

Explainer

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The explainer article demonstrates my knowledge of the conventions of the explainer genre. In my piece, I have explained the phenomenon of framing, particularly focusing on how violence against trans women are portrayed in certain texts. The piece investigates what framing is and how its understanding is important to civically engaged people.

An Empty Frame: What is worth framing?



Within the past few years, many notable historic events have changed the ways that black lives have been represented in the media. The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement has gained the most news coverage from the shootings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown. While the media often centers on stories of violence towards young black men at the hands of white aggressors, there is an absence of media coverage overlooking women's lives, especially those of transgendered people of color.

This problem that consumers of media are not able to read about these injustices diminishes the value of these lives. Media framing aims to provide readers with news that they will agree with. When pieces are produced, the authors write to readers that already have similar political views. The framing of the murders is meant to enact change by connecting to readers who realize that many people exist in a powerless intersection of race, gender and class. Media framing relies on the form, use of vocabulary, and inclusion of varying types of information to paint a picture of the issue for audience consumption. The goal of media framing is to subtly shift audience perceptions. The news articles blame different sources for the dehumanization of trans people of color through the framing techniques that are employed.

In the Slate Magazine article "Trans Women of Color Deserve to Be Mourned as Much as Leelah Alcorn" (February 13, 2015) the author frames the issue of violence against trans women of color as being a widely growing crisis. The words "epidemic" and "rampant" are used to describe the murders of trans women in the context of reported crime. "Epidemic" suggests a wide scope while "rampant" is used to imply that it is uncontrolled or monitored. The fact that the murders are not of high priority to be monitored or pursued suggests that the justice system is partially to blame.

This article serves as commentary that the general public is passive and selfish. The article also mentions how Leelah was the most talked about person in "the last six months", planting a time frame in the reader's minds. The author then names many cases such as Islan Nettles, Zoraida Reyes, Yazmin Vash Payne, and Penny Proud to drive in the fact that there are many instances of this violence. To un-informed readers this may seem like a great number, but when we delve into the

details the cases were not actually within the implied timeline. Two out of the four happened in a time span of greater than 6 months, stemming back two years. The method of ordering the details works to create associations in the minds of readers. When readers read 6 months, they assume that what will be included after will refer back to this time period. By including names, this suggests that the murders are more concrete, thus connecting to readers on an emotional level. At the end of the article, the author frames the audience as the main hope for change. By addressing the reader directly, telling them to “start reading”, “tune in”, and “pay attention”, the article frames the root of the problem to be the passive, uninformed general public.

The Nation’s “What Can Be Done to Stop the Brutal Targeting of Trans Women?” (February 19, 2015) features an interview with Caitlin Breedlove, director of Southerners on New Ground (SONG). Breedlove’s answers frame the issue as fixable through policy changes. Her answers center around the impact that new laws and the involvement of the mass public can have on the lives for Black trans people of color. All of the questions in the interview focus on partnership of Transgender Law Center and SONG. This frames the solution to the problem as being rooted in the policy changes that will come from the work of these organizations. The author frames the solution through managing the information that is released to readers. The author mentions that the interview was “Edit[ed] for clarity and length”. This is one way that the article is able to direct the focus on the work of the organizations involved in the partnership. This is due to the fact that the author has chosen to omit certain parts of the interview. Readers do not know the actual scope of questions that were asked. The article does not include personal emotional details, but rather is objective in its tone. In the description of interactions that people of color have had with white officers the answers frame officers as unjust as they “assumed” and “humiliated” the black man. On the other hand her first description of black men, she uses the word “afraid” and “hesitated.” These sets of words are opposites, thus framing the issue as the result of relationships in different power dynamics.

The article “Every Breath a Black Trans Woman Takes Is an Act of Revolution” (February 6, 2015) begins with the author sharing the significance of Black History Month in her own experience. Hunter states that black history month exists with the system’s constant attempt to erase black lives and culture from it. The frame in this article suggests that the unknown status of the cases is deliberate. By repeating the phrase “Denying Black trans” the text suggests that there is a disparity between those who have power and those who do not. It’s not just that the population does not have resources or that the resources do not exist. The article suggests, through the emphasis of the word “deny”, that goods and services are available, just not accessible. This frame blames the government for failing to provide equal rights and access to resources.

The article continues to frame the American justice system as a root cause of the issue. Included in the post is the description of the murder of Islan Nettles, a young trans person. Sharing the details of the location and the aftermath serves to reveal the blatant corruption of the justice system. The inclusion of the fact that 12 cameras were unable to provide footage implies corruption signaling that the outcome is unlikely a chance occurrence. By adding the fact that the crime took place across the street from a police station, the author calls out the American police force for not doing its job. This frames the police as being lazy and corrupt as they refuse to acknowledge blatant crimes. The added detail that the perpetrator currently walks free, creates the impression that the justice system is not doing its job for the American public as it fails to process evidence justly.

The three articles all present the frame that the invisibility of violence against trans women of color is perpetuated by systematic structures. The articles all choose to focus on different causes of the de-legitimization of the trans life narrative. The articles employ methods of framing which include manipulating available information and creating emotional investment to argue that corruption in the government exists to mute the experiences of transgender people of color. This nod to the distrust of people in power suggests that the American public is also to blame because they allow it to happen. By including the many cases that have been hidden, the authors suggest that American people are

prejudiced as many people of color still face the effects of a nation with a history of injustice. By writing about the lack of representation in mainstream media, authors hope to create passionate readers who will then create change and expose injustice.