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Policing and the Dirty Underbelly: Understanding Narratives of Police Deviance on Social Media Platforms

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POLICING AND THE DIRTY UNDERBELLY: UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVES OF

POLICE DEVIANCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

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Abstract

Policing organizations have been quick to adopt the use of social media as a community-policing and investigative tool. However, the user-generated content on social media platforms can pose a risk to police legitimacy, police accountability, and their role as the 'authorized knowers'. This thesis explores how social media problematizes the social problems game and how social media challenges the police as the 'authorized knowers'. Through the analysis of two case studies - #myNYPD campaign and the Walter Scott shooting – it was found that social media users can use social media platforms to construct claims against and challenge police in the social problems game through the circulation of user-generated content. It was discovered that images and videos play a significant role in the social problems game, and the challenging of the police. The authority that the police have with traditional media differs from the relationship they have with social media. This is because social media becomes much more difficult to control, especially with the interpretive flexibility of images and video. It was found that police still engage in counter-claims making activities through traditional media outlets to counteract claims made online, but that social media also provides a new platform for counter-claims making activities.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, social media platforms have gained worldwide popularity among

users, and have drastically changed the ways in which individuals communicate with one another

(Murthy, 2010). Social media are defined as a "group of Internet-based applications that build on

the ideological and technological foundations of the Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and

exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan as cited in van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p.5). Social

groups, organizations and corporations have been quick to adopt these platforms as a means of

communicating with online users. While many companies find the benefits in using social media,

using it can also be disadvantageous as social media users can challenge and expose

organizations by circulating unfavourable content.

For example, social movement groups such as, the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protestors,

have found success in using social media. The movement used the hashtags (#)

#occupywallstreet, #ows, and #TheOther99 on Twitter to define and raise awareness of the social

problem in the hopes of recruiting others to the movement (Murthy, 2010). While social media

proved useful for the protestors it posed challenges to organizations, such as financial

institutions, who were trying to control the message and image of their organizations. Social

media platforms have also been used to construct police deviance, such as the Robert

Dziekankski case, and London's G20 summit (Goldsmith, 2010). In 2007, the Royal Canadian

Mounted Police (RCMP) were filmed by a bystander tasing and subduing Robert Dziekankski at

the Vancouver International Airport (Goldsmith, 2010). While Dziekankski was subdued he

suffered from a heart attack and died (Goldsmith, 2010). In 2009, at the London G20 summit, a

bystander recorded Ian Tomlinson being struck by a member of the Metropolitan Police Tactical

Support Group (TSG), and falling to the ground (Goldsmith, 2010). Tomlinson suffered a heart

attack dying briefly after the incident and died at the scene (Goldsmith, 2010). In both cases the video recordings of the incidents were provided to news media outlets where they were widely circulated.

The development of social media platforms has made organizations, such as police services, more transparent to the public, and opened up a 'new visibility' (Thompson, 2005). The 'new visibility' refers to the technological advancements in media that have led to organizations being more visible to the public (Thompson, 2005). For example, the development of cameras on mobile phones created a new visibility of the police that had not been seen before (Goldsmith, 2010; Thompson, 2005). The development of the mobile phone, video sharing websites, and social media platforms, for example, allow users to upload unedited or edited photos and video of police onto the Internet with little to no delay (Goldsmith, 2010). Internet platforms allow users to bypass traditional media outlets, such as the news media (Goldsmith, 2010). Content uploaded to these websites has the capability to disrupt police image and police accountability and legitimacy because police are no longer the only individuals who are producing and providing information about the organization to the public (Goldsmith, 2010).

With the 'new visibility' (Thompson, 2005) that social media presents policing organizations, and the constant vigilant watch of these organizations by the public, it is important to understand how social media plays a role in the construction of policing narratives. Social media platforms, and their user-generated content, challenge the notion of the police being the 'authorized knowers' (Fishman, 1980) because it removes the organization's control over the construction of policing narratives (Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Schneider, 2015a). "Authorized knowers" are officials who belong to a bureaucratic institution and whose knowledge claims are perceived as credible by news workers (Fishman, 1980). Traditionally, police have been

considered the 'authorized knowers' of both the police institution and police activities such as criminal investigations (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989). As the authorized knowers, the police provide 'authorized definitions' to the mass media to control what is said about the institution (Doyle, 2003) thus allowing the organization to keep a favourable and legitimate image in the eyes of the public (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989).

Current literature surrounding policing and media has focused on: (1) police use of mass media as a way to control information (Chermak, 1995; Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Doyle, 2003; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989; Manning, 1977; Mawby, 1999; Mawby, 2002), and (2) the relationship that the police organizations have with social media platforms and their use (Crump, 2011; Heverin & Zach, 2010; Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Schneider 2014, 2015a; Trottier, 2012). For instance, police organizations have been found to use their relationship with the media to control what information is presented to the public in terms of crimes and investigations (Chermak, 1995; Mawby, 1999), their officers and police practices (Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Doyle, 2003; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989; Manning, 1977; Mawby, 2002). Thus, the vast majority of this research has focused on how police use social media as a presentational strategy (Chermak, 1995; Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Doyle, 2003; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989; Manning, 1977; Mawby, 1999; Mawby, 2002; Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Schneider 2014) and for public engagement and community building (Crump, 2011; Heverin & Zach, 2010; Trottier, 2012).

However, there is much less known about how narratives of police deviance are constructed on social media, and if social media problematizes our understandings of police being the 'authorized knowers' (Fishman, 1980). The present study addresses these gaps in knowledge by answering the following research questions: (1) How do narratives of police

deviance emerge and take shape on social media?; and , (2) How do social media problematize our understanding of police as the authorized knowers?

To answer these two questions, the research focused on two separate case studies. The first case study focuses on the shooting of Walter Scott in South Carolina. In this case a citizen recorded video caught an altercation between Walter Scott and Constable Michael Slager at a traffic stop, which led to the fatal shooting of Walter Scott by Slager (National Post, 2015). The second case study focuses on the New York Police Departments (NYPD) Twitter initiative where they requested that Twitter users send them friendly photos of police officers and civilians using the #myNYPD hashtag. A social constructionist framework is used to theorize about the role social media platforms play in the social problems game and the construction of police deviance (Loseke, 2003). Data collection and analysis was influenced by qualitative media analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013) and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).

This thesis is broken into six chapters. Chapter One: Theory provides a description of social constructionism and the social problems game. It discusses the players in the social problems game, how social problems are constructed in order to win audience support, and solutions to social problems. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the role of the media in the social problems game. Chapter Two presents a literature review on police deviance, and police and the media. Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach taken for the current research project. In this chapter, I provide an overview of qualitative media analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013) and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). I then provide a brief summary of the two case studies – the #myNYPD campaign and Walter Scott shooting and outline the process of data collection and analysis.

Chapter Four details the major findings of the #myNYPD Twitter campaign. This chapter explores how Twitter users used the #myNYPD campaign to construct claims of police deviance, through the use of text and visual claims, and how this challenged the NYPD's position as the "authorized knowers". I then discuss how the NYPD engaged in counterclaims work by reframing the campaign, allowing them to regain control of the campaign and re-establish themselves as the authorized knowers. Chapter Five details the findings from the analysis of the Walter Scott case. This chapter discusses how the North Charleston Police Department acted as the authorized knowers of the altercation between Michael Slager and Walter Scott, and how their position was challenged by user-generated video of the event released to The New York Times. This chapter helps illustrate how the media uses user-generated content to construct claims and how user-generated content can challenge the police's credibility and authority. Chapter Six provides an overview of the major findings derived from the study and concludes with a discussion of the limitations and contributions of the research.

Chapter One: Theory

In order to understand how narratives of police deviance emerge on social media platforms, I adopted a social constructionist perspective with a specific focus on the "social problems game" (Loseke, 2003). Social constructionism is a theoretical framework that places an emphasis on "how people create and respond to conditions, how we categorize and typify, how we subjectively construct the meanings of problems, and how our constructions influence how we act towards those conditions" (Loseke & Best, 2003). In what follows, I provide an in depth discussion of social constructionism and the social problems game, with specific attention to claims makers, constructing problems, constructing victims and villains, and constructing solutions.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a theoretical framework that is concerned with how people understand and makes sense of the world around them (Loseke, 2003). Specifically, it seeks to look at the meanings that humans create about objective conditions, instead of looking at the objective condition itself (Loseke, 2003). It places an emphasis on understanding how meanings of problems are constructed through claims-making activities and focuses on how people construct and categorize putative conditions as social problems (Loseke & Best, 2011). Social constructionism focuses on how individuals construct social problems (Loseke & Best, 2003). Understanding how individuals construct the world around them is crucial when it comes to social problems because how an individual defines and gives meaning to a particular object influences how they will act towards it (Loseke, 2003). Social constructionists recognize a social problem as "a term used to label conditions believed to occur frequently, to be very troublesome

in their consequences and that therefore need to be eliminated" (Loseke & Best, 2003, p.3). One way to understand the construction of social problems is by looking at the social problems game.

The social problems game involves the competition between players (claims-makers) who compete against one another by engaging in activities (social problems work), in order to win (Loseke, 2003). The prize in the social problems game is having the ability to direct social change, to transform the ways in which individuals make sense of themselves and others, as well as having the capability to alter the objective world (Loseke, 2003). Claims makers are an important component of the social problems game. Claims makers are the individuals who construct claims surrounding a social problem and attempt to persuade the audience (Loseke & Best, 2003; Spector & Kitsuse, 1977). Claims makers can be everyday individuals or individuals who belong towards the top of the hierarchy of credibility. Individuals who belong to the hierarchy of credibility are superordinate individuals or experts who are perceived as more credible, such as police officers, doctors, professors, etc., than individuals in more marginal (Van den Hoonaard, 2012).

Individuals who participate in the social problems game work to persuade the public by engaging in claims-making activities. Claims making activities involve "any verbal, visual, or behavioural statement that seeks to persuade audience members to define a condition as a social problem" (Loseke, 2003, p.607). Claims makers use certain "typifications" or categorizations when they are trying to understand the experiences of everyday life and the individuals around them (Loseke, 2003). Typifications are social resources – they are typical images that individuals construct in their heads about certain things or issues that work to simplify complex social life (Loseke, 2003). For example, individuals often have a typical image in their head about sex workers and prostitution, because they do not know all sex workers, the best they can do is

picture a typical image. Typifications are important to the social problems game because they allow claims makers to create specific images of categorizations about people and issues, that aid in the persuasion of audience members (Loseke, 2003). Further, how a claims maker typifies a social problem can determine how the social problem is to be solved (Loseke, 2003). For example, in the past homosexuality has been typified as both a criminal act, and a mental disorder. These typifications resulted in how the social problem was handled – i.e., criminalization or medicalization. Overall, the social problems game is important because it brings attention to both politics and power (Loseke, 2003).

Claims-making and the Construction of Claims

Claims makers can engage in claims-making through the use of verbal claims, visual claims, and behavioural claims (Loseke, 2003). Verbal claims can include, but are not limited to, claims in textbooks or newspapers, claims on flyers, claims made by news broadcasters, as well as claims made in music (Loseke, 2003). Unlike verbal claims, visual claims are constructed through the use of visual images and can be particularly powerful because typifications of social problems create images in our heads (Loseke, 2003). Lastly, behavioural claims involve doing something rather than creating a visual image or saying something (Loseke, 2003). Behavioural claims seek to disturb social life, with an aim to influence the audience to look at visual claims, and to listen to verbal claims (Loseke, 2003). For example, a behavioural claim could be protestors staging "death-ins" in shopping malls and in city streets after the fatal shooting of unarmed Michael Brown by a police officer (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). Protestors did this not only in memory of Michael Brown, but also to draw attention to police brutality (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015).

Claims makers can also use "motivational frames" in the construction of the social problem (Loseke, 2003). Motivational frames are used to convince audience members that a condition is violating one or multiple cultural themes, and that audience support is needed to address these violations (Loseke, 2003). There are three particular strategies that are used in order to persuade audience members to support motivational frames. The first is to construct a condition as violating multiple cultural themes. The second strategy is to construct popular worry among audiences by linking claims about conditions together, as well as by constructing new conditions that violate a cultural theme (Loseke, 2003). For example, multiple claims have been developed as violating the cultural theme of family such as, family violence, single parent families, divorce, issues surrounding child support, poverty, and cohabitation outside of marriage. All of these claims directly violate the theme of family, and as more claims are attached to the violation of the theme family, the evaluation and concern about the theme also grows (*ibid*). The third strategy is to construct the problem as symbolic. This strategy includes linking multiple claims together, but the claims themselves are about far more than what they are perceived to be on the surface. For instance, there are multiple constructions which surround the problem of police brutality, however the problem of police brutality can also elicit thoughts about police procedure, race, social class, and police accountability. Thus, the problem of police brutality can reflect concerns about larger issues of both class and race (Loseke, 2003).

Constructing Victims and Villains

To evoke feelings and persuade the audience to support claims, claims makers construct the victims and villains of social problems (Loseke, 2003). For example, consider the "moral panic" (Cohen, 1972) that surrounded "crack babies". A moral crusade, from a legal, medical and political perspective, was started in order to save the 'crack baby' from the 'pregnant addict'

(Litt & McNeil, p.254). This was done because not only does the mother's drug use affect her, but it also was reported to have effects on her baby and community. Therefore, the mothers in the situation are framed as villains who are dangers to their innocent and vulnerable babies, and that these babies must be saved. Constructing the mothers as villains allows the audience to feel more sympathetic towards the child because they are considered the victim, and it also minimizes any claims that these mothers may be considered as social resources for both themselves and their child (Litt & McNeil, 1994).

The ability for claims makers to construct victims often relies upon cultural feeling rules. Cultural feeling rules are "general ideas about how we "think we should feel"" (Loseke & Best, 2003, p.110). It is easier for individuals to feel sympathetic and to view individuals as a victim of a social problem when the victim is viewed as being an individual who belongs to a higher moral category, such as police officers (Loseke, 2003). Individuals who belong to a lower moral category, such as drug dealers, are individuals who are difficult to feel sympathy towards and are often not categorized as a victim (Loseke & Best, 2003). For example, the difference in the construction of victims can be seen in news reports of missing aboriginal women versus missing white women. Often Aboriginal women are given less attention when they are missing or murdered because they are constructed as being blameworthy for what happens to them (Gilchrist, 2010). For instance, these women are often constructed as engaging in high-risk behaviors, such as engaging in drug use and sex for money (McLaughlin, 1991), and are therefore responsible for the violence they experience.

Ultimately, cultural feeling rules and feelings of sympathy have influenced claims makers' strategies when approaching the construction of victims (Loseke, 2003). When constructing or typifying victims, claims makers use the following strategies: constructing the

victims as suffering horribly; constructing potential victims as anyone; constructing victim purity; constructing cultural biases in the sympathy evaluation; and personalizing victims (Loseke, 2003). These strategies allow claims makers to persuade audience members to feel a certain way towards the victims of social problems. These strategies also serve as motivational frames, which encourages the audience to believe that there is a great injustice occurring and that it must be stopped (Loseke, 2003). If the audience feels that an injustice is occurring, they are more likely to support the claims, especially if they feel sympathetic towards the victims (Loseke, 2003).

While the construction of victims is important in the social problems game, the construction of villains is also a significant part of the claims making process. Villains, can be constructed as people (e.g., pedophiles), as well as a social force (e.g., racism, capitalism, etc) (Loseke & Best, 2003). According to cultural feeling rules, villains should evoke feelings of hatred and condemnation from the public and these feelings should be followed by the behavioural expression of punishment (Loseke, 2003). Claims makers engage in several strategic steps when constructing villains, such as constructing the villain as a dangerous outsider, or deflecting blame and condemnation (Loseke, 2003). Claims makers may use the strategy of deflecting blame and condemnation when it is difficult to construct an individual as an evil outsider (Loseke, 2003). In these instances blame is placed onto something else such having a dysfunctional family or coming from a poor neighbourhood (Loseke, 2003). Assigning blame and constructing villains can be risky for claims makers because it opens the opportunity for counter claims and claims-competitions, especially because the cultural feelings rules surrounding hatred are very complex (Loseke, 2003). This is due to audience members' often only experiencing feelings of hatred when they believe that the harm of a social problem is done

for no good reason (Loseke, 2003). It can also be difficult for audience members to assign blame to individuals who did not intend to harm anyone, where the instance is perceived as an accident (Loseke, 2003).

Constructing Solutions

Since social problems are deemed to be a problem that can be fixed or changed, it is suggested that a claims maker's work is not finished until the problem is corrected (Loseke, 2003). In order for claims makers to find solutions to social problems, claims-makers construct "prognostic frames" to suggest what should be done and who has authority / control over the problem (Loseke, 2003). However, since the social problems game has a focus on competition, there can be claims-competitions within these frames (Loseke, 2003). Claims competition is often seen with conflicting cultural themes; competition between diagnostic frames; competition surrounding the consequences of solutions if a social problem is successful; as well as competition surrounding time, money and resources to solve the social problem (Loseke, 2003). For example, a claims competition surrounding police wearing body cameras argues that body cameras can provide the public with more transparency and accountability in incidents of police deviance (Coudert, Butin, & Le Métayer, 2015; Freund, 2015). Supporters of body cameras suggest that body cameras have the potential to prevent police use of excessive force and police deviance (Coudert, Butin, & Le Métayer, 2015; Freund, 2015). While this claim constructs a safer future where police would be held more accountable, critics argue there are many complications surrounding body cameras if police are to be equipped with them (Fruend, 2015). For instance there are concerns around how and where the footage will be stored, issues surrounding the privacy of those recorded and the police officers wearing the camera, whether or not the footage can be used to identify individuals involved in future crimes, or what to do if

individuals with protected identities are recorded (Coudert, Butin, & Le Métayer, 2015; Freund, 2015). Ultimately, claims makers must be very persuasive with audience members in order to show that their solutions to the problem are best and that their diagnostic frames are better than others (Loseke, 2003).

Media and the Social Problems Game

The social problems game is often played out in the media because it has the ability to reach a large audience base. Mass media is beneficial because it is uni-directional - meaning audience members can view other individuals through mediums such as televisions and newspapers. However, audience members are not provided the opportunity to interact with the individuals they see through mass media sources. This provides the mass media more control over the content that is published and aired, as opposed to social media where control of content is extremely limited (Thompson, 2005).

Unlike mass media, social media platforms, like Twitter, offer instant communication to anyone who uses it. Any individual who has access to the Internet has the opportunity to construct a variety of claims – including visual and text – and become a claims-maker on any issue they view as a social problem. For example, a Twitter user can reach a large audience, as it currently has 310 million active users (Twitter, 2016a), without having to go to the mass media to disseminate their claims to an audience or appear as a credible source. There is also less control of the content on social media platforms because of the rate at which content can be exchanged. Once a user makes a post, it can begin circulating on these platforms in a matter of seconds. The images and text posted on these platforms is less filtered than the images and

information that the mass media chooses to share with the public, which can pose risks to credible claims-makers or those who belong to the hierarchy of credibility.

To date, the role social media plays in the social problems game is not well known. However, Maratea (2014, 2015) is one of the few scholars who have explored online claims-making on social media platforms. Social media has the potential to problematize claims-making because platforms such as Twitter and Facebook allow any user to make claims about an event or issue. Since social media can circulate and broadcast information to a large audience quickly, any social media user can challenge authorities who are seen as credible and reliable on any given social problem. Therefore, social media has the capability to not only challenge but also change who is deemed as a credible claims maker on any particular topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To date, numerous scholars have focused on the relationship between police organizations and both the news media (Chermak, 1995; Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Doyle, 2003; Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1989; Manning, 1977; Mawby, 1999; Mawby, 2002), and social media (Crump, 2011; Heverin & Zach, 2010; Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Schneider 2014, 2015a; Trottier, 2012). Outlining the literature on news media and social media will help situate the current research and my research objectives. In what follows, I begin with the definition of police deviance and a review of police deviance literature. I then highlight the literature that discusses the relationship between the police and the media. Next, I review literature on police accountability and the "new visibility" (Thomspon, 2005). I close the chapter with a review of the literature on police use of social media and Twitter.

Police Deviance

Police deviance is defined as "behaviour which violates institutionalized expectations – that is, expectations that are shared and recognized as legitimate within a social system" (Cohen, 1955, p.62). There are a variety of actions and behaviours that are considered to be police deviance. For example, there have been instances of police officers posting personal opinions that do not align with the organizations mandates on social media platforms, officers leaking information online or to the media about organizational operations, as well as officers compromising criminal proceedings because of their online personas (Goldsmith, 2015). There have also been instances where police have been caught on video engaging in what have been deemed to be deviant acts. Some examples include the case of Robert Dziekanski and the Royal

Canadian Mounted Police, and the death of Ian Tomlinson at the London G20 demonstrations

(both cases are discussed in detail below) (Goldsmith, 2010).

Police as the authorized knowers have the ability to construct how their organization is

perceived by the public through the ability to select what information is released to the media

(Chermak, 1995). Policing organizations like to present themselves as effective, credible

organizations that protect the community (Chernak, 1995). However, constructions of police

deviance can disrupt this image and challenge police narratives. As such, the media are important

claims makers in the construction of police deviance (Lawrence, 2000). While the police provide

news outlets and journalists with information to construct these instances, these outlets are not

against constructing stories that place police in a negative light. Media outlets can sometimes

have professional incentives to construct negative stories, and do so by using credible sources

and sometimes non-official sources (Lawrence, 2000). If deviant behaviours are captured on

video, the media also has the capability to disseminate the video en masse, where it can then be

played repeatedly to an audience (Goldsmith, 2010). Widely circulating this content allows

viewers or readers to form thoughts and opinions on the subject matter, leading to widespread

discussion of police deviance (Goldsmith, 2010). Release of information which casts police in an

unfavourable light can subject the organization to scrutiny.

While constructions of police deviance can harm an organizations image, the organization is

also presented with the opportunity to become the 'authorized knowers' by shaping and

developing public discourse to minimize damage (Chan, 1995). In cases of alleged police

brutality, the public may pressure agencies, governments or other individuals they see as

responsible to respond to the incident in order to help repair their image (Goldsmith, 2010).

Releasing statements about instances of police deviance can help the organization take control of

the situation, as it presents an opportunity for the police service to outline actions that they are taking to rectify the problem (Chan, 1995).

Police, News Media, & Information Control

Prior to the proliferation of social media, the news media were used by policing organizations to disseminate information to the public in a way that allowed police to maintain narrative control (Chermak, 1995; Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Doyle, 2003; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989; Mawby, 1999; Mawby, 2002). The news media presented police with a 'new visibility' which ultimately allowed the insides of the organization to be seen more visibly by the public (Thompson, 2005). Actions and behaviours that were once invisible to the public eye were made visible by electronic media that could broadcast events globally, with little or no delay, making police actions on the street much more visible (Thompson, 2005). The new visibility is similar to what Meyrowitz (1985 as cited in Doyle, 2003) and Goffman (1959) note as 'backstage' or 'back region' information or behaviour. Similar to the new visibility exposing information that was once hidden, the 'backstage' refers to information or behaviours that were traditionally hidden by organizations (Goffman, 1959). Back stage information and behaviours also became more visible to the public with the development of both television and the police-media relationship. For instance, an individual used to have to be in the same spatial region to witness instances of police deviance. Now, instances of police deviance can be projected to large audiences globally, exposing these practices that were once hidden from the public at large and making police actions more visible. These 'backstage' behaviours are now exposed to the public at a much higher rate than prior to the development of the television and Internet.

The relationship between the police and the news media is fundamental when it comes to the transparency or visibility of the organization (Mawby, 1999). Therefore, with the 'new visibility' policing organizations use their relationship with the news media to protect their image by controlling what information is shared about their organizations.

For example, police have the ability to control narratives surrounding high profile cases by releasing certain segments of information to the public during investigations (Chermak, 1995; Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1989; Lee & McGovern, 2013). Since the police can control what information is delivered to the public, they are able to present themselves as being an effective organization, which can cast them in a favourable light (Chermak, 1995). This not only makes the information released more easily and readily accessible to the public, but it also becomes less costly in consequences because the police have direct control over what is released (Goldsmith, 2015).

While the news media is often used by the police as a strategy to control information and protect their image, it can also pose risks to the police. The news media have the ability to hold police organizations accountable to the public by policing the police (Ericson, 1995). The news media is a platform that allows for the critical evaluation of police responses to crime, the promotion of alternatives, and can be used as an educational tool which informs the public of the effectiveness of police responses to crime (Chermak, 1995). News media policing the police serves as a management tool that urges compliance and regulation which emphasizes police accountability (Ericson, 1995). However, Chermak & Weiss (2005) highlight that while the media generally frames the police in an ideal manner, the media also does not want to simply be used as a propaganda tool that manipulates public thought. As such, the news media will strain their relationship with the police in order to report on stories that they believe are important

(Chermak, 1995). This can lead to the media reporting stories about organizations that are damaging to police images (Mawby, 1999).

For example, in 1998 the British police were under constant criticism in the media (Mawby, 1999). Stories reported by the media included a mismanaged murder investigation that led to calls of resignation, general stories on police corruption, a story focusing on a leaked National Criminal Information Service (NCIS) document, and numerous accounts of chief constables engaging in improper behaviours (Mawby, 1998). This shows that while the police try to control the information that is given to the public, and try to frame themselves in a favourable light in the media, the media also have the ability to change the narrative and be critical of the organization. The police and the media have two different agendas; the police agenda is to detect and prevent crime, while the media's agenda is to maximize audiences and revenue (Mawby, 2002). Ultimately, two distinct, and at time competing, agendas can lead to conflict between the two groups because the media also has to keep their position of being a 'watchdog' (Mawby, 2002).

Police Accountability and News Media

Policing organizations work to control the internal and external policing activities of their officers (Manning, 1977). In order for the public to perceive that an organization is accountable and operating with procedural regularity, organizations must control the information about their actions (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989). Police organizations often use their relationships with the media in order to disseminate information that shows the organization as credible, accountable, and legitimate (Ericson, 1995). Accountability refers to the ability to provide a credible explanation of events or the ability to be accounted for (Ericson, 1995). However news

media also holds policing organizations to *account ability* (Ericson, 1995). *Account ability* refers

to "the capacity to provide a record of activities that explains them in a credible manner so that

they appear to satisfy the rights and obligations of accountability (Ericson,1995, p.137). In order

to appear as a credible and accountable organization through the media, police strategically

release selected information but also engage in acts of distortion where selected information is

not revealed to the public (Ericson, 1995).

Strategically choosing what information should be released allows for the police to

construct beneficial images of themselves so that the news media benefits their organization

rather than harms it (Ericson, 1995; Chermak, 1995). This allows for the police to appear as a

credible, accountable, and legitimate organization. For instance, some police organizations will

request that the news media report on stories such as police award ceremonies, promotions, and

successful crime fighting investigations (Ericson, 1995; Chermak, 1995). These stories can help

gain public support for police services, and can also assist in the legitimization of police work

(Chermak, 1995). In order to maintain the organizations legitimacy it is necessary that the police

manage what is known and what is asked about the organization (Chermak & Weiss, 2005).

Maintaining legitimacy is important to police organizations because it allows the organization to

remain in a credible position in society, as well as provides the image that the organization is

functioning properly and exceeding the demands and expectations of the community (Chermak

& Weiss, 2005).

Most large policing organizations, such as those in the United Kingdom, Canada,

Australia and United States, have even gone as far as developing roles, such as public

information officers, press offices, or roles for public relations professionals, to communicate

with the public and strategically work with the news media (Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Ericson,

1989; Lee & McGovern, 2011; Mawby, 2002). The individuals who fill these roles often have backgrounds in public relations, journalism, or police advising (Ericson, 1989; Lee & McGovern, 2011), and represent the professionalization of public relations in policing (Lee & McGovern, 2011). While police can sometimes struggle with how they are presented in the media, the introduction of these jobs have helped protect the image of the police by providing organizational control over what information is provided to the media (Chermak, 1995). This is important because police 'image work' (Ericson, 1982) helps protect the organization from potential harm and allows the police to remain the legitimate authority, and authorized knower, within society (Chermak, 1995).

The relationship between the news media and police is not symmetrical. Instead, police have become the gatekeepers of information, and they acknowledge that the media needs them, thus the police use the media to their advantage (Doyle, 2003; Ercison, Baranek, & Chan, 1989; Mawby, 1999). The demand for the information that the police control and have access to is often high, in regards to both the information they release to the public as well as the information that they hold (Goldsmith, 2015). The media relies extensively on the police to provide credible information about crime and police operations (Mawby, 1999). Without an established relationship with the police, the media would have a lack of credible and reliable information concerning these organizations, making it difficult to construct stories on their activities (Mawby, 1999).

Thus, as Ericson (1989) argues, the police are "out to patrol the facts" about their organization, which reproduces "the symbolic order of their organization and occupation" (p.206). By controlling the content that is released to the media, the police are then able to "define reality in terms of images of policing and crime" (Mawby, 1999, p. 267). Further, it is

argued that news reporters and news production rely on police as credible sources of information to "clarify the newsworthiness of an incident" when reporting on crime (Chermak, 1995, p.28). Police, therefore, become "… the experts who can comment about an event immediately after it is discovered. These sources are publicly accepted as credible voices on crime, underscoring the media's authority and protecting their image as an objective conveyor of the important events of the day" (Chibnall, 1977 and Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989 as cited in Chermak, 1995, p.26).

For example, in a notable study conducted by Chermak (1995) it was discovered that police organizations often influence news production and selection by allowing the media access to crimes that are known to them, as well as by offering comments to journalists (Chermak, 1995). Police construct crime stories by framing them based on police criteria, which allows the police to strengthen their position as an institution and to remain the 'authorized knowers' about all things related to policing (Chermak, 1995).

Policing and the 'New Visibility'

The technological development and evolution of various forms of media, such as the television, news media, and Internet, has established new opportunities for police. It has also created situations whereby those in positions of power may find themselves exposed to new dangers because of the consequential nature of the 'new visibility' (Thompson, 2005). The 'new visibility' renders organizations to become more transparent to the public, and reveals information or practices that were once considered invisible, visible (Thompson, 2005). Electronic media has a global reach that allows social media and Internet users to engage in various conversations online, no matter their location. For instance, online platforms provide social media users a space to discuss common issues surrounding policing that are occurring

globally, such as police and diversity. The development of these technologies allows people, who would otherwise be considered removed from a setting, to assess and critique actions of the police (Goldsmith, 2010).

For instance, on April 1, 2009 the G20 demonstration was taking place in London, England. During the demonstration, Ian Tomlinson was video recorded as he got caught in the middle of a G20 related protest. The video recording was shot by a visiting American who gave the recording to *The Guardian* newspaper six days after it was recorded (Goldsmith, 2010). The video recording showed that Ian Tomlinson was struck by a member of the Metropolitan Police Tactical Support Group (TSG) from behind causing him to fall on the ground. Tomlinson died at the scene briefly after the incident from a fatal heart attack. When the video recorded footage was made publicly available on April 7, 2009 by *The Guardian*, the footage was then used by media outlets such as Channel 4, BBC and Skynews (Goldsmith, 2010). The video was also quickly circulated via the Internet, with the video gaining half a million views by April 10, 2009 (Walker and Phillips as cited in Goldsmith, 2010). The footage sparked a number of formal and informal complaints surrounding the policing at the G20 demonstrations, and was seen globally due to the connections of various websites and media outlets (Goldsmith, 2010). Through the advent of social media, police behaviours and actions that were traditionally invisible or hidden have been made visible to a global audience (Thompson, 2005).

Social Media and Twitter

The development of the Internet and social media has put a further strain on police in terms of image maintenance. For example, it is more difficult to control the flow of symbolic content on the Internet, which means it is much more difficult for those in positions of power to control

what is made available and what is circulated (Thompson, 2005). This is something that has been seen with social media, where information flow is more fluid and not unidirectional, which can result in news risks and dangers for policing organizations.

The ability for users to generate and exchange their own content on social media provides the potential for users or organizations to become claims makers in the social problems game. Social media platforms allow for both visual and verbal claims to be made and exchanged by users on particular issues, and also allows for users to present counterclaims. Notably, the large number of users on any given social media website also allows for claims to reach a large audience quickly, which can help popularize any given social problem. Thus, social media websites "provide platforms for interactions between users and these users engage in a variety of interactions to obtain the information they are specifically interested in" (Meijer & Thaens, 2013, p. 344).

One popular social media platform is Twitter, which is a microblogging website (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Tonkin, Pfeiffer, & Tourte, 2012). The Twitter platform allows users to send updates and exchange information through any application or device that has internet accessibility (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Procter et al., 2013). The platform allows any individual or organization to make an account for free, which can attribute to Twitter's popularity among users (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015). Messages on Twitter are known as 'tweets' and are limited to 140 characters (Procter et al., 2013; Heverin & Zach, 2010). Twitter users are also able to exchange photos, links, videos, links to blogs and websites within their tweets, as long as it fits into the 140 character maximum (Heverin & Zach, 2010). Twitter is an open platform as any user can view another users' tweets as long as a user's profile has not been set to private (Procter et al., 2013). This means that users' tweets are public on the platform and can easily be found

through the search option provided by Twitter (Procter et al., 2013). Users also have the ability to choose what accounts they would like to follow on the platform, without always being followed back, thus customizing their Twitter feed (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015).

Twitter also has a "simple but powerful method of connecting tweets to larger themes, specific people, and groups" (Murthy, 2013, p.3). The "hashtag" function of the website allows Twitter to connect individuals and conversations together (Murthy, 2013), and allows users to easily view what other users are saying about a particular topic (Procter et al., 2013). A "hashtag" is when "any word(s) preceded by a hash sign "#" are used in Twitter to note a subject, event, or association" (Murthy, 2013, p.3). Essentially, the hashtag function serves as a type of indexing system on the platform, and it allows tweets to be organized in both a clerical and semiotic sense and enables users to quickly search and receive information (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). In the case of the Michael Brown shooting that occurred in Ferguson, Missouri, Twitter users were using the hashtag #Ferguson to document the events and emerging details about the case (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). By using hashtags, Twitter users could easily follow the case and search for emerging information on the platform (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015).

In a semiotic sense, the use of hashtags on Twitter is similar to the coding systems that anthropologists and other various social scientists use (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). While hashtags allow users to contribute to a certain conversation, they also allow users to frame what their tweets are about (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). In essence, hashtags allow Twitter users to reveal meanings within their messages that may otherwise have been hidden (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). Hashtags also enable various perspectives and topics to be linked together that may not have to do with one another (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). For instance, in the case of the #Ferguson hashtag,

there were tweets that supported Officer Darren Wilson as well as tweets that supported the protestors, and both perspectives were using the hashtag #Ferguson (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015).

Twitter also has two other important functions besides the hashtag function. One function is known as the 'retweet' function, and the other is known as a 'mention' (Procter et al., 2013). The retweet function is a key function on Twitter which allows users to re-post another users tweet so that their followers can also view it (Procter et al., 2013). Retweeting messages is done by either pressing the retweet button that is featured on tweets or by copying the original tweet, placing 'RT' in front of it and then simply tweeting it (Procter et al., 2013). Retweets can allow users to quickly circulate a single tweet with the click of a button, which can aid in the construction of social problems. The mention function is much different than the retweet function. The mention function allows Twitter users to reference other users through tweets (Procter et al., 2013). A Twitter mention is when a user's Twitter name, which is also known as a Twitter handle, follows an '@' symbol in a tweet (Procter et al., 2013). Whenever a twitter user is 'mentioned' by another, the tweet mentioning their Twitter name will subsequently show up in their own Twitter feed (Procter et al., 2013). Twitter mentions are an important function because they allow users to engage in real time conversation by notifying each user when they are mentioned in a tweet.

Social Media and Police Presentational Strategy

In order to appear credible to the public, police engage in various presentational strategies (Manning, 1977). Presentational strategies are the ways that policing organizations present their actions, mission, and mandate to the public (Manning, 1977). There are various presentational strategies that police use that include, but are not limited to, the use of technology, appearing

professional, and using crime statistics (Manning, 1977). Professionalism is an important

presentational strategy because it assists an organization in gaining power and authority

(Manning, 1977). Deeming that police work can only be done by police officers makes the

officers and their work more publicly acceptable (Manning, 1977). In a broad sense,

professionalism also helps distinguish social distance between practitioners and their clientele

and allows practitioners to define their motives and purposes (Manning, 1977). Technology as a

presentational strategy allows police to appear efficient by using it to assist in solving human

problems (Manning, 1977). Police organizations have invested in various kinds of technology

ranging from computer systems to bullet proof vests (Manning, 1977). Social media has

provided another platform for police to engage in presentational strategies.

Social media websites have opened new avenues of communication with the public for

policing organizations that provide a number of benefits, such as establishing and strengthening

community relations and connections (Crump 2011; Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Schneider, 2014).

The use of social media by police encourages two-way communication between the organization

and the public (Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Schneider, 2014). Not only does this allow for

community ties to be strengthened, but it also allows for the police to have a very visible online

presence (Schneider, 2014). In order to assist officers with how to present themselves as

approachable and relatable on social media platforms, some policing organizations have

developed documents and guidelines to aid with public engagement through social media

platforms. For instance, the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) in the UK, have

created documents and guidelines for officers to follow when using social media platforms to

make the experience beneficial for both the community and the organization (Crump, 2011). For

example the *Engage* document created by the NPIA places an emphasis on community

connections (Crump, 2011). The document notes that social media should be used to encourage engagement, accountability, and openness between local police and their community (Crump, 2011). *Engage* also mentions that Twitter should be used to establish and strengthen connections with individuals in the community who are typically not reached through other efforts (Crump, 2011). Overall, it is stressed that Twitter and other social media platforms should be viewed as a means to communicate and engage with the community, making the police more accessible and approachable to the public (Crump, 2011).

Social media also has the ability to "humanize" officers as well as the organization as a whole, and make officers appear more relatable to the public (Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Schneider, 2014). As Schneider (2014) notes it is not unusual for officers of the Toronto Police Service to tweet items that are not related to police work. For instance, multiple officers of this service have previously posted photos of their dogs dressed in Toronto Maple Leafs apparel, with one officer tweeting that his dog is excited for playoffs (Schneider, 2014). While the presentation of these officers on Twitter allows them to appear relatable and open to the general public, it should be noted that the relations between officers and the community on Twitter happen on the terms that are framed by the officers themselves, thus keeping them in control of the situation (Schneider, 2014). While Twitter is used as a presentational tool to further community policing efforts, it also allows for the organization and the individual officers to maintain control of the situation on social media platforms (Schneider, 2014). For example, as discovered in Schneider's (2014) study, there was an instance where a Toronto Police Service officer asked if anyone had any legitimate questions during a #copchat discussion on Twitter, after receiving several tweets which challenged the notion of the police. Another Twitter user responded to the cop's question, and tweeted asking if there were any legitimate cops (Schneider, 2014). The officer replied

stating that there are legitimate cops and many to talk to online, but users have to ask legitimate questions – instead of challenging the police (Schneider, 2014). This shows that police can still maintain control over online situations, while also presenting themselves as relatable to the community (Schneider, 2014).

Another study conducted by Liberman, Koetzle and Sakiyama (2013) explored the types of messages that were being posted by 23 of the largest U.S police departments on Facebook. It was discovered that public relations posts were the second most popular type of post made by the departments, next to crime related posts (Lieberman, Koetzle, & Sakiyama, 2013). The public relations posts consisted of community interest stories that were not related to the mission of the police organizations, as well as messages that highlighted the achievements and success of the departments (Lieberman, Koetzle, & Sakiyama, 2013). Often these posts discussed hiring and promoting officers, reducing crime, the confiscation of drugs and guns from communities, as well as the implementation of new technologies that would aid police effectiveness (Lieberman, Koetzle, & Sakiyama, 2013). These posts allow the police to present themselves as an effective and credible organization while engaging with the community in an online environment.

While the communication between officers and the community is encouraged through social media, humanizing officers and making them more available through these sites can also present problems to an organization that likes to have control over both the public and their own organization (Manning, 1977). The development of social media websites has allowed for civilians to challenge police authority, usually through publicly available evidence, in large numbers at a rapid pace (Schneider, 2015a). Social media platforms allow the actions of the police to be assessed by the public which makes the organization more vulnerable, and their claims of acting in a fair and consistent without corruption more questionable (Goldsmith, 2015).

According to Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2015) social media platforms, such as Twitter, "can help citizens disseminate negative images and/ or stereotypes of police, which may undermine their support for the police" (p.599). Often, social media subjects police agencies to the 'new visibility' which can present unflattering images of the police to the public, as well as harmful images of the individual officers who are involved in particular events (Goldsmith, 2015).

The ability for anyone to film or take pictures of police with their mobile phone, combined with the viral ability that social media platforms provide this content can pose significant issues to police image and police constructed narratives (Goldsmith, 2010). For example, at the Vancouver Airport, on October 13, 2007, the RCMP was involved in an incident with Robert Dziekanksi, which was video recorded by a citizen bystander and later released to the media and uploaded to YouTube and circulated on multiple social media platforms (Luchak, 2013). In this incident, the RCMP was called in to the Vancouver International Airport to deal with a distressed Robert Dziekankski (Goldsmith, 2010; Luchak, 2013). Soon after the police arrived, they were recorded by a Canadian citizen at the airport, tasering Dziekankski and subduing him (Goldsmith, 2010). It was while Dziekankski was subdued that he suffered a heart attack and died at the airport (Goldsmith, 2010). The citizen initially gave the video recording to police, but when it was later returned it was released to the media where it then became accessible on YouTube and other social media platforms (Goldsmith, 2010; Luchak, 2013). Upon the release of the video, the public began to scrutinize the police and their actions (Goldsmith, 2010). The video image led to public outcry for the police to be held accountable for their actions (Goldsmith, 2010). The RCMP attempted to repair their damaged image upon the release of the video by condemning the footage, by stating that the video only provided one

perspective of the incident (Goldsmith, 2010), but the damage to their image had already been done.

Police as the 'Authorized Knowers'

The 'new visibility' that the Internet and social media platforms provides make it much more difficult for the police to control the images that circulate (Thompson, 2005). Social media has the ability for police to continue to be the authorized knowers of a situation, and has also given them the ability to give the "authorized definition" of a situation (Doyle, 2003). According to Doyle (2003) the authorized definition of a situation is the definition which "carries the most force" and "the definition which carries the official stamp of the police" (p.135). According to Fishman (1980) "news workers are predisposed to treat bureaucratic accounts as factual because news personnel participate in upholding a normative order of authorized knowers in society….In particular, a newsworker will recognize an official's claim to knowledge not merely as a claim, but as a credible, competent piece of knowledge" (p.143). However, through the use of social media, police definitions of a situation can be challenged more easily and result in police losing control of situations in the online world.

Social media platforms, therefore, pose risk to policing organizations and individual officers with the potential of harming agency effectiveness and officer careers (Goldsmith, 2015).

As noted by Chermak & Weiss (2005) an important aspect of maintaining legitimacy is having the ability to manage the external environment, as well as being able to manipulate it. Social media, however, poses a significant concern to police legitimacy. This is mainly due to the potential of unfavourable content being circulated (Mazerolle, Antrobus, Bennett & Tyler,

2013). If the public perceives the police as behaving in an unjust manner, they are unlikely to support the organization or their authority, which opens the organization up to public criticism and scrutiny (Mazerolle, Antrobus, Bennett, & Tyler, 2013). It can also be difficult for police organizations to remain legitimate, and control the external environment on social media, because of the rate at which information is exchanged to a very large audience (Schneider, 2015a).

While much of the research concerning media and policing has looked at the police-media relationship, and how it benefits police, less is known about how social media influences narrative constructions about police, as well as how it challenges the notion of police being the 'authorized knowers. Further, little is also known about how narratives of police deviance emerge on social media.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Now that I have presented the theoretical framework and literature that has informed the present study, I will now describe the methods that were used to gather and analyze data. I begin by providing an outline of qualitative media analysis and constructivist grounded theory. I then summarize the two case studies before outlining the processes of data collection and analysis.

The current research was influenced by qualitative media analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013) and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Qualitative media analysis "aims to help researchers understand culture, social discourse, and social change" (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, p.5). This methodology primarily relies on using media documents as sources of data, and enables a deeper understanding of the social discourses that occur around the constructions of police deviance on social media. Qualitative media analysis is beneficial because it allows for multiple documents to be examined, and allows for the emergence of themes and frames from the data during the data analysis process (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Frames are "broad thematic emphases or definitions" that are found within the data (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, p.52). Themes are "recurring typical theses" that are found within the data (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, p.53). Themes and frames are essential in defining and understanding situations because "the study of their origins and how they change over time" assists in providing insight into the way narratives are constructed and emerge (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, p.53).

Constructivist grounded theory is defined as a method that "consists of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves" (Charmaz, 2014, p.1). This research method allows a researcher to create a theory derived from her data (Charmaz, 2014). Elements of grounded theory include memo

writing and coding (Charmaz, 2014). However, constructivist grounded theory allows researchers to acknowledge that social reality is constructed rather than accepting that it is objective (Charmaz, 2014).

Constructivist grounded theory starts with inductive data and employs strategies that allow the researcher to constantly go between her data and analysis (Charmaz, 2014). This method provides the researcher the opportunity to constantly interact with her data and emerging analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Similar to qualitative media analysis, constructivist grounded theory recognizes that "people create documents for specific purposes and they do so within social, economic, historical, cultural and situational contexts" (Charmaz, 2014, p.46).

Case Studies:

In order to understand how narratives of police deviance emerge on social media platforms, as well as how the use of social media problematizes our understanding of police being the "authorized knowers", I chose to analyze two case studies: #myNYPD Twitter campaign and the Walter Scott shooting.

#myNYPD

On April 22, 2014 at 1:55p.m the New York Police Department's official @NYPDnews twitter account tweeted "Do you have a photo w/ a member of the NYPD? Tweet us & tag it #myNYPD. It may be featured on our Facebook" followed by a photo of two New York Police Department (NYPD) officers and a civilian in Times Square (Goodman, 2014). Following the request of the tweet other Twitter users began tweeting and using the hashtag to display photos that they had taken while in New York City with NYPD officers (Goodman, 2014). However, in the hours following the request by @NYPDnews, Twitter users were using the hashtag to

illustrate incidents of police deviance and brutality (Goodman, 2014). The campaign was receiving as many as 10,000 tweets per hour on April 22, 2014. The hashtag was being used so frequently among users that the #myNYPD campaign began trending nationally on Twitter. Twitter users tweeted images of interactions between officers and protestors, officers sleeping in uniform on the subway, and officers on trial (Goodman, 2014). These images left little room for friendly images of the NYPD to come to the forefront of the campaign. In response to the campaign, the NYPD chose to not interact with users online or post images on their Facebook page while the campaign was still live. Instead, in the days following the event the NYPD released an official statement on the campaign and Police Commissioner William Bratton spoke to media outlets about how the NYPD viewed the event as an open dialogue.

Walter Scott Shooting

On April 4, 2015 Walter Scott was pulled over in North Charleston, South Carolina by police officer Michael Slager for an alleged broken tail light (National Post, 2015). Not long after being pulled over, an altercation between Michael Slager and Walter Scott occurred (National Post, 2015). The altercation ended with Walter Scott running away from Michael Slager, and Michael Slager firing eight fatal bullets at Walter Scott (National Post, 2015).   Prior to Walter Scott running away, Michael Slager claimed that Scott did comply to his requests following being pulled over and attempted to grab his stun gun (National Post, 2015).

The altercation between Walter Scott and Michael Slager was caught on video by a citizen, Feidin Santana (National Post, 2015). The video recording showed the initial scuffle between Walter Scott and Michael Slager, and Walter Scott running away as he was shot eight times in the back by constable Slager (National Post, 2015). Walter Scott is shown falling to the

ground after the shots were fired, and Officer Micheal Slager proceeds to walk over to Scott's body and handcuffs him (National Post, 2015). After handcuffing Scott, Slager then makes his way back to the cars where the scuffle broke out, picks an object up off the ground, and then places it next to Scott's body (National Post, 2015). Walter Scott died at the scene from bullet wounds.

The video recording of the incident was not released to the public or media directly after the incident. Instead the recording was passed on by Santana to Scott's family lawyer. During this time, the North Charleston Police Department released official statements about the shooting, without knowledge of the video recording. Three days after the incident, on April 7, 2015, the video was given to *The New York Times* by Walter Scott's family lawyer. *The New York Times* then proceeded to publish the video on their website, and other media outlets used the video to construct reports about the case. The video contained information that contradicted the statements of the incident given by the North Charleston Police Department, which drew national and international attention to the case.

Collecting Data

After selecting my two case studies, I explored potential sources or documents of information (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, p.39). For both the #myNYPD and Walter Scott case studies I collected newspaper articles through LexisNexis by performing initial searches with the following search terms: Walter Scott and Shooting; Walter Scott and South Carolina; #myNYPD; #myNYPD and Twitter; #myNYPD and social media.

The LexisNexis search parameters, as discovered through preliminary searches, for the #myNYPD case study were set between the dates of April 22, 2014 – the date the incident

occurred - and April 28, 2014 – the date news information about the incident subsided. After

conducting preliminary searches, I then became familiar with the news articles, such as

#myNYPD AND social media nightmare. Tweets from Twitter were found using Twitter's

advanced search function, by setting the search date to April 22, 2014 and by searching the

hashtag #myNYPD. Other documents that were included are the top Tweets from Twitter that

used the hashtag #myNYPD on April 22, 2014. Top Tweets are popular Tweets that numerous

Twitter users have engaged with and find useful (Twitter, 2016b). Engaging with Tweets can

include Retweets, replies or likes (previously known as favourites) (Twitter, 2016b). These

Tweets were selected to be displayed as top Tweets through an algorithm that detects tweets that

have become popular among users (Twitter, 2016b). Tweets were thematically chosen as

examples to help illustrate the emerging themes and analysis taken from the #myNYPD

newspaper articles.

Search parameters for the Walter Scott case study were set between April 4, 2015 and

May 3, 2016. Initial search terms included Walter Scott, Walter Scott case, Walter Scott South

Carolina, which yielded hundreds of results, with not all results being relevant to my study. After

becoming familiar with the data from these searches, I searched Walter Scott Shooting, and

Walter Scott and traffic stop which yielded more results that discussed the incident in-depth,

rather than the proceedings following the incident.

Theoretical Sampling

Throughout data collection, I engaged in theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014).

Theoretical sampling is a method that seeks to collect relevant data to enhance and expand the

categories in your emerging theory (Charmaz, 2014).Theoretical sampling differs from other

sampling techniques, such as stratified random sampling, because it allows the researcher to select materials for either theoretical or conceptually relevant reasons based on the emergence of information (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). In order to engage in theoretical sampling, I developed conditional theoretical categories, which I derived from my data (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical sampling allowed me to avoid trapping my analysis by using too many pre-set codes or categories that are traditionally related to strict sampling techniques (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Theoretical sampling seeks to include a large range of relevant messages in a sample (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Data was collected to further develop the categories that constitute my theory, until my categories were saturated and no new information was emerging (Charmaz, 2014).

Items that were excluded from the sample included newspaper articles that were labeled as opinion pieces as well as "daily roundup" or "top 10" articles. "Daily roundup" or "Top 10" articles were articles that included small summaries (1-5 sentences) about popular events or news stories that had occurred the same day or the day previous as to when the article was dated. These articles did not offer any additional insight into the analyses. Opinion pieces were excluded from the sample due to potential bias surrounding either event. My research was focused on the narratives constructed by the police, the media, and Twitter users on Twitter, rather than the opinion that an individual had about the events that transpired.

Coding

Once I collected the newspaper articles from LexisNexis and downloaded them as PDF files, I then engaged in coding. The data in the forms of PDF files were loaded into the computer

program QSR NVivo 11, to assist with the coding process. Coding the data took place in two stages: First, initial thematic coding, and axial coding.

Initial thematic coding allowed me to engage with and define data in the early stages of the research process (Charmaz, 2014). During this process, I read through my data for both case studies. While reading through my data, I identified large themes that had emerged across the data. These themes then became my initial codes or "bucket codes". For example, some of the initial codes I had for the #myNYPD newspaper articles included social media nightmare and use of logic.

After engaging in initial coding and defining the key themes that emerged from the data, I engaged in axial coding. Axial coding "relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding" (Charmaz, 2011, p.147). During initial coding, data became fractured when developing coding categories (Charmaz, 2011). Axial coding sought to understand the relationships among the categories and sub-categories I established (Charmaz, 2011).

During this process, codes that were created during the initial coding process were further refined. Based on the further emergence of themes some codes were broken down into subcodes. Sub-codes allowed me to categorize the data in a more specific manner by creating more detailed codes, while becoming more emerged in the data. For example, 'use of force' was broken down into 'excessive force' and 'unjustified use of force'. While the code 'police procedure' was given the subcodes: following procedure, department issued weapons, and body cameras.

Memo writing

Once all of the data was coded, I engaged in memo writing in order to help make sense of, and draw connections between, the information that was emerging from the data. As noted by Charmaz (2014) writing memos allows the researcher to analyze the data and codes in the early stages of the research process. Writing memos continually throughout the research process allowed me to constantly stay involved in the analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2014). Throughout the research process, I engaged in memo writing when ideas or thoughts surrounding the data emerged. Memos were often written in a jot like form on paper, which were then typed thoroughly into a Word Document. This process allowed for me to note any thoughts, questions, or comparisons that I had found in the data. Memo writing helped me theorize emerging themes and data and draw connections between concepts as well as draw connections to broader concepts (Charmaz, 2014). In order to help visualize how my concepts related to one another through my memo writing, I also created concept maps throughout the research process.

Concept Maps

Concept maps, which are also known as the process of clustering, helped me conceptualize and theorize the emerging data (Charmaz, 2014). They also allowed me to make sense of the connections I was seeing in the data, in a visual manner. To create a concept map I wrote my main topic in the center of a piece of paper and placed it in a square. I then drew spokes out to other smaller concepts and circled them as well. Once I did this, I drew arrows from the concepts in order to make sense of how they relate to one another. A one sided arrow indicates a unidirectional relationship between concepts. For example, in the concept map below police-community engagement is related to the ways in which narratives of police deviance

emerge on social media. A double sided arrow indicates that the concepts have a multidirectional relationship and relate to each other in a variety of ways. In the concept map below, being the authorized knowers is related to police brutality, and instances of police brutality have a relationship with the authorized knowers. The concept below is one of the preliminary concept maps that I created for the #myNYPD case study chapter and how the emerging concepts related to one another.
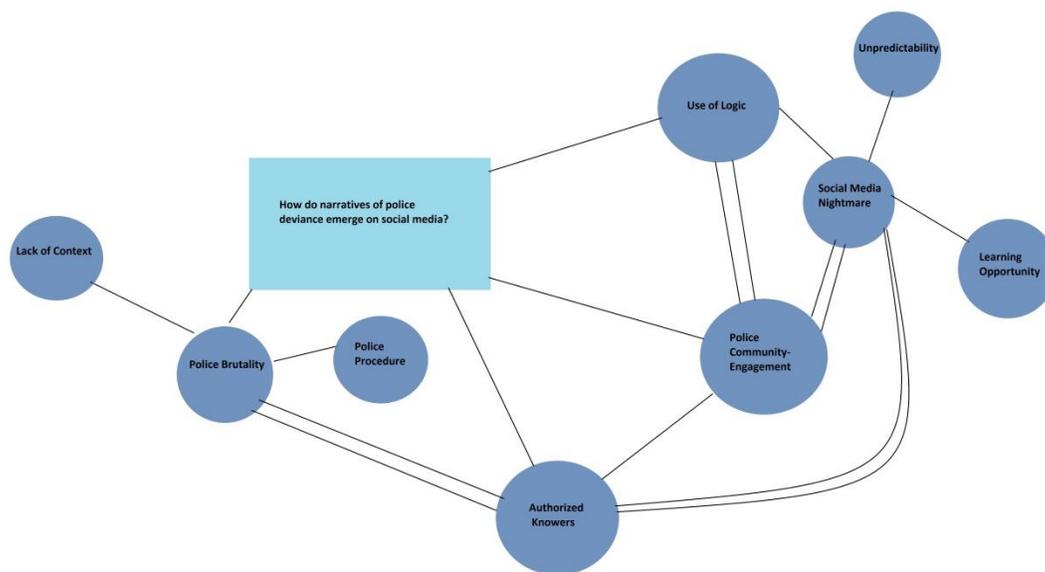
In the proceeding chapter I discuss the key findings that emerged out of my analysis. First, the findings of the #myNYPD case study will be discussed, followed by the findings of the Walter Scott case study.

Chapter Four: #myNYPD Findings

Introduction

As discussed earlier, police are perceived to be the "authorized knowers" of the information and activities that occur inside and outside of their institution (Fishman, 1980). Similar to a position in the hierarchy of credibility, the police as the authorized knowers are approached by journalists to disseminate information about the organization because they are viewed as a credible, reliable, and knowledgeable source (Fishman, 1980). This position allows the police to choose specific information to be released to the public via the media (Goldsmith, 2015). Controlling the flow of information aids the police in protecting their "police image" by presenting information that shows them as an effective organization, as well as limiting the dissemination of negative information about the organization (Chermak, 1995). In order for police organizations to remain credible and effective, they must control the information released about the organization and present themselves in a manner that is only available to certain segments of society (Manning, 1977).

It was much easier for the police to control institutional information when the police-media relationship was largely unidirectional, i.e., from the police to the media to the public (Thompson, 2005). However, with advancements in technology and the development of social media, police have been exposed to a new visibility (Thompson, 2005). As previously discussed, the new visibility allows for practices that were once hidden or rendered invisible by an organization to be seen by the public (Thompson, 2005). With the recent development of smartphones any civilian can catch and record police actions, and upload the content onto social media platforms (Goldsmith, 2015). Thus, social media users have the ability to act as claims-

makers online by constructing and advancing a variety of claims – from verbal to visual. The new visibility enables the public to easily capture police actions on the street through photos or video and upload it instantly to Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube (Goldsmith, 2015). This allows users to interpret police actions, such as the use of force as either justified (legitimate) or unjustified (brutality), and construct claims regarding their actions, in a quick – almost live – environment. Thus, I argue, social media disrupts the positioning of the police in the hierarchy of credibility, and challenges the role of the police as the authorized knowers by allowing anyone with access to the Internet to construct claims.

In this chapter I argue that social media problematizes the social problems game in regards to disrupting the hierarchy of credibility. This chapter analyzes both Top Tweets from the #myNYPD campaign on April 22, 2014, and newspaper articles written about the campaign. First, I outline the political and social context of the #myNYPD campaign. Second, I describe how the #myNYPD campaign was used as a platform for constructing deviance. Third, I show how the social media campaign enabled anyone to become a claims-maker. This is followed by a discussion of how the New York Police Department engaged in counter-claims making in order to regain their position as the authorized knowers.

Political and Social Context

Prior to April 22, 2014, the date that the New York Police Department (NYPD) launched the #myNYPD, there was a range of events that had taken place as well as policies that had been implemented which caused unrest among citizens. For example, members of the public were angry that large banking corporations were not being held accountable for their actions and were instead receiving government bailouts during the housing crash (Gould-Wartofsky, 2015; Scott,

2009). Further, many residents of New York were frustrated by the re-appointment of William

Bratton, a police commissioner accused of using racially biased and controversial tactics, such as

stop and frisk (Goldstein & Goodman, 2014). In order to better understand the events that

surrounded the #myNYPD social media campaign, I will first discuss the global economic crisis

and the events of Occupy Wall Street, the implementation of Stop and Frisk policies by the

NYPD, and the appointment of a new police Commissioner. Each of these events, I argue,

created tensions among the police and the public.

The Global Financial Crisis & Occupy Wall Street

Two-thousand and seven marked the beginning of the global financial crisis when issues

with subprime mortgage loans increased in the United States, followed by a reversal of increases

in home prices (Scott, 2009). Both of these problems have been attributed to the 'housing

bubble', which occurred because of the decades long increases in the prices of homes (Scott,

2009). These issues were also attributed to a lack of intervention by the Federal Reserve to

restrict subprime lending, as well as a lack of correct monetary policy (Scott, 2009). The

'housing bubble' itself is often attributed to two things - the corruption and abuse behind

mortgage lenders where investors and borrowers were misguided, along with the overall greed of

Wall Street which depended on housing sale revenues (Scott, 2009). The housing bubble is also

attributed to the government promotion of home ownership to the middle and lower classes

through government sponsored enterprises (Scott, 2009).

Originally, economists constructed the problem as a subprime crisis, however it was

quickly reframed and constructed as a financial crisis (Scott, 2009). The financial crisis not only

threatened the banking system but also froze credit markets (Scott, 2009). In the fall of 2008,

major banking institutions, such as Lehman Brothers, in the United States began filing for

bankruptcy because of mortgage backed securities and debt that was accumulated during the

housing bubble (Scott, 2009). Some banking institutions received bailouts, in billions of dollars,

in order to remain in operation (Scott, 2009). Institutions that were not able to obtain bailouts

from the Federal Reserve closed, while the consequences of the closures were felt on

international and national levels (Gould-Wartofsky, 2015). The financial crisis had turned into an

economic crisis, which sent most of the world into a deep recession (Scott, 2009).

     The economic crisis caused civilian unrest because large banking corporations were not

being held accountable for their actions and receiving bailouts, while civilian houses were being

foreclosed (Scott, 2009). Stemming from this unrest was the development of the Occupy Wall

Street movement. In the fall of 2011, Occupy Wall Street activists occupied the privately owned

Zuccotti Park in New York City, located not far from Wall Street, for approximately 2 months

(Gould-Wartofsky, 2015). The origins of the movement can be traced back to Vancouver, British

Columbia, Canada where *Adbusters* magazine sent out a call for action. The movement

developed as an opposition "to the politics of austerity, restricted democracy, and the power of

corporate America" (Gould-Wartofsky, p.3). One of the main ideas behind the Occupy

movement was to stand against wealthy powers, which they referred to as the 1%, and place their

support to the other 99%. The Occupy Wall Street movement also relied on social media to raise

awareness about their cause through the use of hashtags (#) such as #ows, #occupywallstreet, and

#TheOther99 (Murthy, 2010). The hashtags also provided encouragement for users to join the

marches and protests that were occurring on the ground in New York City.

     Overall, the Occupy movement was looking for answers to questions that derived from

the economic financial crisis. For instance, "Who was to bear the cost of the financial crisis?

Who was to reap the benefits of the economic recovery?" (Gould-Wartofsky, 2015, p.6). The Occupy activists were aggravated that banks, or those in the 1%, were being bailed out during the economic crisis without consequence, while the 99% were suffering from the consequences. While the Occupy movement spanned many cities, such as Oakland, Atlanta, and Chicago, it was mainly based in New York City (Gould-Wartofsky, 2015).

Stop and Frisk Policy

During the late 2000s, around the same time as the financial crisis, tensions between New Yorkers and the NYPD reached an all-time high due to the use of Stop and Frisk policy (Weisburd, Wooditch, Weisburd, & Yang, 2015). Stop and Frisk policy was originally implemented by the New York Police Department following the War on Drugs, as a method to decrease crime rates in New York City (Weisburd et al., 2015). However, it was during the mid to late 2000s that "Stop and Frisk", also known as Terry Stops[1] or Stop, Question, Frisks, practices reached at an all-time high. This policy allows police officers to stop and search civilians if they have reasonable suspicion or probable cause that an individual is going to commit a crime[2] (Matthews, 2013). Stop and frisks can take place anywhere during anyone's daily routine (Jones-Brown, Gill, & Trone, 2010). In 2011 alone, more than 685,000 stop and frisks were performed by NYPD, while in previous years such as 2003 only 160,851 stop and frisks were recorded by police (Weisburd et al., 2015). Research on stop and frisks have found that they most often occur in neighbourhoods with high crime rates and target individuals who belong to minority populations (Jones-Brown, Gill, & Trone, 2010; Weisburd et al,. 2015). After

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[1] In 1968, in the United States Supreme Court case *Terry v. Ohio* the court ruled that police officers are allowed to stop and search an individual if there is reasonable belief that they are going to commit a crime. Officers no longer had to have probable cause in order to search an individual and interfere with their liberty (Jones-Brown, Gill, & Trone, 2010).
[2] Reasonable suspicion is the belief that an individual is about to commit or has committed a crime, while probable cause requires a higher level of proof to stop and detain an individual (Jones-Brown, Gill, & Trone, 2010).

stop and frisks peaked at an all-time high, changes in politics and a few successful court

challenges, lead to the policy being reversed, and a 72% decrease in their use (Weisburd et al.,

2015).

A New NYPD Police Commissioner

In early 2014, when police-public relations were strained, William Bratton was appointed

as police commissioner (Goldstein & Goodman, 2014). This was Bratton's second appointment

as police commissioner after serving in this position in the 1990s (Wilson & Kelling, 2006).

Bratton was known for implementing controversial tactics, such as broken windows policing[3],

and was a supporter of the controversial Stop and Frisk policy as a means to keep crime rates

down (Goldstein & Goodman, 2014). Bratton also incorporated the use of social media,

specifically Twitter, into the NYPD as a means of police-community engagement (Goldstein &

Goodman, 2014). For example, he encouraged precinct commanders to engage with the public

on Twitter in order to help build a stronger relationship with the community through positive

stories (Goodman, 2014).

II. Police Campaign which gave Claims Making Power to Everyone

NYPD's organizational use of social media, and specifically Twitter, led to the

development of the #myNYPD hashtag where they encouraged social media users to engage

with the police department. Specifically they asked,

> "Do you have a photo w/ a member of the NYPD? Tweet us & tag it #myNYPD. It may be
> featured on our Facebook." (Tracy, O'Connor, Gregorian, & Morales, 2014).

> This tweet opened the dialogue on Twitter between the police and the Twitter community,

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[3] Broken Windows theory suggests that if a broken window goes unrepaired, it is a sign that no one cares, so more windows will be broken (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). Broken windows act as a metaphor for disorder in neighbourhoods. If disorder in neighbourhoods, such as vandalism, is ignored and not addressed the neighbourhood can be further subjected to other types of crime and disorder (Wilson & Kelling, 1982).

allowing Twitter users to then use the campaign as a tool to construct claims about the NYPD and policing in general. It was not long after this tweet was sent out that Twitter users took the hashtag and started using it as a means to spread awareness of allegations of police brutality that have occurred at the hands of the NYPD.

An analysis of tweets identifies that Twitter users were using the social media platform to construct a variety of claims against the NYPD. The following section presents an analysis of tweets and newspaper articles to understand how social media allowed anyone to become a claims-maker. It also illustrates how the ability for anyone to become a claims-maker on social media disrupts the NYPD's position as authorized knowers, by challenging their authority.

Constructing police deviance: protests, race and target enforcement

An analysis of the tweets provides insight into public understandings and perceptions of appropriate and inappropriate police practices. Specifically, police deviance was constructed by claims of excessive force and racial bias.

Twitter accounts using Twitter handles related to Occupy Wall Street, such as @OccupyWallStreetNYC, used the campaign to discuss the conditions and treatment of protestors by the NYPD at the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests in New York City. Many of the tweets involved a combination of verbal and visual claims-making activities. The following tweets, for example, demonstrate the use of social media as a medium for constructing police deviance:

> Free massages from the #NYPD," read one of the Occupy Wall Street tweets, which showed a young man being smashed into the trunk of a car by three cops in riot gear (Tracy, O'Connor, Gregorian, & Morales, 2014).

> "Here the #NYPD engages with its community members, changing hearts and minds one

baton at a time," taunted @OccupyWallStreetNYC, showing a shot of an officer about to strike a protester with his service baton" (Schram & Harshbarger, 2014).

Other Twitter users tagged various photos of police using force that worked to construct the acts as examples of police deviance and excessive use of force. For example:

The quotes and images above show how Twitter users can construct a variety of claims with ease

on social media platforms. The images chosen by Twitter users construct the police as behaving

aggressively and using excessive force towards the individuals in the photos. In the photos, the

NYPD are depicted pulling hair, pushing, and carrying individuals, in a manner that is harming the individuals subjected to the behaviours. In many instances, the photos tweeted by Twitter users have multiple officers interacting with a single, unarmed individual engaging in what appears to be framed as excessive force. For example, the photo tweeted by @matbhh has two officers interacting with a single individual. The individuals in the photos, whom the police are interacting with, are also depicted as being in distress – especially in @Floridathief and @clairerushh's photos where the women appear to be crying out for help. In the image tweeted by @Floridathief not only is the woman screaming for help, but her shirt is also pulled up so her chest is exposed. Images, such as those above, serve as visual claims to evoke emotion in audience members and construct police behaviours as a social problem.

The photos are also accompanied by sarcastic text posts that help illustrate the strained police-community relationship. Twitter user, @matbhh, even references Mayberry which is the fictional town in the Andy Griffith Show where small town cops have a close relationship with the community they serve. This could be a sarcastic reference to the change in policing tactics that has occurred over the past few decades – moving from strong community relations towards militarization - and the construction of the police in the Twitter images as unhelpful community members. Twitter user @clairerushh blatantly states "Don't trust the cops" also illustrating how community members feel about the organization.

Individuals no longer have to be highly placed in the hierarchy of credibility or be perceived as an 'authorized knower' in order to make a claim that reaches a large audience. The #myNYPD hashtag allowed Twitter users to construct claims concerning police deviance and the use of excessive force on civilians through the use of visual and text claims. The construction and request of participation in the campaign by the NYPD, meant that the NYPD would be watching

the campaign for new posts providing Twitter users with a platform to voice their opinions and construct claims that challenged the NYPD's original request. With the content on these platforms being difficult to control, any unfavourable content can challenge the authority of individuals or organizations. This unfavourable content thus disrupts the hierarchy of credibility, but more importantly challenges the position of the police as the "authorized knowers."

Social media provides a platform for claims-makers to use visual images to construct claims. Pictures take police actions out of context and allow the claims-maker, and also the audience, to interpret the actions. The images Twitter users posted often depicted the public as victims, while presenting the police as police as "a bunch of thugs haphazardly wielding force." (New York Daily News, 2014).

The ability for users to combine a variety of claims, such as text or visual claims, on social media can further persuade audience members to support the cause and engage in the dialogue. As noted by Loseke (2003) visual claims are powerful because of the images that they create in one's head. Claims using both verbal and visual claims have the potential to evoke feelings of worry or mistrust from audience members which can help Twitter users gain support for their claims (Loseke, 2003).

Lack of Knowledge and Social Media Unpredictability

Visual and verbal claims were used to construct various claims about the police. One way users used these claims was to construct the NYPD as having a lack of knowledge in regards to how social media works, thus depicting the NYPD as incompetent. Twitter users and news articles constructed the NYPD as lacking the competence to construct a successful social media campaign. Within hours of the original tweet by the @myNYPDnews account, Twitter users

flipped the "community friendly" narrative initiated by the police. The change in the narrative

was constructed as a hashtag hijacking and social media nightmare.

> "The New York Police Department has discovered the perils of trying to engage with Twitter to boost its own image, after a campaign to get the public sharing pictures of "#myNYPD" prompted thousands to share images of apparent police brutality." (UK Independent, 2014).

> "If the NYPD's community affairs wizards expected a trickle of warm and fuzzy photos on their Twitter feed this week when they invited New Yorkers to tweet out their favorite cop pics -- they guessed wrong.
> Amazingly wrong" (amNewYork, 2014).

> "Yet just one hour after the initial post the mood changed, and what followed was a torrent of anger and sarcasm about how "helpful" the NYPD can be" (The New Zealand Herald, 2014).

The quotes above illustrate the unpredictability of social media and identify the

importance of understanding the audience that you are communicating with online. As one news

article explains:

> A law-enforcement source said the department hadn't thought it through. "Good intentions by the NYPD, but . . . who uses Twitter?" the source said. "The younger generation who have had bad interactions with the Police -Department" (Schram & Harshbarger, 2014).

 Various claims-makers, such as academics, police personnel, and even Twitter users, stated that

the NYPD should have put more thought into the campaign, as well as the individuals they were

engaging with, before opening an interactional dialogue on Twitter.

> Anthony Rotolo, a professor of digital communications at Syracuse University, suggested another appropriate response could have been #SMH - shake my head."A lot of time the eagerness to embrace social media tools overshadows our common sense," Rololo said. "In other types of media, we would not so quickly jump to something like this without doing our groundwork first."" (The Toronto Star, 2014).

> Others have been more blunt. "I would call this a rookie move," said Scott Galloway, a professor of marketing at New York University. "Doing it on Twitter is no different as if

they'd changed their uniforms to bull's-eyes." (Goodman, 2014).

A professor from Rutgers University also highlights the importance of the thought process which must go into an online campaign, in reference to the #myNYPD incident, and the implications that can occur to a poorly constructed campaign.

> "This is just part of a long line of Twitter fails," says Aram Sinnreich, a social media expert at Rutgers University School of Communication and Information in New Brunswick, N.J. "These continue to happen when organizations try to use a social network for their public relations efforts without putting much effort into it….The funny thing about it is that, whoever is advising, these organizations never seem to learn," says Professor Sinnreich. "What's happened over and over again is that these inorganic, inauthentic efforts to create viral social memes in the form of hashtags have backfired." "But then they have been used by the broader population to speak truth to power," he says. (Bruinius, 2014).

The quote above highlights the importance behind understanding both how social media works

and understanding the audience that is on social media. Without understanding these aspects it is

difficult to construct a campaign that will be successful, and not be 'hashtag hijacked' by Twitter

users. The lack of knowledge behind the #myNYPD campaign combined with the

unpredictability of social media provided Twitter users with the opportunity to take advantage of

the campaign, change the narrative, and use the hashtag to tag photos that depicted police

deviance. It is also important to take into consideration the political, economic, and social

contexts in which this campaign took place. The economic crisis and NYPD stop and frisk policy

had generated general tensions between the public and the justice system, and the public and the

police. Tensions between the police and the public combined with the inability of police to

tightly control the #myNYPD campaign, created the perfect online environment for Twitter users

to voice their opinions in an uncensored space.

Viral Attention

The #myNYPD campaign is also important because it went "viral" and gained international

and national attention. Characteristics of *viralness* include "stories and videos that [quickly] gain

traction in social media" (Broxton, Interian, Vayer & Wattenhofer, 2013, p.242). On April 22,

2014 the campaign gained trending spots on Twitter nationally and worldwide.

> "But after their friendly PR ping, the Twitterverse exploded with responses, and by early Wednesday, more than 70,000 wags weighed in with a torrent of sarcasm and anger, making #myNYPD the top-trending hashtag on Twitter, replacing #HappyEarthDay." (Bruinius, 2014).

> "By the end of the day, the #myNYPD hashtag had countless images of cops struggling with people - and it trended up to No. 2 in America on the Web." (Schram & Harshbarger, 2014).

> "For a time on Tuesday, that hashtag, developed by the department's social media team, rose to the top 10 shared by Twitter users, not only in New York but around the world." (Goodman, 2014).

The quotes above help illustrate the popularity that the campaign gained within 24 hours of

the original tweet from the @NYPDnews account. It is important to note that the campaign

gained a trending spot on Twitter because this indicates that the #myNYPD hashtag was being

used frequently by Twitter users. A trending spot also indicates that the campaign was one of the

most tweeted about conversations on the platform at that point in time.

The viral attention gained by the campaign means that the constructed narratives surrounding

police deviance were reaching a worldwide audience. The popularity of the #myNYPD hashtag

even influenced other similar national and international hashtags, as seen below.

> "And now the hashtag has spread to other big city departments. On Wednesday, copycat tags like #myLAPD and #myCPD have begun to display pictures of brutal scenes of police aggressiveness in Chicago and LA as well." (Bruinius, 2014).

> "By Wednesday, the public relations situation in New York City had sparked imitators from Los Angeles (#myLAPD) to Mexico (#MiPolicíaMexicana) and over the ocean to Greece (#myELAS), Germany (#DankePolizei) and France (#maPolice)." (Goodman, 2014).

These quotes show the power that claims can have on a social media platform and how

quickly claims and content can be circulated. While the #myNYPD campaign was a local police

initiative, it had global reach that sparked discussion in Mexico, Germany, and France, as well as other North American cities. Not only does this show the success of the claims constructed by Twitter users, but it also illustrates the scale of the live environment that the NYPD had to work with while engaging in counter claims-making activities.

III. Counter-Claimsmaking and Police as Authorized Knowers

Much of the claims-making on #myNYPD constructed police to be the villains in the social problems game. In response, NYPD personnel engaged in counter claims-making in order to help protect their image as well as their position as authorized knowers. In what follows, I will discuss how the NYPD engaged in counterclaims making – (such as going silent, framing the event as an open dialogue, and discussing the lack of context in the photos) as a way to regain their position as the authorized knowers.

Going Silent and Fostering Open-Dialogue

Social media campaigns create a unique environment where counterclaims have to be constructed and presented on a live platform. Since the #myNYPD campaign was receiving upwards of 10,000 tweets an hour after social media users had presented their own narrative challenging the original @NYPDnews account request, the NYPD then had to make quick decisions on how they would engage in counterclaims work in order to regain control of an out of control campaign.

The NYPD engaged with social media in various ways during and after the campaign narrative changed. For instance, the @NYPDnews account responded live to the claims that were being made by only responding to tweets and photos that followed their original request.

"The request actually received a number of positive replies, with people posting images of themselves arm-in-arm with smiling, helpful police officers. To the first of these, the

force even responded personally, saying: "Thanks for the photo! Keep them coming..." (Withnall, 2014).

However, once the campaign was receiving a large number of tweets per hour, police officials stopped responding from the @NYPDnews account to the various tweets they were receiving, whether they were good or bad.

In order for the New York Police Department to remain the authorized knowers of the #myNYPD campaign, the department worked to reframe the situation. Numerous newspaper articles, such as those from *The New Zealand Herald*, *the Daily News*, *the Guardian* and *The New York Times*, cited police personnel attempting to reframe the situation as an "uncensored open dialogue" and that social media is key in providing this. Reframing the campaign as an "uncensored open dialogue" allowed the police to claim that the campaign was not a failure. Instead, the police reframed the situation as one that generated community conversation - even if it was not the conversation they intended on generating.

The NYPD released this short statement following the aftermath of the online campaign:

"The NYPD is creating new ways to communicate effectively with the community," Kim Royster, an NYPD spokeswoman told the New York Daily News. "Twitter provides an open forum for an uncensored exchange and this is an open dialogue good for our city." (Tran, 2014).

The quote above illustrates how the NYPD reframed the situation as one that facilitated open and uncensored conversations between police and community members that are good for the city. In this way, NYPD use the Twitter initiative as an illustration of "community engagement". The uncensored discussion facilitated on Twitter becomes reframed as an approach to transparency. The Twitter initiative therefore is framed as facilitating an open dialogue for the purposes of establishing and repairing relationships with members of the community. Interestingly, these

organizational statements were often located at the end of news and media articles. The location

of these statements, at the end of the media articles, suggests that the NYPD had the final closing

statement on the issue while reasserting their position as the authorized knowers.

Distancing Through Claims-making:

While the NYPD was able to engage in live counterclaims work on social media in order

to reframe the situation in a more favourable light, the NYPD also opted to discuss the campaign

with the media once it ended. William Bratton, the NYPD commissioner, discussed the situation

with news media in the days following the social media nightmare. The following quotes are

what Bratton said to media when asked about the situation:

> ""Old news" is how Commissioner William J. Bratton described the photos on
> Wednesday, dismissing the Twitter backlash as a "brouha." He said the photos were, for
> the most part, scenes of officers doing their jobs.
>
> "The reality of policing is that oftentimes our activities are lawful, but they look awful,"
> Mr. Bratton said, in a comment that appeared to anticipate the worldwide sharing of
> similar images of police behavior."(Goodman, 2014).

These quotes help illustrate how police personnel engaged in counter claims-making off of social

media platforms. Bratton reframed the photos as illustrations of police procedure and police

"doing their jobs". By dismissing the photos as 'old news', the department distances themselves

from discussions of 'deviance'.

Another way in which police distanced themselves from claims of police deviance, was by

focusing on the lack of context behind the photos and tweets that went viral using the #myNYPD

hashtag. Newspaper articles and outlets often published the same two or three tweets referencing

police deviance from the #myNYPD incident without discussing the photos or incidents in depth.

For example, an incident involving an 84 year old man jaywalking on the Upper West Side, as

well as an incident where a young girl was getting her hair pulled, were cited by a majority of

news sources:

> "Images and tweets of arrests of demonstrators went viral, including an officer pulling the hair of a handcuffed young woman and another of the bloodied face of an 84-year-old stopped for jaywalking." (Petoria News, 2014).

> Images and tweets of many arrests of demonstrators went viral, including such presumed lowlights #124 as an officer pulling the hair of a handcuffed young black woman and another of the bloodied face of an 84-year-old who had been stopped for jaywalking. (The Nation, 2014).

While numerous papers cited these incidents, other papers challenged these claims of police

brutality and deviance by questioning the context behind the posts and the authenticity of them.

The following quotes illustrate the use of context of counter claims-making:

> "It was hard at times on Wednesday to sort out which images of officers confronting protesters came from which cities, underscoring the global uniformity in police tactics that have drawn criticism." (Goodman, 2014).

> "These photos had no context, of course, and crowdsourcing like this is never the more fair and accurate way to gather." (Bruinius, 2014).

Even NYPD Police Commissioner William Bratton claimed that the photos were lacking detail

as to what was happening in each situation:

> "The top cop said a lot of the photos that claimed to show police brutality were completely misleading." (DeFalco & Fredricks, 2014).

By engaging in counter claims-making by identifying the lack of context, police distance

themselves from claims of deviant behaviours while also reasserting their position of knowing

the details that go on inside and outside of their organization. Stating that the photos are

misleading or lack context, provided an opportunity for the police to reframe the situation in a

way that is less damaging to police image. It also provides them with the opportunity to construct

counterclaims after the campaign had ended.

A Social Media Nightmare as a Learning Opportunity

The NYPD also engaged in counter claims-making work by reframing the situation as a learning opportunity. As mentioned above, academics, police personnel, and social media users claimed that there was a lack of knowledge in the development of the #myNYPD campaign. The putative social problem was constructed as an illustration of organizational incompetence. Instead of viewing the social media campaign as an '#epicfail' (Tracy, O'Connor, Gregorian & Morales, 2014) the NYPD decided to reframe the initiative as an opportunity for organizational learning, as well as an opportunity for uncensored community engagement.

> "For its part, the NYPD refused to regard the operation as a failure. A spokeswoman said that the "open dialogue" that had followed its request for pictures had been "good for our city"." (Pavia, 2014).

> "And Tuesday's #MyNYPD viral explosion? Whatever the department's original purpose, the brass are now calling the public flame fest healthy." (amNewYork, 2014).

> "It also reflects a broad trend in law enforcement, said Nancy Kolb, who tracks social media for the International Association of Chiefs of Police. She said the response was not a problem but "a learning lesson."" (Goodman, 2014).

Claiming that the #myNYPD campaign is a learning opportunity allowed the police to construct the initiative as an exercise of accountability and community building. William Bratton, for example, welcomed the extra attention that the campaign brought the department (Goodman, 2014).

Conclusion

In the social problems game anyone can be a claims-maker, but generally those in positions of authority, such as police, politicians, academics or social movement activists are those who have the power and audience to construct convincing claims (Loseke & Best, 2003). Social media changes this dynamic of the social problems game because it allows anyone with

access to the Internet to construct claims. Social media further complicates our understanding of the hierarchy of credibility and the police as the authorized knowers. Yet an analysis of the NYPD's social media campaign illustrates how the police do not lose all of their authority and can engage in methods both live online and after an incident to reframe the social problem. For example, the police used the tactics such as 'going silent' and 'distancing' to reframe the claims and to reclaim their position as the authorized knowers.

Chapter 5: Walter Scott Findings

Introduction

The advancement of mobile phones and the ability to capture video and image can pose new challenges for the police as the authorized knowers (Goldsmith, 2010). This is due in part, to the increase in the "new visibility" and the fact that mobile phones can upload user-generated content directly onto social media platforms (Thompson, 2005; Goldsmith, 2010). User-generated materials can be problematic to police departments when users use the content to construct police as using excessive force against the individuals that they engage with. Information or images that are perceived as unfavourable by the public can be especially damaging to police image and their organizational reputation. As previously discussed, the police like to maintain control over the information that is circulated about the organization, in order to appear efficient and effective to the public (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989). However, when the police are exposed as engaging in activities that are perceived to be deviant, the public loses trust that they are operating in a beneficial and efficient manner (Mazerolle, Antrobus, Bennett & Tyler, 2013)**.**

User-generated content has the ability to disrupt the social problems game and the role of claims-makers. Media outlets can base their news stories off of user-generated content and social media posts. This allows journalists to sometimes bypass traditional claims-makers, like the police, because there is content that is easily accessible on the Internet. Anyone who is capable of generating content, such as videos or photos, now has the capability to serve as a claims-maker. Visual claims – such as video or images – have a great capacity to persuade because they can evoke more emotion which garners greater support (Loseke, 2003). If credible news outlets,

such as *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, report on this content there is the potential

for it to set the agenda on a particular social problem (Chomsky, 1992). Ultimately, user-

generated content and social media content have the ability to change and challenge narratives

constructed by claims-makers.

In this chapter, I begin by defining the concept 'agenda setting'. I then provide a

contextual backdrop by discussing previous police altercations with minority communities in the

United States. Next, I describe how the North Charleston police acted as the authorized knowers

and constructed the narrative of the shooting of Walter Scott. I then outline how the online

publication of the video by *The New York Times* challenged the police and their 'authorized

definitions of the situation'. I conclude by discussing how the police department and R. Keith

Summey, mayor of North Charleston, South Carolina engaged in counter claims-making

activities to reframe the situation and re-gain their position as the authorized knowers.

The New York Times and Agenda Setting Media

The New York Times is argued to be one of the most important newspapers in the United

States, and the world (Chomsky, 1992). It is considered an elite version of media that plays an

important role in agenda-setting (Chomsky, 1992). The elite media, which also consists of *The

Washington Post* and major television channels, set the general framework of stories which local

media then adapt to (Chomsky, 1992). Elite media outlets play an integral role in shaping

individual's perceptions (Chomsky, 1992). These media outlets also play a crucial in deciding

how stories and events are constructed (Chomsky, 1992). Agenda setting media are viewed as

credible sources which produce legitimate content. *The New York Times* and other elite media

are able to set agendas in a variety of ways. For example, agenda setting is done by framing,

filtering information, and selecting various topics to report on (Chomsky, 1992).

Race and Fatal Police Shootings in the United States

The Walter Scott shooting occurred on April 4, 2015 during a time where tensions between police and marginalized racial communities were at an all-time high. Prior to the shooting of Walter Scott, several other fatal altercations, involving police and African American community members occurred. These fatal encounters resulted in the deaths of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and Tamir Rice and fuelled a national debate about race and police violence (Calvert & Bauerlein, 2015). The Garner video was "the first in a wave of recordings of African-Americans in violent confrontations with white police officers to command national attention" (Sanburn, 2015).

On July 17, 2014, Eric Garner was arrested by the NYPD for selling untaxed cigarettes on Staten Island (Baker, Goodman , & Mueller, 2015). During the arrest, NYPD officer Daniel Pantaleo placed Garner in a chokehold and while he pleaded that he could not breathe, the police ignored his medical distress and he later died (Baker et al., 2015). The original police report stated that Garner had not had hands placed around his neck by police (Baker et al., 2015). However, a citizen recorded video from a bystander clearly showed that Garner had been placed in a chokehold by an officer, which along with chest compression used during the arrest was later ruled by the medical examiner to cause his death (Baker et al., 2015). When it was discovered that one of the officers used a chokehold – a technique, which is banned by the NYPD – the police were viewed as deviant and corrupt by some members of the public (Baker et al., 2015).

Following the death of Eric Garner, on August 9th, 2014 at 12:03pm Michael Brown was shot and killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). Following the incident, members from the community came together to demand an explanation as to why

Michael Brown was killed in a city street (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). It was reported that during the altercation, Michael Brown was holding his hands in the air asking the officer not to shoot (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). In the weeks following the case there were protests which often involved confrontations with local police (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). However, unlike the Eric Garner case, this incident was not caught on video (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015).

Following Michael Brown's death there was a court case involving Darren Wilson, the officer who shot Michael Brown. On November 24, 2014 a grand jury ruled that it would not indict Darren Wilson for the shooting of Michael Brown (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). This decision further strained police-community relations in Ferguson, and in the days following the ruling, protestors took to the streets to denounce police brutality (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). In the same week that the grand jury ruling was released in the case against Darren Wilson, another African American, Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy, was shot and killed in Cleveland, Ohio.

In November of 2014, Cleveland police officers responded to a 911 call in a park, where it was reported that there was an individual pointing a pistol at people in the park (Izadi & Holley, 2014). The individual who called 911 stated that the gun was probably fake and the individual was a boy, but people in the park were scared (Izadi & Holley, 2014). When the police arrived at the park, they saw Tamir Rice carrying a BB gun that was said to resemble a semi-automatic handgun (Izadi & Holley, 2014). The police pulled the cruiser right up to the gazebo Tamir was sitting in when they found him. Tamir was ordered to show his hands, and then the officer exited the police cruiser (Izadi & Holley, 2014). Within two seconds of exiting the cruiser, the officer shot Tamir, who later succumbed to his injuries (Izadi & Holley, 2014). The information about the gun likely being fake was not passed on to the officers (Izadi & Holley, 2014). The incident was recorded by a surveillance camera on a recreational center across from

the park (Izadi & Holley, 2014).The video recording of this incident initially was not available, but after days of protesting and at the request of Tamir's family, the video was released (Izadi & Holley, 2014).

The cases profiled above strained the relationships between minority communities and police, creating a mistrust and fear of officers and the potential outcomes of interacting with them. In each case there was an internal and federal investigation and court case, however none of the officers in these cases were charged. These cases raised concerns and questions surrounding police procedure, police accountability, police relations with minority communities, and transparency. For the purposes of this thesis, the Walter Scott case was chosen because of the notable narrative change after the video of the shooting was published, and the repercussions faced by officer Slager - which had not been seen in previous cases.

Findings

Walter Scott was pulled over by Officer Michael Slager for an alleged broken tail light (National Post, 2015). Not long after being pulled over, an alleged altercation took place between officer Slager and Walter Scott, which resulted in an unarmed Walter Scott running from the scene and Michael Slager firing eight shots at Scott's back as he ran (National Post, 2015). Walter Scott died at the scene after being fatally hit by the gun fire (National Post, 2015). The incident was caught on video by a Feidin Santana who was passing the incident as it unfolded (National Post, 2015). In the days following the incident, Feidin Santana provided the video to Walter Scott's family lawyer, who then passed it on to *The New York Times* (National Post, 2015). Prior to the publication of the video, the North Charleston Police Department released a statement on the incident, which was challenged when the video was made public (National Post, 2015).

I. Police and the Definition of the Situation

Prior to the release of the video, the police were able to define the situation on their terms, with the information from the officers who were at the scene. Newspapers relied on accounts provided by officer Slager's version of the events prior to the video being released. Officer Slager, his lawyer (at the time), and the North Charleston Police Department constructed the incident as a "traffic stop gone wrong", where officer Slager feared for his life.

> Police in a matter of hours declared the occurrence at the corner of Remount and Craig roads a traffic stop gone wrong, alleging the dead man fought with an officer over his Taser before deadly force was employed. (Hooton, 2015).

> A statement released by North Charleston police spokesman Spencer Pryor said a man ran on foot from the traffic stop and an officer deployed his department-issued Taser in an attempt to stop him. That did not work, police said, and an altercation ensued as the men struggled over the device. Police allege that during the struggle the man gained control of the Taser and attempted to use it against the officer. The officer then resorted to his service weapon and shot him, police alleged. (Hooton, 2015).

> Police initially released a statement that promised a full investigation but relied largely on the officer's description of the confrontation, which began with a traffic stop Saturday as Slager pulled Scott over for a faulty brake light. (Holpuch & Laughland, 2015).

These thematic quotes illustrate the claims and statements that police initially made about the incident prior to the video emerging on *The New York Times* website. The police framed the incident as a "traffic stop gone wrong". According to the analysis of various newspaper articles, the only individuals who knew of the events that occurred were the police and Feidin Santana, the individual who filmed the event on his phone. The police were able to control the content of the information being shared and construct and define the terms of the situation prior to the release of the video.

II. *Video Emergence and the Construction of a Social Problem*

The news media played a significant role in the counter-claims construction of the Walter Scott case. On April 7, 2015 Walter Scott's family lawyer provided the video recording of the incident to *The New York Times*. *The New York Times* then published the user-generated video on their website. The video was spotlighted in national news media and quickly went viral. The events recorded in the video were drastically different than the narrative and claims constructed by the North Charleston Police Department. The news media, specifically *The New York Times*, played a key role in the emergence and circulation of the video, which became central in the social problems game. *The New York Times* set the agenda of the counter claims following the Walter Scott shooting for other news outlets, as they were the first to publish the video that contradicted the official police narrative of the shooting. The publication of the video allowed other news outlets to comment and construct stories on the events portrayed in the video. The video provided the opportunity for the media outlets to challenge the police and their position as the authorized knowers, by constructing counter claims to their original narrative.

The video recording of the incident between Walter Scott and Officer Slager depicted actions and behaviours which challenged the police department's position as the authorized knowers of the event. The information released by the police department and the details in the video recording did not align with one another. Newspapers such as the *Daily News* and the *Irish Mirror* noted the differences in the original claims made by the police department and the claims made by the media after the video was released.

> The footage, filmed by an anonymous bystander, shows the end of the confrontation between the two on Saturday after Scott, who had a warrant out for his arrest, ran from a traffic stop. It was the first piece of evidence that could contradict a statement that Slager released to the public through his attorney. (Plus Media Solutions, 2015).

> News of the arrest came when the video, published by *The New York Times*, appeared to contradict the version of events given by Slager. The 33-year-old said that he had feared for his life after his stun gun had been taken by Scott. (Dutta, 2015).

The news media notes the challenge that the video poses to the police narrative by referencing that the video "contradicted" the original narrative, "blowing the cops story wide apart".

Media narratives surrounding the video raise significant concern about police legitimacy and accountability.

> Mr. Scott's family, who spoke in a series of nationally televised interviews on Wednesday morning, said no charges would have been filed if not for the video, which they were glad had been made public. "It would have never come to light. *They would have swept it under the rug, like they did with many others*," Walter Scott Sr., the father of the victim, said Wednesday on NBC's "Today" Show. (Schmidt & Apuzzo, 2015).

> Stewart said the video forced authorities to act quickly and decisively. "What if there was no video? What if there was no witness, or hero as I call him, to come forward?" asked Stewart. (thespec.com)

The quotes above illustrate the issues surrounding police legitimacy and accountability. Each quote questions what would have happened if the video recording did not exist, which questions the legitimacy of the police department and their practices. They also suggest that without the video publication the department would not have been held responsible; which questions the accountability of the police and if they would have been held responsible for the shooting. The quotes also illustrate police-race problems, as they question what the outcome of this case would have been without the video - suggesting that the outcome would have been similar to the other African Americans who had been killed by police. The quotes above highlight the growing mistrust in police accountability and legitimacy, as well as the building tensions between minority communities and police departments.

When evidence of depicted police deviance comes to the forefront after the police have

already released a formal statement on an incident, it can serve as a "damaging double-whammy" (Goldsmith, 2010). Some of the police's authority is removed because the evidence depicts officer Slager as behaving in a deviant manner in the first place, and then exposes the department as trying to cover up these behaviours (Goldsmith, 2010). Once the video was given to the media, the police no longer had direct control over how the narrative of the incident was framed. The media engaged in counter-claims work and constructed the incident as an issue of police deviance. The various claims that the news media constructed are discussed in detail below.

III. Constructing Police Deviance

New visibility poses a risk to claims-makers who are constructing claims about social problems, because their claims can be challenged by user-generated content from everyday individuals who have not previously been viewed as claims-makers. Verbal claims are powerful, but the Walter Scott video illustrates the power that a video can have in the social problems game. Images and video have the ability to cause audience members to feel more sympathetic towards both the social problem and the victim(s), especially if the audience views the social problem as unjust (Loseke, 2003). In what follows, I explore how the video was used to construct victims and villains, as well as a bigger social problem of policing and race.

Constructing Victims and Villains:

The emergence of the video became central to the social problems game and was integral in the construction of victims and villains. Specifically, the media framed the incident around police deceit, planting evidence, and excessive use of force, which in turn constructed Walter

Scott, and more specifically African Americans, as the victim. Further, by framing the social

problem in this way, the media constructed the police as the villains.

The following quotes demonstrate how both Officer Slager and the North Charleston

Police Department were constructed as villains:

> When Scott doesn't move, Slager pulls his arms back and cuffs his hands. Then he walks briskly back to where he fired the shots, picks up an object, and returns the 30 feet (10 meters) or so back to Scott before dropping the object by Scott's feet. (Dutta, 2015).

> 'In an attempt to *escape prosecution and deceive the public*, Officer Slager made false statements to numerous North Charleston police officers regarding the incident," the group said, *adding that Officer Habersham "deliberately left material facts out of his report.*" The association is the nation's oldest and largest legal organization of predominantly black lawyers, judges, educators and law students (*emphasis added)*. (Blinder, Fernandez & Robles, 2015).

> Pointing out that several officers are under investigation *for discrepancies* in their accounts of what happened after Scott's killing, Rutherford said: *"What does [Santana] do when the people who are supposed to protect us are the ones that are turned against us?"* (Yuhas, 2015).

The quotes above illustrate how the incident came to be framed not only as actions of one

officer, but instead as a problem of police deviance – where "several officers are under

investigation for discrepancies". The discrepancies in the storyline allowed the media to

construct the police as deceitful and corrupt (deliberately leaving material facts out, planting

evidence, etc). The quotes also illustrate that officer Slager attempted to protect his image by

providing false statements to North Charleston police officers. Not only does this allow the

media to construct the police as deviant, but it also allows the media to question the

accountability and legitimacy of the department as a whole. Police-public relations are also

illustrated as strained because the community is unsure of who to turn to for protection when the

police, who are now constructed as corrupt, are the ones who are supposed to serve the

community.

The media also used claims of excessive use of force for constructing police deviance. For example, the articles emphasized the number of shots fired and the fact that Walter Scott was shot in the back.

> The video shows that Slager shot eight rounds *without a verbal warning* and even as Scott continued to run away. *The video also shows that in the aftermath, Slager puts handcuffs on Scott*. (Plus Media Solutions, 2015).

> An object that resembled a stun gun fell to the ground near the two men and Mr Scott started to run while the officer drew his gun. *He was about 15 to 20 feet away and still running when Mr Slager opened fire*, shooting seven bullets, then pausing before firing a final one. After Mr Scott slumped face down to the ground, the police officer walked over, calling in on his radio: "Shots fired and the subject is down. He took my Taser." (Sherwell, 2015).

The media's attention to the number of shots (8) fired at the back of an unarmed black man works to construct the officer's behaviour as deviant. By constructing the narrative as 'excessive use of force', the media constructs Walter Scott as the innocent victim and officer Slager as the villain:

> A video (below) emerged yesterday of white North Charleston police officer Michael Slager - at worst *shooting unarmed, defenceless black man Walter Scott dead* - and at *very worst possibly then planting the Taser that Scott apparently "gained control" of on the man's dead body*. (*emphasis added,* Hooton, 2015).

Information about Walter Scott's personal life, such as his upcoming wedding, his children, and his former employment with the coast guard, were also included in newspaper articles. While articles would at times mention Scott's previous arrest and outstanding child support payments, they only briefly mentioned these aspects and were instead focused on the other details of his personal life. By focusing on his past work as a coast guard and his upcoming wedding, the media draws on cultural feeling rules to construct Walter Scott as an innocent victim who is worthy of sympathy.

Officer Michael Slager, and the police service he worked for, however, became constructed by the media as the villain in the social problems game. Constructing the police organization in this manner challenges the police's position as authorized knowers, because it appears that they did not release credible information to the public and did not actually know what was going on with the police in their organization. The social problem, therefore, becomes constructed as a bigger problem – one of police legitimacy and race relations.

Constructing the problem as Policing and Race

Through the emergence of the video, the media constructed the incident as one example of a bigger social problem concerning policing and race relations. For example, news articles framed the incident as the "murder" of a "black man" by a "white" police officer:

> A white US police officer has been charged with murder after a video emerged of him shooting an unarmed black man in the back as he tried to run away. (Dutta, 2015).

> A WHITE COP in South Carolina was charged with murder Tuesday after a cell phone video revealed he fatally shot a fleeing black man in the back. (Slattery & Murphy, 2015).

Media accounts also drew connections between the Walter Scott shooting and other fatal altercations between police and African Americans, such as Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, and Michael Brown as profiled above.

> The shooting comes as racial tensions between the police and America's black community run high following the deaths ofmen in New York, Cleveland, Ferguson and Dallas. No officers were ever charged in relation to the deaths, which sparked widespread protests and rioting across America.
> Nearly half of North Charleston's 100,000 citizens are black, but the same is true of only 18% of the 340-officer police department. (Bucktin, 2015).

> Officer-involved deaths have, of course, become national news lately, because of two high-profile cases: In Missouri, a police officer shot and killed 18-year-old Michael Brown. And in New York, a police officer used a prohibited chokehold against Eric Garner, which contributed to his death. In both cases, grand juries declined to issue

charges against the police officers. The shooting deaths have ignited a debate over whether police officers have been too quick to use force. (Plus Media Solutions, 2015).

The quotes above link Walter Scott's death to a larger social problem of policing and race. Police officers, who have engaged in fatal encounters prior to the Walter Scott case, have not been held accountable for their actions. It is depicted that these officers can get away with their actions, without having to face repercussions. The lack of accountability in cases involving minority groups has led to strained police-community relationships and public outcry in the forms of protests. It also leads to a general mistrust in the justice system because it appears as though the justice system is systematically bias and is failing one population of society. In this manner, the claims-makers are engaging in domain expansion when constructing these claims (Loseke, 2003). Domain expansion is when an existing social problem, police deviance, is expanded to include more contents, such as race and the justice system (as noted in the quotes above) (Loseke, 2003). The social problem is no longer only about police deviance and race, but has also been expanded to include the justice system and race.

IV. Responding to Counter-claims – Distancing and Implementing Change

In response to the claims and the constructions created by the media and the release of the video, the North Charleston Police Department and Mayor R. Keith Summey engaged in counterclaims making activities. Video recordings of depicted police deviance are often circulated widely through various media outlets, such as social media and news media (Goldsmith, 2010). Through these various forms of media the public will repeatedly view the incident being played over and over again (Goldsmith, 2010). Repeated viewing allows the media to capture the attention of the public and generate conversation and debate over the incident (Goldsmith, 2010). The attention of the public then places pressure on the individuals

and organizations involved in the incident to respond to the events to repair their damaged image (Goldsmith, 2010).

The North Charleston Police Department and Mayor Summey engaged in various counterclaims in order repair their image and regain control over the situation. These counterclaims included denouncing the actions of Officer Slager, as well as firing and charging Slager for the incident. These counterclaims help the North Charleston Police Department to distance themselves from officer Slager and the deviant behaviours depicted in the video recording. They also offer the public perceived solutions and actions, a type of "account ability" (Ericson, 1995), which help the department regain some of their authority as authorized knowers. Online videos provide a new space for account ability from which police can attempt to explain their activities to the public (Schneider, 2016).

Denouncing Officer Actions & Firing an Officer

North Charleston Mayor Summey and police chief Eddie Driggers were quick to hold a press conference once the video footage of the shooting was released. Newspaper articles detail some of the events of the press conference, with specific focus on the denunciation of officer Slager's actions. While Walter Scott's family and friends had denounced the officers' actions from the beginning of the case through interviews, Mayor Summey and Chief Driggers used the press conference as a means of formally denouncing the actions of officer Slager. A few thematic examples help illustrate the point.

> the police chief here said Wednesday that he was appalled by what a video of the encounter revealed."I have watched the video and I was sickened by what I saw," Eddie Driggers, the North Charleston police chief, told reporters, at an emotional and often chaotic news conference, with protesters repeatedly shouting and interrupting. "And I have not watched it since''…. Asked whether the proper protocols were followed after the shooting, Chief Driggers said, "Obviously not." (Blinder & Santora, 2015).

"When you're wrong, you're wrong," Mayor Keith Summey said during the news conference. "And if you make a bad decision, don't care if you're behind the shield or just a citizen on the street, you have to live by that decision." (Welch, 2015).

The swift action taken by local prosecutors after the video surfaced and the nearly uniform public comments by local politicians condemning the actions of the police officer seem to have helped keep the community calm, even as the incident underscored the tension between the police and minority neighborhoods around the country. (Schmidt & Apuzzo, 2015).

The quotes above demonstrate the ways in which the actions of Officer Slager were formally denounced. Articles citing the press conference are dated as early as April 8, 2015. These articles were published only 4 days after the altercation between officer Slager and Walter Scott – noting the relatively swift action of the police. The swift organizational response allowed the police department to distance themselves from the actions of officer Slager, which in turn assisted them in regaining authority and repairing their organizational reputation.

Not only did the mayor and police chief denounce officer Slager's actions, but other American police associations followed suit. One article from *The Guardian* referenced the South Carolina Law Enforcement Officers' Association (SCLEOA) and their denunciation of the officers' actions.

In a statement SCLEOA said: "It is sad for us when a *police officer makes what appears to be a very bad decision that resulted in unnecessary death*. Working *with the community* and elected officials we can overcome this tragedy. The *swift decision* to charge the officer demonstrates that law enforcement will not tolerate the tarnishing of the badge and oaths we all take so seriously." (Holpuch, 2015).

The quote above further illustrates how the police and related associations are distancing themselves from officer Slager, by denouncing his actions. In attempts to distance themselves even further, they place blame on Slager for the "unnecessary death" of Walter Scott which resulted from Slager's "very bad decision." In an attempt to repair the damage done by Slager's

actions, SCLEOA emphasizes working with the community, which can help re-establish police-community relationships which were damaged throughout the case.

Further, Mayor Summey and Chief Eddie Driggers also stated that officer Slager was fired and charged upon the release of the user-generated video evidence.

> WEDNESDAY: North Charleston police chief Eddie Driggers *announce Slager has been arrested and charged with murder*, at approximately 10.30pm last night. (Troup Buchanan, 2015).
>
> Slager, a South Carolina Patrolman, was arrested within hours of the city's mayor and the city's police chief receiving the video. (Bucktin, 2015)

Framing the incident as 'murder' and swiftly firing and charging officer Slager, allowed the police department to construct the officer as deviant and not the service. Further by firing and publicly reprimanding officer Slager's actions, the service works to regain some of their authority.

Implementation of Body Cameras

In response to the emergence of the video and the claims concerning policing and race, the North Charleston police department announced that they were going to roll out body cameras as a means to monitor interactions between police and civilians.

> It is very arguable that with body cameras on law enforcement, we won't have to depend on the courage of a random stranger who happens to witness something happen."
> The mayor of North Charleston, R Keith Summey, said at a press conference on Wednesday that his department had ordered 150 body cameras for officers with help from a financial grant. Summey said after training all officers would wear the cameras while on patrol. (Swaine, 2015).

The quote above illustrates how the police department and the mayor took control of the situation after the video went public. Ordering mandatory body cameras, helps construct a perceived solution to the incident that occurred. Officers will now be held more accountable for

their actions and the department will be able to review footage from any given situation. As stated above, citizens will no longer have to be relied on for footage of events involving civilians and police. The department regains some of the control they lost from media constructions because they are constructed as taking preventative steps for the future. Ordering body cameras also illustrates the importance of video in the social problems game. Body cameras have the potential to provide footage that can persuade audiences to support the police. Video footage taken from these devices also has the ability to construct strong claims surrounding police accountability and legitimacy. Implementing body cameras suggests that videos play a strong role in the construction of claims and social problems.

Conclusion

This chapter helps illustrate how user-generated video can greatly influence news media constructions of events. While the video was posted on *The New York Times* website, it was still user-generated content that news outlets deemed credible for reporting purposes. This content challenges the police's position as authorized knowers and has the potential to disrupt police constructed narratives – especially if the content contradicts police statements. The new visibility led to the construction of a social problem – policing and race. This chapter helps illustrate the power that visual claims possess in the social problems game. Audience members can now view incidents just as they occurred, which can provide strong claims-making power, especially if the content is viewed as unjust.

Chapter Six: Discussion & Conclusion

Discussion

Through the analysis of both case studies, there are some key similarities and differences among the findings. These distinctions were found in the role social media plays in the social problems game, how social media challenges the police as the authorized knowers, and lastly the use of images and video in the social problems game. The social problems game involves claims-makers who compete against one another, to persuade audience members in the hopes of directing social change. The primary contribution that this thesis makes to the research literature is with its empirical illustration of how social media materials can contribute to the social problems game in relation to police accountability and legitimacy concerns.

Overall, in both case studies it was demonstrated that social media and user-generated content have the ability to challenge police narratives and their positions as the authorized knowers. Social media, and the technological advancements that come alongside the "new visibility," allow users to create content that may be deemed unfavourable by the police. Social media allows users to circulate this information quickly online among other users, especially in the case of the #myNYPD campaign. This content also has the ability to go viral, which poses risk to the police because the content can become nearly impossible to control and very difficult to manage. Select content can challenge the police's position as authorized knowers, especially if they have delivered contradictory statements prior to the content being released – as seen in the Walter Scott case. Content becomes much more difficult to control online, because the police are no longer the only individuals contributing to a narrative or campaign.

Social media also allows individuals, especially those who already have strained relationships with the police, to become claims-makers. While not all claims-makers occupy the

same status positions, platforms such as Twitter, allow anyone to become a claims-maker. Individuals no longer have to be a person who possesses authority or a certain status position to deliver or construct claims on a particular topic and this can disrupt the social problems game.

Another finding suggests that videos and images are particularly persuasive in the social problems game. This finding contributes to research that has shown how social media have become a relevant source for developing understandings about audiences' narratives with select social problems like police deviance (Schneider, 2016). In both case studies, images and video were used to challenge the police's position as authorized knowers and to construct police actions as deviant. Online videos have been shown to have an increased importance to the meaning making process (Schneider, 2015b). Due to the new visibility, visuals have the ability to close the distance between an individual and the event, because these visuals, especially video, allow people to view an incident as if they were there (Thompson, 2005). Further, images and viral videos are able to garner a lot of audience support for certain social problems, such as police misconduct, because they evoke emotion.

A key difference was found between the case studies in regard to the police engaging in counter-claims work. If police are challenged by online users, the police can choose to engage in live claims-making in order to help redeem their position as authorized knowers. Another finding in this thesis, demonstrated in the second case study, shows that police, as claims-makers, respond to unfavourable materials on social media through statements issued to news media, a finding consistent with previous research (Schneider, 2015a; 2016). Very little research has examined how police engage in counterclaims work on social media (Schneider, 2016). Research that has been conducted in this area has largely shown that police continue to engage in counterclaims work largely through traditional media (Nolan, 2014; Schneider, 2016). A

contribution that this thesis makes to this emerging area of scholarship is with an analysis of the

NYPD counterclaims work on Twitter. This is a new form of claims-work and work in this area

remains. As shown in this thesis, police do not lose all of their authority in this type of claims

work and can engage in methods both live online and after an incident to reframe social

problems.

Another difference between the case studies was the perceived credibility and interpretive

flexibility of user-generated content. In both cases the notion of the police as the authorized

knowers was challenged, but the ability to redeem this position depended on the perceived

credibility and interpretive flexibility of the images and video in question. As seen within the

#myNYPD campaign, claims-makers are unable to control how people interpret and view

images. The same image can be perceived and used in a variety of ways within the social

problems game. In the case of the #myNYPD campaign, the NYPD were able to claim that the

images on Twitter were police just doing their jobs, and that the images lacked any context

behind them. The same images the NYPD perceived as police work were perceived as police

deviance by Twitter users. Thus, it is much more difficult to control how images are constructed

and perceived by various individuals because of the multitude of ways in which they can be

interpreted. In the end, the NYPD were able to insinuate that Twitter users did not know police

work and that user narratives alongside visual representations were not credible. However, this

was not the case following the release of the video recording of the Walter Scott shooting. Video

materials online have been shown to be viewed by users as more credible than images

(Schneider, 2015b). The credibility factor of the video, coupled with the fact that the video

directly contradicted police statements, contributed to a public outcry. Similar to other videos

shown to contradict police statements, the Scott video was "key…to the public accounting of the

incident [and] while it is indeed one account only of what occurred, its visual form provided a potency and status in ensuing investigations and public discussions that far outweighed other sources and points of reference" including accounts given by police (Goldsmith, 2010, p.925). Moreover, the Scott video was published by *The New York Times* which helped to set a counter-claims agenda for media outlets across the United States.

Research Contributions

Social Media and the Social Problems Game

To date there has been very limited research conducted on how social media influences the social problems game. Previous research has explored how media outlets – such as news outlets and television shows - are key players in constructing claims and exposing audience members to social problems (Loseke, 2003).This thesis contributes to this scholarship by illustrating the role that social media can play in the social problems game.

Social media can disrupt the hierarchy of credibility in terms of who is traditionally seen as a claims-maker. Social media users are provided a potential audience, if their posts become popular enough, with a large worldwide reach and the opportunity to advance claims. Social media also introduces a new platform of counter-claims making. Instead of police constructing claims and releasing them through more formal avenues – such as the media – responses now occur more quickly. This revelation shows how the social problems game contributes to changes in how police respond to social problems. Another finding is demonstrated in the way that the NYPD use Twitter to meet institutional and strategic objectives where more significance is place on aspects of police media performance (Schneider, 2016).

Social Media and Challenging the Authorized Knowers

While police are able to assert their role as authorized knowers through traditional media (Doyle, 2003) outlets such as newspapers and television (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989), less is known about the role social media plays in the police's position as authorized knowers (Schneider, 2016). Therefore, this research also makes a contribution to growing scholarship that seeks to understand how the police's position as authorized knowers can be influenced *through* and *by* social media. Police are able to use their relationship with the media to establish their position as authorized knowers. However, as demonstrated herein, social media can challenge this position because of the types of content circulated, as well as the number of users. This thesis has also shown that the authority that the police enjoy with traditional media outlets is different on social media platforms. Social media users can challenge the police and their narratives, which can challenge authority figures. The key distinction is that unlike with traditional media outlets, it is much more difficult to control online materials.

Organizational Social Media Policy

This thesis also makes practical suggestions in the area of police social media policy. As evidenced by the #myNYPD chapter, more organizational training should be implemented by police departments for their officers in terms of how to use social media effectively – both at the organizational and personal levels. Providing more training on how to use social media may prevent and better equip officers to handle situations like the #myNYPD campaign. Police departments should also place an emphasis on developing social media policy, to help govern the use of social media by officers while on and off duty which has the potential to prevent their image from being harmed.

Limitations

While the research makes several contributions, there were also limitations with suggestions for future research. Online data collection of tweets and time were a limitation for this study. Originally, data in the form of tweets were going to be collected from Twitter for the #myNYPD case study and saved as a searchable PDF document. In order to save the tweets, I had to search #myNYPD through Twitter's search function and scroll backwards on Twitter to the date of the campaign which was April 22, 2014. In multiple attempts I was unable to scroll back to April 22, 2014 before Twitter timing out. Scrolling through Twitter is very time consuming, and at times it would take up to 12 hours to reach the end of April of 2014. In order to try to solve this issue, I tried using different online browsers such as Google Chrome, Firefox, and Internet Explorer. Google Chrome appeared to help reduce the time spent scrolling, but I was still unable to reach April 22, 2014. Ultimately, I was unable to save the tweets into a PDF file which prevented me from coding and analyzing the #myNYPD tweets that were directly on Twitter. In order to rectify this problem, I analyzed the Top Tweets from April 22, 2014 by viewing them directly on Twitter through Twitter's advanced search function. I was then able to read through the tweets and identify key themes that were being discussed between Twitter users. However, for future research it would be ideal to be able to save the tweets from the campaign in order to analyze what exactly was happening on Twitter. It may also be interesting to analyze the conversations happening between users on this topic, as this is something that my research did not focus on. Future research in this area may consider using data scraping software.

Another limitation is the sample size of the newspaper articles for the #myNYPD case study. The sample size for this chapter was rather small. LexisNexis provided few search results using various search terms, and there were often multiple duplicates yielded in each search. For

future studies, it may be beneficial to use more than one newspaper database to collect articles

for a larger sample.

Future Areas of Research

For the purposes of this research, I only analyzed two case studies. While the case studies did

provide insights into the role social media plays in the social problems game, and how social

media challenges the police as the authorized knowers, different police departments may choose

to respond to similar incidents of constructed police deviance in different ways. For purposes of

future research, it would be beneficial to investigate multiple, perhaps international, cases to see

if there are similar findings across various cases – especially in regards to the police and

counterclaims making activities. It would be interesting to see if police departments, on a much

broader scale, engage in similar or distinct counter-claims making activities in cases involving

alleged police deviance.

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