americans (Iheme, 2020; Lawrence, 2023; NPR, 2020), others do not see it as grave an issue (Connelly et al., 2015). Lawrence (2023) pointed out that racism is pervasive in U.S. police departments, and it is this hostile and racist police subculture (Lawrence, 2023)

that is to be blamed for the rising cases of police brutality. Others, however, denied the existence of systemic racism and brushed off the cases of police violence or killings as merely misconducts of a few bad apples in the police force (Iheme, 2020; Pipkins, 2019; Bains, 2018).

1.2 Problem Statement

To date, the issue of American police officers' use of force against civilians, particularly against African Americans remains one of the top issues that deeply divides the two main political parties in U.S., the Democratic and the Republican parties. Given that concrete solutions are not on the horizon and more Americans are dying at the hands of police officers, Americans, particularly the African Americans are becoming more concerned. Americans are still keen to see an end to this issue - in January 2024, 32% of American voters said addressing issues around race should be a top priority for the president and the Congress before the year ends (Pew Research Center, 2024).

Evergrowing Public Concern Over Police Killings of (African) Americans

Since the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, Americans, specifically white Americans, Hispanics and particularly African Americans have grown more worried about the issue of race relations. In fact, their persistent concern over the longstanding issue has significantly increased since 2001 (Saad, 2022). According to polls conducted two years following Floyd's killing, 89% of Americans are eager to see some form of police reform (McCarthy, 2022), however, Americans, particularly African Americans have grown more pessimistic about the ruling Democratic party's ability to deliver their promises to address racial inequality in policing in the coming years (Morrison & Fingerhut, 2022). Surveys conducted in 2023 found that Americans are exhausted and

angry when they think about the country's divisive and corrupt politics (Pew Research Center, 2023) given the lack of concrete solutions on a number of national issues which includes the issue of police brutality. Hence, the African American community is becoming more concern about their safety. It has been found that African Americans across all age groups believe racism in America will worsen in their lifetime and 69% of them said it is now more dangerous for a black teenager living in America than when they were teens (Craig et al., 2023).

The issue of race relations has long been at the forefront of voters' minds. Surveys on American voters' issue priorities revealed a noteworthy pattern in the data, particularly since 2016 as the percentages of voters who saw the issue as 'very crucial' have since peaked twice (Pew Research Center, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2016; Pew Research Centre, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2022). Public outcry for nationwide police reform grew two months before the November 2016 presidential election (Perry, 2016) following police shootings of two African Americans (Terence Crutcher and Keith Scott) in a week (Swaine, 2016). The issue of race relations again dominated U.S. political debates in the months leading up to the November 2020 presidential election following the killing of George Floyd in May 2020 (Dezenski, 2020; Scott, 2020; Strauss, 2020). In early 2023, the fatal beating of Tyre Nichols, an African American, by five African American police officers during a traffic stop (Greve, 2023a) renewed the efforts on nationwide police reform (Dorn, 2023). The pertinent question now is how many more deaths will there be before congressional effort restart?

The Profound Political Divide on Police Violence and Police Reform

Police brutality is one of the issues that deeply divides the Democratic and the Republican parties (Brownstein, 2020). Therefore, it remains to be seen if the U.S. Congress could pass any meaningful legislation given how steadfast the Democratic and the Republican parties are in their stances on the issue.

The two most influential political figures, the Democratic President Joseph Biden and the former Republican President Donald Trump (Blake, 2023; Daniller, 2023) are again running against each other for the 2024 presidency (Hill, 2023). Because party leaders shape the direction of the party (Brack, 2015) and set the tone of political discourse (Stockemer, 2018), Biden and Trump's words have considerable influence over voting decision. The profound difference between the Democratic and the Republican parties' views on police brutality was on full display during the unprecedented nationwide protests following Floyd's death (Brownstein, 2020).

Biden and Trump's responses to Floyd's death were starkly different. President Biden's swift response to Floyd's killing and his promise to the African American community that he will see the police reform through had won him the 2020 election (Galston, 2021; Igielnik et al., 2021; Roberts, 2022). Biden was quick to acknowledge that U.S. is plagued by systemic racism (Forliti & Long, 2020). He also stressed that the legacies of slavery must be addressed (Ali, 2020). Besides showing that he understands African Americans' pain, Biden calmed the raging protests, spoke to Floyd's family members (Aschbrenner, 2020) and called for the officers involved to be held accountable (Culver, 2020). With the Congress stalled in 2021, Biden signed an executive order the following year to call for proactive implementation of a list of measures in not only the law enforcement system

but also the courts and the corrections systems (the entire criminal justice system) to eliminate racial disparities (The White House, 2022). However, as the president does not have the authority over local law enforcement agencies, the directive does not have the force of law at state or local level, therefore, progress at this level, if any, depends largely on the agencies' voluntary participation (Eisenberg et al., 2022; Kanu, 2022).

On the other hand, the then sitting Republican President Donald Trump flamed racial tensions by using controversial terms (i.e. thugs, rioters, looters, anarchists and vicious dogs) when referring to the protesters (Aschbrenner, 2020; McGreal et al., 2020; Scott & Steakin, 2020). For days, Trump avoided talking about Floyd's killing (Ali, 2020) and declined to say if the officers should be charged (Goodin et al., 2020). When he threatened to use violence to suppress the raging unrests, he used the quote, 'when looting starts, the shooting starts,' a quote Americans know well - that it carries a racially charged history (Watson, 2020a). Trump subsequently called on Republican governors to echo his presidential election campaign message - "law and order" (Liptak et. al, 2020, para. 24). Despite the largely peaceful protests following Floyd's death (Mansoor, 2020), Republican senators, and lawmakers in 34 states pushed for 81 draconian anti-protest laws in 2021 to govern protests and to impose a range of penalties from disqualification from unemployment benefits to jail time on protestors (Epstein & Mazzei, 2023). These bills were criticised as being "racist at its core" for targeting people of colour and silencing their voices (Epstein & Mazzei, 2023, para. 16; Gabbatt, 2021).

As the Democratic and the Republican parties are divided on many aspects of the legislations, the U.S. Congress, comprising of the Senate and the House of Representatives (House), struggles to reach a bipartisan agreement on nationwide police reform (LeBlanc, 2023; Pecorin, 2023). Some critics argued that given the political

parties' divergent views on the reform legislations, the shift, or rather the split, that came in the 2022 midterm election spells new challenges for Congress (Dorn, 2023; Amiri, 2023). Prior to the election where the Democratic party successfully retained its control of the Senate and the Republican party won the majority seats in the House (Politico, 2022a; Politico, 2022b), the then Democratic-led House passed the *George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021* twice, once in 2020 and again in 2021 (Congress, 2021). However, since the election there has been no concrete progress in the sweeping policing bill in the Senate (Laughland, 2022; Greve, 2023a) as Republican leaders continue to block the bill (Becket, 2022).

While Biden and Trump's responses exacerbated the political polarisation and impacted the legislative process in the Congress (Brownstein, 2020), their responses also divided ordinary Americans along the partisan line (Brown, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2020). According to a nationwide survey which was conducted in less than a month after Floyd's death, 87.5% of Democrats and Democratic leaners said U.S. police officers are doing either a poor or a fair job at using the right amount of force and treating racial and ethnic groups equally, but only 37% of Republicans and Republican leaners agreed on this (Pew Research Center, 2020). Understandably, 84% of those on the left welcome the notion of giving civilians the power to sue police officers, to hold them accountable for excessive use of force or misconduct but only 45% of partisans on the right support the notion (Pew Research Center, 2020). Meanwhile, when it comes to *Qualified Immunity*, the loophole in law that shields police officers (and other government officials) from being held accountable for causing the death of civilians (Novak, 2023; Sibilla, 2021), the Democrats and the Democratic leaners (14%) were less likely than the Republican and Republican leaners (53%) to support the legal immunity for police officers (Pew Research Center, 2020).

As sweeping police reform in U.S. is nowhere in sight, its police officers are emboldened, and police killings continue to rise in the years since the killing of George Floyd - from 1,150 cases in 2020 to 1,176 cases in 2021, 1,251 cases in 2022 and 1,329 cases in 2023 (Mapping Police Violence, n.d.).

The Political Relevance between U.S. Politics and U.S. Partisan News Media

Politics is argued to be one of the topics that inspire selective news exposure (Stroud, 2008). This is indeed true in U.S. where there is a clear divide in partisans' preferred news sources. The Democrats and Democratic leaners in the country make up about 46.3% of the population while the Republican and Republican leaners make up another 42.3% (Jones, 2023). When it comes to news on the government, politics, and elections, most Democrats and Democratic leaners turn to the left-leaning CNN whilst most Republicans and Republican leaners rely on the right-leaning Fox News (Gottfried, 2017; Jurkowitz et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2014). With such significantly large viewership and given that Americans at both ends of the political spectrum are most likely to cast votes (Mitchell et al., 2014), it is crucial that the top U.S. news outlets, namely CNN, and Fox News (Majid, 2023), disseminate accurate news. It has been found that the news outlets' influence over their viewers grows more significant in the 12 months leading up to an election because a quarter of the partisans from each end of the political spectrum turn to only their trusted news source (either CNN or Fox News) for news on politics and election (Jurkowitz & Mitchell, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2021). Given CNN and Fox News' influence over electoral outcome, it is therefore pivotal to scrutinise the news outlets' reporting on Floyd's death and the events that transpired from his death.

Media ethicist Steve J.A. Ward underlined that impartiality and independence from politics are the fundamentals of ethical news reporting and bias towards one political party overrides the news media's fundamental duty to keep the public accurately informed on matters of public interest (Ward, 2010). Impartiality in news reporting is crucial because media coverage and framing of crises and policy proposals could shape and shift public opinion (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010; Levendusky, 2013a) on the perceptions and opinions of individuals (politicians) and political actions taken by the government (Semetko, 2003). Inevitably, some "purveyors of disinformation" (e.g. partisan news media) prey on "the vulnerability or partisan potential of recipients whom they hope to enlist as amplifiers" (Posetti et al., 2018).

Americans' selective news exposure is concerning because CNN and Fox News are critical of the political party which they do not espouse (Ensor, 2018) and the news outlets, especially Fox News, create news contents that influence and reinforce their respective audience's policy preferences (Dutta et al., 2022; Hoewe et al., 2020). Moreover, in the months leading up to an election, Fox News had in the past generated biased narratives on top election topics that favour the Republican party (Monroe & Savillo, 2022). Dutta et al. (2022) found that the partisan news outlets' swift coverage of the killing of George Floyd, Derek Chauvin's conviction and Chauvin's sentencing reflected the partisan preferences of their respective viewership. This "siloes nature of political coverage" is worrying as it could widen partisan divide (Dutta et al., 2022, p. 5064) on systemic racism and police brutality.

The polarised and biased U.S. news media is being blamed for polarising the country's political landscape. A 2023 survey found that about a quarter of Americans believe U.S. news media is doing more to increase political division in the country (Khoury et al.,

2023). On daily basis, Americans encounter biased journalism, false claims from politicians and misleading headlines (Khoury et al., 2023) as news outlets create conflicts rather than addressing social issues head on (Khoury et al., 2023). Unsurprisingly, only 43% of Americans said they understand the issues the country is currently grappling with and 72% of Americans said the news media is not doing a good job at covering issues on racial and ethnic discrimination (Khoury et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, both CNN and Fox News appeal to news readers from both ends of the political spectrum as the left-leaning CNN is also deemed trustworthy by 11% of Republicans and 5% of Americans who voted for Trump while the right-leaning Fox News is also trusted by 19% of Democrats and 13% of Americans who voted for Biden (YouGov, 2022). The news outlets, therefore, have the potential to bridge the partisan gap on major issues such as police violence by seeking “a fair, inclusive consensus” on the issue and avoiding “sensational and partisan opining” (Ward, 2010, p. 210, para. 3). Given how deeply divided ordinary Americans and the American politicians are on the grave issue of police brutality, it is crucial to investigate how CNN and Fox News, the most reliable partisan news outlets disseminate news on the killing of George Floyd, one of the most high-profile cases of police brutality.

1.3 Research Significance

The George Floyd incident piqued the interest of many researchers. Studies that examined U.S. news media’s representation or framing of the incident factored in the different political leanings of U.S. news outlets. Thus far, the focus has been on the protests that ensued from Floyd’s death.

Some studies examined news images gathered from U.S. news outlets' social media posts (Coward et al., 2022; Norfleet, 2022) and websites (Odom, 2023; Gondwe & Bhowmik, 2022; Borysovykh et al., 2020) to investigate the news media's visual representation of the George Floyd protests, the protestors and the police (at the protests). Other studies examined U.S. news outlets' website videos (Mourad Fahmi, 2022), and social media stories and spot news.

Existing studies on textual representation of the George Floyd incident also focused on the protests (Clément, 2022; Cruz & Holman, 2022; Harlow & Bachmann, 2023). The approaches the researchers have taken include critical discourse analysis (Ahmed, 2021; Lovett, 2021; Repo, 2022; Surette, 2015), content analysis (Zaina et al., 2020) and multimodal analysis (Brown & Mourão, 2022; Canevez et al., 2022; Nichols, 2021; Wright, 2022).

To date, there is a lack of studies that provide in-depth insights, from a linguistic and discursive perspective, into U.S. news media's portrayal of George Floyd and Derek Chauvin. Drawing on the discourse historical approach (DHA) (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016), this study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on U.S. partisan media's representations of African American victims of police brutality and the American police officers who perpetrated their killings by examining CNN and Fox News' representations of George Floyd and Derek Chauvin, from a linguistic and discursive perspective to provide further understanding on how the selected partisan news outlets influence or shape the American public's perception of the social actors over the span three years, from May 25, 2020 (the day Floyd was killed) to May 25, 2023 (Floyd's third death anniversary). This three-year span encompasses the convictions of all the police officers involved in Floyd's death.

This study demonstrates how approaches within linguistics can be applied to the investigation of partisan media outlets' representation of victims of police brutality and perpetrators of the killings. Ultimately, the aim here is to shed light on racism and bias in partisan news media's reporting on the social actors to hopefully reduce overreliance on one partisan media outlet amongst staunch Democrats and Republicans. This study aims to achieve two objectives by answering the respective research questions:

Research Objectives:

1. To determine and to examine the discursive strategies CNN and Fox News used in their news reporting on George Floyd and Derek Chauvin
2. To determine how CNN's portrayals of George Floyd and Derek Chauvin differ from Fox News' portrayals of these social actors

Research Questions:

1. What are the discursive strategies used to construct the representations of George Floyd and Derek Chauvin in the selected CNN and Fox News articles?
2. How do CNN's portrayals of George Floyd and Derek Chauvin differ from Fox News' portrayals of these social actors?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section touches on the beginning of modern-day policing, African Americans' vulnerability to police violence, white officers' fear of using force to defend themselves, as well as past studies on the representations of victims and perpetrators of police violence.

2.1 African Americans' Vulnerability to Police Brutality

In order to comprehend African Americans' vulnerability to police violence, it is necessary to go back in time to look at the beginning of modern-day policing in the

country which began with slave patrols in 1704 in South Carolina (Robinson, 2017). Slave patrols were introduced because the white majority saw policing slaves as crucial to maintaining their dominance in an environment overpopulated by African slaves who have grown more rebellious and more eager to escape slavery (Walker & Katz, 2018; Wilson, 2022). By the end of the 1700s, slave patrols were established in every slave state in U.S. (Robinson, 2017) where patrollers took on the civic responsibility to capture fugitive slaves, police the activities of slaves, prevent violence or open defiance to the system of slavery – to ultimately protect the institution of slavery (Cooper, 2015; Reichel, 1988; Rivers, 2012; Wilson, 2022). Despite the abolishment of slavery in 1865, the consensus amongst white Americans that the population of (former) slaves is a dangerous, brutal and evil race of men (Gabrial, 2016) remains unshattered.

To some, the scourge of police killings of unarmed African Americans in U.S. today harks back to the days when African slaves were not just patrolled but also subjected to violence by patrollers (Cooper, 2015; Moore et al., 2018; Robinson, 2017), often white civilian men (Moore et al., 2016; Rivers, 2012; Reichel, 1988) who “administer(ed) state-sanctioned violence with virtual impunity” (Wilson, 2022, para. 29). Meanwhile, scholars such as Smith Lee and Robinson (2019) drew a comparison between how 21st century policing in U.S., with string of police killings, is operating as an instrument that perpetuate terror and social control over the African American community - in much the same way that lynching with impunity did in the 19th and 20th century (NAACP, n.d.).

In the recent decade, as police violence database shows, African Americans are, amongst black, indigenous, and other people of colour (BIPOCs), the most disproportionately treated with violence and killed by police officers (Mapping Police Violence, n.d.). On the other hand, due to the lack of comprehensive national police misconduct database, the

argument that white police officers are more or less likely than non-white officers to use lethal force against the minorities could not be justified (Kaste, 2019; Menifield et al., 2019). Moreover, there are instances of officers of African descent treating their kind and other minorities with brutality (Lawrence, 2023).

Nonetheless, the overrepresentation of white police officers in at least 99 metropolitans (Keating & Uhrmacher, 2020; Kelly et al., 2021) poses great risk to the African American population because it has been found that in comparison to African American and Hispanic police officers, white officers make far more stops and arrests, and use force more often - especially against African Americans (Ba et al., 2021). Furthermore, white male officers, the largest race-gender group in U.S. police force (Data USA, 2023; Kelly et al., 2021) have been found to use more violence in comparison to their female counterparts (Ba et al., 2021). As U.S. law continues to shield police officers who perpetrated civilian killings from legal accountability (Novak, 2023; Sibilla, 2021), the attitude of white officers towards African Americans, especially that of white male officers is too grave to ignore.

2.2 Fear on Both Sides of the Fence

The issue of police brutality is more than a longstanding difficult relationship between the police force and the African American community, it is a divisive issue that pushes Americans into entrenched opposing camps - along racial lines (and along partisan lines, as mentioned in the previous section). The national poll conducted by Associated Press-National Opinion Research Centre (NORC) in 2015 found that in comparison to white Americans and Hispanics, African Americans have little trust in police officers for most of them think that they are unfairly treated by officers due to their skin colour and that

officers are too quick to resort to using deadly force against black people (Connelly et al., 2015). Clevinger et al. (2018) underlined that individuals from historically mistreated minority group, such African Americans, are much more likely to perceive interactions with police, even those that are ostensibly benign as threatening. The African American community's experience with law enforcement officers invoke such fear in them that about 1 in 2 of them said they rather be robbed than to have unprovoked contact with officers - for fear of losing their lives (Pickett et al., 2022). They also feel more fearful when crossing path with police officers in U.S. than in other countries (Jones, 2017). On the other hand, most white Americans believe that police officers do not use deadly force unnecessarily and they dismiss the influence of race on officers' decisions to use force (Connelly et al., 2015). At least two polls conducted after Floyd's death in May 2020 also revealed racial confidence gap in police performance, where white Americans' trust in officers is higher than that of African Americans' (Brenan, 2024, Santhanam, 2020).

Meanwhile, fear also grows amongst police officers. During an arrest, officers are afraid of how they would be treated, demoralised or ostracised should they resort to applying force - to defend themselves - the way they were trained to (Vaughan, 2023). Besides police officers' misconduct, the defence strategy or fear narrative employed at the court by officers who perpetrated killings of unarmed African Americans was also met with public criticism (USA Today, 2017). These officers built their versions of 'I feared for my life' narrative by drawing on the negative stereotype of African Americans as individuals who are inherently violent and likely to be involved with illegal activities (Alexander, 2010; Lipman, 1998; Trawalter et. al, 2008) to gain the sympathy of the jurors and to ultimately avoid criminal liability (Pipkins, 2019). The historical racial stereotype of African Americans has hence created and perpetuated an environment for

police officers to conveniently justify their abuses and killings of African Americans as self-defence (Park & Kim, 2015; Sim, Correll, & Sadler, 2013; Trawalter et al., 2008).

2.3 Social Actors through the Lens of U.S. News Outlets

As discussed in the *Problem Statement* section, U.S. news outlets' coverage of the issue of police violence in the country could not be dissociated from their political inclination. Therefore, studies that examined the news sources' coverage of the social problem factored in their political leanings. Powers (2023) carried out one such studies and found that "liberal-leaning newspaper was more likely to engage in more sensational coverage, while the conservative newspaper engaged in more contextual coverage" (p. 26).

On another note, and interestingly, U.S. news outlets frame deceased police brutality and vigilante victims of African descent in the same fashion. Lane et al. (2020) who analysed the news coverage of Trayvon Martin, the 17-year-old African American teenager who was shot dead by a white vigilante in 2012 and whose death led to the birth of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement found that the news outlets' pro-white, anti-black frame presented African Americans in a bad light - as individuals who are inadequate, lawless, criminal, threatening and biologically different. White Americans, on the other hand, were portrayed as protectors and virtuous.

2.4 The Representation of Victims of Police Brutality and Police Officers who Perpetrated Killings

Most of the studies that investigated the representations of victims of police brutality looked at the posthumous representations of deceased victims of African descent such as those conducted by Ogden et al. (2020), Lenthang et al. (2021) and Malveaux (2022).

One of the most high-profile cases of police violence before George Floyd was killed is the killing of Eric Garner, the 43-year-old African American who died after a former police officer put him in a lethal chokehold in July 2014 (Lenthang et al., 2021). Ogden et al. (2020) carried out a thematic content analysis to examine how U.S. news media across the ideological spectrum (left: National Public Radio and Politico; centre: ABC News; right: Fox News and Breitbart) represented Garner, an asthmatic who stood at 6 feet 5 inches and weighed 350 pounds (Carr, 2020). The study found that the news outlets “allowed the permeation of misleading and false narrative” on Garner’s cause of death when they gave voice to unqualified and unreliable individuals to comment on the matter (Ogden et al., 2020, p. 655). The news media further misled the public on Garner’s actual cause of death by drawing unnecessary attention to his weight, stigmatising his health condition, and making inferences on the role of asthma in his death (Ogden et al., 2020). The news outlets also provided false narrative about Garner’s life and injected stereotypes about black people when they painted Garner as an “absent, urban Black” father, moreover, his family who received a \$5.9 million settlement was labelled as “unworthies” who conned taxpayers out of their money (Ogden et al., 2020, p. 655-656). Furthermore, Garner was blamed for his own death and was painted as a criminal who was selling loose cigarettes to children at the time of his arrest - an unsubstantiated claim which contradicted eyewitness accounts (Ogden et al., 2020). The news reporting also discounted the role of race in Garner’s death (Ogden et al., 2020), in other words the news outlets dismissed systemic racism in U.S. law enforcement.

Two years later in 2016, Philando Castile, a 32-year-old African American, was shot dead by an officer during a traffic stop after he told the officer that he was armed (Lopez, 2017). In contrast with the negative representations of Garner, both Castile and Floyd who were killed in the city of Minneapolis were referred to as the victims of police brutality by (at

least) three news outlets, namely the New York Times and two Minneapolis news outlets, the Star Tribune and Kare11 (Malvueax, 2022). The content analysis carried out by Malvueax (2022) found that the New York Times was more consistent than the Star Tribune and Kare11 in identifying Castile and Floyd as victims (Malvueax, 2022). Interestingly, all three news outlets were more consistent in identifying Floyd who was killed four years later in 2020 as a victim than when they referred to Castile as a victim (Malvueax, 2022). Furthermore, while all three news outlets downplayed the role of racial discrimination in Castile's death (Malvueax, 2022), only the local news outlets, Star Tribune and Kare11 downplayed the factor in Floyd's death (Malvueax, 2022). Unlike the local news sources, the New York Times attempted to frame Castile as threatening by highlighting his possession of firearm and past traffic stops (Malvueax, 2022). It is said that the discrepancies in the representations of the social actors might have been influenced by the proximity of the news outlets to where Castile and Floyd were killed (Malvueax, 2022).

On the other hand, for decades, the news media have been reporting violent police-civilian encounters in brief, episodic stories from white, middle-class perspective without taking into account the historical and the cultural contexts (Lawrence, 2023). These accumulated portrayals of policing "created a default public picture that generally does not question police powers, how they are used, or against whom" (Lawrence, 2023, p.12).

The white police officer who took Garner's life was given voice and was depicted as the hero – a dedicated officer whose duty suddenly came to a halt due to one unfortunate encounter in the street (Ogden et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the officer who killed Castile was neither framed positively nor negatively in the articles published by the Star Tribune, Kare11 and the New York Times as the news outlets did not address the killing of Castile

head-on, moreover, the news outlets have largely failed to acknowledge the issue of police brutality and police accountability (Malveueax, 2022). However, the news outlets took a different approach to reporting Floyd's killing. While the Star Tribune avoided addressing the issue of police brutality and painted the protests negatively, the majority of Kare11's articles were on police accountability and justice for Floyd, and 80% of New York Times' articles addressed the issue of racial discrimination surrounding Floyd's death. While some U.S. news media are not keen to explicitly identify the very issue plaguing the country, foreign news media such as mainland China and Taiwan's have explicitly identified the issue of racism in U.S. in their news coverage of Floyd's killing (Lin, 2022).

2.5 The Impact of U.S. News Media on Public Sentiment

The pervasiveness of anti-black sentiment and the intergenerational transmission of racism in the U.S. can be attributed to television dramas which portrayed African Americans as amongst other fearful characters - criminals, drug users and hyper-sexualised individuals (Omoni, 2017). The news media also has the capacity to effectively amplify racism by manufacturing "ethnic consensus in which the very latitude of opinions and attitudes is quite strictly constrained" (van Dijk, 1991, p. 246) and setting the agenda for public discussion that suggests "how the readers should think and talk about ethnic affairs" (van Dijk, 1991, p. 246). The influence of news content on public perception has been studied by researchers. The study conducted by Dukes and Gaither (2017) concluded that there is a correlation between information regarding the victim, and attitude toward the victim and the perpetrator such that negative black stereotypic information about the victim evokes less sympathy for the victim but more sympathy for the perpetrator (shooter).

The role of the news media is beyond keeping the public abreast of the latest news for they also function as news ‘filters’ hence they have the capacity to shape viewers’ understanding of social problems by legitimizing or marginalising views (Gillespie et al., 2013; Pipkins, 2019; Surette, 2007), and implying factors that brought upon certain social actions and the different possible solutions to a social problem (Gusfield, 1989; Schneider, 1985). Since U.S. news readers see most major news outlets in U.S. as either left-leaning or right-leaning (Orth, 2024), the country’s partisan news outlets hold the power to divide (or to unite) the society by polarising (Levendusky, 2013b) or not polarising viewers. Two of the country’s top partisan news outlets, namely the left-leaning CNN and the right-leaning Fox News which hold the reputation as the ‘echo chambers’ of the Democratic and the Republican parties (Broockman & Kalla, 2024), therefore have the power to either divide or unite the U.S. society with their news coverage of police violence cases. Bernecker et al. (2021) pointed out that echo chambers are problematic as they lack diverse viewpoints and actively discredit ‘other’ relevant voices, thus insulating viewers from different beliefs. In such a closed ecosystem where preexisting beliefs are reinforced through communication and repetition, social and political polarisation and extremism are likely to spawn (Wikipedia, 2024).

Favouritism in news reporting of divisive, racial issues could further complicate matters. When news media highlight “certain kinds” of criminals and their victims and sideline others, they are indirectly implying that certain people or groups of people are of greater (or lesser) importance in a particular society (Gillespie et al., 2013). U.S. news media coverage of cases of police brutality has been focusing largely on those that involved white police officers and African Americans, especially young African America men (Miller, 2015). Such narrow media coverage of police violence that focuses on a slice of the social problem could leave African Americans believing that only their community is

being (disproportionately) mistreated by police officers, particularly white officers. As a result, African Americans might be more “unwilling to engage with police officers, even when they are likely to receive their support or protection” (Clevinger et al., 2018, p.203). Moreover, by marginalising victims of other minority groups such as the Hispanics and Native Americans (Arce, 2020; Equal Justice Initiative, 2016), the news media is preventing public acknowledgement of and denying accountability for the violence they endured.

Taken together and given the rising racial tension in America following the killing of George Floyd (Montanaro, 2020), it is more crucial now for top U.S. partisan news outlets to adopt a more comprehensive and unbiased reporting approach to covering news on police use of unnecessary deadly force.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection and Selection

Besides the reasons discussed in the *Introduction* section, this study analysed articles published by the left-leaning CNN and right-leaning Fox News because the news outlets are also the leading cable news networks (Business Wire, 2024), and are ranked amongst the most trusted news sources in America (Jurkowitz et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2014). Furthermore, the news outlets’ websites have been the most visited English news websites in the country (Majid, 2023; Watson, 2022b) and when 23.2 million Americans watched Chauvin’s verdict live on 11 networks on April 23, 2021, CNN had the biggest audience (4.03 million viewers) while a few networks including Fox News had at least 3 million viewers (The Associated Press, 2021a).

The data comprised of CNN and Fox News' articles that centred on the key events that transpired between the day George Floyd was killed, May 25, 2020, and the day of his third death anniversary, May 25, 2023, to allow for the analysis of the representations of George Floyd and Derek Chauvin over the three-year period. A confluence of factors contributed to the significance of this period - low public trust in U.S. news media and politics, volatile civil-police relations, increasing efforts to push for racial equality, and successful convictions of Chauvin and the other three officers on both the state and federal charges over Floyd's death. More importantly, during this time both CNN and Fox News which have a reputation of aligning their news reporting to the views of the political party they espouse, prepared for transitions at the top of their organisations. CNN, with its new leadership in May 2022, attempted to be less critical of Republican views by shifting its political alignment from the left to the center (Helmore, 2022; Wemple, 2023). The move however was not well-received by the news outlet's staff (Helmore, 2022) and viewers (Darcy, 2023; Steinberg, 2023a). Meanwhile, Fox News remained steadfast on its centre-right political leaning and hinted that it might lean further to the right (Steinberg, 2023b).

As of June 9, 2020, there were 3,260 CNN and 7,120 Fox News articles containing George Floyd's name and there were 652 CNN and 1,590 Fox News articles containing Derek Chauvin's name. To significantly narrow the search for articles and to avoid researcher bias, CNN and Fox News' timelines of events that transpired after Floyd's death (The Associated Press, 2021b; Vera & Wolfe, 2021) were used to guide the article selection process. For a manageable sample, this study examined only the first(s) articles about each event. As the aim here is to analyse and to compare how the news outlets portrayed the social actors in the same events, when only one news outlet published article(s) on a particular event, the item was marked 'X' in either Table 1 (Appendix A)

or Table 2 (Appendix B), where the keywords used in the searches are also listed. The event marked 'X' were excluded from the analysis. A total of 84 CNN and 103 Fox News articles were selected for this study. The headlines of the selected articles are listed in Table 3 (Appendix C).

Although CNN's timeline webpage has hyperlinks that link each event to the relevant article(s), not all hyperlinks lead to the first articles, therefore each CNN article gathered for the analysis was searched from the news outlet's archive. The search for articles began with the first event (George Floyd's death; May 25, 2020) highlighted in CNN's timeline. The keywords 'George', 'Floyd' and 'death' were typed in the search bar in both CNN and Fox News' archive webpages. The search on CNN's archive yielded 2,188 results after the 'Stories' and 'All CNN' filters were selected. The large number of articles called for more specific keywords to significantly narrow down the search results. Another set of keywords, 'Minneapolis,' 'kneeling,' 'George,' 'Floyd,' 'neck' and 'died,' yielded 108 CNN articles. As there is no date filter on CNN's webpage, the next useful filter, the 'Newest' filter, was selected to send the oldest articles to the back. The first CNN article on George Floyd's death was then located by backtracking page by page. Comparatively, article searches on Fox News' archive were quicker. After selecting the content type filter ('Article') and utilising the date filter, both sets of keywords led directly to the first article on Floyd's death.

In both CNN and Fox News archives, article searches were first limited to the dates specified in the timelines and if no relevant articles were found, the articles published on the day before and(or) the following day (and beyond) were taken into consideration. These steps were repeated until the last event highlighted in Fox News' timeline. The keywords in each article search are summarised in Table 1 (Appendix A).

However, both CNN and Fox News timelines listed events that led up to only June 25, 2021, the day Chauvin was given the state sentence. Hence, the timeline was extended to include the key events that transpired between June 26, 2021, and May 25, 2023 (Floyd's third death anniversary) during which all the police officers involved in Floyd's death were convicted on both the state and the federal sentences. The article search began with CNN's archive as its 'Newest' filter allows articles to be arranged in chronological order. With the keywords 'George', 'Floyd', 'Derek' and 'Chauvin,' and the 'Stories' filter selected, the pages of article headlines were skimmed through. As a headline summarises the salient points in a news report (Saxena, 2006), only articles with either or both social actors' names and(or) other relevant keyword(s) were selected for this study. When a CNN article was located and a Fox News article on the same topic was found, both articles were added to the data and their headlines were added to Table 3 (Appendix C). Meanwhile, Table 2 (Appendix B) summarises the keywords used to search for articles published during this period. Lastly, CNN's top digital stories (articles) in 2020 and 2021 (Willingham, 2020; Andrew et al., 2021) were added to the data. Subsequently, Fox News articles reporting on the same events were added to the data to complete the data collection.

The initial aim here was to gather articles centred on the key events that transpired between May 25, 2020, and May 25, 2023. However, as there is no CNN articles centred on Floyd's third death anniversary, the event was excluded and thus the final corpus comprises of articles published until May 2, 2023, the day the former officer Thao was convicted for the state sentence.

At the preliminary stage of the article selection process, it was clear that only the news articles published under ‘U.S.’ and ‘Politics’ news categories in both CNN and Fox News’ archives are relevant to this study as the news content comprises of the latest development and the responses of the relevant parties, those closely involved in the George Floyd case such as Minnesota officials and Floyd’s family members.

News articles published under the ‘Sports’, ‘Business’, ‘Entertainment’, ‘Faith-Values’, ‘Opinion’, ‘Media’, ‘US Live News’ and the ‘Transcript’ categories were skipped. Amongst the articles excluded from this study are those that focused squarely on the responses of individuals who are not directly involved in the George Floyd case such as politicians (Olson, 2021; Ruiz, 2020a; Schultz, 2021), athletes (Canova, 2021; Morse & Cuomo, 2020), business leaders (Alcorn, 2021), celebrities (Melas, 2020; Young, 2020) and faith leaders (Canova, 2020; Parke, 2020). Articles centred on the George Floyd protests (Betz, 2020; Levenson, 2020; Ruiz, 2020b; Yeung et al., 2020) were also excluded. ‘Opinion’ articles were not taken into consideration as they were written from the first-person point of view, reflecting the writers’ own opinions and observations, not the news outlets’ (Honig, 2020). CNN’s ‘US Live News’ articles were skipped because the brief news updates were often followed by in-depth stories (articles). However, there was one exception and that is the live news published on Dec 15, 2021, as it was not developed and republished as a ‘stories’ article. Fox News articles published under the ‘Transcript’ category were excluded as the content are actual transcripts of the news outlet’s news and political commentary programmes (Fox News, 2020b; Fox News, 2020c). Fox News articles published under the ‘Media’ category were also excluded as the content comprises of only the salient points of the Fox News’ TV news programmes (Creitz, 2020; Fox News, 2020a; Garcia, 2020; Nelson, 2020).

3.2 Data Analytical Procedure

To address the first research question, the finalised lists of CNN and Fox News articles were read through one by one and reread a few times to determine the key discursive topics that appear in both sets of articles. The topics would then serve as the comparative parameters between the two sets of articles, and they are as follow: (1) George Floyd, the African American man who was killed by four (former) police officers, (2) Floyd's death, (3) Floyd's memorials, (4) Floyd's funeral, (5) the four officers who killed Floyd, (6) Derek Chauvin, the officer who knelt on Floyd's neck, (7) Chauvin's conviction on the state charges, (8) Chauvin's sentencing (state charges) and (9) Chauvin's guilty plea on the federal charges.

The data was then analysed using the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), an approach in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), one that is useful in examining multifaceted issues in a society (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017). The approach dissects "discursively constituted power abuse, injustice and social discrimination" (Reisigl, 2017, p. 49) by "discovering inconsistencies, self-contradictions, paradoxes, and dilemmas in the text-internal or discourse-internal structures" and "demystifying the persuasive or 'manipulative' character of discursive practices" in text (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 88).

To address the first research question, the study looked at the five discursive strategies as put forward by Reisigl and Wodak (2016) and summarised in Table 4 (Appendix D). The five strategies, namely, the strategies of nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification and mitigation are useful in deconstructing texts to reveal what is not plainly stated (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). The nomination (referential) strategies concern the linguistic devices used to represent social actors such as metaphors while the predication strategies concern how the social actors are labelled, whether

positively or negatively (Reisigl & Wodak, 2000). The third, the argumentation strategies concern the *topoi* used to justify the positive and the negative attributions while the perspectivization strategies concern the position from which the speakers express their involvement in the discourse (Reisigl & Wodak, 2000). The fifth strategy, the intensification and the mitigation strategies concern the linguistic devices used to intensify and mitigate utterances (Reisigl & Wodak, 2000). However, this study aims to discuss only the salient discursive strategies that are instrumental in the construction of the social actors' representations.

To answer the second research question, the study returned to the analysis of the discursive strategies to elicit information on the similarities and differences in the news media outlets' portrayals of the social actors. This will reveal the ideological stance between the two selected news outlets on the issue of police brutality.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section focuses on the analysis of the most salient discursive strategies in the selected articles, namely, the nomination and the predication strategies. This section also aims to reveal the ideological stance of CNN and Fox News on the issue of police brutality.

4.1 The Nomination and Predication Strategies Associated with George Floyd

The section looks at the nomination and predication strategies associated with George Floyd, his actions, his death, his memorials, and his funeral.

4.1.1 CNN's Representation of George Floyd

4.1.1.1 An Ordinary Man - Not A Stereotype of African American

The depiction of Floyd is nowhere close to the pervasive negative stereotypes of African Americans as lazy (Katz & Braly, 1933), homeless (Whaley & Link, 1998) and prone to committing crimes (Welch, 2007). Firstly, the adjective 'beloved' implies that Floyd was very much loved by his family.

George Floyd's sister Bridgett Floyd said in a statement, "While we will never get our **beloved** George back, ... (2021, March 12)

Although Floyd was born into poverty, he did not let the state of the life he was born into be the barrier to a better life. The verb 'striving' indicates that he tried very hard 'to find a way out, to make a way for his family, his mother, and his siblings.' Here, we can see that Floyd took it upon himself to provide for his family. The verb phrase 'made sacrifices for his family' implies that Floyd put his family's needs ahead of his.

1. He was **born in a poor neighborhood**, he **grew up in poverty** in Houston's Third Ward and was always **striving to find a way out, to make a way for his family, his mother and his siblings**. (2022, May 25)
2. Floyd's brother (said) "George always **made sacrifices for his family...**" (2020, June 10)

Despite being a 'a father of two girls', Floyd was a 'big mama's boy'. The latter is a disapproving term which carries the meaning of a man who others consider to be 'weak' because he behaves as his mother tells him to (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-a). However, the term is used to illustrate the strong bond Floyd had with his mother because when he was with his mother, Floyd would 'lay up onto her in the fetus position like he was still in the womb'. Moreover, he was 'distraught' following her death in 2018.

1. Stephen Jackson said Floyd, **a father of two girls**, ...(2020, May 28)
2. ... George Floyd was **a big mama's boy** who was **distraught** by her death in 2018. "It was so unique how they were with each other. (2021, April 12)
3. He would **lay up onto her in the fetus position like he was still in the womb**," he said. (2021, April 12)

Floyd's brothers saw him as a 'leader' in their household. Floyd showed them how to treat their mother with respect and how to be strong, respectful, and to speak up. Floyd took care of his siblings by preparing them food, making sure they had clothes for school and making sure they arrive at school on time.

1. He (Philonise Floyd) said George Floyd **helped take care of his siblings**, but he didn't know how to cook – so he **made them banana mayonnaise sandwiches and syrup sandwiches**. "He was so much of a **leader** to us in the household, he would always **make sure we had our clothes for school, make sure we would get to school on time.**" (2021, April 12)
2. "Being around him, he **showed us how to treat our mom and how to respect our mom...**" (2021, April 12)
3. Terrence Floyd: "I will salute him every day of my life. He **showed me how to be strong**," Terrence Floyd said. "He **showed me how to be respectful. He showed me how to speak my mind. ...**" (2021, April 12)

Following his death, Floyd was remembered metaphorically as a 'lion'. The possessive pronoun 'our' categorised Floyd as an alumnus of his alma mater, Jack Yates High School. The lion is the main feature of the school's logo. Thus, the reference is a public acknowledgement of Floyd's contribution to the school's sports teams, and it shows that the school is proud to have Floyd as its alumnus. The adjective 'beloved' indicates that Floyd was their cherished student and suggests that Floyd was a good and likeable character during his school days.

Floyd was also referred to as an 'athlete' and a 'student' who was dedicated to football and basketball. He played both the sports at the school where he graduated in 1992. During his time there, Floyd 'helped the football team win the state title' and 'played basketball as a power forward'. Floyd is being remembered for his 'athletic prowess'.

1. The Alumni of Jack Yate is deeply saddened and enraged over the senseless murder of **our beloved Lion**. (2020, June 8)
2. Philonise Floyd described his brother as an **athlete and dedicated student of both basketball and football**. (2021, April 12)
3. Floyd **graduated from Jack Yates High School in 1992**, where he **helped the football team win the state title**. He also **played basketball there**, Lemon said. (2020, June 8)

4. .. friends from high school and beyond fondly recalled his **athletic prowess** in football and basketball. He also **played basketball as a power forward**. (2020, June 9)

Stephen Jackson, a friend of Floyd's for over 20 years, referred to Floyd as a 'friend' and saw Floyd as his 'twin' as they share rather similar facial features and they both loved basketball. Jackson, a retired National Basketball Association (NBA) player whose career spanned 14 years (Basketball Reference, n.d.) likened Floyd to a brother through the simile 'like a brother'. The close association with Jackson, a successful athlete, could influence CNN's audience to see the same quality in Floyd. Although Floyd's achievement in sports was incomparable to Jackson's, many in his neighbourhood looked up to him as he was 'the first one (person)' to receive a sports scholarship.

1. His friend of more than 20 years, former NBA player Stephen Jackson, said, Floyd, ... was **like a brother to him**, and they used to refer to each other as **twins**... "It sucks that the whole world had to see my **friend** go that way... (2020, May 28)
2. ...his brother, Philonise Floyd, said during the visitation ceremony. "He was the **first person who everybody looked up to in our neighborhood because he was the first one to get a scholarship to go** and play basketball or football when he wanted to do," Philonise Floyd said. (2020, June 8)

Having lived for 46 years, Floyd's work experience made known to the public was exceptionally brief such that he worked as a security guard in a Minneapolis restaurant for five years and drove trucks in Minneapolis for an unknown number of years. The highlight of Floyd's life was in Houston where he was raised. There, he rapped with a group called Screwed Up Clik (SUC) and was 'well known' in the Houston's music scene.

1. Floyd, 46, was born in North Carolina and raised in Houston and moved to Minnesota as an adult for a fresh start, **working as security at a restaurant**. (2021, March 29)
2. Floyd, a 46-year-old Houston native, **worked security at Conga Latin Bistro in Minneapolis for five years**, according to its owner, Jovanni Thunstrom. (2020, May 27)
3. The 46-year-old Houston native **moved to Minneapolis** for work and to **drive trucks**, his friend and former NBA player, Stephen Jackson said. (2020, May 27)
4. Before moving to Minneapolis, Floyd was **well known in the Houston music scene, rapping with a group called Screwed Up Clik (SUC)**. (2020, June 8)

In the three-year data, Floyd's past encounter with law enforcement officers in Minneapolis in 2019 was briefly brought up during the court proceedings to compare the conduct of the officers who arrested him in 2019 with the conduct of Chauvin, Thao, Kueng, and Lane. According to the 2019 police report, Floyd 'appeared to be under the influence of drugs' and told an officer that he 'took multiple pills' before the police officers approached him. The information about this arrest was not emphasised in the data and thus did not affect Floyd's overall positive representation as a good character. This is perhaps due to Minneapolis police officers' history of providing false accounts of arrests - as seen in the police statement of Floyd's 2020 arrest which 'made no mention of Floyd being held down with a knee on his neck for more than 9 minutes' (Levenson et al., 2023).

Little is known about what Floyd did in Houston as an adult, but he is said to be 'well known' by a lot of Houston officers. The adjective indicates that Floyd had questionable past in Houston which might have motivated him to leave the city and start afresh in Minneapolis.

1. **Floyd's 2019 arrest** came a little more than a year before Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck for nearly eight minutes as Floyd told Chauvin and three other officers he couldn't breathe. (2021, March 19)
2. According to the 2019 police report, ... **Floyd appeared to be under the influence of drugs and told her (officer) he took multiple pills before his contact with police. The report did not mention follow up** toxicology reports, and medical records either confirming or denying drug ingestion were not immediately available. (2021, March 19)
3. **He's well known, he's known by a lot of our officers...**" said Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo said. (2020, June 8)
4. Floyd, 46, was born in North Carolina and raised in Houston and **moved to Minnesota as an adult for a fresh start, working as security at a restaurant.** (2021, March 29)

4.1.1.2 A Selfless, Likeable Character

Floyd was said to be a ‘huge role model’ for many people but it was his character that made him the ‘person that everybody loved around the community’. He was also labelled as a ‘protector’ and a ‘provider’ for everyone around him.

1. Floyd was a **huge role model** for a lot of people, his brother, Philonise Floyd, said during the visitation ceremony. (2020, June 8)
2. Philonise Floyd said: “He just was like **a person** that everybody **loved around the community...**” (2021, April 12)
3. Stephen Jackson said, “He was ... somebody that wanted to be a **protector and provider for everybody around him,**” Jackson told CNN Thursday. 2020, May 28)

These excerpts below reveal Floyd’s character. The verb phrase in Excerpt 1 indicates Floyd’s optimism. Floyd’s friend described him as a ‘great’ person while his brothers said Floyd had a ‘beautiful soul’ and was a ‘caring and compassionate’ person.

1. In an obituary for the service, Floyd’s family described him as someone who ... could **find “the good in every situation.”** (2020, June 6)
2. Stephen Jackson (Floyd’s friend) said: “... “He was just a **great** dude... (2020, May 28)
3. Floyd was someone who also had a **beautiful soul**, his younger brother, Rodney Floyd, said. (2020, June 8)
4. Floyd’s brother described him as a **caring and compassionate** individual and... (2020, June 10)

The verb phrases below (in bold text) revealed that Floyd put others before him.

1. In an obituary for the service, Floyd’s family described him as **someone who helped others reach their “fullest potential” ...**” (2020, June 6)
2. He just **knew how to make people feel better.** (2021, April 12)
3. Floyd’s brother: ... And he **made sacrifices for complete strangers.** He **gave the little that he had to help others...**” he said. (2020, June 10)
4. He cared about **standing up for people who needed help and for bringing people together,** Courtney Ross (Floyd’s girlfriend) said. (2021, May 26)

4.1.1.3 A Black Man, A Suspect, A Crime Victim, the Deceased Victim of

Police Brutality who Begged for His Life

Floyd was referred to as ‘another black man’. The determiner ‘another’ indicates that Floyd was not the first African American who died at the hands of police officers. This is affirmed by the phrase ‘the thousands of other lost young men and women’. The phrase is also evidence of CNN’s acknowledgement of the continued killings of African Americans by U.S. police officers. According to the statistics, U.S. police officers kill around 23 African Americans every month (Mapping Police Violence, n.d.).

1. (Headline) 4 Minneapolis cops fired after video shows one kneeling on neck of **black man** who later died (2020, May 26)
2. ... officer is on trial for the killing of **another black man**, George Floyd (2021, April 12)
3. ... seeing **another black man** die following a police encounter, ... (2020, May 28)
4. Poignantly invoking their point, activists named some of **the thousands of other lost young men and women** – including Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor and Philando Castile. (2021, April 21)

Early on in the data, Floyd was referred to as ‘the suspect’. According to the police, ‘the suspect’ appeared to have taken drugs, ‘physically resisted’ arrest and ‘appeared to be suffering medical distress’ before he was taken to the hospital where he was pronounced dead.

1. Officers responding to an alleged forgery in progress Monday evening were initially told that a person later described as **the suspect** was sitting on a car and **appeared to be under the influence**, police said. (2020, May 26)
2. Minneapolis police said officers were responding to an alleged forgery Monday evening and were told a person later described as **the suspect** was sitting on a car. They found Floyd, who at that point was inside a car and police said he “**physically resisted**” after he got out. Officers handcuffed Floyd, who police said “appeared to be suffering medical distress.” **He was taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead**, police said. (2020, May 27)

The eyewitness accounts of events and what can be seen and heard in the viral bystander video and the footage obtained from the officers’ body cameras

contradicted the police statement. Floyd instead panicked as he struggled and pleaded with the officers.

1. ...partial footage obtained by the Daily Mail from the body cameras worn by two of the now-former Minneapolis police officers...a **panicked** Floyd can be seen **struggling with officers** while in the back of a squad car in the minutes before his death, saying, "I can't breathe." (2020, August 3)
2. Donald Williams (witness) said he heard Floyd **telling officers that he couldn't breathe.**" (2020, May 28)
3. "... I didn't see a single one of them lift a finger to do anything to help while **he was begging for his life...**," Tera Brown, Floyd's cousin, told CNN's Don Lemon. (2020, May 27)
4. **"Please, I can't breathe,"** the man said... (2020, May 26)

Floyd told the officers that his stomach, neck, and 'everything' hurts. His nose bled.

Eventually, he became 'silent,' 'motionless' and his eyes 'shut'.

1. **"My stomach hurts,"** the man told the officer. **"My neck hurts. Everything hurts."** (2020, May 26)
2. **"His nose is bleeding,"** a woman said of the man. (2020, May 26)
3. "Please, I can't breathe," the man said, screaming for several minutes before **he became silent.** (2020, May 26)
4. By the end of the (viral) video, he is seen **motionless, with his eyes shut,** lying on the pavement. (2020, May 27)

The viral bystander video which documented Floyd's death was the key evidence that refuted Minneapolis police department's initial statement which claimed that Floyd was resisting arrest and died 'after medical incident during police interaction' (Treisman, 2021; Cohen, 2021). Some U.S. law enforcement agencies and officers have been covering up civilian deaths that occurred during or due to an arrest. Police reports and statements have been falsified to exaggerate the seriousness of the (deceased) victim's alleged crime (Sisak, 2019) and "to hide" officers' wrongdoings (Montana Innocence Projects, n.d., para. 3), that is, to ultimately keep the officers' job (Kaur, 2020). The killing of George Floyd shone the spotlight on this culture.

CNN did not overtly refer to Floyd as the victim even after Chauvin was charged with third-degree murder and manslaughter on May 29, 2020, four days after Floyd was

killed. However, there was a shift in tone after June 3, 2020, the day Chauvin was charged with another, more serious second-degree murder, and the other three officers were charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder – it was then CNN began to refer to Floyd as ‘the victim’ of police brutality and his family as ‘the victim’s family’.

1. ... remembering **Floyd and other victims of police brutality** ... (2020, June 6)
2. the **victim, the victim’s family**, and the community” ... (2021, June 25)

CNN also referred to Floyd as a ‘crime victim.’ The noun ‘crime’ delineates not only the form of victimisation, but also underlined the gravity of the officers’ actions and the legal ramifications of their actions. However, there was only one mention of this significant phrase, and it came on December 9, 2022, long after Chauvin was found guilty on the state charges (April 20, 2021) and the federal charge (December 15, 2021). The term was used around the time (early December 2022) when all four officers were given federal sentences. Evidently, CNN was slow to define Floyd as a victim of police brutality.

Prosecutor Matthew Frank said Floyd was a “**crime victim**” ... (2022, Dec 9)

In his own words, Floyd said he was ‘victimized by racist police’ and he was stopped by officers more than 20 times over the course of his life.

In his own words, **he felt that he was victimized by racist police. He was stopped by police more than 20 times over the course of his life.** (2022, May 25)

Floyd’s claim is not unfounded. In a 2019 nationwide survey, 84% of African Americans said they have been unfairly stopped by the police and they believed their race or ethnicity influenced the officers’ decision to pull them over - the Hispanics (19%), Asians (16%) and white Americans (9%) said they had similar experiences (Horowitz et al., 2019).

Moreover, stopped African Americans were searched about twice as often as stopped white drivers (Pierson et al., 2020). As there is no ban on the practice of racial profiling across all state and local law enforcement, officers continue to rely “on generalised racial or ethnic stereotypes” in their daily duties (U.S. Department of Justice, 2003, paras. 5-6; The Associated Press, 2014). Therefore, through Floyd’s words, CNN highlighted the very reason African Americans are the most vulnerable to police violence and why they fear the police.

4.1.1.4 A Familiar Gut-Wrenching Homicide, Another Evidence of Aggressive

Policing on African Americans

In the data, Floyd’s death was being referred to in a number of ways. Firstly, Floyd’s death is a ‘homicide’, according to the Hennepin County’s medical examiner’s office. The finding of the report is consistent with the Floyd family’s commissioned autopsy’s result which concluded that Floyd ‘died from asphyxiation from sustained pressure.’

Secondly, Floyd’s death is referred to as ‘the symptom of a disease’. Here, the noun ‘disease’ is the metaphor for ‘systemic racism.’ ‘Disease’ is defined as “a particular quality or disposition regarded as adversely affecting a person or group of people in a manner analogous to an illness” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Indeed, ‘disease’ explains the widespread nature of racism. According to the United Nations Human Rights Chief Michelle Bachelet, “racism and xenophobia are contagious killers” (United Nations, 2020, para. 2). Therefore, Floyd’s death is ‘yet another’ ‘instance of an African American man dying’ at the hands of police officers.

1. But on Monday, the medical examiner’s office in Hennepin County released the report that said **Floyd’s death was a homicide** resulting from being restrained. (2020, June 1).
2. Floyd died from “**asphyxiation from sustained pressure**” – a finding in the family-commissioned autopsy that is at odds with the medical examiner. (2020, June 1)
3. “**George Floyd’s death is the symptom of a disease**. We will not wake up one day and have **the disease of systemic racism** cured for us...” – said Attorney General Keith Ellison (2020, June 3).
4. Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar via Twitter called the incident “**yet another** horrifying and gutwrenching **instance of an African American man dying.**” (2020, May 26)

Floyd’s death was also referred to as a ‘torture’ and ‘a modern-day lynching.’ Taken together, this suggests that racially motivated malice intent led to Floyd’s death. The phrase ‘in broad daylight’ informs readers of not just the time the killing took place but more importantly it illustrates the officers’ brazenness in using the unnecessary deadly force on Floyd.

1. Crump called Floyd’s killing **torture**. (2020, July 15)
2. “... That was a **modern-day lynching in broad daylight.**” (2020, June 10)

The noun phrase, ‘your neck’ functions as both the metonymy for Floyd’s life and the synecdoche, representing ‘all of us’. ‘All of us’ refers to not just African Americans but also white Americans. The speaker, a civil rights activist who stands by African Americans whose civil rights were violated by police officers (Sayers et al., 2021; Roberts & Calder, 2023) has also supported a white American victim (Martinez, 2021). The excerpt below therefore implies that while Floyd’s life was ended by the police officers, the lives of ‘all of us’ continue to be threatened by law enforcement officers. In other words, Floyd’s death epitomised the vulnerability of Americans to police brutality.

“... **your neck** was **one that represents all of us, and how you suffered is how we all suffer,**” Reverend Al Sharpton said. (2020, June 9)

A simile was used to associate Floyd's death to a past victim, Eric Garner. Floyd's death 'feels like déjà vu' to Eric Garner's mother because to her, the murder of Floyd was like the murder of her son all over again since both Floyd and Garner's lives ended following an encounter with the police, they both uttered the words 'I can't breathe' and they were around the same age. For Paige Fernandez from American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Floyd's death also recalled the death of Garner in 2014 whose last moments were recorded on video.

1. Garner's mother told CNN that Floyd's death **feels like déjà vu**. Monday's incident is forcing Gwen Carr to relive the death of her son Eric Garner, who also uttered the words "I can't breathe" while in a New York officer's chokehold... "It's just **like the murder of my son all over again**. He was basically the **same age as Eric**." (2020, May 27)
2. Paige Fernandez, policing policy adviser for the ACLU, said the incident **recalled the 2014 New York death of Eric Garner, who repeated "I can't breathe" several times after a police officer held him in a chokehold**. Garner died during the arrest, the incident also caught on video. (2020, May 26)

In the data, it was mentioned repeatedly that Floyd's death was met with huge uproar in U.S., but there are only a handful of instances where Floyd's killing is said to be a tragic death brought upon by the country's 'anti-Black racism and aggressive policing.'

1. Floyd's death **launched a summer of protest, unrest and a societal reckoning with America's past and present of anti-Black racism and aggressive policing**. (2021, March 29)
2. His final moments **illustrated in clear visuals what Black Americans have long said about the ways that the criminal justice system dehumanizes Black people**, setting off mass protests across the country as well as incidents of looting and unrest. (2021, April 20)

A list of negative adjectives evokes negative emotions about Floyd's death, namely 'horrific,' 'awful,' 'vile,' 'heartbreaking,' 'horrifying,' 'gut-wrenching,' 'disturbing,' 'sickening,' 'horrible,' 'completely and utterly messed up,' 'the most horrific tragedy,' 'senseless' and 'cruel.'

1. “We all watched the **horrific death** of George Floyd on video as witnesses begged the police officer to take him into the police car and get off his neck,” Crump said. (2020, May 26)
2. **What** happened on Chicago and 38th this last night is simply **awful**. (2020, May 26)
3. St. Paul, Minnesota, Mayor Melvin Carter called the video of **the incident** “one of the most **vile** and **heartbreaking** images I’ve ever seen.” (2020, May 26)
4. Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar via Twitter called **the incident** “yet another **horrifying and gutwrenching** instance of an African American man dying.” (2020, May 26)
5. Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz tweeted Tuesday, “The lack of humanity in this **disturbing** video is **sickening**...” (2020, May 26)
6. Frey (said) ... “what we saw was **horrible, completely and utterly messed up**.” (2020, May 26)
7. **Texas Gov. Greg Abbott** ... called Floyd’s death “the most horrific tragedy” he has ever seen...” (2020, June 8)
8. The Alumni of Jack Yate is deeply saddened and enraged over **the senseless murder** of our beloved Lion. (2020, June 8)
9. Prosecutors contend that Floyd’s killing was so **cruel** ... (2020, October 7)

4.1.1.5 The Gentle Giant who Was Seen as A Sizable Threat

Floyd stood at 6 feet 4 inches and weighed 223 pounds (Hennepin County, 2020). Due to his large stature, George was described as ‘giant’, ‘big’ and ‘large’. However, Floyd was depicted by his family members as a ‘gentle’ person who has a ‘quiet personality’ and a ‘beautiful spirit’.

Chauvin described Floyd as ‘sizable’ and justified his actions by saying that Floyd ‘looks like he’s probably on something’. Taken together, Chauvin amplified the perceived danger he was in by painting Floyd as a large man who was under the influence of drug.

Attorney Crump asserted that ‘Floyd did not pose a threat’. The following year, prosecutor Steve Schleicher echoed Crump’s words when he convinced the jurors that Floyd was never a threat. Furthermore, Floyd was said to be a man who ‘didn’t hurt anybody’ and ‘did not want to be seen as intimidating.’

U.S. police agencies and officers have a history of using the blame-shifting narrative to lay the ground for the fear defence (Pipkins, 2019) and to ultimately avoid criminal conviction. The narrative portrays officers as fearful and had no choice but to use excessive force or to fire their weapon in order to protect themselves from the dangerous and (or) noncompliant (deceased) individuals, as in the killings of Michael Brown in 2014, Philando Castile in 2016 and Anthony Alvarez in 2021 (Sandburn, 2014; Berman, 2017; Lapin, 2021).

1. Chauvin responded as he got into his squad car. **“We had to control this guy because he’s a sizable guy. It looks like he’s probably on something.”** (2021, March 21)
2. But to his girlfriend (Courteney Ross), **“Big Floyd”** was the man she loved. (2021, May 26)
3. He was also a **large man** and **did not want to be seen as intimidating**. (2022, May 25)
4. “George earned the name ‘**gentle giant**’ for his **quiet personality** and **beautiful spirit** towards everyone,” the obituary says – his family said. (2020, June 6)
5. Tera Brown and Floyd’s two brothers held up his picture and spoke of a man **who “didn’t hurt anybody”** and who they described as a **“gentle giant.”** (2020, MAY 27)
6. Ben Crump, an attorney for Floyd’s family, said in a statement Monday that the leaked video shows **Floyd did not pose a threat**. (2020, August 3)
7. Prosecutor Schleicher told jurors... **“...George Floyd was not a threat, he never was...”** (2021, April 20)

Studies found that African Americans with certain traits are more vulnerable to police violence. Across size categories, tall and heavy black and Hispanic men face the greatest risk of being stop and frisk (Milner et al., 2016; Hester & Gray, 2018). It has been found that “height amplifies threat for black men,” and individuals who believe that black people are generally more threatening than white people are likely to find tall black men more threatening than short black men, short white men and tall white men (Hester & Gray, 2018, p. 2713).

4.1.1.6 The Force of Change

Some see Floyd's death as serving greater purposes. Floyd's friend, Jackson and Governor Abbott said Floyd has not died in vain. His death serves as a reminder of how similar incident should be handled in the future and a reminder of how much more the country must do to address its policing issue.

1. Stephen Jackson said: "... **his death will not be in vain.**" (2020, May 28)
2. "**George Floyd has not died in vain. His life will be a living legacy about the way that America and Texas respond to this tragedy,**" said Governor Abbott (2020, June 8)
3. **It was traumatic and it serves as a clear reminder of just how far we have to go.**" – said Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey (2020, May 26)

A number of phrases illustrate the impact of Floyd's death on changes in U.S. policing. His death is said to have 'sparked the fuse,' changed 'the arc of the future of the United States' and led to 'a slew of police reform measures.

1. "A movement is happening in America and I'm glad that all of us get to say that it was George Floyd who **sparked the fuse...**It was George Floyd who **sparked the fuse that is going to change this nation,**" said Rev. Christopher D. Stackhouse (2020, June 6)
2. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott ... called Floyd's death "the most horrific tragedy" he has ever seen. "George Floyd is going to **change the arc of the future of the United States,**" (2020, June 8)
3. The death, which was captured on video by bystanders, **led** to nationwide protests and **a slew of police reform measures.** (2020, July 15).

4.1.1.7 The Holy Symbol of Racial Injustice

Floyd was referred to as an 'ordinary brother.' The noun 'brother' is the term "used by a black man to address or to refer to another black man" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-b).

Here, Floyd was depicted as an ordinary, everyday African American, one who 'nobody thought much about' for he was a man of no significant importance in the society.

However, at his funeral, Floyd was elevated as he was metaphorically referred to as

Jesus and Prophet Isaiah. This implies that Floyd embodies the distinct qualities one normally associates with only Jesus and Prophet Isaiah. Acts 4:11 in the Bible reads “(Jesus is) the stone that you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone” (Bible, n.d.). Therefore, in Excerpt 1 below, ‘the rejected stone’ refers to Floyd, the ordinary man, prior to his fateful encounter with the officers. Meanwhile, ‘the cornerstone’ refers to the deceased Floyd who is now being regarded as ‘an international symbol of the pain that Black Americans have faced for generations.’

1. George Floyd was an “**ordinary brother**” from Houston’s housing projects who “**nobody thought much about,**” which makes his central role in a generational movement that much more powerful, ... “God took **the rejected stone** and made him **the cornerstone** of a movement that’s going to change the whole wide world,” Reverend Al Sharpton said. (2020, June 9)
2. Minnesota Governor Tim Walz said “**George Floyd** didn’t ask to be **an international symbol of the pain that Black Americans have faced for generations,** ...” (2021, May 25)

Floyd’s death was also associated with Genesis 50:20 in the Bible which reads, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (Knowing Jesus, n.d.). Therefore although ‘they’ (the four police officers) inflicted ‘wickedness’ (harm) onto Floyd, Floyd’s death brought together Americans to push for police accountability and reform which could prevent more Americans from dying at the hands of police officers (the ‘goodness’).

The clause ‘Big Floyd who stood up and said ‘send me’’ likens Floyd to Prophet Isaiah who offered himself as the messenger to the people by answering, “Lord! Here am I, Send me,” (Blank, 2023). The verb phrase ‘stood up’ suggests Floyd’s willingness and readiness to offer himself and to accept the God’s assignment (Verrett, 2023). This implies that Floyd died a noble death. This also reflects Floyd’s character as his brother put it - if Floyd ‘was told he would have to sacrifice his life to bring the world together, ... he would’ve did it.’

1. “We know that centuries ago, they took a man, wicked man, put him on the cross. **They** did not understand that though they were intending **wickedness**, that out of much intention of wickedness came **goodness**” ... “But **George Floyd** answered the question in death when it was asked in **Isaiah**, ‘Who should I send?’ Oh God have mercy on us, there was a tall man by the name of **Big Floyd who stood up and said ‘send me,’**” Representative Jackson Lee said. (2020, June 9)
2. Rodney Floyd said: “**If he was told he would have to sacrifice his life to bring the world together**, and knowing him, I know **he would’ve did it,**” Rodney Floyd said. (2020, June 8)

The intersection of Chicago Avenue and 38th Street, the location where Floyd was killed is labelled as a ‘shrine’. The noun refers to a place that people visit to pay their respect to a deceased person (Collins Dctionary, n.d.-a). The noun also carries another meaning and that is a place of worship associated with holy persons (Collins Dictionary, n.d.-a), a saint or deity (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

George Floyd Square, **the intersection of Chicago Avenue and 38th Street**, where Floyd took his last breaths as a police officer knelt on his neck, has become a makeshift **shrine** that represents peace, justice and healing for many residents. (2021, May 25)

The deceased Floyd was further glorified as an equal to two towering African American civil rights leaders, the late Martin Luther King and John Lewis. The men’s contribution to African Americans’ civil rights pursuit and their lived experiences as African Americans in the U.S. tie them together. Like Floyd, King was killed (assassinated) by a white man (Britannica, 2023a). Lewis was arrested 40 times by the police and was also beaten senselessly but he survived the ordeal (Seelye, 2020). While King and Lewis dedicated their lifetime fighting for the civil rights of African Americans (Stanford University, n.d.; Spencer, 2020), Floyd’s fateful tragic and fatal encounter with the officers lit the fuse on the country’s police reform efforts and made him an instantly recognisable face of racial injustice.

“... we’re not ever going to be able to get **George Floyd** out of our systems, as we will never forget **Martin Luther King** or **John Lewis**...,” said Andrew Young, the former US ambassador to the United Nations and civil rights activist. (2021, May 24)

In the years following his death, Floyd's name has become synonymous with the fight for racial equality. His name is labelled as a 'symbol for the racial equality fight' and a 'rallying cry' at protests that call for an end to police brutality against Black people and justice for the community.

For the last two years, **his (Floyd's) name** has been **echoed across the nation from the streets of Minneapolis where protesters marched, to the halls of corporate America where major brands publicly denounced racism. His name is a symbol for the racial equality fight, and a rallying cry for justice and an end to police brutality against Black people.** (2022, May 25)

4.1.1.8 A Life that Mattered and Worthy of Celebration

Floyd's memorials and funeral focused on celebrating his life. Unlike the funerals of past victims of police violence, Floyd's funeral was attended by police officers who were there to escort his body. Moreover, Floyd was given a proper send-off that included a white horse-drawn carriage and a second carriage that proudly acknowledged Floyd as a Jack Yates football player.

1. On Monday, thousands of mourners gathered at The Fountain of Praise church to pay their respects to Floyd. The memorial was the third stop in **a series of events to celebrate his life.** (2020, June 9).
2. The (funeral) service was **a celebration of Floyd's life,** said Mia K. Wright, the co-pastor of The Fountain of Praise church. (2020, June 9)
3. **Floyd's body was escorted by the Houston Police Department** into Houston Memorial Gardens in Pearland. **A white horse-drawn carriage carried his casket** for about a mile to his final resting place. **It was followed by a second carriage with two large football balloons and a poster that read "Jack Yates 88"** – a reference to Floyd's high school alma mater and his football jersey number. (2020, June 9)

4.1.2 Fox News' Representation of George Floyd

4.1.2.1 George Floyd Mattered - Not Just A Face, A Name, A Cause

Fox News referred to Floyd as 'a man' thus underlining that Floyd was a human whose 'life mattered' and therefore should have been treated with respect and dignity by the police officers. With phrases such as 'more than another face on a t-shirt,' and 'more than

another name on a list that won't stop growing,' Fox News emphasised that Floyd is not just a cause, not just a name to be chanted in the streets during protests.

1. Representative Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., (said) ... he (Floyd) is **not just a cause - a name to be chanted in the streets**. He was **a man...**" (2020, June 10)
2. Joe Biden said, "His **life mattered**." (2020, May 27)
3. Philonise Floyd told lawmakers. "To make sure that he is **more than another face on a t-shirt. More than another name on a list that won't stop growing**." (2020, June 10)

Fox News referred to Floyd as a 'gentle giant', 'the cousin whom everybody loved' and a 'king'. The noun 'king' in Excerpt 3 suggests that Floyd was a tough person.

1. Representative Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., (said) "... He was known as a '**gentle giant**.'" (2020, June 10)
2. Both women (Floyd's cousins) described Floyd as "**the cousin whom everybody loved**." (2020 May 26)
3. Maurice Lester Hall, a longtime friend of Floyd's, ... "I'm going to always remember seeing the fear in Floyd's face because he's such a **king**..." (2020, June 5)

Fox News went on to depict Floyd as a man who had a family and 'a rich life that was taken away from him far too early.' Floyd 'moved to Minneapolis several years ago to seek work' and for a fresh start. He fell in love with the city where he stayed for the people and the opportunities. Fox News evoked readers' sympathy for Floyd by highlighting what he would not be able to do – seeing his daughter grow up and getting married.

1. Representative Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., (said) ... "... He **had a family**. He **had a rich life that was taken away from him far too early**." (2020, June 10)
2. He **moved to Minneapolis several years ago to seek work and a fresh start**. (2020, June 8)
3. "He **loved the city**. He **came here [from Houston] and stayed here for the people and the opportunities**," said Floyd's girlfriend (2020, May 29)
4. **He will never see her grow up, graduate. He will never walk her down the aisle**," said Roxie Washington, the mother of Floyd's 6-year-old daughter (2020, June 3)

4.1.2.2 A Sizable Gentle Giant who Must Be Controlled

Floyd was referred to as a 'gentle giant' who was about love and peace. Floyd's friend, a passenger in Floyd's car on that fateful day said Floyd 'was trying to show he was not resisting.' A video footage reinforced that Floyd indeed 'posed no threat to the four

officers.’ However, Fox News attempted to paint Floyd as a threat to the officers with the phrases ‘a large man who was struggling with officers’ and ‘gotta control this guy ’cause he’s a sizable guy.’

1. " **Floyd** was a **gentle giant**. He was **about love and about peace**," said Floyd’s girlfriend (2020, May 29)
2. Representative Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., (said) ... **He** (Floyd) was known as a '**gentle giant...**' (2020, June 10)
3. Maurice Lester Hall, a longtime friend of Floyd's, was a passenger in Floyd's car when police approached him ...(said) ... **Floyd was trying to show he was not resisting**. (2020, June 5)
4. Ben Crump, the attorney for the Floyd family, said the footage reinforces **that Floyd posed no threat to the four officers**. (2020, August 3)
5. ...he was a **large man who was struggling with officers...** (2021, May 1)
6. Chauvin said: "**We gotta control this guy ’cause he’s a sizable guy ...** (2021, April 1)

4.1.2.3 A Black Man, A Suspect, A Crime Victim, A Victim of Police Brutality

who Died in Custody

Fox News referred to Floyd as a ‘black man’ and an ‘African American.’ While doing so, Fox News drew the distinction between Floyd and Chauvin’s skin colour by mentioning both men in the same sentences, occasionally in succeeding sentences.

1. The cousins of an **African-American** Minnesota man who died while in police custody, during which a **white police officer** pressed his knee against his neck ... (2020, May 26)
2. Floyd is seen in the footage in custody with a **white Minneapolis police officer**’s knee to his neck and is heard saying, “I cannot breathe.” **Floyd**, who is **black**, died soon afterward. (2020, June 3)
3. ... **Floyd**, who was **Black**, died after former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin held his knee on Floyd’s neck as Floyd pleaded for air. **Chauvin**, who is **White**, has ... (2021, May 24)
4. **Floyd**, a **Black man**, died May 25, 2020, after **Chauvin**, who is **white**, ... (2023, Feb 1)

Floyd was also referred to as ‘the suspect’ who struggled to breathe, died in Hennepin County Medical Center, was suffering a medical distress, was under the influence of drugs and physically resisted arrest.

1. ... a white officer pinned his knee against **the suspect's** neck as he **struggled to breathe**, ... (2020, May 26)

2. "... **the suspect was suffering a medical distress...** He was transported to **Hennepin County Medical Center where he died a short time later,**" said Minneapolis police spokesman. (2020, May 26)
3. Officers located **the man** who was sitting in his car and said they thought he **was under the influence...**he "**physically resisted officers.**" (2020, May 26)

However, eyewitness accounts and the viral video of the incident revealed a starkly different scenario. Floyd's friend who was with him in the car when the officers approached them referred to Floyd as a 'grown man' who cried and pleaded with the officers. In the viral video, Floyd was heard yelling, 'I cannot breathe!' and 'Don't kill me!' A bystander said Floyd's nose was bleeding.

1. Maurice Lester Hall, ... a passenger in Floyd's car when police approached him ...(said) ..."I could hear him pleading, '**Please, officer, what's all this for?**'" ...seeing a **grown man cry**, before seeing a grown man die. (2020, June 5)
2. In a video shared on social media early Tuesday, Floyd is heard yelling, "**I cannot breathe! I cannot breathe!**"..."Don't kill me!" (2020, May 26).
3. Frazier said...his **nose was bleeding.** (2020, May 26)

Floyd is then referred to as a 'patient' who 'was probably deceased' at the scene as his 'pupils were large.' The relative clauses 'who died while in police custody,' 'who died this week while in police custody' and 'who died in police custody' affirm that Floyd died at the hands of the police officers.

1. Derek Smith (a paramedic) said that after he arrived at the scene in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, he could not find a pulse in Floyd's neck and that the Black man's **pupils were large**, indicating "**the patient was probably deceased.**" (2022, January 26)
2. The cousins of an African-American Minnesota man **who died while in police custody**,... (2020, May 26)
3. ... in the death of George Floyd, a black man **who died this week while in police custody.** (2020, May 29)
4. George Floyd **who died in police custody.** (2020, June 3)

The prepositional phrases 'in custody' and 'in police custody' explain that Floyd's death occurred while Floyd was being held by the police. The conjunction 'while' in the excerpts below explain that both Floyd's death and Floyd's arrest took place concurrently.

1. Chauvin was captured on video pressing his knee onto a handcuffed Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes before his death **in custody**. (2020, October 22)
2. ... the Black man's death **in police custody**, ... (2021, March 12)
3. "...death of Mr. Floyd, **while** in custody ... (2020, May 29)
4. ...the death of George Floyd **while** in police custody. (2020, June 7)

Floyd was referred to as a 'crime victim' who was 'killed (murdered)' and whose death could have been prevented had the officers done the right thing during the arrest.

1. Assistant Attorney General Matthew Frank described Floyd on Friday as a "**crime victim**." (2022, Dec 9)
2. ...after George **was killed**, ... (2023, May 2)
3. "My brother **was murdered** in broad daylight with a knee to his neck for nine minutes," Philonese Floyd. (2022, July 7)
4. ...Mayor Jacob Frey apologized to all victims of Chauvin and said that if police supervisors "had done the right thing, George Floyd **would not have been murdered**." (2023, April 13)

In 2020, Floyd was categorised together with 'Breonna Taylor,' 'Ahmaud Arbery,' and 'Rayshard Brooks.' Collectively, the African Americans are referred to as those who were killed by police or vigilantes. Taylor and Brooks were shot by white officers (Lovan, 2023; Ortiz, 2022) while Arbery was shot by white vigilantes (Franklin, 2023). In 2023, Floyd was grouped together with another African American, Rodney King, who survived the savage beating perpetrated by white officers in Los Angeles in 1991 (Garcia, 2021).

1. The names George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Rayshard Brooks--**all killed by police or vigilantes**... (2020, November 5)
2. ... it goes beyond recordings of excessive force used against **Rodney King** in 1991 and **George Floyd** in 2020. (2023, Jan 27)

Floyd's death was compared to the death of Eric Garner who was killed by Daniel Pantaleo, white police officer who put him in chokehold in 2014 (Sanchez & Prokupecz, 2014). A simile with 'than' was employed to compare the men's manner of death and to underline that Floyd's death was worse than Garner's.

1. **Floyd's death has prompted comparisons to that of Eric Garner**, an African-American man whose death was brought on by an illegal chokehold during a 2014 interaction with New York City police. (2020, May 26)

2. **"In many ways it is worse than Eric Garner** because they got their knee on his neck and he is begging, pleading, not one minute... but eight minutes begging them to let him breathe," Crump said. (2020, May 26)

The phrase 'George Floyd's story' functions as a synecdoche because it represents 'the story of black people'. African Americans, specifically adolescent males, live in fear of police and have 'a serious concern for their personal safety and mortality in the presence of police officers' (Staggers-Hakim, 2016; Smith & Robinson, 2019, para. 7). In other words, African Americans live in fear every day not knowing when their lives will be taken away from them.

Rev. Al Sharpton said during Thursday's eulogy that **George Floyd's story** has been the **story of black people**. (2020, June 6)

4.1.2.4 A Death Caused by Systemic Racism: A Torture, A Suffocation, A Hate

Crime, A Lynching, A Homicide

Two autopsy reports have concluded that Floyd died from medical complications caused by compression on his neck during the restrain. Floyd's death was labelled as 'a stain on the soul of America.' As the noun 'stain' carries the meaning 'permanent damage to someone's reputation' (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-c), Excerpt 1 can therefore be understood as – Floyd's death leaves lasting damage to the U.S.' international image.

1. The president called Floyd's murder "**a stain on the soul of America**" ... (2022, May 24)
2. Attorneys for Floyd's family released the results of an independent autopsy report Monday afternoon showing that **Floyd's death was caused by asphyxia** due to neck and back compression that led to a lack of blood flow to the brain. (June 1, 2020)
3. Another autopsy, conducted by the Hennepin County Medical Examiner's office, stated that **Floyd died from "cardiopulmonary arrest complicating law enforcement subdual restraint, and neck compression" while being restrained**. (June 1, 2020)

Floyd's death was labelled as a 'murder,' a 'hate crime,' a 'lynching,' a 'homicide' and a 'killing.' Floyd's niece referred to his death as 'not just murder but a hate crime.' In the

same article where Excerpt 2 was taken from, Fox News associated ‘hate crime’ with ‘lynching.’ This suggests that the news outlet recognises Floyd’s murder as a lynching.

1. ... **the murder** of George Floyd... (2023, May 2)
2. Floyd's niece said during her remarks. "This is **not just murder but a hate crime**" (2020, June 9)
3. In Congress, Democrats introduced a sweeping police reform bill that would ban chokeholds, **make lynching a federal hate crime**, ... (2020, June 9)
4. "I would tell you that you can believe your eyes, that **it's a homicide, it's murder**," Prosecutor Blackwell said of the video, ... (2021, March 29)
5. The **killing**, which was recorded on video by a bystander, sparked worldwide protests as part of a broader reckoning over racial injustice. (2022, Dec 9)

The Floyd family Attorney said Floyd was ‘tortured in the last 8 minutes and 46 seconds of his life.’ Floyd’s killing was labelled as a ‘suffocation.’ The simile, ‘like a fish out of water,’ was employed to illustrate the dire state Floyd was in as he was gasping for air.

1. Attorney Ben Crump said: “... we absolutely believe **he was tortured in the last 8 minutes and 46 seconds of his life.**” (2020, June 3)
2. “Witness Donna Williams who yesterday was the person in the video saying ‘You all are gonna kill him’ **likened it to suffocation like a fish out of water, gasping for air,**” Crump said. (2020, June 3)

Floyd’s death and the deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Rayshard Brooks reignited the BLM movement in 2020 and ‘put race and justice at the centre of the election.’ Floyd’s death drew ‘new attention to the treatment of African Americans by police and the criminal justice system,’ erupted nationwide and worldwide protests over police brutality against minorities and systemic racism, and sparked calls for change in policing.

1. The names George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Rayshard Brooks--all killed by police or vigilantes--**re-energized the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement this year and put race and justice at the center of the election.** (2020, November 5)
2. His death has inspired international protests and **drawn new attention to the treatment of African Americans by police and the criminal justice system.** (2020, June 8)
3. Floyd’s death **sparked nationwide protests** last spring and summer **over police brutality against minorities and systemic racism.** (2021, April 20)
4. Floyd’s death, which **sparked worldwide protests and calls for change in policing** in the U.S. (2021, May 24)

Floyd's death was described as 'awful,' 'harrowing,' 'deeply disturbing,' 'very shocking' and 'tragic.'

1. What happened ... was simply **awful**." (2020, May 26)
2. "The video images of the incident that ended with death of Mr. Floyd, while in custody of Minneapolis police officers, were **harrowing** to watch and **deeply disturbing**," Barr said in a statement Friday. (2020, May 29)
3. Trump said about the video of the moments before George Floyd's death. "That's a **very shocking** sight." (2020, May 29)
4. "Yet the fact that a **tragic** death occurred does not transfer it into a criminal act. (2023, Feb 1)

4.1.2.5 George Floyd's Memorial and Funeral

Floyd's memorial was about the life he lived. It was also a time to embrace the Floyd family with love and kindness as evidenced below:

"The memorial is about the life that Mr. George Floyd lived, and this is a time to embrace the family with expressions of love and kindness," Peterkin said. (2020, June 6)

On the other hand, Floyd's funeral was labelled as a 'home-going celebration.' The term 'home-going' is 'an African American and Black-Canadian Christian funeral tradition marking the going home of the deceased to the Lord or to Heaven' (Homegoing, 2023)

"This (funeral) will be a **home-going celebration** of brother George Floyd," Fountain of Praise pastor Mia K. Wright told mourners. (2020, June 9)

4.1.2.6 Not A Death in Vain

Fox News briefly mentioned Floyd as the force of change. The phrases 'will not have died in vain' and 'has not died in vain' suggest that Floyd's death will have its significance. The infinitive phrase 'to change the arc of the future of the United States' suggests that Floyd's death will have a role in shaping the country's future.

1. "... George Floyd **will not have died in vain** ...," said Trump (2020, May 29)

2. The video footage of Floyd's death ignited simmering racial tensions in the city and has **shined a light on the use of force by police officers against black residents.** (2020, May 29)
3. **“George Floyd is going to change the arc of the future of the United States. George Floyd has not died in vain.** His life will be a living legacy about the way that America and Texas responds to this tragedy,” Abbott said. (2020, June 8)

Floyd’s death ‘touched the world.’ The verb ‘touch’ carries the meaning “to influence someone emotionally, or cause feelings of sympathy in someone” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-d). African Americans the world over were affected and can relate to Floyd’s death as police brutality and discrimination against people of African descent is a global issue. Amongst the countries grappling with the issues are France (Diallo, 2023), Germany (Perrigo & Godin, 2020), Brazil (Carvalho, 2023) December 15), the United Kingdom (Khan, 2023) and Sweden (Naib, 2018). In a matter of two weeks, Floyd’s death become ‘a worldwide symbol’ for ‘changes to police practices and an end to racial prejudices.’ About a year after his death, it was said that his name has become ‘synonymous with justice and dignity and grace and prayerfulness.’

1. In his eulogy, the Rev. Al Sharpton ... (said) ... you've **touched the world.** (2020, June 9)
2. ... the 46-year-old man whose death has become **a worldwide symbol** in demonstrations over calls **for changes to police practices and an end to racial prejudices.** (2020, June 10)
3. “Floyd's name is **"synonymous with justice and dignity and grace and prayerfulness,"** House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said. (2021, April 20)

The Perspectivisation Strategy Associated with George Floyd

Apart from the nomination and predication strategies, another strategy worth mentioning is the perspectivisation strategy. While both CNN and Fox News employed this strategy, it is significantly more evident in the selected CNN articles as the news outlet gave voice to a long list of social actors to weigh in on George Floyd, his death and the events which ensued from his death. In the selected CNN articles, the ‘we-group’, for instance, oscillates greatly between social groups from ‘we,’ the Americans to ‘we’, the African Americans, ‘we’, the attorneys, ‘we’, the protestors and ‘we’, the Floyd family. While

granting the social actors the opportunity to humanise Floyd, CNN allowed its readers to learn more about Floyd from the first-person point of view. More importantly, the perspectivisation strategy in both sets of data is instrumental in highlighting the discrepancies between the police and the eyewitness accounts of what transpired during Floyd's last moments.

1. This is the floor, not the ceiling of where **we** need to get to. **We** know that accountability in the courtroom is only the very first step - Minnesota Governor Tim Walz said. (2021, April 21)
2. **We** cannot sink to the level of our oppressors, and **we** must not endanger others during this pandemic - the Floyd family's attorney Benjamin Crump said. (2020, May 28).
3. Earlier, Hennepin County Attorney Michael Freeman, giving an update to reporters on the case, said ... "**We** need to wade through all of that evidence and come to a meaningful decision and **we** are doing that to the best of our ability." (2020, May 28)

4.2 The Nomination and Predication Strategies Associated with Derek

Chauvin

On April 20, 2021, Chauvin was found guilty on the state charges. "The second-degree murder charge said Chauvin assaulted Floyd with his knee, which unintentionally caused Floyd's death. The third-degree murder charge said Chauvin acted with a "depraved mind," and the manslaughter charge said his "culpable negligence" caused Floyd's death" (Levenson & Cooper, 2021, para. 5). In July 2022, a federal court sentenced Chauvin to 21 years in prison for depriving Floyd and another victim of their civil rights.

The section looks at the nomination and predication strategies identified in CNN and Fox News' articles associated with Derek Chauvin, his actions which ultimately caused the death of George Floyd, his guilty verdict, the sentences given to him, his guilty plea and his life in and out of uniform.

4.2.1 CNN's Representation of Derek Chauvin

4.2.1.1 The Four Officers; the Four Murderers

Derek Chauvin, along with three other officers involved in Floyd's death case are collectively referred to as 'the four officers,' 'these officers,' 'the officers,' 'they' and 'them.' The adjective 'complicit' ties the men together as equally culpable in Floyd's death. As Attorney Crump put it - each of the officers 'played a role that ultimately led to his death - whether it was a knee to the neck or denying any intervention.'

1. Minneapolis Police Chief Medaria Arradondo fired the four officers and said **they were "complicit" in Floyd's death**, ... (2020, June 3)
2. Floyd family attorneys Ben Crump and Antonio Romanucci..(said) "**Each of these men played a role that ultimately led to his death – whether it was a knee to the neck or denying any intervention** as George and onlookers begged for his life." (2020, November 5)

The officers' actions 'drew widespread condemnation' and various parties called for the officers' arrest and conviction for causing Floyd's death. The officers' collective action was labelled as a 'killing,' a 'murder' and a 'lynching.'

1. The FBI is investigating **the incident**, which **drew widespread condemnation of the officers** after a video showing part of the encounter circulated on social media. (2020, May 26)
2. Minneapolis Police Chief Medaria Arradondo (said) ... **Floyd's family and protesters nationwide have called for them to be arrested and convicted for the killing**. (2020, June 3)
3. "**They need to be charged with murder because what they did was murder**," Tera Brown (Floyd's cousin) told CNN. (2020, May 27)
4. "**They lynched** my brother. That was a **modern-day lynching** in broad daylight." (2020, June 10)

A simile with the conjunction 'than' was employed to serve two purposes. First, it compares the way the officers handled Floyd to the way one would treat animals. Secondly, the simile underlines that Floyd was treated worse than an animal. The

officers' use of force or actions was criticised as 'lack of humanity...sickening', 'abusive, excessive and inhumane' and a 'terrible insult to police and policemen.'

1. Philonise Floyd said. "They could have tased him; they could have maced him. Instead, they put their knee in his neck and just sat on him and then carried on." "**They treated him worse than they treat animals**," he said. (2020, May 27)
1. Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz tweeted Tuesday, "The **lack of humanity** in this disturbing video is **sickening**..." (2020, May 26)
2. Crump said: "This **abusive, excessive and inhumane use of force** cost the life of a man who was being detained by the police for questioning about a non-violent charge" (2020, May 26)
3. "This was a **terrible insult to police and policemen**," the President (Trump) said of the officer's behavior. (2020, May 29)

4.2.1.2 The Egoistic Cruel Serial Predator who Killed

Chauvin was labelled as a 'serial predator' and a 'blunt instrument of police brutality and racism.' The noun phrase 'the knee of officer Derek Chauvin' functions as a synecdoche which represents 'the knee of the entire Minneapolis Police Department.' This implies that the police department is equally culpable in Floyd's death. Indeed, "the City of Minneapolis has a history of policies, procedures and deliberate indifference that violates the rights of arrestees, particularly Black men" (Sanchez & Parks, 2020, para. 5). Taken together, Chauvin is represented as a (former) officer who belongs to a group of officers within the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) that participate in police violence, particularly against African Americans.

1. Both lawsuits say that "**Chauvin was a serial predator** who was never stopped by the City...(2022, June 1)
2. "Beware the ease of blaming Chauvin alone. While **he is a blunt instrument of police brutality and racism**, he could never flourish in a police agency that lived up to its mission statement," Attorney Bob Bennett said in a statement. (2023, April 14)
3. "It was not just **the knee of officer Derek Chauvin** on George's Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, but it was **the knee of the entire Minneapolis Police Department** on the neck of George Floyd that killed him," attorney Ben Crump said. (2020, July 15)

A litote, "an understatement in which a positive statement is expressed by negating its opposite" (Literary Terms, n.d.) was employed to depict Chauvin as an officer who

‘flourish(ed) in a police agency that (didn’t) lived up to its mission statement.’ The adverb ‘never’ negated the positive statement (bold text). The relative clause ‘who was never stopped by the City (of Minneapolis)’ while suggests Chauvin as a repeated offender, the clause highlights the failure of the city’s police department to oversee and to discipline their officers. Moreover, while being a police officer at MPD, Chauvin had 18 complaints filed against him but only 2 of the complaints were ‘closed with discipline.’ Chauvin was found to have falsified police reports in at least two of the arrests he conducted prior to Floyd’s death. Chauvin ‘lied about the encounter in his police report’ and ‘left out critical information about the interaction.’

1. “... **he**(Chauvin) **could never flourish in a police agency that lived up to its mission statement,**” Attorney Bob Bennett said in a statement. (2023, April 14)
2. Both lawsuits say that “Chauvin was a serial predator **who was never stopped by the City...**(2022, June 1)
3. **Chauvin had 18 complaints filed with the police department’s** internal affairs division, according to MPD. **Only two of the 18 complaints against Chauvin were “closed with discipline,”** according to a public summary from police. (2020, May 28)
4. Chauvin **later lied about the encounter in his police report and “left out** critical information about the interaction,” the city said. (2023, April 14)

In court, Chauvin was depicted as the officer with ‘authority’ and the other three officers as ‘powerless.’

1. The core of Plunkett’s argument was that Kueng was an inexperienced officer and subordinate to **Chauvin, a department veteran of more than 18 years and the field training officer in charge.** (2022, Feb 23)
2.he (Chauvin) had the **authority.** He (Chauvin) had the **power,** and the other officers, the bystanders were **powerless...** (2021, April 20).

Judge Cahill concluded that Chauvin ‘abused his position of trust or authority,’ ‘treated Floyd with “particular cruelty” and without respect’ and denied Floyd the dignity owed to all human beings. A witness said Chauvin ‘remained on top of him (Floyd).’

1. Judge Peter Cahill wrote that two aggravating factors warranted a harsher sentence – that **Chauvin “abused his position of trust or authority” and treated Floyd with “particular cruelty.”** Chauvin, the judge wrote, **treated Floyd “without respect and denied him the dignity owed to all human beings.”** (2021, June 25)
2. “I didn’t see George Floyd resist at all,” Frazier told the court, but added that **Chauvin remained on top of him.** (2022, Feb 24)

In Excerpt 1, the relative clause ‘when he used excessive and unreasonable force upon the body of Mr. George Floyd’ defines the moment when Chauvin betrayed his badge. Chauvin was depicted as an officer who ‘failed in the most basic human sense’ for not responding to Floyd’s call for help. Chauvin was not concerned about Floyd’s safety as he kneeled impassively on Floyd’s neck. The prosecutors painted him as an officer who is full of himself and egoistic such that he did what he wanted, ‘how he wanted and for as long as he wanted.’

1. “Mr. Derek Chauvin betrayed this badge **when he used excessive and unreasonable force upon the body of Mr. George Floyd,**” prosecuting attorney Jerry Blackwell said...” (2021, March 29)
2. “When you hear someone calling for help, you are supposed to help. **This officer failed in the most basic human sense,**” ... said Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey (2020, May 27)
3. “The police (Chauvin) **were not concerned about George Floyd’s safety** even as he was handcuffed, face down on the ground with his breath and life being slowly extinguished,” said Attorney Crump (2020, October 9)
4. Video of the incident that led to Floyd’s death showed **Chauvin impassively kneeling** on the 46-year-old Black man’s neck and back... (2021, September 24)
5. He (Chauvin) was going to do what he wanted, **how he wanted, for as long as he wanted.** (2021, April 20).

‘The technique’ Chauvin used on Floyd was dismissed as ‘not permitted’ and not what Minneapolis police officers were trained to do and thus does not reflect the ethics and values of the Minneapolis Police Department. Chauvin’s action was criticised as ‘deadly force’ and ‘unreasonable.’

1. “**The technique** that was used is **not permitted; is not a technique that our officers get trained in on,**” said Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey. (2020, May 27)
2. Foremost among the critics was Minneapolis Police Chief Medaria Arradondo.“That in no way shape or form is anything that is by policy. **It is not part of our training, and it is certainly not part of our ethics or our values,**” Minneapolis Police Department Chief Arradondo said. (2021, April 12)
3. Seth Stoughton, a use-of-force expert, former police officer and associate professor of law at University of South Carolina, said Chauvin’s actions represented **deadly force** and were **unreasonable.** (2021, April 12)

4.2.1.3 The Guilty Verdict - A Form of Rare Justice

The guilty verdict elicited different reactions from the social actors. Some saw the guilty verdict as a ‘moment of justice’ and ‘justice’ for Floyd. Floyd’s family underlined that it is a ‘painfully earned justice.’ On the other hand, Reverend Al Sharpton said the verdict (and the sentencing) is ‘not justice’ because it came only because the African American community has been disappointed time and time again. Nonetheless, the guilty verdict ‘led to cries of joy and sighs of relief.’

1. ...White House press secretary Jen Psaki said **that** was a **moment of justice...**” (2021, May 7)
2. “George Floyd we did it!!” Darnella Frazier said on Facebook. “**Justice has been served.**”
3. In a statement, the Floyd family described the verdict as “**painfully earned justice.**” (2021, April 21)
4. “**This verdict and the sentencing** is the longest sentence we’ve seen, but it is **not justice...** We got more than we thought only because we have been disappointed so many times before,” Reverend Al Sharpton said. (2021, June 25)
5. In the streets of Minneapolis, **the verdicts led to cries of joy and sighs of relief** among those nervously watching the trial, including many people outside the Cup Foods store where Floyd took his final breaths. (2021, April 20)

The guilty verdict was described as ‘right,’ ‘too rare,’ ‘historic’ and ‘monumental.’ It was also said that the conviction ‘has the feel of a historical turning point’ because unlike Floyd, Emmett Till, Rodney King and many other African Americans did not get justice.

The phrase ‘too rare’ carries great significance. U.S. law enforcement officers are indeed very rarely convicted of murder for the killings they perpetrated because *Qualified Immunity*, a loophole in law shields them (and other government officials) from being held accountable for causing the death of civilians (Novak, 2023; Sibilla, 2021). According to Mapping Police Violence (n.d.), only 1.9% of the 12,360 police killings that occurred between January 31, 2013, and December 31, 2023, has seen the perpetrator(s) charged with a crime. Chauvin and Lane are the first (former) white officers to be

convicted for the death of an African American in the state of Minnesota (Chappell, 2021c; Haavik, 2021).

The Democratic party has insisted on, amongst others, ending *Qualified Immunity* and to come up with a new standard that had to be reached for an officer to be charged, however, the Republican party fears that the moves could bring forth “frivolous lawsuits” (Pecorin, 2023, para. 13). The *George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021*, a federal bill which would “limit *Qualified Immunity* as a defence to liability” (Congress, 2021, para. 2) to hold officers accountable for future deaths of civilians was passed twice by the House (Greve, 2023a) but has stalled in the Senate (Laughland, 2022) due the divide between the parties.

1. President Joe Biden welcomed Tuesday’s guilty verdict in the murder trial of a former Minneapolis police officer but said the outcome was “**too rare**” ... (2021, April 20)
2. Philadelphia Police Chief Charles Ramsey called the verdict “the **right** verdict” (2021, April 20)
3. Terrence Floyd, another of Floyd’s brothers, described the verdict as “**monumental**” ... (2021, April 20)
4. The conviction **has the feel of a historical turning point. “...Emmett Till didn’t get justice. Rodney King didn’t get justice,”** said Jones, **pointing to previous trials of White crimes against Black men that ended in acquittals.** (2021, April 20)

4.2.1.4 The Day of the Guilty Verdict - A Day of Significance

The day the guilty verdict was read and the verdict itself are seen by some as of great significance. The day the guilty verdict was read was labelled as a ‘huge day for the world,’ a day of ‘pivotal moment’ and a ‘historical moment.’ The moment, according to activists, is a moment ‘to keep moving forward in addressing racial injustice.’ The moment is further labelled as a ‘chance’ for the country ‘to take a turn in the right direction.’ The hopeful Attorney Crump saw the verdict as ‘a sign of hope for

the future.’ Crump also labelled the verdict as ‘the precedent’ to imply his hope that future indictments of officers will lead to similar successful convictions.

1. **“This is a huge day for the world,”** Floyd’s girlfriend Courteney Ross told reporters outside the courthouse Tuesday.
2. Brandon Williams, Floyd’s nephew, ...**“So when I say today is a pivotal moment, it is chance for America to take a turn in the right direction,”** Brandon Williams, Floyd’s nephew, said. (2021, April 21)
3. **“...Proclaim this historical moment, ...,”** Crump said. (2021, April 20)
4. While the nation paused for the reading of the **guilty verdict** against former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin – and many rejoiced – activists say now is **a moment to keep moving forward in addressing racial injustice.** (2021, April 21)
5. Civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who represents the families of Floyd and Daunte Wright, urged people across the country to see **the verdict as a sign of hope for the future.** (2021, April 20).
6. **“Let this be the precedent** where we overcome systematic racism and oppression,” Crump added. (2021, April 20)

4.2.1.5 The Guilty Verdict – A Reminder of the Long Road Ahead

On the other hand, Chauvin’s verdict served as a reminder of long road ahead to achieve racial justice and equality. White House press secretary, Jen Psaki saw the verdict as both a ‘reminder’ and ‘the beginning’ of the efforts to implementing sweeping police reform.

.. ... White House press secretary Jen Psaki said they (the indictment of the other three officers) and the Chauvin verdict were **reminders that “there’s still more that needs to be done.”** “While that was a moment of justice, certainly, that **it is just the beginning,**” Psaki said. **“And it’s a reminder of the need to put police reform in place through our legislative process and put those reforms in place across the country.”** (2021, May 7)

Many Americans recognised that one guilty verdict alone ‘cannot produce the sea change’ needed to root out systemic racism in America. The idiomatic expression ‘sea change’ means a ‘strong, clear and definite change in a situation’ (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, n.d.) which includes “a complete change in someone's attitudes or behaviour” (Collins Dictionary, n.d.-b). Therefore, the text in bold can be read as – Chauvin’s guilty verdict alone will not suffice to effect the much needed changes to put an end to police

brutality and prejudice against people of colour – the changes would include but not limited to the criminal justice system, the legislative system, the law enforcement agency’s culture and police officers’ attitude towards people of colour.

Countless leaders and activists, along with the President of the United States, underscored the point Tuesday that **one verdict cannot produce the sea change needed in American society to root out the brutality and prejudice faced daily by people of color in their dealings with police.** (2021, April 21)

Metaphors were employed to label Chauvin’s verdict and the end of police killing in the country. Minnesota Governor Tim Walz referred to the verdict as ‘the floor’ which connotes ‘the foundation’ or ‘the first step’. Walz referred to the end to police brutality as ‘the ceiling’, which suggests the ‘ultimate goal’. The spatial distance between the metaphors illustrates the degree of efforts required to bring sweeping police reform to full fruition.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz... “This is **the floor, not the ceiling of where we need to get to,**” Walz said. “We know that accountability in the courtroom is only the very first step.” (2021, April 21)

The metaphors inspired from American football rules were employed to metaphorically refer to Chauvin’s verdict as ‘a first down, not a touchdown’. In an American football game, the players move the ball down the pitch by phases, 10 yards forward each time (Griffiths, 2023). In each phase, each team has four chances to reach the 10 yards, and a progress forward is called ‘a down’ (Griffiths, 2023). A touchdown is scored when the ball is carried all the way to the other end of the field which in about 100 yards in length (Griffiths, 2023). While ‘a down’ does not yield any point, a touchdown is worth 6 points. Therefore, the metaphor ‘a first down’ implied that the guilty verdict is a small, insignificant achievement. If a ‘touchdown’ refers to a greater, more significant achievement such as the implementation of

nationwide police reform, taken into account the nature of the football game, a ‘touchdown’ would require much more and persistent effort.

“We must break the backbone of legal lynching forever. Police killing people is getting away with legal lynching,” Jackson said. “So, we still have a lot of work to do, **this is a first down, not a touchdown.**” (2021, April 21)

4.2.1.6 The Appropriate Historic Sentencing

Two months after Chauvin was found guilty on the state charges, he was sentenced to 22 1/2 years. Floyd’s sister said the sentence shows that the issue of police brutality is ‘finally being taken seriously.’ The sentence was described as ‘appropriate’ and ‘historic.’

1. Bridgett Floyd, Floyd’s sister ... said the 22-and-a-half year prison **sentence signals that police brutality is “finally being taken seriously.”**
2. President Joe Biden said ... Derek Chauvin’s 22-year sentence for the murder of George Floyd “seems to be **appropriate**” ... (2021, June 25)
3. Floyd family attorney Ben Crump, in a statement, said the “**historic sentence**”... (2021, June 25)

About eight months after Chauvin was convicted on the state charges, he pleaded guilty in federal court to civil rights charges related to George Floyd’s death (Perez & Broaddus, 2021). Floyd’s brother said the guilty plea is ‘big’, it is of great significance. Meanwhile, Attorney Crump called the day Chauvin pleaded guilty as a day of ‘a victory for the interest of justice.’ Here, Chauvin is metaphorically labelled as a ‘blue wall’ who ‘fell.’ While the colour blue is synonymous with the uniform of law enforcement officers (ISSM, n.d.), the metaphor ‘blue wall’ is borrowed from the widely used phrase, “the blue wall of silence” which refers to the “unofficial agreement between law enforcement not to challenge each other’s misconduct” (Montana Innocence Projects, n.d., paras 1-2). The verb ‘fell’ depicts Chauvin as a defeated police officer who has lost the battle in court. By pleading guilty to the federal charges, Chauvin avoided the risk of being “convicted at trial” and imprisoned for life (Vercammen & Almasy, 2022, para. 5).

1. George Floyd's brother on Chauvin guilty plea: "This is **big**, because **a blue wall fell**, and it never falls" (2021, December 15)
2. Following former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin pleading guilty in the federal civil rights case ... attorney Ben Crump said in a statement, "While in many ways today is **a victory for the interest of justice**, we will never forget its cost." (2021, December 15)

4.2.1.7 The Favourite Son, the Good Man

In stark contrast with Floyd, in the selected CNN articles, there are only two nouns that referred to Chauvin, namely 'son' and 'good man' as the news outlet gave voice (once) to only Chauvin's mother.

Carolyn Pawlenty, Chauvin's mother, grew emotional as she described him as her **favourite son** and "**a good man.**"

4.2.2. Fox News' Representation of Derek Chauvin

4.2.2.1 The Four Officers, the 'Killer KKKops'

The four officers were collectively referred to as 'they' and 'the officers.' They were labelled as the 'killer KKKops.' The officers 'violated Floyd's rights,' and 'murdered' Floyd when they restrained him. Biden said the officers 'must be held responsible' and he called their actions 'egregious.'

'KKK' is the abbreviation for Ku Klux Klan, a U.S. hate organisation. The group was founded soon after the civil war ended (Britannica, 2023b, para. 1) to restore "white supremacy through intimidation and violence aimed at the newly enfranchised Black freedmen" (Britannica, 2023b, para 2.). The group's white supremacist agenda "has continued to the present" (Britannica, 2023b, para. 1) and its members, the white supremacists believe in the "natural superiority of the lighter-skinned, or white," and often "relied on violence to achieve their goals" (Jenkins, 2024, para. 1).

This clearly indicates that Fox News saw the incident as a deliberate attack towards Floyd due to his skin colour.

1. "... **they** murdered our cousin" – said Floyd's cousins (2020, May 26)
2. "**They** murdered my brother, ... **they** should be put in jail for murder," said Bridgett Floyd (2020, May 27)
3. the officers **violated Floyd's rights** when they restrained him (2021, March 12)
4. Thousands filled an intersection in the street where Floyd died, chanting and carrying banners that read, "I can't breathe" and "**Jail killer KKKops.**" (2020, May 27)
5. Biden said, "... they **must be held responsible** for their **egregious** actions.." (2020, May 27)

4.2.2.2 The Cruel Coward who Refused to Lift His Knee

Chauvin was labelled as 'a monster,' 'the product of a "broken" system' and 'someone who has proven to be a national embarrassment' and a 'coward.' He was also referred to as 'the man who killed George Floyd,' the 'officer failed in the most basic human sense' and 'the senior officer' who 'called all of the shots.'

1. "That guy's a **monster** ..." (2021, Dec 17)
2. He said Chauvin, 45, was **the product of a "broken" system** - Defense attorney Eric Nelson said (2021, June 2)
3. Police Chief Brian O'Hara said ...the department is "forced to reckon once again with the deplorable acts of **someone who has proven to be a national embarrassment.**" ... the repetitive behaviour of this **coward** (2023, April 13)
4. Why is **the man who killed George Floyd** not in jail?" Frey (2020, May 27)
5. **This officer failed in the most basic human sense...**" (2020, May 26)
6. Chauvin **called "all of the shots"** as **the senior officer at the scene...** (2022, January 2022)

Chavin's actions was labelled as 'deplorable acts.' His actions 'shocked the nation's conscience,' 'sparked a nationwide outcry and demands for reform' and 'prompted an explosion of social justice and anti-police brutality.'

1. Police Chief Brian O'Hara said ...the **deplorable acts** of someone who has proven to be a national embarrassment." (2023, April 13)
2. Prosecutors said Chauvin's actions ... "**shocked the Nation's conscience.**" (2021, June 2)
3. The images of Officer Derek Chauvin ... kneeling into Floyd's neck **sparked a nationwide outcry and demands for reform.** (2020, June 10)
4. Chauvin's actions, which were recorded on harrowing video that circulated widely online, **prompted an explosion of social justice and anti-police brutality** protests that lasted for months. (2021, June 25)

The subordinate clause ‘because his upper airway was compressed by Officer Derek Chauvin's knee’ explains the main clause, ‘Floyd died.’ The judge found Chauvin ‘abused his position of authority as a police officer’ when he ‘committed his crime.’ The adjective ‘slowly’ in Excerpt 3 implies that Chauvin deliberately killed Floyd.

1. Floyd died **because his upper airway was compressed by Officer Derek Chauvin's knee**... (2022, January 7)
2. Cahill agreed, finding Chauvin ... **abused his position of authority as a police officer, committed his crime** ... (2021, June 2)
3. Derek Chauvin "**slowly killed George Floyd** (2022, January 24)

The phrase ‘could have turned back and removed his knee from George Floyd's neck’ implied that Chauvin had ample time to reconsider his choice of restraint technique to better handle the situation. It was also said that Chauvin ‘knew what he was doing’ and ‘had nine minutes and 29 seconds to understand what he was doing and stop kneeling’ but he ‘chose not to.’ The judge said Chauvin ‘treated Floyd with particular cruelty.’ His actions were described as ‘egregious.’

1. "There's somewhere around 300 seconds in those five minutes, every one of which the officer **could have turned back and removed his knee from George Floyd's neck**," said Mayor Frey (2020, May 27)
2. "He **knew what he was doing**. He **had nine minutes and 29 seconds to understand what he was doing and stop kneeling**. He **chose not to**." (2021, Dec 17)
3. Cahill agreed, finding Chauvin **treated Floyd with particular cruelty**... (2021, June 2)
4. Prosecutors said Chauvin's actions were **egregious** ... (2021, June 2)

While some referred to Chauvin's action as ‘kneeling,’ prosecutor Blackwell referred to it as ‘grinding and crushing.’ The duration of the kneeling on Floyd's neck was emphasised by three prepositional phrases, namely ‘for almost eight minutes as he eventually became unresponsive,’ ‘until he could not breathe’ and ‘until the very life was squeezed out of him.’ According to use-of-force experts, Chauvin ‘restrained’ Floyd for ‘too long’ given that Floyd was already under control and was no longer fighting.

1. ... cell phone video showed an officer **kneeling** on Floyd 's neck **for almost eight minutes as he eventually became unresponsive**. (2020, May 28)

2. Derek Chauvin... seen **kneeling** on George Floyd's neck **until he could not breathe**, ... (2020, May 29)
3. Prosecutor Blackwell said, "That he put his knee upon his neck and his back, **grinding and crushing** him until the very breath, no ladies and gentlemen, **until the very life was squeezed out of him.**" (2021, March)
4. But use-of-force experts told The *Associated Press* that the video showed that the officer clearly **restrained the man too long, noting the man was under control and no longer fighting.** (2020, May 27)

Two verb phrases in the excerpts below, namely ‘refusing to remove his knee from Floyd's neck’ and ‘didn’t let up, he didn’t get up’ highlighted Chauvin’s refusal to stop restraining Floyd.

1. A video of the incident spread quickly on social media, showing one of the police officers **refusing to remove his knee from Floyd's neck** despite pleas from Floyd, as well as bystanders. (2020, May 27)
2. The White police officer "**didn’t let up, he didn’t get up**" even after a handcuffed Floyd said 27 times that he couldn’t breathe and went motionless, according to Blackwell. (2021, March 29)

The verb phrase ‘pressed the man's face so hard against the ground that his nose was bleeding’ illustrates both the prolonged restraint and pressure exerted on Floyd.

Frazier said the police officer **pressed the man's face so hard against the ground that his nose was bleeding.** (2020, May 26)

4.2.2.3 Guilty of State Charges - A Guilty Verdict Welcomed by Democrats

Fox News gave voice to countless Democratic leaders to weigh in on Chauvin’s guilty verdict and very limited voice to Republican leaders. Floyd’s family members and friends were not given the voice to respond to the verdict.

President Joseph Biden and Vice President Harris called the guilty verdict ‘a giant step forward in the march toward justice in America.’ House Speaker Nancy Pelosi saw the verdict as ‘a step in the right direction for justice done.’ Minnesota Governor Tim Walz said the verdict was ‘an important step forward for justice in Minnesota.’ Harris called

the day the guilty verdict was read ‘a day of justice in America.’ Biden underlined that it was ‘a time for the country to come together to unite as Americans.’ The guilty verdict was also labelled as ‘an official proclamation of what so many of us have known for nearly a year.’

1. The guilty verdict in the murder trial of former Minneapolis police Officer Derek Chauvin "can be **a giant step forward in the march toward justice in America,**" President Biden and Vice President Harris said Tuesday. (2021, April 20)
2. Pelosi said the guilty verdict is "**a step in the right direction for justice done**" ... (2021, April 20)
3. Walz called the verdict "**an important step forward for justice in Minnesota.**" (2021, April 20)
4. Harris, during the call, said: "This is **a day of justice in America.**" (2021, April 20)
5. Biden said this was **a time for the country "to come together to unite as Americans."** (2021, April 20)
6. "This guilty verdict serves as **an official proclamation of what so many of us have known for nearly a year:** George Floyd was murdered by an officer who was sworn to protect and serve," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. said." (2021, April 20)

Chauvin’s guilty verdict ‘set off jubilation around Minneapolis,’ ‘brought a sigh of relief’ and ‘ripped the blinders off for the whole world to see the systemic racism’ but it ‘will not heal the pain that existed for generations.’

1. Chauvin’s guilty verdict **set off jubilation around Minneapolis.** (2021, April 20)
2. Harris, ...the verdict **brought "a sigh of relief"** ... (2021, April 20)
3. "It (the guilty verdict) **ripped the blinders off for the whole world to see the systemic racism,**" Biden said (2021, April 20)
4. **This verdict ...will not heal the pain that existed for generations....**” Harris said. (2021, April 20)

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said the verdict ‘showed justice has been served’ but Governor Walz said ‘true’ justice for George ‘comes through real, systemic change to prevent this from happening again.’ Meanwhile, Republican Senator Tim Scott said the verdict was ‘right.’

1. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said the verdict **showed "justice has been served."** (2021, April 20)
2. "**True** justice for George only **comes through real, systemic change to prevent this from happening again,**" Walz said. ." (2021, April 20)
3. “There is no question in my mind that the jury reached the **right verdict,**” tweet Republican Senator Tim Scott. (2021, April 20)

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said the verdict was ‘not a substitute for policy change.’ The phrase indicates that the anticipated change is a change in policy. Similarly, Harris said the verdict is only ‘a measure of justice,’ not ‘equal justice’ because there is still work to be done to reform the criminal justice system.

1. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., said the verdict was "**not a substitute for policy change.**" (2021, April 20)
2. "**A measure of justice is not the same as equal justice,**" Harris said. "... the fact is we still have work to do..." (2021, April 20)

4.2.2.4 Derek Chauvin’s 22.5-Year State Sentence – A Slap on the Wrist

Sentencing

Chauvin’s 22.5 years state sentence elicited different reactions – while some welcomed the sentence, others voiced their displeasure. The Floyd family’s attorney said the sentencing was ‘one step closer to healing’ as the sentencing delivers closure and accountability.’ The sentence was deemed ‘historic,’ ‘lengthy’ and ‘the longest for a police officer in Minnesota history.’

1. In a statement, Ben Crump, the attorney for the Floyd family, said the sentencing was "**one step closer to healing by delivering closure and accountability.**" (2021, June 25)
2. "This **historic** sentence..." (2021, June 25)
3. ... Derek Chauvin 's conviction and **lengthy** prison sentence... (2021, June 26)
4. ...civil rights activist Rev. Al Sharpton noted the sentence was **the longest for a police officer in Minnesota history** ... (2021, June 25)

On the other hand, some found the length of the sentence ‘very disappointing,’ ‘a punch in the gut,’ a ‘slap on the wrist,’ ‘shorter than what was appropriate’ and ‘not enough.’ The speaker in Excerpt 4 is an African American. Therefore, the pronoun ‘we’ refers to ‘we’ the African Americans. The conjunction ‘when’ here carries the meaning ‘despite the fact that.’ It is therefore implied that there are ‘two systems of justice in America’ (Bice, 2020).

1. "**Very disappointing,**" Van Jones tweeted. He said "'It's **a punch in the gut**". (2021, June 25)

2. Floyd's brother, Rodney Floyd, called it a **"slap on the wrist."** (2021, June 25)
3. ... civil rights activist Rev. Al Sharpton noted the sentence was ... **shorter than what was appropriate.** (2021, June 25)
4. "22.5 years is **not enough** for Derek Chauvin murdering George Floyd in broad daylight **when we have people serving life sentences for non-violent crimes,"** NFL quarterback Robert Griffin III tweeted (2021, June 25)

4.2.2.5 Derek Chauvin's Guilty Verdict - A Preordained Conclusion

Chauvin's guilty verdict was not well-received by some lawyers who saw it as a 'preordained conclusion.' Firstly, many political leaders have called for the officers to be held accountable. Representative Maxine Waters of California, for instance urged protesters in Minnesota to "stay in the street" and "get more confrontational" if the jury does not find Chauvin guilty (Singman, 2021, para. 37). Secondly, as Lawyer Mark Geragos pointed out, Chauvin's trial was 'the closest thing' to the trial of the white officers who participated in the beating of Rodney King, an African American back in the 1990s. Both Floyd's death and the beating of King led to historic protests and riots. Two white officers were found guilty in the federal court in 1993 for violating King's civil rights. Chauvin, who was charged with violating Floyd's civil rights was also found guilty.

1. One expert called the conviction a **"preordained conclusion,"** said lawyers Mark Geragos, Julie Rendelman and Eric D. Anderson. (2021, April 20)
2. Geragos called the Chauvin trial **"the closest thing" to the 1990s federal trial** of the Los Angeles police officers indicted on charges of **violating Rodney King's civil rights.** The L.A. case prompted one of the **deadliest race riots in American history** after a jury in criminal court proceedings acquitted four **White police officers** in the beating of **King, who was Black.** In April 1993, **two** of the four officers were **convicted.** (2021, April 20)

4.2.2.6 The Good Man with No Nuclear Family Support

The significant clause in Excerpt 1 is the subordinate clause 'before video of the fatal arrest went viral.' Firstly, the clause highlights the turning point in Chauvin's life – the moment when the video went viral. Secondly, the subordinating conjunction 'before' emphasised what Chauvin had before the video went viral - his marriage and his

stepchildren. Therefore, Excerpt 1 paints Chauvin as a man who has now lost his marriage and the custody of his stepchildren. The phrase ‘has no known biological children’ contributes to representation of Chauvin as a man who has no nuclear family support. Meanwhile, Chauvin’s mother referred to him as a ‘good man’ whose ‘identity has also been reduced to that of a racist.’

1. **Derek Chauvin**, the former Minneapolis police officer convicted of murder and manslaughter in the death of George Floyd, **was married with two stepchildren before video of the fatal arrest went viral.** (2021, April 21)
2. Derek Chauvin **has no known biological children.** (2021, April 21)
3. My son’s **identity has also been reduced to that of a racist.** I want this court to know that none of these things are true, and that my son is a **good man.**" (2021, June 25)

4.2.2.7 The Brave and Celebrated Officer

Fox News emphasised Chauvin’s achievement while he was in uniform. Prior to joining the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD), Chauvin ‘served as a military police officer in the U.S. Army Reserve.’ He ‘joined the MPD in 2001’ and has ‘spent 19 years’ with the department during which he received ‘multiple medals for bravery,’ ‘won two medals of valor,’ ‘opened fire,’ and was ‘singled out for (his) bravery.’ It was also said that Chauvin had ‘no criminal record’ and has never ‘violated the law because he lived an honorable life.’

1. Derek Chauvin, 44, **spent 19 years with the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) and was awarded multiple medals for bravery;** he also had at least 17 civilian complaints filed against him. Prior to that, he **served as a military police officer in the U.S. Army Reserve.** (2021, April 21)
2. He **joined the MPD in 2001** and was reprimanded in 2007 for an incident in which he was accused of pulling a woman out of her car after he caught her driving 10 mph over the speed limit. But he **was also singled out for bravery.** Files show the ex-cop **won two medals of valor, one in 2006** for being part of a group of officers who **opened fire on a stabbing suspect who pointed a shotgun at them, and another in 2008 for a domestic violence incident in which Chauvin broke down a bathroom door and shot a suspect in the stomach.** (2021, April 21)
3. He (Chauvin)...had **no criminal record.** (2021, June 25)
4. "He’s not coming into this as a career criminal with six points, five points, four points, he’s coming into this **never having violated the law because he lived an honorable life,**" said Chauvin’s defense lawyer (2021, June 25)

The Mitigation and Intensification Strategies Associated with Derek Chauvin

Apart from the nomination and predication strategies, it is worth mentioning that Fox News used the mitigation and intensification strategies to mitigate Chauvin's past misconducts (underlined in Excerpts 1 and 2 above) by sandwiching them with what the news outlet deemed as his achievements as a police officer (bold text in Excerpts 1 and 2 above). The news outlet intensified the mitigation by repeating this pattern or arrangement of information. It also made no mention of Chauvin's punishments for stating them would only reaffirm his guilt. Fox News' attempts to downplay Chauvin's misconducts did not work to Chauvin's advantage as the information the news outlet presented in the two excerpts only served to reaffirm its negative portrayal of Chauvin - as illustrated in the excerpts, Chauvin is an officer who is accustomed to using unnecessary force.

4.3 Comparisons in the Representation of George Floyd and Derek Chauvin by CNN and Fox News

The analyses above detailed the discursive strategies used by CNN and Fox News to depict George Floyd and Derek Chauvin, thus addressing the first research question. The current section addresses the second research question by discussing the similarities and the differences in the representation of the two actors.

4.3.1 Representation of George Floyd

Although the initial aim of this study was to investigate all the five discursive strategies, only three of the strategies, namely the strategies of nomination, predication and perspectivisation were found to be the most salient and instrumental in the construction of the George Floyd's representations.

The analysis of nomination and predication strategies associated with George Floyd revealed Floyd's positive representations in both CNN and Fox News' reporting. While CNN consistently depicted Floyd as a good character, Fox News made brief attempt to paint Floyd in a bad light. Floyd's posthumous representations as summarised below are in sharp contrast with U.S. news media's representations of victims before him such as the late Eric Garner who was blamed for causing his own death and whom the media painted as amongst others, a criminal and an absent father. The positive representation of Floyd, a victim of police violence, one of African descent, could be the news outlets' attempts to quell public anger that raged across the country. The outrage over Floyd's killing finally subsided weeks before his second death anniversary (George Floyd protests, 2024). However, that might not have been the case as by then all four former officers have been found guilty on the federal charges. Justice for Floyd's family might be the real reason the protests died down. Hence, the deliberate positive representation of Floyd, if indeed it is, could be the news outlets' move to win the trust, and ultimately the votes of the African American community for their votes will again determine the winning political party in the upcoming 2024 November presidential election. As African American voters are still largely aligned with the left-wing (Cox, 2024), CNN's news content is crucial in keeping them in the Democratic camp.

While both the news outlets employed the perspectivisation strategy, there are significantly more evidence of the strategy in CNN articles as the news outlet gave voice to a long list of credible social actors to voice their first-person views on amongst others, Floyd's character, his cause of death and the issue of police brutality. This is in contrast with the media coverage of Eric Garner as not only was Garner not humanised, unqualified and unreliable individuals were given voice to weigh in on the cause of his

death. By consistently humanising Floyd, CNN displayed sympathy and more importantly, empathy to the African American community.

In comparison to Fox News, CNN consistently presented readers with significantly richer information about Floyd. CNN did not just humanised Floyd, instead the news outlet painted a picture-perfect African American man, one who could do nothing wrong in his life and thus was not deserving of the fate that had befallen him. In the selected CNN articles, Floyd was painted as the pillar of his loving family, a man who could hold down jobs, a lovable character who bonded well with others and a selfless role model. In short, CNN portrayed Floyd as a man worthy of everyone's adulation and respect - one without the negative stereotypical traits of an African American. By doing so, CNN is redefining the qualities of African American men.

When CNN repeatedly referred to Floyd as 'a black man' and 'a suspect,' the news outlet did not intend to demean Floyd instead it aimed to draw attention to Floyd's ethnicity, his gender and the difficult situation that he was in. Besides his skin colour, his tall stature also did not taint his positive representation as CNN did not portray Floyd as a threat to the officers. Instead, CNN repeatedly refer to him as a 'gentle giant' to contrast his softer side with his large stature.

On the other hand, given the significantly sparser information in the selected Fox News articles, the news outlet could not have elaborately humanised George Floyd to the extent observed in CNN's reporting. Nonetheless, Fox News, like CNN, depicted Floyd as a person who mattered and whose life mattered. However, there is evidence of attempt to paint Floyd in a bad light. Although Fox News portrayed Floyd as a gentle sizable giant, the news outlet also depicted Floyd as an individual who

‘must be controlled’ thus suggesting that he might be under the influence of substance. However, the news outlet did not go on to demonise or criminalise Floyd.

Negative representations of police violence victims of African descent are not uncommon (Malvueax, 2022). Therefore, it is surprising that neither CNN nor Fox News attempted to sensationalise Floyd’s as well as his girlfriend’s addiction to opioids (Pagonas, 2021). The lack of such attempt goes to show that the news outlets were aware that they were treading a delicate, fine line. It would be risky for CNN to smear Floyd’s reputation for that would drive away its African American viewers and undermine their trust in the news outlet and the Democratic party. It is perhaps trickier for Fox News. While the news outlet aligns its news coverage to echo the Republican party’s ‘law and order’ campaign, it must not drive potential African American voters away to the left-wing.

Meanwhile, both CNN and Fox News referred to Floyd as a crime victim. While acknowledging the four officers’ actions as a form of crime, the news outlets are indirectly referring to them as criminals and thus deserving of prosecutions. CNN went on to refer to Floyd’s death as a ‘familiar homicide.’ By referring to his murder as one that is ‘familiar’, CNN acknowledged that Floyd is one of the statistics and this case of police brutality, the one that took Floyd’s life, is not isolated. Meanwhile, Fox News referred to Floyd’s killing as a death which was caused by systemic racism. This reference is of great significance as Fox News clearly implied that Floyd’s death should not be seen as a tragedy that began with five men and ended with one death and four convictions. Instead, it is a grave issue that looms large.

CNN and Fox News painted Floyd’s memorials and funeral in different tones. CNN’s depictions of Floyd’s memorials and funeral were that of large gatherings

where Floyd's life was celebrated and where Floyd was sent off with dignity. On the other hand, Fox News depicted these events as rather sombre affairs. Fox News depicted Floyd's memorials as a time for the members of the public to embrace Floyd's surviving family members and Floyd's funeral as an event where his departure sinks in as it was referred to as 'a home-going celebration' which means returning of the "deceased to the Lord or to Heaven" (Homegoing, 2023, para. 1).

While both the news outlets recognised Floyd as a force of change such that his death will bring forth some form of changes in the society, only CNN went on to put Floyd on the pedestal by referring to him as a holy symbol of racial injustice. This suggests that Floyd's name and his tragic death will forever be inked into American history.

4.3.2. Representation of Derek Chauvin

The discursive strategies instrumental in the construction of Derek Chauvin's negative representations in both CNN and Fox News articles are the nomination and predication strategies.

CNN portrayed Chauvin as a murderer and an egoistic, cruel serial predator. His guilty verdict was painted as a form of rare justice and the day his guilty verdict was read was depicted as a day of significance because it is very rare for the court to successfully convict a law enforcement officer of killing a civilian. Similarly, his sentencing was labelled 'historic'. Therefore, his guilty verdict (on the state charges) serves as a reminder of the long road ahead for those who seek racial equality. Unlike its depiction of George Floyd, CNN did not humanise Chauvin as it suppressed the voice of his family members and friends such that readers only know, through the voice of his mother, that he is a 'good man' and her 'favourite son.' CNN's portrayal

of Chauvin as a bad police officer who is guilty of murder and deserving of prosecution is aligned with the Democratic party's view on prosecuting police officers who are involved in police violence (Edmonson & Fandos, 2020).

Meanwhile, Fox News portrayed Chauvin as not just a cruel coward who refused to lift his knee off Floyd's neck but also a racist officer who has links to the Ku Klux Klan. By associating Chauvin to the far-right, extremist white supremacist group, Fox News is implying that Chauvin's use of force on Floyd was deliberate and driven by his hatred towards or disregard for people of the minority group.

In CNN's reporting, Chauvin's guilty verdict (on the state charges) and his 22.5-year state sentence was depicted as both a welcomed and a not well-received court decision as some saw it as 'a slap on the wrist' sentencing. Unlike CNN, Fox News depicted Chauvin's guilty verdict as a 'preordained conclusion.' By saying that Chauvin's fate was determined beforehand, Fox News is implying that Chauvin was made the scapegoat for the police force and hence, he did not receive a fair trial.

Fox News humanised Chauvin by portraying him as a brave, celebrated officer and the 'good' man who had lost his marriage, his stepchildren, and his career, following Floyd's death. This representation of a white police officer who perpetrated the killing of an African American is close to the representation of the white officer who killed Garner, who was given voice and was depicted as the hero, the dedicated officer whose duty suddenly came to a halt due to one encounter in the street (Ogden et al., 2020, p.657).

While CNN consistently painted Chauvin as an unfit police officer, the day after Chauvin was found guilty on the state charges, Fox News published an article where it employed the mitigation and intensification strategies to mitigate Chauvin's misconduct by drawing readers' attention to his 'achievements' throughout his 19-year career as a police officer. Fox News was careful to paint Chauvin, a man the court found guilty of murder, in good light. Hence, Chauvin's 'achievements' were layered with his past misconducts. The news outlet's move to publish such an article a day after the nation celebrated Chauvin's guilty verdict is an open, public defiance to the criminal justice system. The news outlet's response to the verdict is aligned with the Republican party's stance on embracing law enforcement officers including those who used unnecessary fatal force on civilians (Edmonson & Fandos, 2020).

5. CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine the representation of George Floyd, the most high-profile victim of police violence and the representation of his killer, Derek Chauvin in the news articles published by two top U.S. partisan news outlets, namely CNN and Fox News, the news sources which have a reputation for aligning their news coverage to the views of the political party they each espouse. More specifically, this study aims to shed light on bias, not necessarily bias driven by racism, in the partisan news outlets' coverage of the social actors to hopefully bring awareness to the danger or the risk of overreliance on either one of the partisan news outlets for news on divisive social issues such as the issue of police violence.

Overall, the current study has demonstrated how approaches within linguistics can be applied to the investigation of partisan media outlets' representations of victims of police brutality and the perpetrators of their killings. By analysing the partisan news media's

portrayals of the social actors over the span of three years, this study has elicited some valuable insights. While presenting a more detailed and exhaustive analysis of the portrayals of the social actors is beyond the scope of this study, the analysis carried out by this study has brought to light some discrepancies in Fox News' portrayals of the social actors over the span of three-years and such inconsistency or wavering in news reporting goes to show that the established news outlet might have been grappling with the appropriateness of its reporting angle or realigning its reporting to its political alignment.

More importantly, the analysis has found that the news outlets are aware of the power or capacity they have at their disposal, whether to fan or to quell the flame in time of racial unrest. Therefore, future studies on partisan news outlets' coverage of divisive social issues could aim at investigating inconsistency or discrepancy in news content by analysing the news disseminated through the news outlets' different platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and the television.

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