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National Anthem Protests in America

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Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank Dr. Patricia Ahmed for her help and support with this project.

Journal of Undergraduate Research Submission Acknowledgment Form

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Mentor Acknowledgement Statement

I, Patricia Ahmed, certify that I have read, reviewed, and approved
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_ Date: 6/27/18 _

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NATIONAL ANTHEM PROTESTS IN AMERICA

Author: Seth Johnson

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Department: Sociology and Rural Studies

ABSTRACT

The NFL national anthem protests have divided America. This paper investigates how media portrayals of the protests reflect and likely exacerbate these divisions by analyzing coverage by three major news outlets: FOX, MSNBC and CNN as well as one sports outlet: ESPN. Several transcripts of commentary were sampled from each outlet. The data were coded using qualitative analysis technique employing both open and axial coding. The results show that FOX tended to portray the protests as anti-patriotic; MSNBC and CNN were more inclined to frame the protests in terms of fighting racial injustice. ESPN noted its disappointment over the fact that coverage over the protests tended to fuel political debate, rather than an open discussion about racial divisions and injustices.

INTRODUCTION

For many who call the United States home, the American flag and national anthem is a unifying experience; where a perception that all things considered good and just in the world come together under the symbolism of devout American pride, or what many would refer to as a sense of patriotism. It is a symbolism that reflects on an idea of freedom that many fought and died for, and continue to fight and die for to this day. The many Americans who conceive their nation in this way, often may not have interest in seeing it in any other light; whether it be a completely contrasting viewpoint, or one that coexists with complications to the positive symbolism. A stark viewpoint in contradiction would suggest the flag and anthem quite simply symbolizes systematic domestic and foreign oppression through social stratification; while a more complicated conception of the flag and anthem would be that it symbolizes freedom and all things good and just in the world for some, as well as systematic domestic and foreign oppression for others. While this may appear confusing and as one in the same, it is important to take note of the difference here in the entirely subjective view of

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good versus bad; being that the three proposals I have made in their respective order are situated as purely good, purely bad, and a complicated mixture of good and bad. Regardless, what may be more important in reflecting on the protests to the flag and anthem that have been popularized through sports entertainment is that the perceptions I have previously listed are slowly and continuously lost within the argument; and the argument has instead moved towards those who are for and against America, rather than examining our society with a constructive and critical approach.

While I would never consider myself a proponent of American exceptionalism, and ultimately fall somewhere between a conception of purely bad, and a mixture of good and bad; I do find this entire protest situation fascinating, as well as extremely alarming. As stated prior, the arguments I have listed above are not entirely present, and it has mostly become an argument about the necessity of American exceptionalism, and while dismissing all of those who oppose it. Rather than a review of the inequalities within our society, as well as the inequalities we have perpetuated onto others, we are legitimizing the millions who fall within the first group discussed in this topic (the devout patriots) and their particular approach to American exceptionalism. While history does not repeat itself, Mark Twain once suggested that it often rhymes; and if we are to learn anything from other nationalistic societies, great consequences may lie ahead when we adhere to a blind sense of patriotism.

Furthermore, this topic is important to examine not only for the wrong path the argument has taken, but also why this has occurred. Who is controlling the argument? What institutions have the power to steer the argument, and more importantly, what do social demographics have to do with the course of this discussion? I think what we may find, is that those who have traditionally held power in American society are not only controlling the direction of the argument, but also attempting to control the perception of millions on either side of the argument.

The introductory paragraphs above do expose my sense of bias from a personal standpoint, and perhaps that should be expected, as we are all consumed by bias in any sensitive discussion. However, this is a research project; what we are attempting to examine here goes far beyond opinion and pre-conceived notions to the topic, and the research itself should

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only aide in confirming or denying the various opinions that relate to this topic, including my own. The research should give us a better look at (1) what themes are present around this discussion of anthem and flag protests, (2) who is conceiving and steering the themes present in this topic, and perhaps in more abstract outlook, (3) why are these themes present in this discussion? This research will take an inductive approach in forming a critical analysis to the discussion of national anthem and flag protests that have been currently popularized in modern sports entertainment, as well as the massive media as whole. However, this topic is not new, and rather has re-emerged throughout the course of our nation's history. From this, we must understand that some context is vital in our understanding these protests; not only from the history of protests in our nation, but also the history of American patriotism and racism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the national anthem protests occurring in our sports world, particularly in the national football league, a wide scope of topics is necessary to cover in deciphering the simple questions, such as “what?” and “why?” A great starting point may be applying “what?”, such as, what is the purpose of the anthem, and how does it make people feel. People is broad, and should be; there are a lot of people in the United States, and we should not assume the anthem makes all people feel the same. First, the anthem may have many purposes, but its primary purpose is for unity. This is a bit vague though, because I do not simply mean unity with and for one another; but more so unity with one another for the purposes of a nation state, and uniting for the subservience to that nation state, along with all that it embodies. Per Avi Gilboa and Ehud Bodner (2009: 460): “A national anthem represents the ideas and values of the nation and state.” Again, this is broad, the notion of ideas and values, as they can be argued (and will be later) for what we believe them to be, and how they are truly represented in contrast to theoretical ideas and values. In fact, as these authors point out, this “attempt” to unite often leads to the opposite for many, or symbolism that divides (Bodner and Gilboa 2009:461). This divide occurs as the theoretical ideas and values, such as liberty, justice, and freedom for all, are just that; theoretical, not applying to all, therefore not unifying.

Stratification the American way is done so primarily through sex, race, and class; and as it pertains to the national anthem protests, race has played a particular role in who protests and

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who does not, as well as who supports the protest and who does not. While exploring the “what?” and “why?” in regard to the anthem is vital, the line drawn by race in our nation’s history of protest also brings forth the “who.” For instance, what and why is there a protest, and who is protesting? What we may notice from our nation’s history is that the “what?” and “why?” loses its importance when factoring in the “who.” When examining the “flower power” movement of the 60’s, we commonly simultaneously think of the Vietnam War.

While many participated in protests against the war, those who faced the most scrutiny in protest were African American athletes who participated in protests of other form. In particular, Muhammad Ali comes to the forefront in this discussion of African American sports figures who rose in protest against the actions of the United States government. What is often lost in legend of Ali and his protest is that it was much more than just the Vietnam War, it was also the freedom movement reflecting on the racial discrimination in American society. Heavily scrutinized then, though lauded today; this was the path which Muhammad Ali walked, and perhaps a similar path is taken today by Colin Kaepernick in his anthem protest. Eric Allen Hall (2011:475) notes that historians and journalists consistently privilege the life of boxer Muhammad Ali in surveying a wide range of activism among African American athletes in the black freedom movement. This was not the only case of this, however, as two African American track athletes at the 1968 Olympics rose their fists in silent protest for support of the Black Power Movement. Tommie Smith and John Carlos were banned by the International Olympic Committee, and viewed as traitors back home in the United States. It was only forty years later, in 2008, that the two of these men would go from traitors to heroes in the eyes of the American press. The two were awarded the Arthur Ashe Award for Courage at the 2008 ESPY’s, prompting Jamal Ratchford (2012:50) to ponder the question of “How and why were Smith and Carlos banned by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1968 but appreciated in 2008?” Perhaps the same privilege will be awarded to Kaepernick by future journalists and historians, although the disdain and debate rages present day for Kaepernick in his anthem protest. It seems that this is a reoccurring theme in the United States; every generation assumes racism is only a thing of the past, rather than a relic that has persisted through time. While most in the United States will not deny our nation’s history in racism, many will deny its existence in the current state, and many who do so are white. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s (2005) the transition to what he calls “new racism” and its correlation to those who negate the notion of modern racism

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existing, or what he may suggest as those who believe we live in a “post-racial’ nation:

By this I mean the system or racial structure characteristic of the post–Civil Rights era comprised the following elements: (1) the increasingly covert nature of racial discourse and practices, (2) the avoidance of direct racial terminology, (3) the elaboration of a racial political agenda that eschews direct racial references, (4) the subtle character of most mechanisms to reproduce racial privilege, and (5) the rearticulation of some racial practices of the past.

Indeed, we should not be entirely surprised by the racial divide in relation to the anthem protests, as this new racism takes the structure and foundations of our racist past and cloaks it as a means to blind our vision of it in current practices. The division is further observed by David G. Embrick (2015), as he makes his case of two nations existing within one. Both the abolition of slavery and the Civil Rights movement were meant to eliminate the barriers between the black and white experience, though still today, “Being black in America meant significantly more obstacles to economic, educational, or political success in comparison with their white counterparts” (Embrick 2015:838). The American economy, educational, and political systems symbolize structural components of our nation, which in return reflect on our values and ideas for our nation; from this, we can gather that our flag and anthem hold values and ideas that embody opportunities and success to some, while also representing barriers to opportunities and success for others. In essence, we cannot expect the flag and anthem to mean the same thing for black individuals in America as it does for many white individuals through their respective experiences. However, the irony in this is that the entirely positive image of the United States from many whites is the real source of the dividing force, while they see the opposing view that sheds light on the division and inequalities as the source of division, or divisive in itself. Much of the argument against those who are protesting resides from a military standpoint, and a disrespect for it, or disrespect for patriotism in general. Perhaps this lack of recognition in the divide resides in our nation’s patriotism, or for many whites, their sense of blind patriotism.

In fact, the core of American patriotism resides in our nation’s founding, and much of what embodied the ideas and values of the revolutionary movement, or the patriots, was hypocritically reserved for powerful whites at the forefront of the movement, while withheld

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from blacks. “However, many of the American patriots either failed to understand these liberal political values or failed to live by them because racial barriers precluded blacks from enjoying such values” (Parker 2010:98). Patriotism, and the foundations of it, seem to have everything to do with current attitudes towards what our nation’s symbols portray. We can then also gather that patriotism confirms and reinforces the division in thought processes. “By offering a distorted, self-serving and unselfcritical view of our collective experience and the world, it makes people prone to support government policies that advance our own aims and interests without due regard for the well-being of others” (Macedo 2011:414).

Thus, a country rooted in patriotism, and a patriotism rooted in racism, ultimately leaves us with a country rooted in structural inequalities reinforced through our ideas and values. Surely, patriotism reflects the ideas of American ideas and values, and there are plenty of Americans who are not white. However, the connection between who is patriotic and what racial group they belong to is undeniable as well. “According to exponents of this perspective, members of dominant racial/ethnic groups tend to have strong patriotism, while members of subordinate groups tend to have weak patriotism” (Ishio 2010:68). Ishio (2010) refers to this with a group dominance perspective, where positive and negative social value encompass the entire experience of whites and blacks in America, respectively, and are entirely rooted in what sustains the relationship between both patriotism and racism. All resources available to Americans are tilted along racial lines, and always have been; this meaning that ownership of the resources corresponds with ownership of our nation, or ownership of pride in our nation. However, it would seem this is not entirely the common thought process among the media, where patriotism and racism are thought to be separate issues among many. This research project will seek who is pushing this narrative, and what direction the conversation has taken.

METHODS

As stated earlier in the project, this research will undergo inductive reasoning through qualitative research and analysis. In taking a grounded theoretical approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967), theory will take its form through examining a particular interest, which in this case is the discussions presented and opinions portrayed in regard to the anthem and flag protests. While I have mentioned some of my own thoughts to start this project, they

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become irrelevant in this grounded approach; I will focus solely on the data collected in field observations, as well as the open and axial coding, to devise an informed analysis of this research. There are patterns I am anticipating will emerge, such as a racial divide in the support or opposition of the protests, as well as network's political ideologies to play a role in the support or opposition.

Four specific influential media outlets will be examined as sources for field observations: CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, and ESPN. From the four sources, five separate observations from each network will be conducted, with a combination of both articles and discussions viewed on national television from each program. Themes will be sought and discussed through interpreting the coding devised from each network. With the open coding, I will look for words such as: approval, disapproval, patriotism, freedom, military/service, disrespect, racism/race, inequality, injustice, etc. The discussions on national television will also include specific coding for demographics of the speakers. The cross-section of key words used in the dialogue, demographics, and media outlet will provide a broader picture in devising the axial coding, and ultimately a conclusion from this coding.

I expect the data analysis to reflect arguments portraying approval or disapproval for the protest, rather than content of why the protest is occurring, or what the protest is about. I expect ESPN to be slightly less politicized, as many commentators were athletes themselves and have more experiences and relationships with those of varying race and background, as well as less pressure in affiliation to political ideology. I would expect those on Fox News to take a rather hardline stance against the protests, mostly proclaiming the disrespect for American exceptionalism and the military. I would also expect a less diverse social demography of those speaking on behalf of Fox News. In contrast, I would expect a mixed social demography, as well as a mixed message from both CNN and MSNBC; with most supporting protest, though still paying too much attention to how they are protesting (or how they ought to) as opposed to why they are. In general, I would expect the majority of those who oppose the protest to be white. Those who support the protest will probably be made up of a large variety of demographics, though the smallest number of supporters remaining with whites.

RESULTS

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Tables 1 and 2 show the results of the open and axial coding of the CNN texts.

Table 1: Open Coding Matrix of CNN Materials

Code	Sample Quotes/Text Excerpts
racism	"protests about race, struggles of racism"
racism	"heritage", racists, affiliated with white heritage in America
racism	patriotism eclipsing racism
racism	"America, racially segregated for majority of history"
racism	institutional racism, racial apartheid, a part of America
racism	systemic racism in America
racism	"protests against racism transcends American exceptionalism"
racism	racial injustice
racism	racial intolerance
racism	players take knee as silent and powerful protest of police violence and systemic
racism	racial injustice
racism	protest of racism
racism	Trump criticism has nothing to do with anthem, everything to do with dog whist
racism	issue steeped in racial resentment
freedom of speech	owners mention free speech
freedom of speech	"Not disrespecting America or military, respecting best thing about America
freedom of speech	protest a part of democracy
freedom of speech	right to protest peacefully
freedom of speech	"freedom of speech"
freedom of speech	"free speech for everyone, especially speech you do not want to hear"
freedom of speech	exercising First Amendment

Table 2: Axial Coding Matrix of CNN Materials

Axial Code	Sample Quotes/ Text Excerpts
protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	"protests about race, struggles of racism"

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protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	"heritage", racists, affiliated with white heritage in America
protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	patriotism eclipsing racism
protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	"America, racially segregated for majority of history"
protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	institutional racism, racial apartheid, a part of America
protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	systemic racism in America
protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	"protests against racism transcends American exceptionalism"
protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	Trump criticism has nothing to do with anthem, everything to do with dog whistle racism
protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	issue steeped in racial resentment
protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	racial injustice
protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	players take knee as silent and powerful protest of police and systemic racism
protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	racial intolerance
protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	racial injustice
protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality	protest of racism
protest patriotic rather than unpatriotic	owners mention free speech
protest patriotic rather than unpatriotic	"Not disrespecting America or military, respecting best traditions about America"
protest patriotic rather than unpatriotic	protest a part of democracy
protest patriotic rather than unpatriotic	right to protest peacefully
protest patriotic rather than unpatriotic	"freedom of speech"
protest patriotic rather than unpatriotic	"free speech for everyone, especially speech you do not want to hear"
protest patriotic rather than unpatriotic	exercising First Amendment

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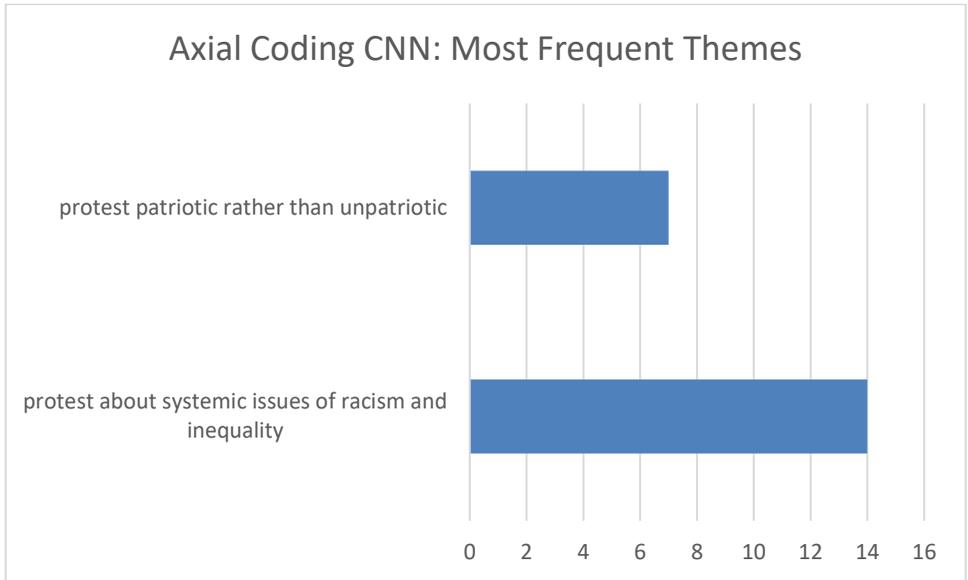


Figure 1: Results for Most Frequent Themes (Axial Coding CNN)

In reviewing the results of the open coding processes for CNN, the two most frequently occurring codes were “racism” and “freedom of speech”. While other words were often attached to racism, such as inequality, systemic, and injustice, racism remained the common theme in discussing the protest. Patriotism was another word that occurred with some frequency, however it was always used in the context that the protests did not challenge patriotism, hence the code “not unpatriotic”. Free speech tied in well with both patriotism and racism, in the sense the using your right of free speech to protest racism is in fact patriotic. A statement in Peniel Joseph’s opinion piece portrayed this, “This rich tradition of athletes being voices of protest against racism transcends patriotic symbols of American exceptionalism, whether represented by the flag or by the National Anthem”.

With “racism” and “freedom of speech” as a major reoccurring theme in the open coding process, each played a role in the axial coding of “protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality” and “protest patriotic rather than unpatriotic” (See Figure 1 above). These two together characterize the message portrayed by CNN quite well. The protest is and always has been about institutional racism and the inherent inequality that comes with it.

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Also, the protest itself is not unpatriotic as others have pushed that narrative; actually, it is quite the opposite, the protest is a patriotic measure, an exercise of free speech for the betterment of the United States.

Tables 3 and 4 show the open and axial codes that emerged from the sampled MSNBC materials.

Table 3: Open Coding Matrix of MSNBC Materials

Code	Sample Quotes/Text Excerpts
Racism	protests about racism
Racism	protesting racial injustices
Racism	protest of race relations in the United States
Racism	conversation should be about race, gotten away from it
Racism	young black people being killed, core issue
Racism	protests about social injustice, police misconduct with black Americans
racism	"young black men, blown away in the street"
racism	race has always been the issue
racism	"racist police blowing people away, this is what protest is about"
Trump	Trump's comments about McCain's service, liking soldiers who aren't captured, more offensive than kneeling
Trump	initial reasons for protest, turning towards Trump, rather than focusing on African American community and law enforcement
Trump	Trump took conversations beyond protest
Trump	Trump has to respect citizens and rights
Trump	Trump taking away from message of protest

Table 4: Axial Coding Matrix of MSNBC Materials

Axial Code	Sample Quotes/ Text Excerpts
protest about racism and injustice	protests about racism
protest about racism and injustice	protesting racial injustices
protest about racism and injustice	protest of race relations in the United States
protest about racism and injustice	conversation should be about race, gotten away from it
protest about racism and injustice	race has always been the issue

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protest about racism and injustice	young black people being killed, core issue
protest about racism and injustice	protests about social injustice, police misconduct with black America
protest about racism and injustice	"young black men, blown away in the street"
protest about racism and injustice	"racist police blowing people away, this is what protest is about"
Trump and supporters change message to issue of patriotism	Trump's comments about McCain's service, liking soldiers who aren't captured, much more offensive than kneeling
Trump and supporters change message to issue of patriotism	initial reasons for protest, turning towards Trump, rather than focusing on African American community and law enforcement
Trump and supporters change message to issue of patriotism	Trump took conversations beyond protest
Trump and supporters change message to issue of patriotism	Trump has to respect citizens and rights
Trump and supporters change message to issue of patriotism	Trump taking away from message of protest

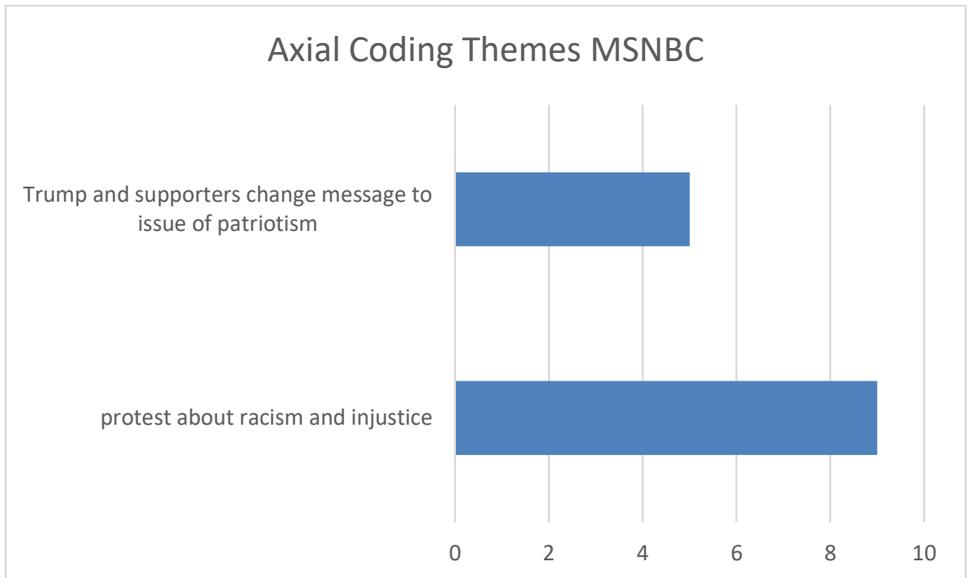


Figure 2: Most Frequent Occurring Themes MSNBC (Axial Coding)

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MSNBC’s open coding was similar to CNN’s, with “racism” as a frequently occurring code as well. After that, the invoking of Trump’s name in a negative light was very frequent, perhaps as frequent as racism. From this, the code “Trump” was developed, though the commentary revolving around Trump was largely in response to his claims of the protests being disrespectful. Patriotism was another theme, used in a similar manner to that of CNN; where the protests were not against patriotism, but rather the protestors are patriotic themselves. Bob Costas in an interview with MSNBC’s Brian Williams made a compelling statement in regard to this, “protests and patriotism are reconcilable, they live side by side”. While “racism” was prominent with both CNN and MSNBC in the open coding process, the context of the discussion was slightly different. MSNBC gave more direct focus on the injustices experienced by Americans due to institutional racism, giving way to the axial coding of “protest about racism and injustice”. Additionally, any conversation regarding Trump was negating his claims of the protest being unpatriotic, disrespectful, and not about race; choosing not to address the core issues behind the protest, as defined by those protesting. This developed the axial coding of “Trump and supporters change message to issue of patriotism”, which was the most frequently occurring theme (See Figure 2 above).

The next set of materials sampled were from Fox News. Tables 5 and 6 show the open and axial coding results.

Table 5: Open Coding Matrix of Fox News Materials

Code	Sample Quotes/Text Excerpts
disrespect	players refuse to stand, met with boos, deservedly so
disrespect	disgraceful protest
disrespect	players disrespect flag, disrespect American sacrifice
disrespect	players cannot honor police, but can disrespect the flag

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disrespect	if NFL does not stop disrespecting flag, punishment
disrespect	protestors disrespecting flag, military, country
disrespect	disrespect in kneeling, disgraceful
disrespect	do not allow protest, need to respect country and flag
disrespect	about respect, respect for flag, country, military, protest beyond disrespectful
disrespect	NFL, disrespecting country and military
disrespect	American patriots refused to watch players protest sacred symbols
disrespect	fans disgusted by total disrespect of American patriotic values
disrespect	slap in the face to those who care about respect to anthem, flag, those in service veterans
disrespect	same message, same disrespect
disrespect	owners okay with disrespect that protesting players are showing for America's soldiers and those who serve/served nation with great honor
disrespect	disrespecting flag to push agenda
disrespect	disrespectful..
disrespect	disrespectful..
Trump	Trump is right, fire players who kneel
Trump	Trump not first president to defend flag, anthem, pledge of allegiance
Trump	gesture now about protesting Trump
Trump	Trump defending military, flag, anthem, those who keep us safe
Trump	anthem about saluting, honoring military, Trump is right
Trump	Trump standing up for anthem and patriotism

Table 6: Axial Coding Matrix for Fox News Materials.

Axial Code	Sample Quotes/ Text Excerpts
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	players refuse to stand, met with boos, deservedly so
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	disgraceful protest
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	players disrespect flag, disrespect American sacrifice
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	players cannot honor police, but can disrespect the flag

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protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	if NFL does not stop disrespecting flag, punishment
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	protestors disrespecting flag, military, country
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	disrespect in kneeling, disgraceful
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	fans disgusted by total disrespect of American patriots
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	slap in the face to those who care about respect to and those in service and veterans
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	American patriots refused to watch players protest sacred symbols
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	do not allow protest, need to respect country and flag
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	about respect, respect for flag, country, military, protest disrespectful
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	NFL, disrespecting country and military
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	same message, same disrespect
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	disrespecting flag to push agenda
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	disrespectful..
protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans	disrespectful..
Trump defending patriotism	Trump is right, fire players who kneel
Trump defending patriotism	Trump not first president to defend flag, anthem, pledge allegiance
Trump defending patriotism	gesture now about protesting Trump
Trump defending patriotism	Trump defending military, flag, anthem, those who kneel
Trump defending patriotism	anthem about saluting, honoring military, Trump is right

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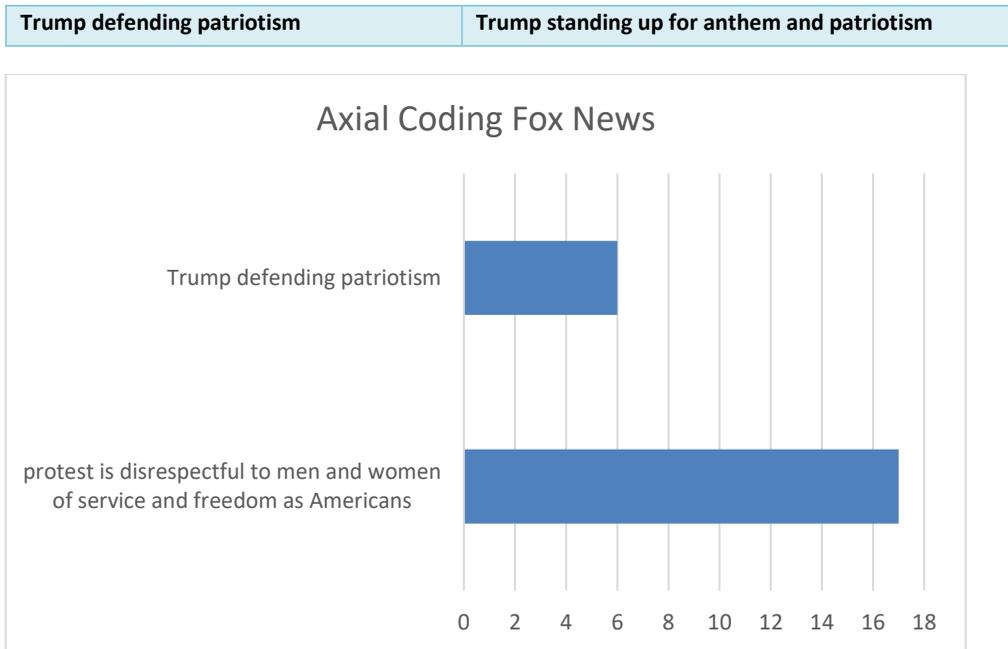


Figure 3: Most Frequently Occurring Themes (Axial Coding)

The coding for Fox News was different from the first two networks, where the most frequently occurring codes were issues regarding “disrespect” and “Trump”. Another common code was “patriotism”, though used more simultaneously with the first two codes mentioned here. Another frequent theme, though primarily used from one source, Sean Hannity, was “race”. In one manuscript, he often invoked the idea that race was not the center of this issue, and that those protesting and those within the “left” media were playing to “race card”. In example, “Now, while this national anthem issue is clearly about respecting the military, the country, our flag, well, the Democrats and members of the mainstream left-wing establishment, ideological media predictably are trying to make this all about race”.

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Out of any of the networks, the open coding for Fox News held the most consistent code of “disrespectful”, helping to form the axial code of “protest is disrespectful to men and women of service and freedom as Americans” (See Figure 3 above). A similarity between MSNBC and Fox News (and the only one, to be sure) was the common open code of “Trump”; however, the open code for each network developed a contrasting meaning in the axial coding process. Overwhelmingly, Trump’s name was used in a positive light, giving way to the axial code of “Trump defending patriotism” in his disapproval of the national anthem protests, which also occurred frequently in these materials (See Figure 3).

The final set of materials analyzed were sampled from ESPN. Tables 7 and 8 show the results from the open and axial coding of these texts.

Table 7: Open Coding Matrix for ESPN Materials

Code	Sample Quotes/Text Excerpts
message lost	real issue hijacked
message lost	players coming together, though protest has lost message
message lost	real issue lost
message lost	Kaepernick's point has been lost
message lost	became about how, when, and where protest is acceptable
message lost	people offended, off the hook to engage in real issues here, racial inequality and
racism	oppression, prejudice, brutality by police officers
racism	about racial inequality and injustice
racism	racial inequality and injustice
racism	ongoing effects of institutional oppression, countries legacy
racism	no conscious being should be able to suggest no oppression, or institutional disadvantages

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racism	Kaepernick addressing systemic issues, racial injustice
racism	Kaepernick "stood" for marginalized and oppressed by not standing
racism	continue conversation about hate and racism, white support is crucial

Table 8: Axial Coding Matrix for ESPN Materials

Axial Code	Sample Quotes/Text Excerpts
protest message shifted away from original message	real issue hijacked
protest message shifted away from original message	players coming together, though protest has lost message
protest message shifted away from original message	real issue lost
protest message shifted away from original message	Kaepernick's point has been lost
protest message shifted away from original message	became about how, when, and where protest is acceptable
protest message shifted away from original message	people offended, off the hook to engage in real issues here, racial inequality and injustice
protest cause initially about systemic issues of racism	oppression, prejudice, brutality by police officers
protest cause initially about systemic issues of racism	about racial inequality and injustice
protest cause initially about systemic issues of racism	racial inequality and injustice
protest cause initially about systemic issues of racism	ongoing effects of institutional oppression, countries legacy
protest cause initially about systemic issues of racism	no conscious being should be able to suggest no oppression, or institutional disadvantages
protest cause initially about systemic issues of racism	Kaepernick addressing systemic issues, racial injustice
protest cause initially about systemic issues of racism	Kaepernick "stood" for marginalized and oppressed by not standing
protest cause initially about systemic issues of racism	continue conversation about hate and racism, white support is crucial

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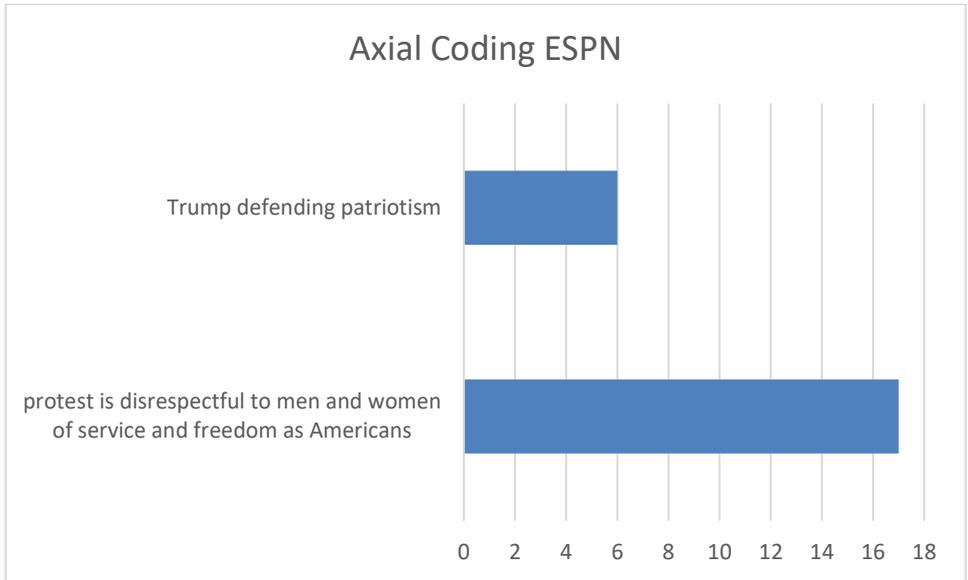


Figure 4: Frequently Occurring Themes (ESPN Axial Coding)

ESPN frequently discussed the shift in message with the protests, giving the code “message lost”. They also had a smaller theme in discussing Trump, though often attaching this with the first code mentioned here. Another more common theme from ESPN was the topic of race, acknowledging the institutional racism, inequality, and injustice, in the United States, hence the reoccurring code of “racism”. Max Kellerman from ESPN’s first take articulates this core issue well, “He has addressed a systemic issue, in a way that has brought more attention to it, an ongoing issue... addressing racial injustice”.

ESPN took notice of the core issue here, with the open coding of “racism” a common theme, as it was with CNN and MSNBC. This helped develop the axial coding of “protest cause initially about systemic issues of racism”. However, notice the slightly different approach in the axial coding from CNN and MSNBC, as they reflect on what the protest was initially about. This, along with the open coding of “message lost”, helped pave the way for the axial coding of “protest message shifted away from original message” as a frequently occurring

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theme (see Figure 4 above) shedding light on divisive discussion surrounding this topic.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

Some of the coding strategies I presented before gathering data were fulfilled, while others were not. Likewise, many of my expectations from each network were also relevant, though hardly paint a complete picture as to what the research revealed. First, the social demographics presented from the authors of the articles, as well as the televised commentators, were fairly diverse throughout. Each network portrayed men and women commentators, as well as black and white commentators, with the exception of ESPN having all but one female engaged in the discussion. An area that I missed the mark to an extent was with predicting a lack in returning to the original message of the protests, according to those protesting. CNN spent the most time acknowledging the original message of systemic issues, particularly as it pertains to racial inequality, within the United States. Freedom of speech was highlighted as a patriotic measure, while also taking note that protest is a form of freedom of speech. MSNBC took a similar stance to CNN, proclaiming the message of the protest as one towards fundamental issues of inequality that exist in America. There was heightened emphasis from this network on more specific issues of police brutality, the patriotism in non-violent protests, as well as the protests in no form revealing signs of disrespect or dishonor for the nation, or for the military. However, MSNBC did expose itself as more politicized, name-dropping the President of the United States, Donald Trump, as a main source of changing the protest's message from racism to patriotism, and fueling the divisiveness. As expected, Fox News was staunch in its firm patriotic beliefs, using terms such as disrespectful and disgraceful interchangeably to describe the protests. They view American patriotism and its symbols as not a race issue, and rather that any protest against them are entirely unpatriotic, as well as completely disrespectful to the nation, the military, those who serve in the military, and the notion of freedom itself. ESPN's approach was slightly different from the rest of the networks as well. While the commentators remained adamant that the protest was about real issues within our society, much like CNN and MSNBC, they seemed to agree that the meaning of the protest was lost for other reasons.

Without naming the other media sources, they noticed the politicized nature of this topic. Rather than a healthy discussion, the debate became a "left" and "right" political issue.

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Ultimately, ESPN does make a point; while their discussions are perhaps less informative about the historical controversy of patriotism, racism, and inequality, the topic has turned towards a political debate, instead of an honest discussion about how the United States is certainly not perfect in the realm of justice and inequality which it boasts. And it is just this, the idea of perfection, American-exceptionalism, that is the problem. We can, and should, disagree with how we are to adjust to problems facing our society. However, we remain stuck in the bickering about whether the problem actually exists, which is a sure path to failed discourse around any important topic.

Both MSNBC and CNN maintained that the protest was primarily about injustice at the institutional level, developing the axial coding of “protest about racism and injustice” and “protest about systemic issues of racism and inequality”, respectively. However, rather than an approach on how to address these issues, the narrative for each outlet reflected on their disagreement with the message Donald Trump, as well as Fox News, portrayed. In example, “protest patriotic rather than unpatriotic” for CNN, and “Trump and supporters change message to issue of patriotism” for MSNBC. ESPN seemed to take note of the divisive nature of the discussion, suggesting the “protest message shifted away from original message”, as well as taking note of the original message of “protest cause initially about systemic issues of racism”; forming the focal point of the axial coding for ESPN.

LIMITATIONS

Due to time constraints, I was only able to code a limited number of materials from each of the four networks used in this analysis. A larger sample of texts would bolster the findings of this study.

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