

## *Sewing Responsibility: Media Discourse, Corporate Deviance, and the Rana Plaza Collapse\**

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Sarah Hupp Williamson, *University of West Georgia*

Jennifer Lutz, *North Carolina State University*

On the morning of April 24, 2013, Rana Plaza, an eight-story building housing five garment factories collapsed killing 1,129 workers and injuring 2,500. It quickly emerged that U.S.- and European-based retailers were sourcing items produced at Rana Plaza. This paper takes the Rana Plaza collapse as a case study of how media discourse constructs ideas about corporate deviance, responsibility, and risk management in the global supply chain. Guided by the crime news frame and global risk governance, newspaper articles from the U.S. and Bangladesh are used for a content analysis. This paper expands the literature of corporate crime and global risk governance to include the fast fashion industry. We find little evidence that either country discusses Rana Plaza as corporate deviance or the criminal condemnation of corporations. We find evidence that global risk governance is nationalized, as U.S. papers shift blame away from U.S. corporations and onto Bangladesh.

### Introduction

Bangladesh has increasingly come to rely on garment assembly as a way to grow through exports, achieved primarily through reliance on low waged workers (Taplin 2014). In Bangladesh in 2013, garment manufacturing made up one-fifth of the economy and four-fifths of its exports (Bradsher 2013). Reliance on such growth can be attributed to the explosion of the fast fashion model. Through globalization and technology, the model of fast fashion has done away with cyclical seasons to sell clothes and has opted instead for putting out new inventory consistently throughout the entire year (Cline 2012; Taplin 2014). High volumes of inventory mean cheap prices for consumers, with new products entering stores on a weekly basis. With production outsourced, global supply chains have become “long and unwieldy” stretching across multiple countries (Cline 2012:97).

While many countries are involved in the garment production process, only a few—Bangladesh among them—“have developed highly complex systems for producing and shipping tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of identical, high-quality shirts, blouses or trousers to a global retailer within several weeks of receiving an order” (Bradsher 2013). Often

associated with such a system are low wages and a lax regulatory environment driven by heightened pressures to reduce costs and time. In Bangladesh, 2013 monthly entry-level wages were only \$40, child labor remained prevalent, and compliance issues in factories were consistently ignored. Still, such employment often remains as a viable option for many women coming from poverty in rural areas (Taplin 2014).

On April 23, 2013, an engineer was called to inspect a building in the suburb of Savar, outside the capital of Bangladesh. Examination of cracks in the structure caused the engineer to determine that the building was unsafe. The next day, however, workers of the five factories found within the eight-story building returned (Yardley 2013). On the morning of April 24, 2013, the Rana Plaza building that housed these garment factories collapsed, killing 1,129 workers and leaving 2,500 injured. It quickly emerged that many U.S.- and European-based retailers were sourcing items produced at Rana Plaza. In the months that followed, Bangladesh officials and Western retailers each sought to determine their responsibility in relation to their place in the global supply chain.

This paper takes the Rana Plaza collapse as a case study to explore how media discourse framed blame, responsibility, and corporate deviance. Drawing from the literature on global risk governance as well as media's relationship with coverage of corporate deviance, this paper takes a qualitative and quantitative approach to explore media coverage in a comparative manner. Specifically, Cavender and Mulcahy's (1998) crime news frame focuses analysis on how media shapes conceptions of blame and crime, while Beck (2005, 2008) and Klinke's (2014) work on global risk governance situates these questions within the larger global supply chain and conceptions about responsibility. Together, these perspectives form the theoretical basis of this paper. Through analysis of newspaper articles from two U.S. and two Bangladesh papers, this framework is used to examine the transnational framing of harms associated with the fast fashion industry. Findings show little evidence that either country discusses Rana Plaza as corporate deviance or the criminal condemnation of corporations. Instead, there is evidence that global risk governance is nationalized, as U.S. papers shift blame away from U.S. corporations and onto Bangladesh.

## Theoretical Overview

### *Corporate Deviance and Media Framing*

Over time, the coverage of corporate crime in the media has increased greatly (Cavender and Mulcahy 1998). Still, street crime is covered far more often in the news media than corporate crime, with some pointing to the "newsworthiness" of street over corporate crime (Cavender, Gray, and Miller

2010; Cavender and Mulcahy 1998). While such events are likely to receive more coverage based on the perceived level of seriousness, and particularly if physical harm is involved, the media's role in the production of discourse is connected to other factors as well. This may include things such as "geo-political interests, market needs, advertising policies, organizational budgets, access to and control of information sources, cultural priorities and newsworthiness, and dominant discourses" (McMullan and McClung 2006:69). While the media may draw upon public interest in determining what topics to cover, alignment with newspapers own ideological interests still occurs (Cavender and Mulcahy 1998).

Cavender and Mulcahy (1998) developed a conceptual model of crime news frames which they then used to analyze news coverage of a case study of corporate deviance. The crime news frame deals with the assumptions that journalists may bring to their coverage of crime, as well as how their notions of newsworthiness are informed. There are four recurring elements that make up the crime news frame. First, crime news makes an attribution of responsibility for wrongdoing. Second and relatedly, this attribution is often individualized and a simplifying hero and villain narrative often deployed. Third, by defining and condemning the violation of them, moral boundaries are reaffirmed. Finally, resolution—often through the individualized "capture, punishment, or condemnation of the criminal"—gives closure to the narrative (Cavender and Mulcahy 1998:701). This framing also draws attention to the role of media coverage and controlling corporate deviance.

In assessing the implications of media coverage, consideration is also given to the ability to enact social control over corporations who have committed wrongdoing. In the context of Rana Plaza, the power that transnational corporations (TNCs) hold becomes important in understanding the response. Michalowski and Kramer (1987) have noted that TNCs are difficult to control due to a lack of consistent cross-national regulation and the absence of enforced transnational regulation. Still, studies have noted the importance of public image and the work of consumer and activist groups in imposing sanctions (Bartley and Child 2011; Gerber and Jensen 2000).

### *Global Risk and Its Governance*

According to Beck (1992), risk refers to the ways in which we deal with the hazards caused by modernization. The risk society thesis contends that in the modern era risks are more diffuse and larger than ever before. As a result of this growth, competing claims emerge between scientific and social rationality (Beck 1992). Beck (1996:5) acknowledges that the construction of risks lies not with scientific experts, but with the "social production of knowledge, with all its contradictions and conflicts." With risks open to social construction, the

media represents a key player in shaping knowledge around risks open to contestation, including industrial and supply chain risks. In addition to their role in the construction of crime, news media have also played a vital role in the construction and communication of risks to the general public (McCarthy et al. 2008; Wilkinson 2010). As with crime coverage, communications are impacted by “newsworthiness” and news values. Risk coverage may be related to attributions of blame, visual imagery, exposure impact, and conflict about the risk itself (McCarthy et al. 2008). Similar to Cavender and Mulcahy’s crime news frame, risk coverage may focus on questions of blame and the prosecution of corporations or individuals (McCarthy et al. 2008; White 2003). The knowledge about risks can be “changed, magnified, dramatized or minimized” (Beck 1992:23).

Research has also noted the importance of examining the complexities associated with global risks, including their governance (Klinke 2014). Global risks such as climate change and cross-national financial crises have emerged with globalization. Global flows and connections move risks in the realms of the environment, economy, human rights, and security that extends beyond national borders. There is, however, an inequality present with global risks, as their dangers may be exported spatially or temporally (Beck 2008).

Further, the interpretation of global risks is complex, involving sociopolitical and sociocultural perspectives which shape responses, including who is seen as the responsible party (Beck 2005; Klinke 2014). Beyond shaping issues of responsibility, conflict may also occur about the “distribution of guilt, costs, and justice” (Beck 2005:26). Thus, while the risks are global in nature, the discourse about governance around them may be individualized or even nationalized. For example, Beck (2008) notes the role that power plays in definitions of transnational risks, including where responsibility lies and who decides how compensation should proceed.

### *Framing Rana Plaza*

In regard to the case study of Rana Plaza, media coverage of corporate crime directs theoretical consideration to how media are involved in the production of official discourse, as well as the relationship between media, shame, and compliance. Regarding the Rana Plaza collapse, Cavender and Mulcahy’s (1998) conceptual model of crime news framing is applied to understand who and what media attributed responsibility to as well as what potential resolutions to the collapse represented. As for global risk governance, this framework situates the collapse in relation to the transnational corporations involved in Rana Plaza and the fast fashion global supply chain. Specifically, the theory further illuminates the power dynamics and relationship between transnational corporations and the countries they source from.

This theoretical framing also represents an important contribution to the literature. While extant research on the fast fashion industry has certainly explored labor issues in factories (Gerber and Weeks 1992; Locke and Romis 2010) and environmental impacts (Seck 2018; Singh 1998), there has been a dearth of research on the industry as it relates to sociological understandings of crime and inequality on a transnational and corporate level. Thus, the use of the aforementioned theoretical frames extends sociological inquiry into questions about what is considered transnational crime and corporations' role in managing supply chain risks. Ultimately, in this paper, the framework of global risk governance and media coverage of corporate deviance directs consideration to how news media are involved in the production of official discourse about industrial accidents and crimes, who is framed as responsible, and discussion of how such risks in the global supply chain should be managed.

### Data and Methodology

Using a mixed method content analysis approach, this study examines the ways in which the media frames blame, responsibility, and corporate deviance around the Rana Plaza collapse. Further, we assess how media discourse differs across the U.S. and Bangladesh using the chi-square test of significance to compare the frequencies of frames used. As two of the highest circulated newspapers in the U.S. (Pew Research Center 2017), we use *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* as the U.S. newspapers.

We select two, English-language, Bangladesh papers for comparison. *The New Nation* takes a critical approach to news reporting and is comparable to *The New York Times*' progressive approach. Comparable to *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Financial Express* is also a financial news publication that focuses on economics and business developments. The inclusion of both Bangladesh papers and U.S. papers allows us to compare how the media frames corporate deviance across countries and provides both a national and international perspective on the collapse.

It is important to note that in 2013, during our time period of analysis, the Press Freedom Index scores for Bangladesh and the U.S. were 54 and 21, respectively, with lower scores indicating more freedom (Freedom House 2014). Bangladesh's index score reflects a long history of laws and legal restrictions that have historically limited the freedom of the press and have challenged the democratization of Bangladesh (Ahmed 2009). Given this caution, as well as finding a lack of qualitative differences across papers within countries, the focus of analysis remains on comparing media discourse across countries.

The analysis focuses on the period between April 24, 2013, when Rana Plaza collapsed, and December 31, 2013, when we reached saturation in our coding. Extending data collection through the end of 2013 also allows for the inclusion of coverage of larger events such as retailers and NGO's meeting to discuss and sign accords and compensation agreements.

To collect news articles, we used the search term "Rana Plaza" in the online news databases of LexisNexis and ProQuest. This search returned 5,552 articles. To narrow down the scope of this project, we use the four selected papers exclusively, which produced 851 articles. We further narrowed the number of Bangladesh articles, which returned the largest number of results, by choosing a random starting point and selecting every fifth article to produce a sample of 20 percent of each paper's articles (Kaid and Johnston Wadsworth 1989). We also screened the articles by removing both unrelated articles and repetitive pieces. This resulted in a final sample of 243 articles; 47 from *The New York Times*, 57 from *The Wall Street Journal*, 85 from *The Financial Express*, and 54 from *The New Nation*. The sample includes news reports, in-depth investigative reports, and editorial pieces.

After narrowing our sample, articles were qualitatively analyzed using NVivo. As a first step, each news article was read before beginning any coding to develop a codebook. As qualitative content analysis can proceed from an inductive tradition, this initial open coding stage was important to look for themes and categories that could be present beyond the focus of the theoretical framework (White and Marsh 2006). While such analysis does not extend to the implicit meanings of the text, as would be done in discourse analysis, qualitative content analysis provides context to the phenomena under study, situating it within the larger picture through a large amount of detail (White and Marsh 2006).

Throughout coding, attention was paid to attributions of blame or responsibility, discussion of harm, crime framing, and potential resolutions. Overall, three broad themes—attribution of responsibility, corporate crime versus accident framing, and resolutions—emerged from the data. While we coded for the reaffirmation of moral boundaries in our open coding stage, the data did not reveal the use of this crime news frame in the articles.

The five subthemes within attributions of responsibility, which point to the cause of collapse, include the following categories:

*Owner:* The collapse is attributed to the owner, who was aware of cracks in the building but had workers remain in the building

*Construction:* The collapse is due to structural building issues (i.e., built on wetlands)

*RMG Sector:* The collapse is attributed to a lack of inspection/regulation/compliance in garment factories

*Fast Fashion Industry:* The collapse was caused by the nature of fast fashion global supply chains and the rapid growth of the international apparel industry

*Individualized:* An individual is blamed for the collapse

**Table 1**  
**Frequency of Codes**

Code name	Bangladesh newspapers ( <i>N</i> = 139)	U.S. newspapers ( <i>N</i> = 104)
<b>Attribution</b>		
Owner*	22 15.83%	39 37.50%
Construction	22 15.83%	24 23.08%
RMG sector*	19 13.67%	36 34.62%
Fashion*	14 10.07%	43 41.35%
Individualized*	24 17.99%	33 31.73%
<b>Framing</b>		
Crime	10 7.19%	13 12.5%
Accident*	18 12.95%	26 25.00%
<b>Resolution</b>		
Inspection	55 39.57%	32 30.77%
Labor	38 27.34%	28 26.92%
Accord*	31 22.30%	37 35.58%
Compensation	21 15.11%	17 16.35%

\**p* < .05.

Additionally, when identifying individualized blame, we focused on two framing subthemes used to discuss the collapse:

*Crime Framing:* Newspaper discusses the collapse as a crime, negligent manslaughter, or homicide

*Accident Framing:* Newspaper discusses the collapse as an industrial accident

Finally, four subthemes within resolutions emerged in our open coding process:

*Inspection:* Need to inspect buildings and better regulate the garment industry

*Labor Reform:* The garment workers need more rights and protections (wages, unions)

*International Accord:* Global retailers should take responsibility by creating a safety accord

*Compensation:* Compensation should be given to the victims of the collapse and the victims' families

After identifying these subthemes, we qualitatively coded each article using these themes. Importantly, content was coded multiple ways if it exemplified several themes. In coding the attributions of responsibility, we found that content often included multiple frames. For example, blame being attributed to both an individual and faulty construction within the same text.

Following the qualitative content coding, we conducted quantitative analysis by identifying the frequency of each code. Using a chi-square test of significance, we compared the frequencies of each code across U.S. and Bangladesh newspapers (Table 1).

## Results

### *Attributing Blame: Construction, Fast Fashion, and Industry*

Five subthemes were identified through coding of attributions of blame. These themes demonstrate how newspapers framed responsibility for the collapse. Attributions toward the owner and other individuals were found primarily in relation to crime and accident framing, and are discussed later. Here, attributions toward construction, the fast fashion industry, and Bangladesh garment industry are discussed. Qualitative differences in how these frames of blame were used are found, and the chi-square test of significance revealed many cross-country differences in the frequency of the frames.

### *Construction*

Attributing the collapse of Rana Plaza to the construction of the garment factory was found in both Bangladesh and U.S. newspapers. We found no statistically significant difference in the use of this code. References to illegal construction and poor building materials were common. The Bangladesh newspapers detailed how Rana Plaza lacked a solid foundation due to being built on wetland, making it vulnerable to collapse: “Rana Plaza was not built with solid and concrete foundation. It was built over wetland with a vulnerable foundation” (4/30/2013). In addition, papers would also note that the building only had permission to be five floors high, but another three were later added without the proper permits.

Rana Plaza, whose collapse on April 24, 2013 caused more than 1,000 deaths was allegedly constructed in an illegally occupied piece of land, and lacked permission for extra floors. (6/12/2013)

In discussing where the blame for such faulty construction should lie, Bangladesh papers turned their focus more to individuals rather than the regulatory environment. Such discussion often commented on the negligence of the building and garment factory owners, who had employees continue to work in the building despite the previous warning about cracks in the pillars of the building:

The industrial police authority and Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) have blamed both the garment factory owners and building owner for keeping the factories open though they had promised to shut down it due to severe fault in structure. (4/26/2013)

Workers of the Rana Plaza factories alleged that despite cracks in the building, the owners of the five RMG units forced them back to work. (5/19/2013)

Both the owner of the building...and the owners of the garments factories that were housed there, are responsible for what did occur...because of the sheer lust for profit, the workers were directed to report for work, despite the fact that the building developed cracks. (6/2/2013)

Bangladesh papers thus pointed to the responsibilities of the owners for knowing about faulty construction but not taking action, ultimately leading to the building’s collapse.

Much like the Bangladesh newspapers, U.S. newspapers also cited faulty and illegal construction, the use of substandard building materials, and the building’s location atop wetlands when discussing the cause of the collapse. One U.S. article states that “Rana Plaza had been shoddily built, atop filled wetlands” (6/14/2013), while another claims “The factory complex that collapsed this week in this country’s deadliest industrial accident was built without proper permission on unstable land” (4/26/2013).

Similarly, there is also still discussion of the building and garment factory owners' responsibility for the illegal construction of extra floors as well as ignoring building cracks and ordering employees to continue working. Unlike the Bangladesh papers, however, this individualized attribution of blame is found alongside broader blame toward Bangladesh having poor building construction more generally. Articles from U.S. newspapers state:

The collapse of the Rana Plaza reminded the world of the appallingly dangerous working conditions in Bangladesh's clothing factories. (8/19/2013)

Building collapses are common in South Asia due to poor construction techniques, shoddy materials and few inspections, allowing owners to cut costs. (4/27/2013)

Interestingly, in discussing this broader environment of poor construction, both U.S. papers reference the role of the fashion industry:

As demand from foreign buyers rose, factories began sprouting across the country, including quickly built structures to accommodate the small operators who did subcontract work on tight margins. (5/1/2013)

The collapse of the Rana Plaza factory. . .shined a harsh light on poor safety standards and working conditions in parts of Bangladesh's \$20 billion garment industry, which supplies many major Western stores. (11/21/2013)

In their discussion of construction, U.S. papers go beyond an individual focus to discuss the state of construction in Bangladesh at large, as well as how this fits with the broader industry of fast fashion.

### *Fast Fashion*

The finding that U.S. papers focused on the broader environment as contributing to poor construction is echoed by the fact that U.S. papers had a much higher percentage of attributions directed toward the fast fashion industry compared to Bangladesh papers. We found this difference was statistically significant, with 10 percent of Bangladesh papers blaming fashion compared to 41 percent of U.S. papers. In attributing blame to the fashion industry, both U.S. papers direct attention to the ways that fast fashion has created an environment in which there is a lack of accountability in the global supply chain for clothes. As excerpts show, some scrutiny is now directed at Western retailers for not taking more direct action to ensure safety for workers:

The severity and frequency of these disasters are an indictment of global clothing brands and retailers like Walmart, H&M and the Gap, which buy billions of dollars of clothes from Bangladesh but have so far refused to demand and pay for adequate safeguards at the factories that fill their orders. (4/26/2013)

But if Mr. Rana has been vilified, he is partly a creation of the garment era in Bangladesh, during which global businesses have arrived in search of cheap labor to keep profits high and costs low. Directly or indirectly, international brands are now sometimes interlinked with men like Mr. Rana, and placed at risk by them. (5/1/2013)

U.S. papers also point to the role of corporate responsibility in maintaining oversight of the entire production chain:

The...collapse has heightened criticism that Western retailers, who have flocked to Bangladesh for its low-wage apparel industry, should do more to monitor worker safety in plants that manufacture their brands. (4/29/2013)

Public anger over the collapse and reports of regulatory issues drew attention to the difficulty large Western retailers face in making sure their suppliers operate under safe conditions. (4/26/2013)

These papers also both note the role of retailers in squeezing costs in the production process, often resulting in factory owners looking to cut costs through wages or safety in order to keep up with demand. Such pressure often leads to subcontracting, which is when the main contracted garment factory may send a portion of the work order to a second garment factory. Such practices have often been noted as a way to complete large orders under the necessary time constraints and may be done without the knowledge of the retailer who first contracted the factory. Summarizing this process one article states:

Every player has motives to look the other way. The retailers ignore the subcontracting because they would rather manage fewer big contracts, and the per-piece price of garments falls with bigger orders. Suppliers don't turn down giant orders because they fear they will be shut out of future jobs. (9/15/2013)

By discussing how the industry of fast fashion played a role, U.S. newspapers directed attention to the responsibility of Western corporations contracting in Bangladesh.

### *Industry*

While U.S. papers gave more attention to the problems created by fast fashion, both Bangladesh and U.S. papers attributed blame to the ready-made garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh. The use of this code does show a statistically significant difference between countries of publication, with 14 percent of Bangladesh papers blaming the RMG sector compared to 35 percent of U.S. papers. In Bangladesh papers, there is a focus on the lack of proper inspection, regulation, and compliance within garment factories. Bangladesh newspapers pointed more specifically to the role of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) trade

organization when discussing negligence and institutional failure within the regulatory sphere:

BGMEA should take institutional effort to make their industries compliant and bring a qualitative change in the sector. . .The garment entrepreneurs should abide by the law of the land and time has come to make the garment entrepreneurs accountable. (5/5/2013)

Bangladesh papers also noted that the necessary laws were in place, but ensuring their enforcement was the real issue:

RehmanSobhan said the country is still struggling for enforcement of adequate governance which was evident from the 'Rana Plaza' accident. As the matter stands, about a dozen agencies can be identified which did not deliver their appropriate duties. (5/12/2013)

Comprehensive local laws on the security of buildings exist but are not properly implemented. . .Bangladesh had adequate laws governing the safety of buildings but these were not properly implemented. (4/26/2013)

That Bangladesh papers pointing to laws existing but lacking a regulatory environment that ensures enforcement stands in contrast to the U.S. papers which were more likely to point to the specifics of the case of Rana Plaza. Excerpts note that the proper permits were not obtained, again bringing the focus back to illegal and substandard construction.

The owner of Rana Plaza, local politician Sohel Rana, didn't obtain mandatory permits from the municipal agency that oversees building safety in the greater Dhaka area. . .It could and should have been demolished. (4/26/2013)

The Rana Plaza building violated codes, with the four upper floors having been constructed illegally without permits. (4/25/2013)

U.S. papers were also more likely to point to the failure of inspectors and "Government engineers whose inspections allegedly failed to uncover building code violations." As one excerpt points out:

[Bangladesh's] government building inspectors were so ineffectual that it was vital that Western companies make sure that their inspectors also examined the structural integrity of factory buildings. (5/2/2013)

Despite these subtle differences, both U.S. and Bangladesh newspapers frequently referenced the role of corruption in contributing to illegal construction and a lack of enforced compliance. In the case of Rana Plaza, U.S. newspapers describe how the building owner, Sohel Rana used his political clout to obtain an illegal permit from the local mayor. One U.S. article notes that "Mr. Khan, the former mayor, said this practice created serious risks, since officials were handing out permits, often for bribes, without insisting on the necessary

safeguards” (5/1/2013). The way corruption eroded safety standards across the industry were also noted more broadly by Bangladesh papers:

Negligence, lack of resources, bribes involved in licensing and permits or collusion between factory owners and safety inspections allows facilities to remain even when dangers are identified. (6/12/2013)

As well as U.S. papers:

And it [the government] does nothing to curb rampant corruption that puts millions of workers' lives at risk, whether through shoddy construction or disregard for safety regulations (5/15/2013)

Bangladesh would have safer factories if officials enforced the standards already on the books. But corruption is rife and the garment industry dominates the economy, so those in the business often buy their way into licenses and out of inspections. (5/21/2013)

In regard to industry, Bangladesh papers discussed the responsibility of the RMG sector as a whole to hold itself accountable and ensure regulations are followed. Corruption is noted as interfering in this though. U.S. papers also give attention to corruption, though in terms of industry they focus on the specifics of the Rana Plaza case, rather than whether or not regulatory enforcement was an industry wide problem.

### *Individualizing Blame: Crimes versus Accidents*

The crime news frame developed by Cavender and Mulcahy (1998) draws attention to how attributions of blame are often individualized. Individualizing blame simplifies the narrative by clearly delineating the actor responsible. Such a narrative is also seen in the case of Rana Plaza. Attributing blame to the owner and individualizing blame was found to be statistically significant, meaning there is an association between country of publication and allocation of blame to the owner or another individual. The focus of individualized attributions for U.S. and Bangladesh newspapers centered on the building owner, Sohel Rana, as well as the owners of the several garment factories located within the building. Bangladesh papers point blame to Rana's knowledge and subsequent dismissal of warnings about structural cracks in the building the day prior to the collapse. In regard to the factory owners, Bangladesh papers blame them for forcing employees to continue working.

The owner of Rana Plaza and five garment factories knew that it visibly developed some major cracks on its pillars. Even then they forced several thousand workers to enter the building to work defying all cautionary words from the local municipal authorities as well as the local government engineer. (4/30/2013)

U.S. newspapers also attribute blame to Sohel Rana, as summed by one article: “Garment industry leaders have blamed [Rana] for lying about the structural safety of the building; when cracks were discovered the day before the disaster, Mr. Rana is accused of assuring factory bosses that the building was safe to operate” (4/29/2013). However, in their discussion of the factory owners’ responsibility for forcing employees to continue working, U.S. papers also point to the pressure of getting the work order done as a contributing factor. Excerpts from U.S. papers cite factory owners as being pressured to continue work due to deadlines:

A longtime factory supervisor and implored him and others to return to work, citing pressing deadlines. (12/31/2013)

I did not force the owners, Rana said, It was them who forced me, saying they would face huge losses, and shipments would be canceled if the factories were closed for even one day. (4/29/2013)

In addition to pointing out the role of these deadlines, U.S. papers also noted the pressure of the garment industry in Bangladesh more broadly:

Factory owners...were under financial pressure because political unrest had scared off buyers, company executives said...They were under tremendous pressure to meet shipment deadlines. (4/30/2013)

Employees for the factories said managers had urged them to return to work...Some of the factories in Rana Plaza were under pressure after missing orders due to constant protests in the capital, which have led to road blockages and port shutdowns. (5/7/2013)

Such discussions are absent in Bangladesh papers attributions of blame against the owners, save two which blamed “sheer lust for profit” (6/2/2013) and placing “more importance to money-making than the safety of the workers” (5/4/2013) as the driving force behind factory owners directing employees to continue working.

Despite individualizing the blame, papers differed in how they framed the collapse of Rana Plaza as a crime or accident. In regard to framing Rana Plaza as a crime, there was no statistically significant association found between country of publication and use of the code. It should be noted that the use of the crime code was overall quite low, with Bangladesh papers using this code only 7 percent of the time and U.S. papers only 13 percent. Bangladesh papers rarely used the word crime itself, instead focusing on the negligence of the owners. Where this term is used, coding still considered it criminal rather than accident framing of Rana Plaza, as the excerpts below show.

According to labour leaders, ‘workplace accidents cannot be termed ‘mere accidents’ as these accidents often occur due to negligence of the employers and constant failure of the government bodies responsible for inspecting safety measures for the workers. (4/30/2013)

“We must ensure that incidents such as Rana Plaza tragedy never happen in the country,” [the president of MCCI] opined. She said Rana Plaza is the outcome of negligence over the industry. “Rana Plaza is not accident, rather it is negligence.” (5/31/2013)

Negligence could certainly indicate criminal liability, and from their investigation, officials would indeed issue a warrant for the building owner over illegal construction and criminal negligence leading to death. Still, it is important to note that journalists focused on the use of the term negligence rather than crime. Negligence is utilized to direct focus to the role of regulatory laws and the individual owners’ responsibilities to uphold these laws.

U.S. papers again focused on the owner not heeding warnings from engineers regarding the structural integrity of the building and the subsequent criminal investigations surrounding Rana Plaza. However, these papers also pointed out that the legal recourse being taken against the owner was a rarity in Bangladesh. Both U.S. papers emphasized the uniqueness of this case:

Mr. Rana was hauled into the courthouse, along with the factory bosses, surprising some legal activists who could not remember a single case in which judges had taken such action against members of the garment industry. “That was very unusual,” said [lawyer and legal activist] “I think it was only possible because of the level of national and international outrage.” (6/30/2013)

Despite many accidents over the years in Bangladesh’s factories, no factory owner has ever been formally charged with a crime relating to an industrial accident. . . . But they say the Rana Plaza case marks a turning point, and that someone will be held responsible. “There is a lot of attention on this,” said [police heading investigation] “Everyone wants to see justice done.” (7/27/2013)

More frequently though papers framed Rana Plaza as an accident. The use of this code was found to be statistically significant. Both Bangladesh and U.S. newspapers made frequent mention of Rana Plaza as the worst industrial garment industry accident in Bangladesh history. However, they did differ in how they approached framing the causes of such an accident. Bangladesh papers emphasized that as an industrial accident, future accidents in the industry can be prevented by strengthening regulations and their enforcement:

Terming some tragic accidents in RMG factories ‘unacceptable’, [the Finance Minister] said: “It must be admitted that despite taking different measures, still there remain some deficiencies in respect of factory inspection and enforcement of safety and welfare measures.” (10/23/2013)

The latest and the worst ever industrial accident involving the Rana Plaza has only reinvigorated the demand for greater vigilance against such accidents by all concerned. (5/20/2013)

U.S. newspapers do mention that Western retailers were doing business in Bangladesh, but focus the responsibility on the Bangladesh government. It is up to

the Bangladesh government to improve safety regulations, or they risk losing business from Western retailers.

[Rana Plaza is] putting pressure on the government to act to improve safety standards or risk losing Western customers. (5/9/2013)

The shutdown of three factories of the Nassa Group, which has made clothes for Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and Sears Holdings, among others, followed mounting pressure from workers' groups and foreign retailers for the Bangladesh government to take action after the country's deadliest industrial accident. (5/10/2013)

By focusing on Rana Plaza as an accident, the blame for the collapse is directed away from Western retailers. U.S. papers highlighted the need for the Bangladesh government to have a more direct role in the prevention of future incidents.

### ***Resolutions: Industry Reform, Compensation, and an International Accord***

Finally, four subthemes within resolutions emerge in our coding process. These themes highlight the actions that should be done to reconcile the incident, and what actions should be taken to prevent future incidents. First, news sources emphasize the need for industry reform through enhanced safety inspections and labor improvements. Additionally, the news sources suggest the need for financial compensation for the victims and the victims' families. Moreover, the papers highlight the need for an international safety accord, which calls upon global retailers to take preventative measures to avoid future incidents. Interestingly, while the attributions of blame revealed many cross-country differences, we found fewer statistically significance differences in the frequency of the resolution frames across countries.

### ***Industry Reform***

Both U.S. and Bangladesh papers equally discuss the need for improved safety inspections and labor reform. Forty percent of the Bangladesh papers discuss the need for safety inspections, and 31 percent of U.S. papers discuss the need for better safety inspections. Importantly, this difference is not statistically significant. Similarly, we find no association between the country of publication and the discussion of labor reform with both U.S. papers and Bangladesh papers using this frame in 27 percent of the articles.

The U.S. and Bangladesh papers were not only quantitatively similar, but also qualitatively similar in their discussion of industry reform. Notably, U.S. and Bangladesh papers discuss labor reform and the need for inspections simultaneously, while recognizing the need for an overhaul to improve the garment industry. Exemplified here, two Bangladesh articles state:

The \$24.21 million joint initiative includes the Better Work Programme of the government and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) aimed at improving working conditions in the country's RMG sector. The programme will provide technical support for building and fire safety assessments, strengthen and support labour, fire and building inspections, build occupational safety and health awareness, capacity and systems, and also provide rehabilitation and skill development training for the victims. (10/23/2013)

Labour leaders put forward Thursday a set of demands including allowing trade unions (TUs) at factory level, issuance of appointment letters and proper implementation of maternity leave as per the existing labour law. They also demanded enhancement of wages, ensuring both fire and building safety and restoring the previous provision of sharing a five per cent profit of factories with workers. (5/10/2013)

Similarly, U.S. papers also discuss these industry improvements in tandem. For example, one U.S. article says:

[The government] has ordered inspections of the nation's 5,000 factories for safety and said it would soon raise the monthly minimum wage in the garment sector from \$38 per month. (5/24/2013)

Although U.S. sources emphasize the need for industry reform through better safety inspections and labor reform, U.S. papers often ridicule the Bangladesh government for their efforts in industry reform. For example, one U.S. article says:

While the officials called the new [labor] law a landmark strengthening of workers' protections, rights groups said the law made only modest changes and took numerous steps backward that undercut unions. Bangladeshi lawmakers adopted the new law three weeks after the United States suspended Bangladesh's trade preferences, saying that labor rights and safety violations were far too prevalent in that country's factories. (7/17/2013)

Furthermore, newspapers from both the U.S. and Bangladesh suggest that industry reform, through safety and labor improvements, is a multifaceted endeavor that requires the efforts of the government, workers' rights organizations, and employers. For instance, these excerpts from Bangladesh newspapers demonstrate this discussion of a multifaceted approach to industry reform:

Both government and BGMEA must take steps to overcome the problems and save our garment industry immediately for better economy. (5/24/2013)

"Mr. Uramoto [ILO regional director] said, 'Rana Plaza collapse was a terrible tragedy, which is seen as a turning point for the country. The government and employers' and workers' organisations agree that urgent action is needed to secure the safety and integrity of all RMG factories and to promote workers' rights in Bangladesh.'" (8/3/2013)

In the same way, articles from U.S. papers also discuss the necessity for a multifaceted approach to industry reform, calling on the government, manufacturers, and retailers to work together on industry improvements: "The

government needs to step up factory inspections, and Bangladesh manufacturers should invest more of their profits into making their factories safer. But none of this will happen if clothing retailers in the United States and Europe do not demand it and help pay for it" (9/15/2013).

In their discussions of industry reform, both U.S. and Bangladesh sources discuss the need for safety improvement and labor reform simultaneously and acknowledge the group effort necessary for such improvements to occur. While the discussion of this resolution is quite similar across countries, it is important to reiterate that U.S. sources criticize the efforts from the Bangladesh government for their reform efforts.

### *Compensation*

Articles from both Bangladesh and U.S. papers equally discuss the need for financial compensation for the victims of the collapse and for the victims' families. Fifteen percent of articles from Bangladesh papers and 16 percent of articles from U.S. papers discuss the need for financial compensation. Further, both the Bangladesh and the U.S. papers condemn Western retailers for their lack of participation in contributing to compensation funds. It is important to note that while U.S. papers condemn Western corporations for this aspect of the response, they still do not place blame on them for their role leading to the actual collapse of Rana Plaza. Demonstrated here, both of the U.S. papers critique Western retailers for not participating in compensation efforts:

"It's shocking that companies that were expressing their profound grief after the Rana Plaza tragedy are now failing to turn up to compensation talks," said Kalpona Akter, executive director of the Bangladesh Center for Workers Solidarity. "It brings into question the brands' sincerity in helping workers who suffered death and injury while making clothes for Western stores." (10/24/2013)

The two dozen or so Western clothing companies and retailers whose clothes were being made in Rana Plaza should also contribute. (8/19/2013)

Importantly, U.S. papers do critique Western retailers for their lack of participation in compensation funds, but they were also likely to blame the Bangladesh government for their slow and chaotic compensation efforts. Illustrated here, both U.S. papers offer a critique of the compensation efforts in Bangladesh:

Bangladesh's government has made some modest short-term compensation payments to some victims. . . . But much of the money donated to the government for the survivors and the families of the dead has not been released. (12/19/2013)

The government of Sheikh Hasina announced that it would take care of victims and their families, a promise that it has yet to fulfill despite having collected private donations for that

purpose. Four months after a building collapse killed more than 1,100 factory workers in Bangladesh, their families are still waiting for adequate – and in some cases, any – compensation. (12/21/2013)

On the other hand, Bangladesh sources did not critique the efforts of their government in the compensation process. Bangladesh papers did, however, reprimand Western companies for their lack of contribution to compensation efforts, similar to U.S. papers:

The IBC demanded \$71 million for compensation and long-term rehabilitation of the victims, 45 percent of which was demanded from global brands who resource garments products from Bangladesh, 28 percent from factory owners, 18 percent from the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), and 9.0 percent from the government. “Six months have passed since the deadly incident. So far, only nine brands have made concrete commitment to join the compensation plan, though a total of 29 brands were invited to join it,” said IBC general secretary Romesh Chandra Roy at a press conference. (10/2/2013)

Furthermore, both Bangladesh papers highlighted and applauded the efforts of organizations and companies that donated to the victims’ compensation fund:

Prime Bank Limited has decided to help the victims and their families of Savar “Rana Plaza” by contributing one day’s basic salary of all the employees of the Bank as donation. (4/29/2013)

BRAC donated artificial limbs and Tk 0.1 million to each of the 12 victims of Rana Plaza tragedy, who survived with disability as part of long term rehabilitation support of the non-government organisation. (11/24/2013)

While U.S. and Bangladesh papers equally examine the need for financial compensation and criticize Western retailers for their lack of financial support, their discussion of compensation does differ in other important ways. First, articles from U.S. sources provided an unfavorable evaluation of compensation efforts by the Bangladesh government. Second, no Bangladesh articles offered this criticism of the government, but they did praise the efforts made by those Bangladesh organization that donated to a compensation fund.

### *An International Accord*

Among the resolution codes, the need for an international accord was the only theme that showed a statistically significant association between the country of publication and the frequency of the code. Thirty-six percent of the U.S. articles discuss an international safety accord among Western retailers, while only 22 percent of the Bangladesh articles discuss an international safety accord among retailers.

Ultimately, the Rana Plaza collapse led to the development of two separate international safety accords. Most European retailers signed the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, which aimed at holding retailers

contractually responsible for the safety of their factories by improving inspections, updating factories, and closing structurally unsafe factories. On the other hand, most U.S. retailers signed onto a separate accord, Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, which was led by Walmart. The Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety promised no legal liabilities for companies that signed on, and provided less rigorous safety inspections and was less transparent in releasing inspection reports to the public.

Although U.S. papers discuss the international accords more often than Bangladesh papers, when it was considered, they both critique U.S. retailers for not signing the European-led safety accord, but applaud European companies. For example, several Bangladesh articles state:

More than 90 global clothing brands, mostly European that signed a recent pact for safety of garment workers in Bangladesh. (10/5/2013)

Rana Plaza has only reinvigorated the demand for greater vigilance against such accidents by all concerned. The major European retailers sourcing apparels from Bangladesh have signed a deal to make joint efforts to improve the safety standards at Bangladesh apparel units. Meanwhile, North American retailers reportedly are trying to devise their own plans to help improve safety standards in Bangladesh garments units. (5/20/2013)

Wal-Mart and Gap two U.S. giant retailers sourcing apparels from Bangladesh and facing criticism for neglecting fire and building safety for workers are now working to build their own 'independent safety plan' for Bangladesh garment factories. (6/1/2013)

Comparably, U.S. papers also applaud European retailers for signing the European-led safety accord and comment on U.S. involved companies not signing this safety accord. However, when U.S. papers discuss the lack of U.S. involvement with the European safety accord, they do highlight that U.S. retailers will still sign a separate safety accord:

Many major European retailers have signed the international accord but most American retailers have cited liability concerns, opting to do their own audits of factory conditions. (5/31/2013)

More than 100 multinational clothing brands and retailers have signed a legally binding, Europe-dominated accord that requires them to help finance fire safety and building improvements in Bangladeshi factories. But most American brands, including Walmart and Gap, refused to join, and have instead pursued an approach that does not oblige them to help finance safety improvements. (11/5/2013)

The members of the European-led group... have made binding commitments to help pay for fire safety measures and building upgrades... While the American-dominated group, which has 26 members, including Walmart Stores, Target and Gap, has stopped short of making such a binding commitment, it has pledged to provide loans for the improvements. (11/19/2013)

Walmart has refused to join that effort. But, in January, it announced that it would demand that factories quickly correct any safety violations and would dismiss any contractor that uses unapproved or unsafe factories. Two weeks ago, Walmart pledged \$1.8 million to establish a health and safety institute in Bangladesh to train 2,000 factory managers about fire safety.

(4/26/2013)

The US-led accord absolves corporate responsibility for the plaza collapse and lessens the role of retailers in financing labor and safety reform. Arguably, the US-led safety accord was a response to criticisms and may have been a strategic move by U.S. retailers to eliminate negative press. It is particularly interesting that U.S. sources comment on U.S. participation in this accord when critiquing these same retailers for their lack of participation in the European-led accord.

### **Conclusions: Contributions, Limitations, and Future Research**

In this study, we take the Rana Plaza collapse as a case study to explore how the media frames responsibility and resolutions when a corporate crime occurs. We advance the body of research on crime by expanding the study of corporate crime into the global fast fashion industry, a vastly understudied area in criminology. We also add to the literature on global risk governance by considering how industrial risks in the fast fashion industry are responded to by transnational corporations and countries. Additionally, we contribute to the existing body of work by providing an analysis of both U.S. and Bangladesh papers, which captures a cross-national comparison of the framing of wrongdoings by Western corporations. Consequently, we find several notable qualitative and quantitative differences in our cross-national comparison, which not only corroborates major theoretical tenants pertaining to corporate crime framing and global risk governance, but also makes a major contribution to the literature.

Importantly, our analysis revealed little discussion of the Rana Plaza collapse as a crime. Again, only 7 percent of the Bangladesh articles used the crime frame, and only 13 percent of U.S. articles used the crime frame. In both U.S. and Bangladesh papers, the Rana Plaza collapse was more likely to be referred to as an accident. Most importantly, none of the article used the term “corporate crime” to describe the collapse. This finding substantiates previous theorizing on media and corporate crime framing (McMullan and McClung 2006). Additionally, our analysis of the Rana Plaza collapse confirms the individualized attribution of blame (Cavender, Gray, and Miller 2010; Cavender and Mulcahy 1998; Evans and Lundman 1983). Both the U.S. and Bangladesh sources attributed responsibility to the plaza’s owner, Sohel Rana. It is important to note that the U.S. sources more often employed the individual attribution frame, which absolves responsibility from the U.S. retailers.

Despite these similarities, there were cross-national differences as well. U.S. and Bangladesh papers focused on the role of construction when attributing and individualizing blame. However, U.S. papers gave much more attention to the role of the broader fast fashion industry in contributing to the issues involved at Rana Plaza. Importantly, U.S. papers did discuss the role of U.S. retailers in global commodity chains by highlighting negative aspects of the fast fashion industry. However, such discussions of the fast fashion industry also highlighted the complex nature of global commodity chains and argued that it is difficult for U.S. retailers to track all subcontracted work in Bangladesh and inspect every factory in their commodity chains.

Furthermore, although U.S. sources discussed the role of retailers in global commodity chains, U.S. sources were also likely to point attributions of blame back to Bangladesh by blaming the RMG sector, poor inspections, and faulty constructions. Such findings support the literature on global risk governance and the idea that responsibilities of risk, such as “guilt, costs, and justice” are often individualized or nationalized (Beck 2005; Klinke 2014). In this case, global risk governance is nationalized, as U.S. papers acknowledge the presence of U.S. corporations, but ultimately shift blame onto the regulatory environment found in the garment industry of Bangladesh.

Previous research on corporate deviance reveals the difficulty in controlling transnational corporate crime. Due to a lack of sufficient transnational regulations and enforcement, and the global power of TNCs, controlling corporate deviance becomes particularly problematic (Michalowski and Kramer 1987). Importantly, we found little evidence in the case of the Rana Plaza collapse that would suggest that the Bangladesh or U.S. news sources were arguing for better control of corporate deviance. Neither U.S. nor Bangladesh sources discussed the criminal condemnation of corporations, but rather argued for the punishment of Sohel Rana, the inspectors, and the engineers. Yet despite this commonality, U.S. papers also differed in some respects in their framing of solutions as well. In the discussion of both industry reform and the financial compensation of victims, the U.S. papers take an unfavorable stance against the Bangladesh government by critiquing the government’s handling of the collapse. Further, the U.S.-led accord is presented favorably through an image of transnational corporations working across borders to address risk. Ultimately, however, the accord does not represent a viable solution to addressing such risks as it redirects responsibility away from corporations by minimizing their role in financing labor and safety reforms.

Although our analysis makes considerable contributions to the literature on global risk governance, corporate deviance, and media discourse, the analysis is not without limitations. First, Bangladesh has limited free press with legal restriction on news outlets and journalists. Given the limited free press, caution

should be made, as the Bangladesh sources may be censored in order to adhere to the country's media laws. Secondly, although the official language of Bangladesh is Bengali, our analysis was limited to those news articles available in English. Therefore, we are limited in which Bangladesh news sources could be included in our analysis.

Since our analysis was limited to 2013, future research should consider the longitudinal effects of media framing on corporate responsibility. Our analysis reveals individualized attributions of blame and no blame on the corporations. Although the involvement of Western retailers in the global supply chain is acknowledged, they are ultimately framed positively through the lens of the U.S.-led accord. Thus, future research would benefit from an assessment of the lasting consequences for corporations following the Rana Plaza Collapse. Specifically, research should examine whether the international safety accords were effective in creating meaningful safety changes. Previous analyses of media framing highlight the importance of political ideology in news reporting. While our analysis selects comparable U.S. and Bangladesh papers based on political leanings, our analysis is limited to cross-country analysis. Therefore, future research should assess how newspapers, with different political ideologies, within the same country, frame corporate deviance. Finally, working within the global risk governance paradigm, future research should further assess how transnational corporations shift risks and blame down the global supply chain and onto countries within the global south. Our findings reveal that within the global fast fashion industry, the U.S. papers overwhelmingly push blame back to Bangladesh, by placing blame on individual Bangladeshi actors, poor industry oversight, and construction issues. Future analyses should expand the global risk governance framework to assess these processes within other industries.

Ultimately, our research demonstrates the importance of media in shaping ideas about corporate deviance, blame, and responsibility in the global fast fashion industry. Our study adds to the limited research on corporate deviance and fast fashion by wedding literature on corporate crime and global risk governance. The Rana Plaza collapses provide a unique case to study, as the factory was located in Bangladesh, but housed many factories producing goods for Western corporations. Therefore, by analyzing both U.S. and Bangladesh papers, we reveal cross-national similarities and differences in news coverage. Importantly, while both countries refrain from using the term "crime," the U.S. used framing tactics which absolved real guilt from U.S. companies by criticizing Bangladesh.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

ENDNOTES

\*Please direct correspondence to Sarah Hupp Williamson, Department of Criminology, University of West Georgia, 1601 Maple Street, Carrollton, GA 30118, USA; e-mail: sarahhuppwilliamson@gmail.com

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