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**Divest or Disband?: A Social Problems Game Analysis of Canadian Media Coverage of
2020's Defund the Police Movement**

By

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Graduate Degree, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2021

THESIS

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Abstract

Policing in Canada and America has come under the microscope due to several high-profile incidents of police violence against racialized citizens. The murder of George Floyd by officer Derek Chauvin thrust the concept of ‘defund the police’ to the mainstream public dialogue. To date, there are few studies that explore what defund the police means. The present media analysis addresses this research gap by analyzing how Canadian mass media covered the defund police movement. A social constructionist theoretical framework was utilized to analyze 109 newspaper articles on defund the police from *The Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail*. The study illustrates how ‘defund the police’ was constructed as a solution to the putative problem of biased policing. However, the way in which the term was typified significantly differed among claims-makers, resulting in a competition *within* the social problems game. For one group, defund the police was typified as organizational reform and sought to change existing policies and procedures to raise the legitimacy of police, while for the other group it was typified as abolishment with the goal of dismantling policing. The following thesis empirically investigates how this claims-making competition played out within Canadian media sources.

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Chapter One - Introduction

On May 25th, 2020, White police officer Derek Chauvin killed George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds, causing Floyd to asphyxiate (Holmes IV, 2020). A witness captured the event on video, which then became a media phenomenon that sparked anti-police protests worldwide. These protests, however, did not occur solely because of the death of George Floyd, but instead are related to other Black residents who had lost their lives when interacting with police. In Canada in 2020, for example, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, a Black woman suffering a mental health crisis, died when she fell from her apartment during a police-initiated wellness check (Waldron, 2020). These examples of Black residents who died during police encounters are a very small sample of the countless other Black individuals who have suffered the same fate. In response to the apparent racial inequality that impacts racialized residents while interacting with police, activists and members of the public took to the street calling to ‘defund the police’. As defund the police is a relatively new concept with no clear definition, the following study conducts a media analysis to investigate the way in which the defund the police movement has been constructed as a solution to the putative problem of biased policing. Specifically, using a social constructionist theoretical framework (Loseke, 2003), I examine the social problems game surrounding the defund the police movement to illustrate who the claims-makers are, how they have typified the concept of defund the police and constructed it as a solution to the social problem of biased policing.

This timely media analysis contributes to existing literature on social movements by allowing for an in-depth look at how newspaper articles contributed to the claims-making process within the defund the police movement. As Loseke (2003) explains, the mass media represents an integral part of modern social movements, as most people rely on the mass media

to supply the information that informs their opinions. Knowing that readers turn to mass media to interpret and understand what defund the police means, claims-makers attempted to forward their beliefs on what the social problem of police was and what should be done about it. In forwarding their beliefs, claims-makers offered various competing definitions of what defund the police means, creating confusion and division that contributed to the movement losing steam moving into 2021. This study looks at how claims-makers utilized the media to advance their views on what we should do to correct the putative problem of biased policing.

This thesis examined 109 newspaper articles published by *The Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail* between May 25th, 2020 and October 25th, 2020 to develop an understanding of how the defund police movement was reported in Canadian news media and what claims were being made throughout the process. This thesis adopts the following composition. Chapter 2 presents the literature surrounding police use of force, anti-Black policing and defunding the police. Chapter 3 describes social constructionism and the Social Problems Game (Loseke, 2003), while chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach used for the study. Chapter 5 provides an empirical analysis of the defund the police movement as organizational reform, while chapter 6 provides the analysis of the competing abolishment narrative. In chapter 7, I utilize a social problems theoretical framework to theorize the empirical findings presented in chapters 5 and 6 to develop a deeper understanding of how claims-makers constructed the defund police movement, its villains and victims, and proposed solutions. I conclude the thesis by discussing the substantive and practical contributions made through the study, as well as discuss the study limitations and offer recommendations for future research in this area.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

In this chapter, I begin by reviewing police use of force powers in Canada and America. I then review research on anti-Black racism perpetrated by Canadian and American police before reviewing the current literature regarding the defund police movement.

Police Use of Force & Anti-Black Policing in America

The United States of America is a republic of fifty member states that have fifty local governments. Because of the varied nature of member states, the term “use of force” varies in definition depending on where a person lives. In 2016, the Bureau of Justice Statistics noted that 99.8% of officers have a written policy on the use of deadly force, with 99.4% of officers having policies on the use of less-lethal force (Brooks, 2020). The report also finds that police departments only hold external investigations for 32.5% of officers who use force resulting in a citizen’s death (Brooks, 2020). In the absence of federal legislation, states individually regulate their use of force guidelines, with most use of force protocols using a linear use of force continuum based on situational factors (Terrill & Paoline, 2013). An example at the state level, the Illinois Compiled Statutes (2012) states that deadly force involves any force that is likely to cause great bodily harm or death, including discharging a firearm toward a person or firing toward a vehicle with a person inside. A peace officer may use force that is reasonably necessary during the application of an arrest, with deadly force justified when the threat of imminent lethal force is present towards an officer or another person (Illinois Compiled Statutes, 2012).

The standard study used to estimate police use of force in America is the Police Public Contact Survey (PPCS). The PPCS is a household survey that asks various questions about police-public encounters including use of force queries completed by members of the public who have come into contact with police throughout the United States (Garner, Hickman, Malega, & Maxwell, 2018). Self-report surveys such as the PPCS allow for a more complete picture of

police use of force, as relying on official police reports may miss events that do not make an official report. The 2011 version of the PPCS, completed by 41,408 respondents, found that much less than 1% of the population experienced police use of force, highlighting the rarity of the act (Garner et al., 2018). However, the authors note that non-English-speaking persons were not included in the survey, and definitions of “police contact” and “use of force” varied over time (Garner et al., 2018). When looking at police-involved shootings from 2015 to 2016, there were 1,948 total shooting fatalities, with Black residents being killed during police encounters at a 2.3 times higher rate (Shane, Lawton, & Swenson, 2017).

It is estimated that police use force anywhere from 0.1% to 31.8% of the time in public encounters (Shane et al., 2017). This estimate varies widely due to inconsistent methods used to collect data when dealing with varying service-level datasets, as well as the absence of a national data use of force collection effort (Peeples, 2020; Shane et al., 2017). An analysis of self-report surveys completed by respondents throughout America shows between 600,000 and 700,000 residents over the age of 15 experience police use of non-lethal force each year (Motley & Joe, 2018). Civilians who may come into contact with police and be subjected to the use of force include vulnerable sectors like persons living with mental illness, which is estimated to represent 10% of all police calls (Seo, Kim, & Kruis, 2021).

Academic literature focusing on officer use of lethal force in America illuminates anti-Black racism. Discharging firearms, as a use of force option, contribute significantly to the number of civilians killed by police each year, with an average of three residents killed per day and one-thousand killed every year (Krieger, 2020; Mullinix, Bolsen, & Norris, 2020). However, Goh (2020) notes that these estimates come from government databases that may not give accurate data. Specifically, police reports may not accurately reflect a use of force outcome and

coroner reports do not always mention any police involvement (Goh, 2020). Academic estimates suggest that suspects who die at the hands of police brandish a deadly weapon nearly 80% of the time, with around 45% of all officer-involved shootings leading to the suspect's death (Jennings, Hollis, & Fernandez, 2020). Offenders who die at the hands of police are overwhelmingly male, are mostly under the age of 40 and White (Shane et al., 2017). However, when adjusting for the entire population, the data surrounding police-involved shootings of Black suspects is alarming. Officers are quicker to shoot Black suspects compared to White suspects, and Black suspects are much more likely to be shot while unarmed (Jennings et al., 2020).

In New York, Black individuals are more likely than White individuals to have force used against them by police (Kramer & Remster, 2018), and have a higher likelihood of being stopped and frisked (Gelman, Fagan, & Kiss, 2007). A study looking at police use of force by citizen's ethnicity found that "while Blacks represent 13.2% of the US population, they represent 27.6% of total deaths at the hands of police (6338) included in the data on violent deaths recorded by the Centers for Disease Control between 1999 and 2013" (Newton, 2018 p. 1067). When looking at body-worn camera footage of officer use of force events, officers used force more quickly on Black suspects compared to White suspects (Willits & Makin, 2018). However, the authors mention that factors other than citizen's ethnicity may play an important role in officer decision-making (Willits & Malkin, 2018). One of these factors is income level. Motley and Joe (2018, p. 58) note "Black residents with incomes of less than \$20,000 were significantly more likely to experience exposure to police shooting, cursing, threatening arrest, and handcuffing than Black residents with incomes of \$20,000 - \$49,000 and \$50,000 or more." This finding suggests that, while racial bias may be present, other factors, like socioeconomic status, play a significant role.

When looking at the United States in totality, Black residents aged 16 and older are “3-4 times more likely than White residents to experience police contact involving use of less-than-lethal types of force and 3 times more likely to perceive the force used by police as excessive” (Motley & Joe, 2018, p. 51). This finding is interesting when looking at the demographics of officers in the United States. United States police forces are 75% White and male, and police use of disproportionate violence rises the more “stereotypically Black” a person appears to be (Cowell, Corsi, Johnson, & Brinkley-Rubinstein, 2020). As well, White officers use higher levels of force on Black civilians compared to Black officers (Headley & Wright, 2020; Wright & Headley, 2020).

Research has also found Black residents to be subject to a higher likelihood of a deadly encounter when dealing with police in the United States compared to White residents. One in sixty-five deaths of a young Black person in America comes at the hands of police, and the year 2015 saw Black civilians killed by police twice as often as White, Native Americans, and Hispanic civilians (Newton, 2018). Black women, who compose 13% of the population, represent one-third of women killed by police in the United States (Desai, 2020). Studies suggest that this type of violence may be momentous, as New York stop and frisk data shows that when a Black suspect kills a police officer, there is an increase in use of force against Black residents, with this phenomenon expanding to the greater United States (Sierra-Arévalo & Nix, 2020).

Police use of Force & Anti-Black Policing in Canada

Looking at Canada, police are trained and given use of force and arrest authority very similar to their American counterparts. Officers in Canada gain their power to use force through the Criminal code of Canada. The Criminal Code justifies a peace officer in using lethal force when the officer believes on reasonable grounds that the force is necessary to protect the officer

or any other person from imminent grievous bodily harm or death (*Criminal Code*, 1985, s 24(4)). Departments equip Canadian police officers with the same tools that their American counterparts have, including pepper spray, conductive energy weapons (CEW), and firearms. Locally, police services form their own use of force guidelines. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) use the Incident Management / Intervention (IMIM) model, which is a use of force continuum that uses five reactionary techniques in response to five subject states of resistance (RCMP, 2020). Citizen levels of resistance range from co-operative to threatening grievous bodily harm or death, and officer response options range from communication to lethal force accordingly (RCMP, 2020). Officers must also complete a use of force report whenever physical force occurs in the line of duty. IMIM is in line with the national use of force framework of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, which acts as a common use of force approach for police services throughout Canada (RCMP, 2020).

When comparing the level of police use of force to the level of citizen resistance, in 2015, officers reacted with equivalent force 79.5% of the time, with 12.4% of events deemed to use excessive officer force (Boivin & Lagacé, 2015). In British Columbia, researchers analyzed police use of deadly force in thirty documented instances. Of these incidents, 15 occurred during the commission of a criminal offense, four when a member of the public weaponized a motor vehicle, three during a physical confrontation, and eight because of mental illness or suicidal behaviour (Parent, 2011). In Canada, 460 fatal civilian-police encounters occurred between 2000 and 2017, with most happening in Toronto, Ontario (Pica, Sheahan, Pozzulo, & Bennell, 2020). As well, Canadian police officers are killed on duty at a rate of two per year (Parent, 2011).

In Canada, police use of force towards Black residents compared to White residents is markedly different. In Toronto, racial profiling by the police service has been a long-lasting

issue, primarily driven by stop and search practices (Hayle, Wortley, & Tanner, 2016; Wortley & Tanner, 2003). A 1994 survey of Torontonians found that 44% of Black male respondents had involuntary contact with police, compared to 12% of White males and 7% of Asian males (Wortley & Tanner, 2003). More recent research shows that police stopped 80% of Black youth aged 15-24 in Toronto for what they call “general investigation” (Meng, 2017). In Kingston, police stopped 40% of Black youth under 25, compared to 11% of White youth (Satzewich & Shaffir, 2009). These additional contacts add supplementary investigative efforts towards Black individuals, creating hotspots for police attention. As well, a survey of Toronto high school students found police stopped 50% of Black respondents at least twice in the past two years, which was much higher as compared to stops with Whites, Asians, and South Asian students (Wortley & Tanner, 2003). Hayle et al. (2016) looked into delinquent youth behaviour as a possible determinant for police stops. Participants were asked if they had engaged in any delinquent acts within the last 12 months including theft, drug use, and carrying a weapon. Researchers found that among youth who reported no participation in delinquent activity, Black youth were more than six times as likely to be stopped by police compared to White youth. This finding suggests that the relative level of participants’ deviance does not explain the disproportionate level of police contact, and that the difference in police treatment of Black residents requires further examination.

On top of facing greater police use of force, Black residents in Canada face unique challenges when dealing with police. In Toronto, Black motorists have long complained about being pulled over by police at a disproportionately high rate. This phenomenon birthed the term “driving while being Black” (Meng, 2017). For example, Toronto Police vehicle stop data from 2008 to 2012 found that 22% of the entire Black male population of Toronto had been stopped

and documented by police (Meng, 2017). In Kingston, Black drivers are four times more likely to be pulled over compared to White drivers (Satzewich & Shaffir, 2009). Respondents of an Edmonton study on civilian perceptions shared the sentiment that Canadian police treat Black residents differently than other residents and believe that modern police interactions reflect historical racism in North America (Ayoyo, 2018). Furthermore, a 2009 study that surveyed adults living in Toronto found that 80% of Black respondents believe that officers treat Black residents worse than White residents (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2009). The impact of racial profiling like the examples above was highlighted in the Ontario Human Rights Commission's report *Under Suspicion, Research and Consultation Report on Racial Profiling in Ontario* (2017), which found that racial profiling by police is a widespread problem in the province that needs to be addressed through educating officers on the history of discrimination against racialized groups, as well as standardizing the collection of accurate race-based data to identify regions where racial disparities need the most support.

Black Lives Matter

Public unrest relating to the historical mistreatment of Black individuals peaked on February 26th, 2012, when a private citizen shot Trayvon Martin while he was walking home after purchasing candy and iced-tea from a convenience store (Blackmon, Neville, & Jones Thomas, 2019). In response to the acquittal of the person who shot Martin, BLM was founded to build local power to intervene in the violence suffered by Black communities worldwide (Black Lives Matter, 2020; Fabregat & Beck, 2019; Furman, Singh, Darko, & Wilson, 2018; Giwa, Mullings, Adjei, & Karki, 2020; Osborne & Cooke, 2020; Wilkins, Livingstone, & Levine, 2019). Other instances that have fueled the BLM movement include the deaths of Michael Brown and George Floyd, two American Black men killed by White police officers (Bourne, 2020; Desai,

2020; Kochel, 2020; Siegel, Poulson, Sangar, & Jay, 2021). In Canada, those in support of BLM cite the deaths of Regis Korchinski-Paquet and Ejaz Choudry, two racialized Canadians who died while interacting with police, as recent examples of systemic racism (Gamrot, 2020). Those who support BLM pay special attention to police reform, bringing to the forefront issues such as racially biased policing, excessive use of force, systemic racism, and social problems associated with racism (Drakulich, Wozniak, Hagan, & Johnson, 2020). The Canadian chapter of BLM has a list of demands posted on their website, which include fixes related to governance, policing and incarceration, education, and pursuits to end Islamophobia and White supremacy (Black Lives Matter, 2020). This expansive list of demands ranges from public apologies by government officials for historic racial inequality to specific policy changes, including a call to remove acts such as the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act (Black Lives Matter, 2020). The BLM movement has become a global network, known as the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) which is an organization made up of over 100 like-minded groups with the common goal of racial equality (Bourne, 2020).

One of the common ways in which BLM acts to promote their social justice values is through protesting. The 2016 Toronto Pride Parade, a parade celebrating LGBTQ2S+ rights in Canada, saw a sit-in organized by BLM activists with the goal of raising attention towards anti-Black racism in the Toronto Police Service (Greey, 2018). Specifically, BLM demanded that “the Toronto Pride committee work harder to centralize Black, Indigenous, racialized, trans, and disabled people in future organizing efforts” (Furman et al., 2018, p. 35). The Pride Parade did not restart until the event organizers agreed to BLM’s demands (Furman et al., 2018). As well, Pride Toronto requested that the Toronto Police Service not participate in the 2018 Pride Parade (Janus & Draaisma, 2018). The recent death of George Floyd has sparked protests by those

sympathetic to BLM worldwide. In America, 23 states responded to persistent protesting by calling in the National Guard to help quell unrest (The Economist, 2020). As recently as September 7th, 2020, states such as New York, Kentucky, Oregon, and Portland held protests (Levenson, 2020). Fifty people were arrested in Portland during demonstrations that saw violent clashes with police, and September 7th, 2020, represented the one-hundredth straight night of protesting since George Floyd's death (Levenson, 2020). Indeed, repeated instances of Black lives ending as the result of contact with police has galvanized the BLM movement, and protesting continues to present day in the fight towards social justice. One of the loudest talking points stemming from Black Lives Matter involves defunding the police (Black Lives Matter, 2020), which stands currently as a hotly contested issue.

Defunding the Police

In Canada, America, and internationally, there have been calls to defund the police (Akbar, 2020; Campbell, 2020; Garrett & Slobogin, 2020; Goff, 2021; Maynard, 2020; Watson, Turner, & Hines, 2020). However, because of the volume of responses and competing opinions on how to fix modern policing, there are different and competing messages regarding how to move policing forward. A very popular suggestion among scholars and activists involves reallocating police finances, in order to take away from officer budget and invest in marginalized communities (Jacobs et al., 2021). Maynard (2020) notes that Canadian police salaries have seen a 40% increase from 2000 to 2013, which contributes a sizeable portion of the 15.1 billion dollars spent on policing in 2018. Thus, scholars suggest reallocating some of this budget towards initiatives such as updating mental-health care policies (Glauser, 2020) and funding social services like housing and youth education (Ruffin, 2021; Watson et al., 2020). Other calls for police reform involve updating training protocols to promote safer, more inclusive, and more

effective police practices (Ghezzi, Funk, & Houmanfar, 2021; Koziarski, 2021; Staller, & Koerner, 2021), and removing police from current partnerships, including police-school partnerships and collaboration with social work (Jacobs et al., 2021; Nijjar, 2021). However, not all scholars see organizational reform as the solution for defunding the police, but instead offer arguments in favour of disbanding and abolishing the police service (Chua, 2020; Jacobs et al., 2021; O'Rourke, Su, & Binder, 2021).

While most of the literature surrounding the defund police movement focuses on money allocation, there are calls for policing itself to end. Abolitionists believe that the criminal justice system is systemically flawed, as police and prisons represent the principle mode of governmental control and subjugation over people's lives, specifically people of colour (Akbar, 2020; O'Rourke et al., 2021). This argument suggests that policing inappropriately controls social issues such as homelessness and joblessness through punitive measures. These measures have promoted systemic racism, particularly in the American context, since the move to mass incarceration in the 1980s, which critics argue negatively impacts these marginalized communities (Simon, 2021). Abolitionists believe that communities would see improvement for these vulnerable sectors through a transformative societal reimagining of policing and the criminal justice system geared towards recognizing and repairing racial disparity and discrimination (McLeod, 2019). In order to achieve this goal, abolitionists wish to reassign many of the roles police currently hold. For example, police in both Canada and America often are first responders to residents in a mental health crisis. Those in favour of abolition believe that social workers are better suited for these calls, and that other vulnerable groups of people may have better results with non-police responders (Jacobs et al., 2021). As well, abolitionists believe that moving away from costly policing and prisons allows for an investment into vulnerable

communities through initiatives including anti-violence programs, harm reduction systems, and the decriminalization of homelessness (Maynard, 2020). Abolitionists also maintain that police must not be replaced with an entity similar to policing, with the goal of working towards police-free societies (Chua, 2020).

As evidenced above, there is a lack of clarity and agreement on what “defund the police” means and how to make the defund police movement actionable. The lack of clarity and agreement on defund the police was clearly evidenced in the 2020 United States presidential election where police reform was a divisive talking point, with President Donald Trump labelling BLM protestors as “anarchists” seeking to abolish policing (Sekou, 2021). Conceptualizing defunding initiatives as anarchistic makes the movement less palatable to the mainstream public, in contrast to policing reform by reallocating funding. Politicizing an already divisive discussion creates a battleground that manifests in competing claims and narratives sent out to the public. Highlighting these various competing narratives surrounding the defund police movement illustrates why the current study is necessary. This study utilizes a qualitative media analysis to examine how the media plays an important role in defund police social problems game.

Chapter 3 - Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I begin by introducing a “social constructionist” (Loseke, 2003) theoretical framework to examine the putative social problem surrounding the defund police movement. Social constructionists give analytical attention to the social, political and cultural processes by which people make sense of what is happening in their social environment (Loseke, 2003). They argue that understanding social problems requires an analysis of the claims-making processes that construct a condition to be a social problem (Loseke, 2003; Best, 2016). In what follows, I begin with an introduction to social constructionism. Next, I introduce the social problems “game” and discuss the construction of social problems and the players involved (Loseke, 2003). I conclude by discussing how solutions to social problems are constructed.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a theoretical perspective that focuses on how people understand the world around them (Loseke, 2003). Rather than focusing on undermining or debunking claims (Adorjan, 2012), social constructionism asserts that nothing in this world is inherently meaningful until humans assign meaning to it (Best, 2016). For example, one person may see single-use plastic water bottles as a convenient storage system for water, while another person may see that same water bottle as a symbol of humans negatively affecting the earth through pollution. Anything can be assigned meaning, and multiple and competing meanings may be simultaneously present. As such, social constructionists ask “why do people decide that something needs to be done about some conditions, and how do they decide exactly what should be done?” (Best, 2016 p. 14). In order to effectively conduct research through the theoretical framework of social constructionism, “[...] the analyst must extricate her/himself as best as she/he can in order to observe the processes through which formulations are rendered and

received” (Adorjan, 2012, p. 3). As the goal of this thesis is to observe how the social problem of biased policing is constructed, as well as how solutions are packaged, it is important to maintain analysis without taking a stance (Adorjan, 2012).

Defining the Social Problem

Social problems are identified and constructed through a social problems process wherein claims-makers attempt to convince others that a social problem exists (Best, 2016). A social problem, as defined by Loseke (2003), is something that is wrong, widespread, can be changed, and should be changed. Those who contribute to and suffer from social problems are referred to as practical actors, which refer to laypeople who exist in everyday life, in contrast to the scientists and academics who study them (Loseke, 2003). An example of a modern social problem in Canada and America is anti-Black racism. In response to perceived anti-Black racism, activists formed Black Lives Matter in 2013 to address racial issues in Canada and America, with a mission to “[...] build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes” (Black Lives Matter, 2020). Social movement, including protesting and social media activism, propelled the social problem of racial inequality to the forefront of public opinion. This social movement occurred through social media websites like *Twitter* alongside physical protests, which effectively labelled the problem as urgent and in need of change (Ince et al., 2017). Social problems work refers to the activities that people take part in with the goal of bringing a social problem to mainstream public thought (Loseke, 2003).

Social Problems Game

Loseke (2003) argues that social problems work is part of a larger social problems “game”. The competition between claims-makers to identify a social problem and propose a solution is referred to as a “game” because the object of claims-making activities is to “win” by

garnering audience support and leading social change. Stafford and Warr (1985) predict that the groups most likely to alter public opinion towards their specific cause will be those able to portray the social problem as wrong, prevalent, and mutable. Thus, the social problems game involves groups presenting their social problem of interest as more wrong and important than other social problems. A Social Problems Game involves claims-makers attempting to define a condition as a social problem that needs public concern and correction (Best, 2016; Loseke, 2003). For example, #BlackLivesMatter was a *Twitter* hashtag that was credited as the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013 (Wilkins et al., 2019). While #BlackLivesMatter was socially viewed as important to social change, counter-hashtags including #WhiteLivesMatter, #BlueLivesMatter, and #AllLivesMatter were utilized to compete against the Black Lives Matter movement (Wilkins et al., 2019). These opposing hashtags represented multiple competing factions that attempted to shape public opinion towards systemic anti-Black racism. The prize of the Social Problems Game is the ability to “[...] lead social change, to change the objective world in which we live, [and] to change the ways we make sense of ourselves and others” (Loseke, 2003, p. 20). When societal focus is placed on one social problem, other social problems become neglected.

It is impossible for a person or group of people to know of every potential social problem facing Canadians today. Loseke (2003) uses the term “audience carrying capacity” to reflect this, noting that social problems are in direct competition with the problems of an individual’s life, which can include familial or financial stress. As such, there is a constant competition in the social problem’s game. These competitions fall into two categories: competitions *among* social problems and competitions *within* social problems (Loseke, 2003). The first, competitions among social problems, simply refers to the countless number of issues that exist, and the limited

resources available to combat these problems. When given a list of five government spending items, which included pharmacare, dental care, child care, home care, and vision care, participants in a research study did not reach a consensus on prioritizing an item, with childcare leading the way at 26.2% (Ramji & Quñonez, 2012). This study illustrates that public opinion, while extremely important, is rarely ever uniform, causing difficulty when framing a social problem as important. Competitions *within* social problems occur when two (or more) claim-makers address the same social problem with differing views on the issue itself. Politicians may be participants in these competitions to gain support from a voting demographic. In Canada, for example, abortion rights have historically been a contentious issue, with Bill C-43, a bill criminalizing abortion in 1991, being defeated in the Senate after being passed in parliament (Saurette & Gordon, 2013). This example illustrates how tightly contested some political issues are, with one group (pro-choice) viewing abortion as a woman's right and another group (pro-life) viewing abortion as violating the right to life.

After identifying a social problem, two parties emerge as the major players - villains and victims. A victim in the Social Problems Game refers to somebody who is perceived to be harmed by a condition, with villains referring to the party that causes harm (Loseke, 2003). These villains can be persons, places, or systems responsible for the harm associated with the condition (Loseke, 2003). Sawyer and Gampa (2018) state that the Black Lives Matter movement collectively believes that Black people should have the same value as other ethnicities in America and Canada, citing both historical harms (e.g. slavery) and modern harms (e.g. police brutality) as examples of this power and value imbalance. This construction of the social problem sees the Black ethnic group as victims and has police and justice institutions cast as villains. Understanding the portrayal of villains and victims in the Social Problems Game is

important, as one way in which claims-makers draw attention to a particular social problem is through encouraging sympathy towards victims (Loseke, 2003).

An example of a social problem that has competing narratives and players in the Social Problems Game involves the “disproportionate minority contact” Black youth face when dealing with law enforcement. Disproportionate minority contact refers to the unbalanced interactions that occur between law enforcement and minority youth compared to White youth (Donnelly, 2019; Spinney et al., 2018). The American justice system presents an illustration of this racial disparity, where “[...] Blacks are especially overrepresented in the juvenile justice system, accounting for 16.6% of the general youth population and over a third of delinquency cases” (Donnelly, 2019 p. 289). Looking at the data, a person could safely assume that a social problem exists, as there is an observable trend that, at face value, appears racist within the justice system. However, within academia, there are competing narratives explaining why this disproportionality exists. Spinney et al. (2018) frame this dichotomy as differential selection and differential offending. Differential selection argues that Black and White youth have similar rates of offending, but that minority youth are more likely than White youth to receive tougher consequences within the justice system because the system treats the two parties differently (Spinney et al., 2018). Differential offending takes a more individualistic approach, and focuses on crime severity and previous criminal activity as the determinant for how a youth is treated, rather than their ethnicity (Spinney et al., 2018) . Within the disproportionate minority contact example, society agrees that the social problem is important. However, the construction of the problem changes based on one’s belief in differential offending or differential selection. Central to the construction of social problems are ‘typifications’ (Loseke, 2003).

Typifications

A typification is a means of categorization that helps people make sense of the world around them (Loseke, 2003). Typifications are mental images of things that people find *typical*, and these mental images act as a short-hand reference for making sense of the complex world around us. It is impossible for any person to have first-hand experience and knowledge in everything. Due to this fact, typifications are necessary because of the vast amount of information available in the world (Loseke, 2003). Loseke notes that a typification is very similar to a stereotype, with one of the main differences being that a typification is something that must occur for humans to understand the vast world around them. Typifications that are deemed to be incorrect are commonly labelled as stereotypes.

Typifications are extremely important in the Social Problems Game, as their construction has a large impact on how likely the social problem will be considered. For example, the debate surrounding abortion has utilized two competing typifications: pro-life and pro-choice. “Pro-life” chooses the suffix “life” to help typify the procedure of abortion as medical and to think about the issue scientifically, while “pro-choice” typifies the same procedure through the experience and rights of the woman (Loseke, 2003). As well, pro-life supporters argue that opposing viewpoints are “anti-life” while pro-choice supporters argue that opposing viewpoints are “anti-choice” (Ntontis & Hopkins, 2018). Typifying a complex issue like abortion allows individuals to adopt a stance without full knowledge of the procedure. In the Social Problems Game, the typification of social issues is executed by claims-makers.

Claims-Makers and Audience Members

A claims-maker is a person or group of people who attempt to assign meaning to putative social problems (Loseke, 2003). Examples of claims-makers include scientists, teachers, parents, media personnel, and social justice activists. Claims do not hold equal power in society, and

many factors influence their ability to create social change. Claims made by claims-makers are not uniformly accepted, and the person or group of people who make the claim are just as important as the claim itself. Claims-makers exist on a “hierarchy of credibility” (Loseke, 2003). The hierarchy of credibility refers the process in which audience members initially rank the validity of claims based on who is claiming. This hierarchy places the opinions of scientists and professionals over the opinions of the layperson. This belief that some people are more credible than others occurs because of the societal recognition that scientists are experts in their related fields and professionals have more experience than the average person. For claims-makers to be successful in their endeavors, they must reach out and convince others in the community to join their cause.

The target population for claims-makers when constructing a social problem is audience members. Claims-makers must convince audience members that a particular social issue is urgent and believable (Loseke, 2003). Audience members judge which social problems are relevant and in need of addressing and are therefore just as important as claims-makers in the Social Problems Game. An analysis of how the Black Lives Matter movement was being framed online examined over 66,000 tweets from the online speech platform *Twitter* (Ince et al., 2017). Looking closer, between January and November 2014, tweets involving Black Lives Matter appeared 373 times before the police-involved shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black man, with 19,942 tweets published thereafter (Ince et al., 2017). This surge of tweets caused those who were taking part in trending Black Lives Matter on *Twitter* to become part of the claims-making process, with the target audience being users of the social media website. While those who read the tweets represent the immediate audience of those taking part in tweeting about Black Lives Matter, the overall aim is to construct the social problem as important. As

tweets trend, they may reach the desk of those in the media, who may report on the trend and expose the social problem to a wider audience.

Similar to claims-makers, not all audience members hold equal power. Audience member importance refers to the power imbalance that exists between different sections of audience members based on characteristics like age, employment, and socioeconomic status (Loseke, 2003). The clearest example of a social group that holds very little bargaining power in society is children. Due to their inability to vote in most countries, children are typically not a target audience for claims-makers. Instead, children rely on adult activism to draw attention to their unique social problems. The power imbalance between audience members affects the messaging efforts of claims-makers, as the success of their endeavour relies on their ability to generate interest towards their social problem.

Constructing Claims

Loseke (2003, p. 26) defines a claim as “any verbal, visual, or behavioural statement that seeks to persuade audience members to define a condition as a social problem.” The construction of claims in the Social Problems Game is the process in which a claim is packaged and delivered to the public (Loseke, 2003). For example, a protest can be described as a “peaceful gathering” or a “riot.” Describing a protest as a peaceful gathering tells the reader that the persons involved in the protest are law-abiding citizens that are rallying together to forward their desired social cause. When describing that same social gathering as a riot, the protestors are assumed to be violent and involved in illegal activity. Even though the protest is the same in both claims, the construction of the claim has a large impact on how a media consumer interprets the claim.

There are three main types of claims: verbal, visual, and behavioural (Loseke, 2003).

Verbal claims construct meaning through words. Loseke (2003) states that verbal claims are also known as rhetoric. Radio shows, network television, political discussions, newspaper articles, and music contain various verbal claims-making towards social problems (Loseke, 2003). An analysis of Trump's speeches during the 2016 election campaign argued that Trump's rhetoric appealed to White working-class individuals by claiming that their collective status and safety in America was diminishing (Lamont et al., 2017). In one example, then-candidate Trump referred to a recent homicide of a ninety-year-old man by stating: "The perpetrators were illegal immigrants with criminal records a mile long, who did not meet Obama administration standards for removal" (Lamont et al., 2017, p 168). Donald Trump *claimed* that White working-class individuals should worry about their status and safety within the United States, and in doing so became a claims-maker with the goal of constructing a social problem.

Visual claims are those made through images. The Iraq war was the first conflict to offer the layperson the ability to log on to a video-streaming website, such as *YouTube*, to view pictures and videos of war (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2009). This was the first time the gruesome effects of war, including death and injury, were shown to a large audience in a way that network television traditionally avoided (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2009). These images provided a less constructed and more realistic viewpoint of war from the allied perspective. Loseke (2003, p. 26) states that "because typifications of social problems are 'pictures in our head,' claims using visual images can be very powerful because they put these pictures directly in our head." Indeed, seeing war through the eyes of soldiers on the ground absent of media framing can be powerful in forming public opinion. As such, the visual imagery offered by social media sites like *YouTube* can construct anti-war sentiment.

Behavioural claims are actions that are taken to draw attention to a social issue. A prime example of a behavioural claim is protesting. In 2016, Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the national anthem of a televised NFL football game to protest racialized oppression and police brutality in America (Boykoff & Carrington, 2020). The goal of the protest was to highlight racial inequality as a very important social problem in modern America, and Colin Kaepernick represented the claims-maker in this process. As discussed earlier, not all voices are equal, however, and because of his elevated status as a professional football player, Kaepernick's message was received on a large scale.

Primary and Secondary Claims Making Through Mass Media

Mass media within the Social Problems Game refers to “[...] any form of information/entertainment that is available to a large number (mass) of people” (Loseke, 2003 p. 40). This is a very large scope, which includes but is not limited to radio, print, and internet-accessible documents, movies, and talk shows. Due to the platform in which the media can bring a message to many people, the mass media cannot help but be a major player in the Social Problems Game (Loseke, 2003). People working in mass media become claims-makers through primary and secondary claims-making. Primary claims-making is a close relative to social activism and occurs when a reporter constructs a social problem. Secondary claims-making is the process in which a reporter presents another group's packaging of a claim (Loseke, 2003). For example, Boykoff (2020) found that various newspapers, specifically the *New York Times*, held favourable views and offered pro-activist framing towards Colin Kaepernick's NFL national anthem protest. In this instance, print media acted as a secondary claims-maker. Rather than constructing the social problem themselves, the *New York Times* presented the social problem through the packaging offered by Colin Kaepernick.

When looking at claims-makers in mass media, it is important to remember that for many people claims are viewed through network television. One of the prime directives of network television in a capitalist society is to sell their product, which inclines network producers to tailor their programming to a target audience, catering to demographics such as age and gender (Loseke, 2003). Understanding that those who work in network television have profitability in mind is important when analyzing mass media's impact in the social problem's game. If network television is a prize in the social problem's game, then competition for media coverage will be heavily prioritized.

Constructing Solutions

After a social problem has been established and successfully placed into the public's attention, the next step is to construct solutions to the problem. This step is completed through the use of *prognostic frames* (Loseke, 2003). Prognostic frames are claims that outline what needs to be done in order to fix a social problem, and who should correct the problem.

The body-worn camera debate in Canada offers an example of a prognostic frame. After the fatal shooting of Sammy Yatim in 2013 by Toronto police, there were public discussions about implementing the use of body-worn cameras (Bud, 2019). Some of the claimed benefits of implementing body-worn cameras included increased police transparency and accountability, as well as a mitigation of unwarranted citizen complaints (Bud, 2019). These prognostic frames were meant to persuade police services to implement body-worn cameras. Just as social problems can be constructed and typified in a number of different ways, so too can solutions and prognostic frames. Multiple prognostic frames may be presented for a social problem, and these frames may compete for importance (Loseke, 2003). As prognostic frames are part of the Social Problems Game, there exists an ever-present competition to remain relevant.

The construction of prognostic frames focuses on two areas: changing culture and changing how the world is organized. Changing culture means altering the way in which society thinks about a social problem (Loseke, 2003). For example, the Spread the Word to End the Word campaign, funded by the Special Olympics, used paid television and internet advertisements to persuade the public to stop using the word “retard” by establishing the word as highly offensive to intellectually disabled people (Lyle & Simplician, 2015). Rather than lobbying government to change policy, Spread the Word to End the Word geared its focus on changing the way the public *thinks* about the word. Changing how the world is organized means altering the systems in place meant to control our behaviour (Loseke, 2003). Like the body-worn camera example, this method typically involves attempting to change laws and policies. Claims-makers may package prognostic frames that attempt to change policy and how people think about a social problem at the same time.

Conclusion

In review, social constructionism seeks to understand why we place meaning on things, how villains and victims are constructed, how we decide which social problems deserve our attention, and who is tasked with fixing these social problems (Loseke, 2003). Claims-makers attempt to persuade audience members into deeming a particular social issue relevant, resulting in a Social Problems Game. Complex issues, including the defund police movement, are typified in order to be better packaged as a social problem. Solutions to social problems are packaged through prognostic frames, which seek to change culture, how communities are organized, or both. The goal of the Social Problems Game is to inspire social change. A social constructionist perspective will be utilized throughout this thesis in order to understand the social problem of systemic anti-Black racism that manifests in perceived mistreatment from police.

Chapter 4 - Methodology

Having outlined the theoretical framework that is guiding my analysis, I now move to a discussion of my methodology. I begin by discussing constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) and explain how it guided my analysis process. Then I discuss how I collected and stored newspaper articles. Next, I outline the guiding research questions and my process for coding and analyzing the data. Finally, I reflect on the impact my social location and positionality played throughout the research process.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

This study utilized a constructivist grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theorizing involves using a flexible framework that allows theory to be constructed and revisited through the process of data collection and analysis. The author explains that constructivist grounded theory promotes the acknowledgement of the researcher's unique characteristics, and how they may influence data analysis, rather than striving for objectivity. Within this theoretical approach, researchers use the data collection and analysis process simultaneously, allowing researchers to adapt the scope of their research based on discoveries made during the data-gathering process. As Charmaz notes; “[researchers] can add new pieces to the research puzzle or conjure entire new puzzles *while we collect data*, and that can even occur late in the analysis” (2014, p. 25). Utilizing grounded theory allowed me to revisit my research questions as I became more acquainted with the data.

At the outset of the study, the goal of data collection was to see how claims-makers featured in newspaper articles constructed the defund the police movement. During the initial phases of data collection and analysis, the theme of anti-Black policing appeared to permeate throughout the selected articles. However, a new theme emerged through the later stages of data

analysis: the social competition to define what defund the police means. I found that two competing groups offered very different opinions of why biased policing is a current social problem, and what society should do about it. One group, those who supported organizational reform, believed that the system of policing needed to be addressed, and that by addressing the highlighted flaws in the system, policing could improve. The other group, those who supported abolishing the police, believed that the system of policing was flawed beyond repair, and that any proposed solutions to biased policing should lead to getting rid of police entirely. This discovery led to discussions with my thesis committee, which determined that this study would investigate how these competing sets of claims shaped the defund movement. Before introducing and defining the coding process, it is important to understand the research questions that guided my analysis.

Research Questions

Claims-makers have constructed racial bias in policing as a pressing social problem in Canada and abroad. One solution that is commonly put forward to address this social problem is to defund the police. However, depending on who you ask or what you read, defund the police can mean many things. As such, the main research question is: how is defund the police constructed in Canadian news media? After the initial data analysis, three more research questions emerged:

1. Who are the claims-makers involved in constructing the solution of defund the police and what are they claiming?
2. How is defund policing typified and how are the claims constructed?
3. How is the role of police constructed within these articles, and how are solutions to the social problem of biased policing presented?

Data Collection

In order to understand how the defund policing movement was constructed, I conducted a media analysis of articles featured in *The Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*. These outlets were selected because they represent two of the most circulated papers in Canada and are well known as trendsetting newspapers among the Canadian public (News Media Canada, 2020). The selection criteria included all news articles that spoke about defunding the police within a five-month window between May 25th, 2020 and October 25th, 2020. The starting date was selected as it was the day George Floyd was killed (Holmes IV, 2020), which caused nationwide protests in Canada and America and thrust defund police into the collective public discussion. The five-month time window allowed for sufficient news coverage within the selected media sources to accumulate.

I used the Factiva news database located in the Wilfrid Laurier University online library to collect news articles from the *Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail*. This database allows for full-text searches through the selected news sources. Using Factiva as a search engine allows for the collection of articles that are hidden behind paywalls, which enables a complete analysis of the above-mentioned timeframe without worrying about a budget. The search terms “defund* police” and “defund the police” were used to ensure I captured all articles that spoke directly to the defund police movement. A total of 286 articles were initially identified through this selection criteria.

After obtaining the 286 articles, I narrowed my selection criteria. Selection criteria refers to the methods that researchers use to select which data is examined based on the object of analysis, and typically includes exclusion and inclusion criteria (Kleinknecht, van den Scott, & Sanders, 2018). Duplicated or very similar versions of previous articles, and minor editorial

revisions resulting in reprints, including revisions and updates to articles were excluded. After this, a total of 109 articles were included for data analysis. I then downloaded the PDF files of those articles, and imported them into NVIVO 12, a qualitative data analysis software, to aid in the coding process.

Coding Procedure

After importing the newspaper articles to NVIVO, I organized the documents through a process of initial and focused coding (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) notes that initial coding grants the researcher the ability to move swiftly through the data while becoming acquainted with various topics and themes that may emerge. I decided to organize my codes into topics and themes. For example, excerpts related to civilianizing the police through removing use of force options were placed within the *Demilitarization* code, and excerpts pertaining to internal police investigations were placed within the *Internal Police Review* code. I began by doing line-by-line coding, which breaks up large texts into separate lines that allowed me to code the news articles into themes at the micro-level (Charmaz, 2014). After initially coding 15 of the articles, I created a code book that listed a brief description of the codes I came up with. An example of one of these codes is *Academic Professionals as Claims Makers*. Claims put forward by scholars were placed in academic professionals as claims makers to help identify prevalent opinions coming from this group.

I also employed the use of *sensitizing concepts* to aid in the coding process (Charmaz, 2014). Sensitizing concepts refer to the initial ideas or questions that a researcher has that aid in the inquiry of a subject. I began by asking *who are making these claims?* This question allowed me to start to categorize claims-makers to look for patterns to emerge. Later in the process of initial coding, I found that many of the claims made were about what should be done to rectify

the social problem of biased policing, which informed codes related to potential solutions like *Reallocating Money*. Reallocating money housed rhetoric surrounding taking money from the police and giving that money to other entities, for example racialized communities.

After completing the initial coding process, I moved to focused coding. Focused coding involves identifying the most significant and meaningful codes so that a researcher can analyze large amounts of data (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014, p. 140) explains that focused coding “[...] means concentrating on what your initial codes say and the comparisons you make with and between them.” As the focused coding process allows for continuous discovery, I was able to refine previous codes, come up with new codes, combine multiple similar codes, and disregard codes that were not deemed important. For example, I combined the codes “roadblocks to defunding” and “governmental issues” into the code “bureaucracy,” as the previous two codes contained excerpts and quotes displaying frustration with policies that prevent immediate policing change from occurring. In another example, I eliminated the code “corruption” as the instances where claims-makers referenced police corruption were better situated in other codes such as “internal police review” and “police as villains.” Upon completion of the coding process, I ended up with 32 updated focused codes in my code book.

After completing focused coding, I proceeded to analytically memo the data. Analytic memos represent the bridge between coding and writing, where the researcher initially analyzes the data to discover prevalent ideas and common themes that elicit the researcher’s own ideas about the subject (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014, p. 162) notes that during the memo-writing process, “[...] you stop and analyze your ideas about the codes in any – and every – way that occurs to you during the moment.” I began by going through my focused codes and comparing them to discover common themes that may emerge. I jotted down these common ideas and kept

track of powerful quotes and article excerpts that spoke to these themes. For example, after reading various opinions on how defunding the police should work, I wrote:

Calls to defund the police vary. Much of the rhetoric so far revolves around a 10% reduction, which is backed by scholars and some politicians. Some wish to see the police defunded up to 50%, with some calling for government to remove *all* funding. There are ongoing arguments within these articles about what defunding means, and how much we should take from police changes depending on who is claiming.

Memo writing allowed me to make connections within the data, permitting me to begin answering my research questions. However, before these memos were used to inform my writing, I took a step back to acknowledge the impact my positionality and social location had on my interpretation of the data.

Positionality and Social Location

An important part of qualitative research is the acknowledgement of the researcher's *positionality* and *social location*. Positionality refers to the identifiable characteristics of the researcher that make them unique, including age, gender, ethnicity, and personal experiences (Charmaz, 2014). For example, some of my positionalities include being a cis-gendered White male with military experience and various law-enforcement jobs. As well, my initial interest in pursuing this study partially stems from a previous employment goal of mine. Growing up I had wanted to become employed as a police constable. After an unsuccessful application process, I decided to pursue a master's degree in criminology, which helped me decide that policing was not for me due to the risks associated with policing including post-traumatic stress disorder and the risk of physical harm. These positionalities have an impact on how I interpret data.

Acknowledging one's positionality is important to the qualitative process, as these characteristics

influence how a researcher interprets the world around them. Social locations are defined as “characteristics that place you in a particular situation, or in reference to another” (Charmaz, 2014 p. 10). The combination of social locations and positionalities help tell the story of who we are, and it is very important for researchers to recognize their own stories and how these stories impact their perception throughout the research process (Charmaz). In order to remain analytically attentive to this process, I began by looking at my social locations and positionalities.

As a White male privileged enough to be able to access higher education, I observe phenomena, such as systemic racism, from an outsider’s perspective. I accounted for my positionality and social location by engaging in reflexivity. Charmaz (2014) notes that reflexivity is the process of acknowledging that researchers interpret data through their own lived experiences, and that it is impossible for a researcher to be scientifically neutral and unbiased in qualitative research. Further, reflexivity involves understanding how the researcher impacts the research process (Kleinknecht, van den Scott & Sanders, 2018). I used memo-writing as a way to engage in reflexivity. Throughout the memo-writing process, I actively acknowledged my positionality as a privileged White male and evaluated the data through the lens of the casual reader. Through discussions with my thesis committee, I was able to determine which terms were appropriate to be used throughout my thesis. In order to simplify and standardize the writing approach, descriptive terms such as “Black” and “White” were used to distinguish persons of interest. As newspaper articles and academic literature make use of the terms “Black” and “White” to describe citizen ethnicity, I deemed their continued usage appropriate for this thesis. Ongoing discussions with my thesis committee ensured that my analysis was informed through the rhetoric of claims-makers entirely, mitigating the presence of personal bias.

Upon completion of this process, I was able to use this data to begin answering the research questions. Through the use of constructivist grounded theorizing and reflexivity, I identified two competing claims concerning the defund police movement. The first, which I present in chapter five, typifies defund the police as ‘organizational reform’, while the second, which I discuss in chapter six, typifies defund the police as ‘abolishment’. In what follows, I present the empirical findings for each side of the social problem game in chapters five and six. In chapter seven, I utilize a social problems framework to theorize the empirical findings.

Chapter Five – Findings: Organizational Reform

Organizational reform represents the first of two competing constructions of defunding the police. In constructing the solution of defund the police as organizational reform, these claims-makers suggest that implementing major changes to the way police operate will yield positive results and address concerns of anti-Black policing. A fundamental belief associated with the proposed solution of organizational reform is that society needs police in some capacity. Through article analysis, three prominent claims were used in the construction of defund the police as organization reform: policy change, redistribution of funds, and diversification of policing.

Policy Change

One of the central claims used in the construction of defund the police as organizational reform was concerning policy reform. Claims-makers in favour of policy change believe that there are currently guidelines that police follow that inevitably result in negative or harmful interactions that disproportionately affect racialized communities. Claims concerning the policy change focused on four prominent sub-themes: banning ‘carding’ policies (also referred to as “street checks” and “stop and search”); modifying perceivably biased internal investigation processes; limiting the types of calls police respond to; and, navigating governmental roadblocks that stand in the way of police reform.

Carding and performance metrics. Carding is the process in which police officers in Canada stop a person on the street, without warrant or suspicion of crime, to gain information on the person (Tobias & Joseph, 2020). Many politicians and academics claim that carding disproportionately affects racialized community members, causing more harm than good. New

Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jagmeet Singh, speaking out after the police-involved death of New Brunswick resident Rodney Levi, directly referenced carding:

On Monday, Singh repeated his call for the Trudeau government to ban police street checks. Also known as “carding,” these checks proved controversial as extensive reporting by the Star showed they allowed police in Toronto to disproportionately stop and document information of racialized people. University of Toronto Prof. Akwasi Owusu-Bempah, an expert on race and policing, said the federal government could show leadership by banning the practice for the RCMP (*Toronto Star*, 16 June 2020).

This excerpt contains two key claims. The first claim is that carding is wrong as it enables the police to target racialized individuals without warrant and subject them to questioning and intelligence gathering. The second claim is that a federal ban on carding would show leadership, which implies that the government would show a lack of leadership should they not ban the practice. A government that is unable to provide effective leadership in rectifying the social problem of biased policing may lose significant public support and framing carding as a federal leadership test puts pressure on the majority government to respond to these claims.

Calls for police to end ‘carding’ practices were also connected to broader calls for police to reduce their contact with racialized communities. Owusu-Bempah, a University of Toronto professor specializing on race and policing, warned that banning street checks might not be enough to solve the social problem of biased policing:

[...] Owusu-Bempah cautioned that banning street checks doesn't necessarily reduce levels of police contact. He co-authored a study in 2019 that found 26 percent of Black respondents to a GTA survey said they were stopped by police at least twice in the previous two years. Carding was restricted in Ontario in 2017 (*Toronto Star*, 16 June 2020).

The quote above references carding being restricted in 2017, with Black residents still experiencing elevated levels of police contact after the fact. This claim suggests that carding does not wholly explain the elevated level of contact Black residents have with police. To

promote positive change in policing, this argument suggests that other organizational reforms must be made in addition to the removal of carding.

For example, the outgoing chief for the Toronto Police Service (TPS) Mark Saunders, acknowledges problems associated with carding, but argues that the problem is not carding itself, but the broader shift in policing towards metrics:

Where [carding] was wrong was when it was used as a *measuring tool for performance*, and when people thought that more was better. And, you know, if (police patrol) Car A got 10 and Car B got 20, that represented Car B was working harder. This was where it got not good. This is where we started to lose our legitimacy (*Toronto Star*, 1 August 2020, *emphasis added*).

Above, the outgoing chief focuses the problem of carding on a broader organizational issue concerning performance metrics – noting that when ‘carding’ “got not good” and police began to “lose...legitimacy” was when it was used by the service to evaluate officers’ work performance. Thus, the act of ‘carding’ is not inherently bad, but the way in which the organization utilized the activity as a performance measurement was problematic.

As demonstrated above, claims concerning the need to change the use of ‘carding’ involve different sets of claims-makers (specifically politicians and police officers) and explanations of the problem. First, politicians constructed carding as a process that fosters a potential abuse of power and has contributed to disproportionately stopping racialized citizens. For these claims-makers, ‘carding’ is a practice that needs to be abolished. In contrast, police services constructed carding as a community intelligence gathering tool that has been misused by police services as a performance management tool that has negatively affected police legitimacy. Framing the issue of carding as a procedural error allows the mitigation of responsibility for officers and works to protect the legitimacy and role of police. Instead of saying carding itself is problematic, the claim suggests that carding is an appropriate police process so long as officer performance is not measured by frequency of civilian contacts.

Internal investigations. A second claim used by claims-makers in favour of defunding the police concerned the current model that Canadian police services follow for internal investigations. Internal investigations refer to the process that police services follow when examining officer conduct after specific parameters are met. In Ontario, the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) investigates cases involving the police where a person suffers serious injuries or death, a police firearm was discharged or there are allegations of sexual assault (Special Investigations Unit, 2021). Currently, police or ex-police who serve in agencies such as the SIU, handle these investigations (Maynard, 2020). Claims-makers argue that police should not be investigating themselves, stating that it is a conflict of interest that promotes unfavourable results for victims of police violence and negatively impacts police legitimacy.

Many claims-makers used the death of Ejaz Choudry, a 62-year-old Punjabi man living with schizophrenia as an example of inappropriate practices (Garmot, 2020). In June of 2020, police officers responded to a mental health crisis when family members of Choudry called for help after he threatened to harm himself. According to an SIU report, Choudry was armed with a 20cm knife when police kicked down his balcony door, with police shouting at Choudry in English to drop his weapon (Nasser, 2021). Choudry did not speak English. During the encounter, which lasted over three hours, police utilized a CEW and plastic bullets on Choudry (Nasser, 2021). When this method was not effective, officers discharged firearms, killing Choudry (Garmot, 2020). Claims-makers drew on this case to question the legitimacy of the use of SIU:

Another aspect of policing that has been questioned is the province's Special Investigations Unit, which investigates any case where there has been a death, serious injury or allegations of sexual assault involving police. Choudry's friends and family have been calling for an independent public inquiry into his death, stating that the SIU "has historically failed victims of police violence and brutality" (*The Toronto Star*, 20 July 2020).

The quote above characterizes the SIU as negative actors that either work against the victims of police violence or do not conduct their investigatory role with due diligence and “fail victims of police violence and brutality”.

Claims-makers construct their claim by identifying a conflict of interest - arguing that “police investigating other police is inherently biased” (The Toronto Star, 3 July 2020).

The Special Investigations Unit (SIU), established in 1990, was supposed to improve police accountability yet it is widely criticized as a *toothless organization*. The Ontario Human Rights Commission, for example, reports that there are many documented instances of TPS [Toronto Police Service] officers failing to co-operate with the SIU, providing biased and untrustworthy testimony, or attempting to stop the recording of incidents (*The Toronto Star*, 9 June 2020, *emphasis added*).

In the excerpt above, SIU is defined as “toothless”, with officers and police services who fail to co-operate with SIU investigations defined as “biased”, and “untrustworthy”. These word choices are important, as they not only undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the investigatory service, but they also promote the use of outside agencies for conducting internal investigations. In labelling the SIU as *toothless*, claims-makers delegitimize the organization by presenting the SIU as lacking the authority and respect of the police departments they investigate.

When discussing the need for organizational reform, claims-makers also drew on the high-profile Dafonte Miller case. In 2016, off-duty police constable Michael Theriault beat Dafonte Miller, a Black teenager, so severely that the teenager lost an eye to injury (Hayes, 2020). The assault occurred during an attempted arrest by Theriault and resulted in the off-duty constable being charged with aggravated assault and attempt to obstruct justice. After a lengthy trial, Theriault was convicted of assault, a lesser charge. The officer remains employed with the TPS. After the assault, the TPS did not report the incident to the SIU. Note the following coverage of this incident in The Globe and Mail:

Toronto's new interim police chief has apologized for the force's handling of a vicious police assault on a Black teenager, acknowledging they erred in not alerting the province's police watchdog after an off-duty constable beat Dafonte Miller in Whitby, Ont., in December, 2016. "We made the wrong decision that night," interim Chief James Ramer, who took lead of the service following Mark Saunders's retirement at the end of July, said at a news conference Thursday. "As a result of that decision, *trust* has been broken between the police, Dafonte Miller and the broader community. For that, on behalf of the Toronto Police Service, I want to apologize" (*The Globe and Mail*, 7 August 2020).

Claims-makers draw upon this incident to illustrate the shortcoming of "police watch dogs" by demonstrating how incidents of police misuse of force are left to the discretion of police themselves. The article explains how SIU's mismanagement of the incident was the result of unclear legislation. This decision, explained later on in the article, was the result of the SIU relying on legislation that did not expressly state that off-duty officers have a duty to report police-involved cases resulting in serious injury or death (Hayes, 2020).

Redefining roles. The third claim used to construct organizational reform as a solution to the social problem of biased policing was one that focused on the role of the police and the types of calls police should be responding to. Sandy Hudson, Co-founder of Black Lives Matter Toronto, argues that other agencies are more capable of responding to certain calls with safer results:

There are many scenarios that police respond to these days that could be handled by others, Hudson said. She cited a recent opinion column published in the New York Times that suggested rewriting policies or statutes to prevent police officers from responding to certain kinds of emergencies, such as those that involve substance abuse, domestic violence, homelessness or mental health (*The Toronto Star*, 2 June 2020).

Wong-Tam, a Toronto city councillor in favour of a 10 percent TPS budget cut, further explains:

Asking police officers to be the social worker that shows up on the doorstep armed with guns and pepper spray, I just don't think that has given us always the best outcome (*The Toronto Star*, 18 June 2020).

As illustrated in the media excerpts above, claims-makers suggest that police are not “social workers” and therefore are not the best suited to respond to certain calls – such as mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, and social disorder. Above, officers’ equipment, such as “guns and pepper sprays” are used to paint a visual image of the way modern police presence can escalate situations rather than de-escalate them. Thus, claims-makers in favour of organizational reform believe that the key to mitigating potential issues relating to mental-health crises is to prevent police from responding to them altogether.

When speaking about police response to mental health crises, politicians largely agreed with members of the public. Governmental discussions surrounding this issue culminated in proposed changes to policing policy. Many politicians directly referenced their support of these proposed changes. John Tory, the current mayor of Toronto, is one of the politicians in favour of redefining police roles:

Tory has his own series of recommendations, starting with asking city staff to work with the police service to develop "alternative models of community safety response" that includes *creating a non-police response to calls that don't involve weapons*, such as mental health crises (*The Toronto Star*, 29 June 2020, *emphasis added*).

The Toronto Police Services Board met to discuss recommendations aimed at reforming police:

The board report recommends an alternative community safety model be developed that *removes police officers from responding to certain calls*, including emergency mental health situations (*The Toronto Star*, 18 August 2020, *emphasis added*).

The excerpts above have used defund the police as a way to redefine police roles – having funds be diverted towards the development of “alternative models of community safety” that narrows the purview of police to law enforcement and public safety calls. In this way, claims-makers identify the continued need for police in society but redefine what their role and responsibilities are by “creating a non-police response to calls that don’t involve weapons”. One of these

potential response teams, the Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team, was mentioned within the articles:

Earlier this year, Peel police followed Toronto police in launching a Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team that pairs specially trained officers with mental health crisis workers to respond to mental health crises. For now, that team is small, with only two units on the road from noon until 2 a.m. each day, and at a cost of less than \$1 million, it's a fraction of the overall cost of policing (*The Toronto Star*, 12 July 2020).

The excerpt above illustrates how police services are creating new policies and practices in response to mental-health calls for service with the goal of producing safer outcomes.

Yet, government legislation represents a significant roadblock in the pursuit of policy change in policing. For example:

On July 9, Peel regional council voted to explore different ways to reduce the role of police in mental-health calls. However, a motion to reduce police involvement was not passed, as the Mental Health Act only authorizes police to transport patients to a hospital or psychiatric care (*The Toronto Star*, 20 July 2020).

Nishan Duraiappah, the Peel Regional Police Chief at the time of Ejaz Choudry's death, offered his opinion about police response to mental health calls:

The current paradigm for policing is we are not mental health professionals. Under current legislation with the Mental Health Act, if there is somebody in crisis that needs to be connected, the only legislative body that can take them to the hospital is the police (*The Toronto Star*, 14 July 2020).

Both of the excerpts above draw attention to the challenges facing organizational reform. For example, the regional council of Peel was unable to pass a motion that would limit police involvement in mental-health calls. Even though public, police, and politician opinions support this change, the Mental Health Act authorizes only police officers apprehend and transport mental-health patients to a hospital for assessment in cases where the person is mentally disordered and are a risk to themselves and others (Garmot, 2020).

Redistribution of Funds

A second central theme of organizational reform focused on defunding the police by redistributing funds. Claims-makers construct the solution of divesting and reinvesting in two distinct ways. There are some claims-makers who suggest that police funding be reduced by ‘de-tasking’ and redefining police roles. For other claims-makers, they call for money to be diverted away from policing and reinvested into the racialized communities that have suffered injustices when interacting with police. In this way, both sets of claims-makers call for a reduction in police funding, but how and why the reduction is called for differs.

Reducing funds by de-tasking police. Claims-makers assert that a promising way to limit the possibility of police malpractice is to reduce police funding by “de-tasking” the police (Gillis, 2020). Similar to the earlier discussion of changing the role of the police, claims-makers typify defunding the police as a way to reduce some funding while reallocating those funds to services that can take on tasks police would no longer be responsible for. In this way, claims-makers frame de-tasking with the assumption that with less mandatory tasks, police would require less money to operate. The Toronto Police Services Board, led by Mayor John Tory, voted unanimously to approve a roadmap for comprehensive police reform, which includes:

The board's plan makes changes that will reduce policing costs, including the eventual *removal of police from some mental health crisis calls* - a move they say will allow money currently spent on policing to go elsewhere (The Toronto Star, 19 August 2020, *emphasis added*).

Other community voices seek to remove police from attendance at drug overdose scenes:

Recent weeks have seen growing calls to defund the police, which *include rerouting and investing this money into different community programs and social services*. Here's one idea where we could start: *stop routine police attendance at drug overdoses*. [...] Overdoses are first and foremost medical emergencies, and police involvement is unnecessary at best and counterproductive - perhaps fatal - at worst. Far from being protective, police presence can be a public health risk (The Toronto Star, 9 August 2020, *emphasis added*).

Both excerpts above speak to the importance of limiting police funding by redefining (“de-tasking”) the police – e.g., removing attending mental health calls and drug overdose calls from their mandate. The second excerpt, for example, argues that police presence during an overdose is counterproductive because drug overdoses are “first and foremost medical emergencies”, and police response to these calls can be “fatal”. The authors state that police response can be fatal to those suffering a drug overdose as some witnesses feel calling 911 will not safeguard them from being on the police radar (Butler-McPhee, Ka Hon Chu, van der Meulen, & Jeon, 2020). Using words such as ‘fatal’ focuses the reader’s attention on the importance of remedying the social issue of biased policing. When observed through the lens of defunding the police, claims-makers argue that taking money away from the police through de-tasking measures is urgent and necessary.

Reinvesting in racialized communities. A second popular claim used in the defund police movement involves taking money from the police budget and reallocating that money into racialized communities. Claims-makers believe that reinvesting money into these communities is the first step forward in preventing biased police violence while simultaneously helping communities that have suffered police violence and over-surveillance. An article that presented the competing conceptualizations of defunding the police as Toronto city council debated defunding the police noted:

[...] Defunding the police has taken on many different meanings as protests have spread across North America and beyond. Defunding doesn't necessarily mean reducing the police budget to \$0 or abolishing the force altogether. Typically, it calls for the redirection of some or most funds currently being used for policing to city services for marginalized communities that have been subject to violence and over-policing (*The Toronto Star*, 29 June 2020).

Above, defund has been defined as ‘redistribution’ not ‘abolishment’. The use of the word ‘typically’ is important here as it infers to the reader that majority of people understand

defund to infer reinvestment and not abolishment. Councillor Matlow, a Toronto politician in favour of a 10 percent police budget decrease, details the potential benefits of reinvesting in the community:

Matlow said evidence demonstrates that investing in communities "by helping our kids avoid picking up a gun in the first place rather than funding ways to arrest them and incarcerate them afterwards" are better at making those communities safer. "It protects people. It serves them better" (*The Toronto Star*, 30 June 2020).

The excerpt above frames reinvesting in the community as a process that enhances community safety. This community safety is argued to materialize through educating youth to avoid criminal behaviour, resulting in the proactive prevention of crime.

Activist organizations, such as Black Lives Matter, also argued for the reinvestment of police funds into racialized communities:

Black Lives Matters Toronto member Syrus Marcus Ware called for the "redirection of Toronto police funds into Black, Indigenous, racialized, impoverished and other targeted communities." (*The Toronto Star*, 19 June 2020).

Black Lives Matter Toronto - a group actively fighting anti-Black racism and police violence - has published several demands. The first of these is to "immediately redirect a minimum of 50 percent" of the current Toronto police budget towards housing, food security, transit, libraries, anti-violence programs and more. (*The Toronto Star*, 29 June 2020).

While the amount of funds being called to be redistributed away from police services differ among the claims-makers, common among these calls is for funds to be redirected toward marginalized communities and community safety initiatives, such as anti-violence programs.

Diversification Within Policing

The third, and final, claim used in the construction of organizational reform as a solution to the putative problem of biased policing concerns diversifying the police service membership. Claims-makers who support diversifying the police service believe police services should place strong emphasis on promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. Claims about diversifying the

police service falls into two categories. First, claims-makers suggest that the police service must accurately represent the communities they serve by adopting diverse hiring practices and promotional policies. Second, claims-makers suggest that police services should enhance officer training, especially regarding racial sensitivity.

Diversify the service. Claims-makers calling for increased diversity note a lack of diversity within Canadian policing – particularly in leadership roles:

Jacqueline Edwards, a manager with the Correctional Service of Canada in Kingston, Ont., says there's still a lot of work that needs to be done to diversify the upper ranks of public safety agencies (*The Toronto Star*, 7 June 2020).

An example of this need to diversify is mentioned in another article:

Out of Ontario's 52 SIU investigators, seven are people of colour, three of whom are Black. Two other investigators are Indigenous. In Manitoba's Independent Investigation Unit (IIU), two of their 11 investigators are people of colour, and another investigator is Indigenous. Four out of 25 ASIRT investigators in Alberta are not white, including two who are Indigenous (*The Toronto Star*, 3 July 2020).

Claims-makers argue that the police should do their best to visibly exemplify the communities they serve. Scholar Owusu-Bempah, speaking to the benefits of diversifying the police service, comments:

Diversity in a police force is important for two reasons, said Owusu-Bempah. A diverse workforce would ensure the only interactions a police officer has with a Black or Indigenous person are not through policing. It also means more people will see themselves reflected in the institutions (*The Toronto Star*, 9 June 2020).

Tom Stamatakis, president of the Canadian Police Association, in an article released eight days after the death of George Floyd, agrees that police services should better reflect the communities they serve:

“We realize our police services have to reflect the diversity of communities we police,” he said. “We realize when we're responding to the community we need to ... look at things from their perspective” (*The Toronto Star*, 2 June 2020).

Both quotes above argue that improving diversity hiring would create positive changes for policing. Claims-makers argue that a police service that visibly represents their community would be better able to tackle the unique challenges facing racialized communities. The first excerpt speaks to a lesser-known potential benefit to diversifying the ranks of policing: increased racialized contact for officers. Professor Owusu-Bempah states that having more Black and Indigenous officers would provide opportunities for other officers to have more contact with racialized communities inside of their workplace. This, in turn, could lead to positive change by promoting positive interactions with coworkers rather than solely relying on interactions with civilians.

Claims-makers believe that there is a severe lack of diversity in leadership roles within policing, and the only way to change that is to address the diversity issue by encouraging the career growth of diverse leadership candidates. This claim suggests that promoting more diversity in leadership roles within the police force will lead to more positive outcomes and a more diverse and inclusive police service.

Enhancing diversity training. Many claims-makers argue that paying special attention to officer training is an effective way to enact positive change to police culture. Claims-makers suggest that specialized training focused on diversity and inclusivity would allow officers to better understand the unique challenges equity-seeking communities face. As well, claims-makers suggest that specialized training would result in better and safer police-civilian outcomes by addressing bias among officers. A set of proposals put forward by Toronto Police Services Board chairman Jim Hart, which was backed by Mayor John Tory, include an inclusivity training mandate:

[Inclusivity training] would cover anti-racism – and specifically anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism – “bias avoidance,” LGBTQ issues and “intersectionality” (the way

social groupings such as race, class and gender overlap), as well as ethics in policing. The course would be kept up-to-date with input from the City of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism unit. Current anti-Black racism retraining courses for police would also be made permanent and studied for possible expansion (*The Globe and Mail*, 18 June 2020).

This claim suggests that inclusivity training is crucial for police to ensure fair and equal treatment as well as safe contact with civilians. Further, the claim above implies that without inclusivity training, police services will be unable to alter officer culture to align with the rest of society. Some claims-makers suggest training would, over time, cause a positive cultural shift in policing, with David Soknacki, a former budget chief and Scarborough councillor commenting:

[...] changes to training and culture will usher in transformation from the next generation of officers once they reach management levels. "Right now what you're seeing is the service members who have been trained in the ways that existed before transformation ... and the pressure was not and is not ongoing to force the change (*The Toronto Star*, 5 June 2020).

The excerpt above focuses on the culture of policing. The main claim is that while there is no way to force meaningful change among seasoned officers, the next generation of officers will usher in a cultural transformation to police organizations. Claims-makers believe that new recruits who have benefitted from early diversity training and progressive cultural influences would eventually replace the 'old guard' in leadership positions, which would revolutionize the culture of policing in time.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to demonstrate how claims-makers typify defund policing as organizational reform. Claims-makers constructed the prognostic frame of organizational reform in three distinct ways. The first claim used was one of policy change. This change involved modifying police processes, including limiting what types of calls police are mandated to attend, as well as removing ineffective "sham" processes like internal police investigations. The second claim involved divesting funds away from police and reinvesting

them into the community. The final claim used concerned diversifying the police service through adopting pro-diversity hiring and promotional processes and developing inclusivity training.

Overall, the proposed solutions relating to organizational reform subscribe to the belief that these reforms can improve policing and are necessary for the safety and security of citizens.

Chapter Six – Findings: Abolish the Police

The second, and competing, typification of the defund the police movement was abolitionism. Key claims-makers who typify the solution of defund the police as abolishing the police include activists, with Black Lives Matter playing a prominent role. Claims-makers who typify the solution of defunding the police as abolitionism believe that policing directly causes society unnecessary harm, especially within racialized communities. An analysis of the newspaper articles yielded three themes surrounding the abolitionism of the police. First, claims-makers rationalized the abolitionism of police through the claim that policing is inherently unfixable. Second, claims-makers state that the origins of policing in Canada and America was to carry out racially discriminatory policy. Finally, claims-makers suggest that civilianizing the police service, which refers to employing more civilians rather than sworn officers for various duties, would yield positive results. The following chapter will describe how claims-makers typify and construct defund the police as abolishing the police.

Policing as Unfixable

Those who typified defund the police to mean abolitionism constructed policing as unfixable. Claims-makers in support of abolitionism believe that a society without police is safer than a society with police. Activism is the primary way in which pro-abolition thoughts reach the public, with most claims conveyed in the form of protest. Speaking directly to safety and policing, BLM leader Sandy Hudson notes:

Right now, Black communities, and often Indigenous communities, are interacting with police on a regular basis just because of the *way police target our communities*. They *don't provide safety for us at all*," Hudson said. "Conversely, communities that aren't typically engaging with police on a regular basis feel safe with the police because of the option to call them, but they're not actually interacting with them very much (*The Toronto Star*, 2 June 2020, *emphasis added*).

The excerpt above contains a direct claim related to the perceived danger associated with being subjected to policing, arguing that police do not provide safety for racialized communities, but instead target them. By stating that police do not provide safety “*at all*” and that police “*target communities*”, Sandy Hudson made the claim that police presence *endangers* citizens. This claim constructs police as a threatening entity that must be dismantled in order to ensure public safety. The quote also notes how communities that are not “targeted” by police would feel safe to call them because they are not interacting often enough with police to experience a pattern of negative consequences. BLM claims-makers constructed the defund police movement as one necessary in order to protect racialized communities.

During a defund the police protest outside of the TPS headquarters, protestors voiced their frustrations towards many issues surrounding biased policing, including the dangers surrounding police presence:

The route was easily traceable even after the streets began to clear as chalk drawings reading, “Black Lives Matter” and “Who do you call when cops kill?” accompanied the many, many colourful messages along the route. These all led back to police headquarters, where protestors made their feelings clear throughout the day with a succinct, direct message to police officers. “Quit your jobs! Quit your jobs!” (*The Toronto Star*, 19 June 2020).

By asking “who do you call when cops kill?”, BLM claims-makers draw attention to concerns with police presence. These claims-makers believe that summoning the police service places them in immediate danger, and victims have no response options to save them from police violence. Thus, defund the police, for BLM claims-makers, means to abolish the present policing system:

"Today we are here to abolish the police," another speaker said, to another round of cheers. "Defunding is the first step. It is simply the first step" (*The Toronto Star*, 30 August 2020).

This initial goal of defunding the police comes with the long-term goal of dismantling the service, as illustrated later in the same media excerpt:

“We need to DEFUND as a means to ABOLISH.” (*The Toronto Star*, 30 August 2020).

As illustrated above, claims-makers have typified defund the police to mean abolishment.

Claims-makers in favour of abolishment, much like those in favour of organizational reform, believe that society should reallocate the funds from policing into the community. Those calling for abolition believe that members of racialized communities are especially deserving of these funds, as they are frequently the victims of police violence. Activist Desmond Cole spoke about this issue while speaking at a Defund Police rally in central Toronto:

Reflect on what would be different if we could use the resources that are currently being used for policing *to actually care (for) and support* Black, Indigenous, queer and trans, homeless and disabled and other marginalized people in our community [...]” (*The Toronto Star*, 29 June 2020, *emphasis added*).

Of particular interest in the quote above, is the way claims-makers framed their claim through the use of “actually care for”. The use of the phrase “*to actually care for*” signifies to the reader that funding the institute of policing goes against the wellbeing of marginalized groups in the community. Further, Cole mentions the homeless and disabled in the above quote, highlighting more potential victims that could have their quality of life improved through action. This claim further emphasizes that to help these marginalized communities, government must “reallocate” the money they give to the police to racialized and other marginalized communities. While participating in a Defund Police protest at TPS headquarters, protestors associated with Not Another Black Life—a Toronto activist group in support of abolishing the police—spoke directly to this issue:

"Without the removal of the laws of colonialism, the liberation of Black, Indigenous and people of colour will cease to exist. Invest in people, not police. Reallocation Committees will ensure funding divested from police forces will be reallocated back to community-based initiatives" (*The Toronto Star*, 30 August 2020).

There are two main claims within this excerpt. The first claim is that modern police still hold ideological roots in colonialism, which leaves racialized community members at risk. Thus, claims-makers believe that radical change, which in this case involves abolishing the police, is necessary. The second claim asks society to invest in people, not police. This claim establishes the narrative of binary choice, making it appear that one may invest in police, or the public, but not both. Thus, those in favour of organizational reform wish to modestly defund the police, while still maintaining police presence within the community. Those calling to defund the police see defunding as the *first step* in a series of steps meant to dismantle and abolish the institution of policing.

For claims-makers arguing to abolish the police, they argue that training and organizational reform is not the answer. BLM leader Sandy Hudson speaks about this issue multiple times. In an article discussing the various ways policing could be reformed, Hudson believed training would not lead to successful reform:

Many police forces, including the Toronto police service, already have mandatory annual bias and diversity training. The Ontario Police College also includes training on bias, which the Ontario Human Rights Commission has said should include the impacts of under-policing on Indigenous communities. But Hudson said more training is not the answer. "I don't know what additional training we haven't thought of yet that could possibly be implemented that is going to change things now in 2020," she said (*The Toronto Star*, 9 June 2020).

As well, in an article that looks at the various definitions of defund the police Hudson states:

"I don't think we need the institution of policing as it exists right now, whatsoever. We've tried the reform thing and it's just not working," said Sandy Hudson, co-founder of Black Lives Matter Toronto and now a law student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) (*The Toronto Star*, 2 June 2020).

The media excerpts above frame abolishment as the only way forward because, as Sandy Hudson notes, training reform has failed and there is no training that "is going to change things now in

2020". In an article that interviewed Black police officers in Canada about the George Floyd's death and the Defund Police movement, the author notes:

Some critics have gone so far as to suggest doing away with the current model of policing under the banner "defund the police." No amount of training or diversity hiring will change the recurring pattern of police violence, they say." (*The Toronto Star*, 7 June 2020).

BLM Leader Sandy Hudson agrees with the belief that attempting reform will achieve positive results:

"They need to defund the police. It's the only thing that's going to work. They've already tried all these types of reforms," [...] (*The Toronto Star*, 12 August 2020).

Both quotes above work to discredit claims calling for training and organizational reform initiatives and argue that organizational reform will not change the "recurring pattern of police violence". The goal of these claims-makers is to take as much money away from the police as possible, with the eventual dismantling of the police service as a result.

Policing as Historically and Systemically Racist

Claims-makers also typify the solution of abolishing the police through claims of systemic racism. Claims-makers who typify defund the police as abolishment point attention to historical and racial discrimination perpetrated by the government, including slavery and segregation. Claims-makers assert that police were used to enforce racist ideologies. Speaking of the previous atrocities committed by police, a reporter covering equity and inequality for *The Toronto Star* arguing that police should attend mental health calls noted:

When you follow the line of blue shields back to their origin, one of the first forms of police in the American south were slave patrols. And Canada is not too far off. The Mounties were founded to police Indigenous people as the country colonized westward and the organization was based on the force the British used to control the Irish. The way Indigenous and Black people are treated by the police has been and still is damningly similar (*The Toronto Star*, 3 June 2020).

The excerpt above performs two actions related to the claim of police-perpetrated systemic racism. The first action is presenting the historically discriminatory past of policing to the reader. Presenting the prejudiced history of law enforcement in Canada and America to the reader allows for a deeper understanding of the origin of policing. The second action related to the claim of police-perpetrated systemic racism involves linking the past to the present. Stating that the police treat Black and Indigenous people “*damningly similar*” to the way police treated those groups during slavery and residential schooling works to undermine the credibility and legitimacy of police services.

Claims-makers assert that the history of colonization of Canada and America directly impacts the legacy of discrimination that racialized community members have experienced in North America. An article written about the historical legacy of racism in North America outlines how language has changed to acknowledge historical and modern discrimination:

BIPOC and racialized are often used in North America. Racialized “is language that refers to people who experience racism,” Hudson said. BIPOC is an acronym for Black, Indigenous, person of colour. [...] This iteration, BIPOC, emphasizes the unique experiences that Black and Indigenous people can have in North America, due to the history of colonization, slavery and genocide (*The Toronto Star*, 4 September 2020).

The media excerpt above works to (1) educate readers on the origin of the term BIPOC, which stands for Black, Indigenous, person of colour, and, (2) argue that the unique experiences that Black and Indigenous people have in North America are *due to* colonization. While not directly referencing policing, the belief that colonization directly contributes to modern-day discrimination strengthens the abolition rhetoric, tying historical actions such as slavery and residential schooling to modern policing.

Claims-makers in favour of abolition believe that modern police discrimination is just as dangerous, with BLM Toronto co-founder Rodney Diverlus stating during a defund police protest at TPS headquarters:

“We know that police kill our communities,” Black Lives Matter Toronto co-founder Rodney Diverlus told a crowd of supporters Friday. “We know that being Black and Indigenous is a danger when it comes to interaction with police. “We know that our lives when we interact with the police are not safe” (*The Toronto Star*, 19 June 2020).

The excerpt above powerfully argues that being Black and Indigenous is not safe when interacting with the police because police “kill our communities”. While such claims are powerful in their own right, they are situated against the backdrop of historical colonial violence perpetrated by Canadian and American governments. Thus, claims-makers arguing for abolition believe that historical, systemic racism contributes to modern police violence against racialized communities.

Civilianization

Finally, claims-makers for abolition construct ‘civilianization’ as the way forward. Civilianizing the police service means outsourcing current police duties to members of the public who are not members of the military or police. Claims-makers who support civilianizing the police service believe that outside agencies, such as social work and mental health care, would better perform the current roles of police in society, with better, safer outcomes. Contrary to those in favour of organizational reform, abolitionists believe that these outside civilian-run agencies can effectively replace modern policing. Within the abolitionist view of civilianization, removing officers from specific roles and duties has the greater goal of reducing officer numbers and limiting interactions with the public.

A commonly mentioned solution to the social problem of biased policing shared among those in favour of abolishing the police and those in favour of organizational reform is

civilianizing mental-health emergency calls. Claims-makers believe that sending unarmed mental-health experts to mental-health calls will result in better outcomes for all parties involved in a mental-health emergency. As well, those in favour of abolishing the police assert that mental-health workers will be better equipped than police officers to de-escalate volatile scenarios. During a town hall meeting hosted by the Toronto Police board, attendees commented:

"A person who is in so much pain that they want to die doesn't need an officer with a gun, a Taser and handcuffs showing up at their door," said Rachel Bromberg, co-founder of the Reach Out Response network, a coalition working to build a civilian-led mental health emergency service. "That person needs gentle, compassionate, trauma-informed response by well-trained mental health experts." Jaya Balkissoon also questioned why police were responding to these calls, saying she and other people of colour are scared that any interaction with police can result in death (*The Toronto Star*, 10 July 2020).

This claim offers context into police presence at mental-health crises. First, claims-makers assert that the use of force options police may elect to use during interactions with people in mental health crisis cause fear and injury. The second claim states that when the scenario involves racialized community members suffering mental-health crises, the victims have a genuine fear that the interaction will result in their death. Both of these claims seek to limit or end the role of the police officer in mental-health calls for service.

In order to further the narrative that police presence is not necessary during mental health and addiction crises, some claims makers offer a more direct assertion. These claims-makers argue that police presence during overdose is *completely unnecessary*. In an article requesting that police refrain from attending drug overdose calls, the authors note:

When people call 911 to request an ambulance upon witnessing an overdose, only paramedics should be sent, and the situation should be treated as the medical emergency it is. Unfortunately, that's not what seems to be happening, at least not in Ontario, with police regularly attending overdose scenes with little obvious rhyme or reason. More often than not, there is no purpose for police to be present (*The Toronto Star*, 9 August 2020).

This claim is very simple and straightforward; police have little to no reason to respond to overdose calls. As well, the belief is that police presence does not treat the scenario as a medical emergency. Later on in the same article, the rhetoric surrounding police presence at mental-health calls becomes more accusatory:

Not only are police unhelpful during these life-and-death situations, but they create roundabout ways to criminalize the Good Samaritans who call 911 for help. Our recent research has revealed that when police are present at an overdose, some engage in surveillance, at times even taking down names of people perceived to be "involved" or simply in the vicinity. Police have returned to these people in the following hours or days to get more information from them, triggering fear that they are now on the police "radar." (*The Toronto Star*, 9 August 2020).

The excerpt above asserts that police presence at substance use calls criminalizes any citizens on scene who called police for help. This argument suggests that people who are in or around the event may have increased police contacts in the future by being placed on the police radar, bringing trouble to themselves. This claim is very powerful, as it expresses concern to readers that *any* police involvement can be extremely negative, and that being known by the police for any reason is troubling. When perceived alongside the previously mentioned carding issue, which saw racialized community members become targets for police intelligence gathering, claims-makers produce a claim that promotes fear of interaction with police to the public.

Abolition by defunding. Reducing the police budget is one of the central themes of the defund the police movement, however those in favour of abolition believe that reducing police budget through civilianization is a step towards abolition rather than a standalone solution. Claims-makers view funds currently allocated to the police as funds taken away from marginalized communities. Speaking of this notion, a Torontonians politician introduced a motion that stated:

"It is incumbent upon decision-makers to ensure that necessary resources and supports are provided to Black, Indigenous and People of Colour. The police budget is the single largest

item in our city's operating budget," said the motion that acknowledged ongoing anti-Black racism (*The Toronto Star*, 29 June 2020).

This claim directly mentions the police budget as the single largest item within the city's total budget. Mentioning this fact directly after stating that BIPOC persons receive their necessary support frames the police budget as a roadblock to that support. As previously mentioned, policing in Toronto has a budget of over one billion dollars annually (Pagliaro, 2020). After stating that city council must ensure racialized members of the community receive necessary support, the police budget comes into question. An article examining the potential methods of defunding the TPS through the rhetoric of claims-makers for and against the idea mentioned the current TPS budget:

Salaries and benefits account for nearly 90 per cent of total police spending. Those wages are locked into multi-year contracts approved by the Toronto Police Services Board. The current contract, which secured an 11.1 per cent wage increase over five years - more than the increase for any other city employee - expires in 2023 (*The Toronto Star*, 5 June 2020).

This excerpt illustrates the nature of police budgeting, which is very heavily skewed towards salary and benefits. While politicians, activists, and the public place pressure on governments to defund police services, the budget breakdown of policing represents a hurdle of bureaucracy that is very difficult to overcome in a short amount of time. Claims-makers in support of civilianizing the police service mention that civilians could do a better job and cost much less, effectively replacing the police, which would help alleviate the bureaucracy surrounding defunding the police.

Black Lives Matter believes in a firm 50 percent budget cut to policing, stating:

On its website, BLM TO says it is ultimately "working toward the abolition of the police and toward a society where we can all be safe." Its demand for a 50-per-cent cut is backed by a number of groups and is the subject of form emails and petitions that have flooded the inboxes of city councillors, according to their staff (*The Toronto Star*, 29 June 2020).

This excerpt claims that abolishing the police would work towards making society safer. BLM activists further state that reducing police budgets by 50 percent would act as a first step abolishing the police, and place vast pressure on local government through emails and petitioning. One of the few ways to accomplish significant budget cuts to police is through civilianization. Toronto police board member Jim Hart spoke to this issue, stating:

Toronto police board chair Jim Hart said Thursday that he doesn't think the police budget is too high. Changes made as part of the police modernization plan have resulted in cost savings, including a reduction of 600 positions - saving \$100 million - the civilianization of some roles, and changes to the service's shift schedule, Hart said (*The Toronto Star*, 5 June 2020).

This excerpt contains two claims. The first claim is that the police budget is not too high as it currently stands. Many members of the police service support this claim, which makes sense as their budget significantly impacts their operational strength as well as their salaries. The second claim is that police services already seek to civilianize where possible in order to produce budgeting efficiencies. This claim serves to shed light on how police services attempt to utilize their budget. During the defund the police movement, claims-makers who support keeping the budget the way it is must convince the public that police deserve their level of funding.

Eliminating the number of police officers is a belief forwarded by those who wish to abolish the police. Claims-makers believe civilianization is a process that would help dissolve policing as it would cut the number of on-duty officers down and would therefore limit the number of interactions police have with the public. Activists are not the only people who support this claim. Some politicians in both Canada and America have made statements and debated eliminating police responsibilities. Toronto Mayor John Tory mentioned taking away tasks from police in an action plan:

The plan instead calls for an audit of the police budget, greater financial transparency — including the “immediate” posting of a line-by-line breakdown of the 2020 budget — and

“de-tasking” measures Tory says will result in less spending on policing down the line. That includes the development of an alternate community safety model that removes police officers from responding to certain calls, including emergency mental health situations, and a requirement that the Toronto police “detail potential reductions” to the budget that would flow from a new model (*The Toronto Star*, 11 August 2020).

The key word within the excerpt above is *de-tasking*. In this context, de-tasking is the removal of police responsibility for a specific duty for the purpose of reducing the cost of policing. De-tasking is another form of civilianization, as civilian personnel take over the tasks originally undertaken by police officers. These de-tasking measures would lower the number of officers needed within a police service, and would limit the number of interactions police have with the public. In America, some of these plans have become actions. Seattle politicians approved budget cuts to policing:

The proposed cuts now under discussion would include transferring the 911 call centre to other city departments. The city is also exploring the creation of a public safety department that could take on some other tasks currently handled by the police. The budget cuts approved Monday included eliminating the mounted patrol unit and school resource officers, along with cuts to the department's SWAT team (*The Toronto Star*, 15 August 2020).

This excerpt contains three key claims as to how society could successfully civilianize a police service. First, Seattle’s city council approved budget cuts paving the way for substantive policy change. Then, politicians explored ways to create other departments that would replace police officers for specific duties. Finally, current police units, such as school resource officers and SWAT teams, were either removed or downsized. Those in favour of abolition believe that these types of actions would lead towards abolishing the police by showing that society does not need officer presence as these duties are transferrable to civilian response options, like mental health experts attending mental health calls.

Activists spoke largely in support of this type of civilianization. BLM, the organization spearheading efforts to dismantle the police service (Black Lives Matter, 2020), demonstrates

strong interest in replacing police services with other agencies. A co-founder of BLM Toronto commented:

Sandy Hudson, a co-founder of Black Lives Matter Toronto and co-host of the Sandy & Nora Talk Politics podcast shared a thread on Twitter about a preinterview she gave regarding George Floyd's homicide. One of the ideas she put forth was to “develop an alternative, nonpolice, front-line service for emergency mental health support” (*The Toronto Star*, 3 June 2020).

This excerpt represents the belief that outsourcing officer duties to alternative agencies would be an effective solution to the proposed social problem of biased policing. As BLM has been very open about its desire to dismantle the police service, this quote then stands as a means towards abolishment. It is important to note that both those who wish to abolish the police and those who wish to reform policing agree that civilianizing the service is a good idea. However, those in favour of abolition view civilianization as a model to follow the dissolution of the police service.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to outline how claims-makers typify defund the police to mean abolishment. Claims-makers calling for abolishing the police argue that policing is unfixable. Claims-makers asserted that the policing system is inherently flawed, a waste of money, and that no amount of reformation attempts would fix the social problems associated with policing. Further, they argue that the historical systemic racism in Canada and America inform police practices and that modern policing continues to suffer from colonial ideology. Finally, they argue that a significant step toward abolishment is civilianization because civilians would cost less than police and do a better job at keeping the community safe, especially when responding to mental health crises. Overall, claims-makers in support of abolishing the police believe that the less contact police have with the community members, the safer the public becomes.

Chapter 7 – Analysis

The previous two chapters have outlined the findings of this media analysis. Claims-makers competed to establish the concept of Defund the Police as either organizational reform or abolishment through rhetoric delivered through Canadian mass media agencies. I now present an analysis of the claims-making activities through the lens of Loseke's (2003) Social Problems Game.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Social Problems Game involves various groups claiming that their social problem is more important than other social problems (Loseke, 2003). Within the defund the police debate, the Social Problems Game manifested in two sets of competing claims about where defunding the police should lead; reformation or removal of police. While claims-makers on both sides had agreement on aspects of the putative social problem of biased policing, how each camp viewed who was responsible and how society should solve the issue varied significantly. Loseke defines competitions within social problems as contests between two opposing groups, with the goal of establishing what should be done to solve the social problem. For example, claims-makers in support of organizational reform believe that policy changes like diversity training would improve the social problem of biased policing. This is in line with academic literature surrounding police reform which also suggests enhanced training as a potential precursor to greater police reform (Koziarski, 2021; Staller, & Koerner, 2021; Ghezzi, Funk, & Houmanfar, 2021). In contrast, those in favour of abolishing the police believe that no amount of training or policy reform will lead to meaningful results, and the system of policing must be dismantled entirely. Some studies suggest that police officers could be replaced with non-police entities (Chua, 2020; Jacobs et al., 2021), which was a common pathway to dismantling the police offered by abolitionists.

In what follows, I begin by discussing how the news media agencies presented the claims-makers and their claims through the editorial process. Specifically, I will examine the presentation of each side of the debate. First, I will discuss how each side of the Social Problems Game defined the social problem of biased policing. In this study, claims-makers on both sides of the debate sought to establish the narrative surrounding the defund police movement, who is at fault for the social problem, and what needs to be changed. Next, I discuss how the claims-makers construct the victims and villains within the Social Problems Game. Finally, I discuss the claims-making activities employed.

News media agencies have profit in mind and sit in budget meetings to determine the value of news stories (Sumpter, 2000). As such, where news agencies place an article, particularly when considering front-page news, is indicative of how socially relevant a newspaper agency deems an article (Sumpter, 2000). Within the 109 articles that spoke about the defund the police movement, the newspapers placed 9 articles on the front page, 10 articles within the first five pages, 46 articles within the first section of the newspaper, and 45 articles in other sections. The majority of articles related to defunding the police made the first section of the newspaper, indicating that the social problem of biased policing was relevant enough to maintain front-section coverage during the study period. Of the articles that resided on the front page, five articles discussed police budgeting, and four discussed police reform through initiatives such as civilianization and training. All of these front-page newspaper articles featured organizational reform as the prominent theme. The selected newspaper agencies posted five articles on the front page in June 2020, two in July 2020, one in August 2020, and one in October 2020. The peak of media coverage occurred in June, the month preceding the death of George

Floyd, which suggests to readers that the defund movement was the most socially relevant at that time.

Claims-Makers & Competition Around the Social Problem

Through analysis of the newspaper articles, two prominent claims-makers emerged within the defund police movement. The first claims-makers, lead by scholars and some left-leaning politicians, but also including activists and media personnel, attempted to establish defund the police as a means of reforming the organization. In the American context, defund the police became a highly politicized debate, with Republicans stigmatizing the movement and Democrats initially pushing for a defund initiative before abandoning it in 2021 (Peoples, Farm & Lemire, 2020). In Canada, politicians from all major parties commented on their belief that biased policing is a social problem; however, not all politicians agreed that defunding was an appropriate solution (Ballinal, 2020, Keller, 2020; Seucharan, 2020). Claims-makers meant for reformation to keep policing intact and allow for efforts, such as training reform and policy change, to fix the social problem of biased policing. The second claims-makers, led by activists and BLM, and also attracting support from a few scholars, called for police services to be abolished, with defunding the police being an important first step in the abolition process. This party viewed abolishment, which translates to the dismantling of the police, as the only way to protect racialized community members from police. These competing claims laid the groundwork for various themes related to the Social Problems Game (Loseke, 2003) to emerge. As the goal of claims-makers is to convince audience members of the legitimacy of their claims and sway public opinion, it is important to package claims in a simple and palatable way to allow for the public to comprehend complex subject matter (Loseke, 2003).

Defining the social problem. The first theme found within the defund the police movement is the initial identification of the social problem of biased policing. Claims-makers on both sides of the defund police debate have been outspoken towards the social problem of biased policing. After the death of George Floyd at the hands of police (Bourne, 2020; Desai, 2020; Jacobs et al., 2021; Maynard, 2020; Osborne & Cooke, 2020), the defund police movement received an extensive amount of media attention, causing the social problem to be discussed on a national level. The social movement surrounding the defund the police movement started with grassroots organizations, such as BLM, coordinating protests as well as online claims-making activities on social media websites such as *Twitter* (Wilkins et al., 2019). Soon after, mass media organizations started covering the movement, shifting the conversation towards a more mainstream audience.

Loseke (2003) notes that social problems are not stable, can have competing definitions, and possess an ability to be changed. Within the defund the police movement, claims-makers on both sides identified the social problem as policing responses to racialized communities. Both claims-makers sought to convince audience members that the social problem of biased policing was an important matter that society must immediately address. For example, one media article covering defund police protests noted:

Especially for someone who is Black, Indigenous or a person of colour, the very presence of an armed officer could aggravate an already delicate situation, says the James R. Johnston chair in Black Canadian studies at Dalhousie University. "When you have experiences, for example, in Toronto where Black men are 20 times more likely to be harmed or killed by police than (white) people, then yes, of course we're going to be anxious," says OmiSoore Dryden (*The Toronto Star*, 18 June 2020).

Claims, such as the one above, work to validate the social problem of biased policing to the public. In this quote, Professor Dryden notes that Black men are 20 times more likely to be harmed or killed by police, in order to highlight the importance of the social issue of biased

policing. Much of the narrative surrounding police within this study mentioned that racialized civilians are at a higher risk of police violence and over-policing as compared to the rest of society. Thus, claims-makers discuss these issues in the hopes that the social problem catches the public's attention.

Social problems work is about persuading audience members and successful claims are able to convince the public that the problem is important and demands our time and resources (Loseke, 2003). For example, one excerpt from an article with a pro-organizational reform stance attempted to directly define what defund the police means:

The defund movement doesn't mean abolishing police - although there are calls for that, too - but rather is an acknowledgment that law enforcement has ballooned to encompass far-ranging responsibilities it's incapable of addressing [...] (*The Toronto Star*, 18 June 2020).

In contrast, activists in favour of dismantling the police during a protest at TPS headquarters commented:

"We demand our basic human right to live peacefully with the equitable opportunity to live our best lives, take care of our families and support our communities," protesters with Not Another Black Life said in a prepared statement. "Without the removal of the laws of colonialism, the liberation of Black, Indigenous and people of colour will cease to exist [...]" (*The Toronto Star*, 30 August 2020).

These two excerpts highlight a common theme that was found throughout the analysis of claims-maker's rhetoric. The first excerpt attempts to directly define what defund the police means and adopts the stance that the role of police should not have expanded this far. As well, the claim that law enforcement has ballooned to encompass far-ranging responsibilities implies that policing reform through measures like officer de-tasking would see positive results by taking away some of these responsibilities. The second excerpt states that society must remove the laws of colonialism in order to ensure the liberation of racialized community members. As referenced in chapter 6, many abolitionists feel that policing in its current form is negatively impacted by its

colonial roots (Edwards, 2020). Thus, through their beliefs, removing colonialism involves dismantling police as well.

Simplifying the problem. The final theme related to defining the social problem of biased policing was the simplification of complex issues. Claims-makers on both sides used simple language to explain the complex issue of policing in Canada and America, with the goal of convincing audience members that the social problem is prevalent and fixable. Simplifying complex issues into easier to digest frames is a tactic employed through social problems work (Loseke, 2003). For example, Min Sook Lee, a Canadian professor speaking in support of defunding the police explained:

"We need to do more than just symbolic support, how do we materialize that?" Lee said. "A strike interrupts business as usual," she said. "We can't normalize killings of Black people by police with impunity. We can't normalize new killings of Indigenous people with impunity in Canada." (*The Toronto Star*, 8 September 2020).

The key word within this example is "impunity", implying that police do not receive any negative repercussions when they are involved in a scenario that results in a civilian's death.

According to the Special Investigations Unit Annual Report (2021), from April 1, 2020, through March 31, 2021, there were a total of 397 investigations into officer conduct in Ontario. Fourteen officers were charged through these investigatory efforts, representing 3% of all cases. This report suggests that a very few cases result in the director of the SIU laying a charge. A further investigation into the outcome of cases where an officer is charged by the SIU found that of the 147 charges laid against officers between 2005 and 2020, 51 led to convictions (Gillis, 2021).

Claims-makers in favour of organizational reform utilized the simplification of complex issues to attempt to persuade audience members towards their interpretation of defunding the police. As referenced in chapter 5, claims-makers framed the social problem of biased policing as primarily anti-Black in nature (Gray, 2020; Pagliaro, 2020). Claims-makers also suggested

that current police responsibilities, like mental health calls, would have better results without police presence (Gillis, 2020). Focusing on specific issues and remedies, rather than looking at the big picture, allows for readers to more easily digest the information given to them. Rather than meticulously identifying all potential problems with policing, claims-makers acknowledge the audience carrying capacity (Loseke, 2003), which is the audience's ability to think about social problems when weighed against other forms of burden and stress.

Those who made claims in favour of abolishing the police simplified complex issues in a slightly different manner. Claims-makers in favour of abolishing the police placed the majority of their focus on claims related to racial issues. As referenced in chapter 6, abolitionists made claims concerning the perceived lack of safety racialized community members feel when interacting with police (Armstrong & Lorinc, 2020). Simplifying the complex issue of policing into an issue of communal safety for racialized civilians allowed for members of the public who are morally opposed to this type of discrimination to show their support without having to consider the various other factors that can contribute to police use of force and over-policing against racialized citizens. This simplification allows for the argument that policing should be abolished to be more digestible by audience members.

Constructing Villains and Victims

The second element of Loseke's (2003) Social Problems Game I will be analyzing is the construction of victims and villains. I will begin by demonstrating how claims-makers constructed victims. I will then discuss how claims-makers constructed villains. Finally, I will analyze how claims-makers construct the social problem of biased policing as a matter of government concern (Loseke, 2003). As the government is the only entity who can

fundamentally change policing, the government then becomes vitally important to the social problem of biased policing.

Constructing victims. The majority of claims made by both sides suggest that racialized community members represent the victims of the social problem. Claims-makers pointed to high-profile cases of racialized police violence like the death of George Floyd as an example of a policing system that they argue disproportionately affects racialized community members. Thus, claims-makers construct victims of police violence as *deserving of sympathy* (Loseke, 2003). For example, at World News Day, an event held by the Canadian Journalism Foundation and World Editors Forum, pop star Macy Gray commented:

“We're in the corner of those left behind,” Gray says. “Everybody's talking about Breonna Taylor and defund the police, but at home you have a mom who lost her daughter. People don't consider what the family goes through” (*The Globe and Mail*, 28 September 2020).

This excerpt calls for a deep consideration for the victims of biased policing. Gray feels it is important not to forget that there are secondary victims that may be suffering emotionally outside of the direct victims of police violence. Claims-makers like Macy Gray seek to convince the public that the social problem of biased policing *should* be a top priority, as the pain and suffering of a segment of the population draws sympathy from other community members.

After claims-makers identified and constructed the victims in the Social Problems Game, the next observable step taken was to apply the potential for victimhood to greater society. The Social Problems Game refers to these types of claims as constructing potential victims as anyone (Loseke, 2003). This claims-making strategy seeks to convince audience members to be cautious for their own safety, which is noted to strongly motivate audience members to take a claim seriously (Loseke, 2003). As discussed in the previous chapters, there are many communities that are potential victims of police bias, including persons living with mental health issues (Francis,

2020), members of the LGBTQ2S+ (Gray, 2020) community, and those suffering from addiction (Butler-McPhee et al., 2020). However, the majority of quotes within these articles referenced racialized police bias. One of these quotes related to racial inequality in treatment by police notes:

"It's systematic racism. So many cases, just because of your colour, your race, you're treated differently," said Choudry's nephew Hassan Choudhary at a news conference following his uncle's death. (*The Toronto Star*, 20 July 2020).

This excerpt showcases the philosophy that potential victims can be any racialized person. Canadian police killed Ejaz Choudry, a visible minority, during a mental health call (Garmot, 2020). The focus on the race of the victim, rather than the circumstances of the scenario, suggests to the reader that police will treat any person of colour differently than their White counterparts. Also, the claim is that this type of interaction may lead to the loss of life for a racialized community member. Thus, claims-makers suggest that it is of grave concern for racialized community members as well as their allies to support the defund the police movement.

The construction of potential victims as any racialized community member was one of the few shared claims made between those in favour of organizational reform and those in favour of abolishing the police. Both camps emphasized the heightened risk of injury or death that racialized community members face when interacting with police, with both camps referring to recent and historical examples of police mistreatment of BIPOC individuals to fortify their claims. Not all marginalized groups were covered equally, with groups like members of the LGBTQ2S+ and those suffering addiction, having much less coverage than police-involved mental health calls. Even within the context of mental health calls, both camps focused the majority of their claims on mental health calls in which the participant is a racialized community member.

Constructing villains. Claims-makers favouring organizational reform constructed villains through identifying potential systemic flaws and addressing policy and training concerns with policing. The main villain was not a person or group of people, but the system of policing itself. As illustrated in chapter 5, claims-makers claimed that the current system of policing suffered from issues such as poor training (Gray, 2020) and inflated police budgets (Gillis, 2020). While there is mention that organizational reforms can usher in transformational change by replacing the ‘old guard’ with new recruits receiving additional training (Pagliaro & Willis, 2020), organization reformists focused their rhetoric on policy change rather than villainizing individual ‘bad apple’ police officers. This focus on the system rather than on the individual police officer allowed for changes to be suggested that did not involve removing police from the street. For example, as demonstrated in chapter 5,

The [Toronto] board report recommends an alternative community safety model be developed that removes police officers from responding to certain calls, including emergency mental health situations (The Toronto Star, 18 August 2020).

This alternative community safety model seeks to change policy rather than lower the number of on-duty police officers, which places the focus on the system of policing rather than its individual parts.

Claims-makers who supported organizational reform largely shied away from speculating about the intentions of police officers, choosing to instead focus on the steps that lead to incidents of biased policing and what society can do to prevent these events in the future. For example, as mentioned in chapter 5, TPS did not alert the SIU of an assault by an off-duty officer:

Toronto's new interim police chief has apologized for the force's handling of a vicious police assault on a Black teenager, acknowledging they erred in not alerting the province's police watchdog after an off-duty constable beat Dafonte Miller in Whitby,

Ont., in December, 2016. “We made the wrong decision that night,” interim Chief James Ramer [...] said at a news conference Thursday (*The Globe and Mail*, 7 August 2020).

In this example, the claims-maker calls the action a mistake. SIU reporting legislation at the time did not have clear direction on reporting off-duty officer conduct (Hayes, 2020). Thus, rather than suggesting the service tried to hide the officer misconduct, this claim seeks to suggest a flaw in the system is partly responsible for the outcome. This narrative takes blame away from the individual and police service, and towards the system/policy.

Claims-makers who pushed for defund the police to mean abolishment took a much different approach to constructing villains. Through the claims-making activities of abolitionists, the main villain of the social problem of biased policing was the government, with police being labeled villains by acting as an arm of government. As demonstrated in chapter 6, claims-makers assert that the governments of Canada and America have historically worked against racialized community members, with police being created to carry out laws that were created during colonialism (Edwards, 2020) and that the very root of policing therefore is illegitimate. Claims-makers in favour of abolishing the police continued that line of thinking by making numerous claims suggesting that police kill racialized community members due to the colonial roots of policing. This claim takes the unique circumstances of police-citizen encounters out of the equation and instead focuses on the ethnicity of the civilian. This vilifies police as dangerous and discriminatory at best and killers at worst. As well, this type of rhetoric inevitably places members of racialized communities on guard.

Supporters of abolition chose to use vivid and dramatic language that constructed the police to be the villains. For example, BLM co-founder Rodney Diverlus stated during a defund police protest:

“We know that police *kill* our communities” (*The Toronto Star*, 19 June 2020, *emphasis added*).

In another example, Kandace Montgomery, director of the Black Visions Collective, stated:

“We're safer without armed, unaccountable patrols supported by the state *hunting* Black people” (*The Toronto Star*, 8 June 2020, *emphasis added*).

As illustrated in chapter 6, abolitionists claim that police “*kill* our communities”. The strength of this language, coupled with claims that any BIPOC person may experience this type of discrimination, highlights the claims-making strategy of abolitionists. This strategy involves constructing police as an imminent threat to racialized community members by convincing the public that interacting with police as a racialized person will inevitably lead to harm.

Another villain that was constructed through claims-making was governmental bureaucracy. Many claims-makers expressed frustration with the government’s inability to enact meaningful change to policing, with politicians handcuffed by legislation that forces police to remain in their current roles and responsibilities. An example of this bureaucracy involves the Toronto Police Service collective bargaining agreement:

[The] collective agreement is governed by the provincial Police Services Act, city spokesperson Brad Ross said, and is binding until it is replaced with a new agreement. The current contract expires in 2023. That means the total 11.1 per cent pay hike awarded the police over five years can't be amended. (*The Toronto Star*, 28 June 2020).

Even if the public and politicians agree on what *should* happen, governmental bureaucracy acts as an impenetrable barrier to solutions offered by claims-makers. This bureaucracy is acknowledged by both reformists and abolitionists; however, there is a clear pattern of distrust from the abolitionist group related to government structures. For example, activist Desmond Cole, who is in favour of abolishing the police, noted during a Toronto defund protest:

"We're here to say there are alternatives to the violent, colonial, white settler policing structure that exists and that we have to put those alternatives forward so that the people inside that building can't say they didn't know or weren't told" (*The Toronto Star*, 29 June 2020).

Labelling the structure of policing as violent and the product of white settler colonization works to undermine the legitimacy of policing for diverse community members. The argument is that the colonial roots of policing are still in effect today, and are unlikely to be meaningfully changed, and therefore must be abolished.

Claims-makers in favour of organizational reform focused on the organization and system as the villain, thereby protecting individual officers. However, rather than saying the system of policing is beyond repair, those in favour of organizational reform offered solutions to the perceived flaws in policing policy like the increasingly-inflating police budget and inadequate training initiatives. As both sets of claims-makers identified the government as responsible for enacting change, the social problem of biased policing quickly became a debated issue in both Canadian and American government.

Constructing the problem as a governmental concern. The final party that was constructed by claims-makers through the Social Problems Game was the government. Loseke (2003) explains that within the social problems process, the government is often a high-priority for claims-makers as the government typically has the power to make sweeping societal change through laws and policies. An example of how often the government found itself in the social problems process was evident in the words of Toronto mayor John Tory:

"To the tens of thousands of Torontonians who have called and emailed my office and the offices of my council colleagues over the past few weeks, and to those who have peacefully taken to the streets to march and protest: I want you to know that I see you, I hear you, and I am listening" (*The Toronto Star*, 29 June 2020).

This quote highlights the amount of collective pressure that was put on Canadian governments during the study period. As Best (2016) describes, the social problems process starts with claims-making, which leads to media coverage, which leads to public reaction. When mayor Tory received tens of thousands of emails and calls surrounding the Toronto Police Service, public

reaction to the social problem of biased policing reached a boiling point. This amount of public pressure ensured that this issue would be a priority concern for the government.

Many politicians agreed with activists and the public about the need for organizational reform. As discussed in chapter 5, many members of the Canadian government were outspoken about their belief that government should defund the police by a certain percentage (Pagliaro, 2020), and government should immediately address other policies such as sending police to mental health calls (Gray, 2020). In this case, claims-makers in favour of organizational reform would appear to have been successful in making the social problem of biased policing a matter of government concern. As referenced in chapter 6, abolitionists routinely called on the government to take swift and decisive action regarding policing, with the majority of suggestions related to defunding the police by up to 50 percent immediately (Pagliaro, 2020; Black Lives Matter, 2020).

Claims-Making Activities

In this section of my analysis, I focus on the claims-making activities utilized by both sets of claims-makers to convince audience members that a social problem is important and in need of immediate remedial action. Specifically, I explore: (1) the use of extreme consequences, (2) constructing claims at the “right time”, and, (3) the construction of solutions.

Constructing Extreme Consequences

Constructing extreme consequences (Loseke, 2003) occurs when claims-makers focus solely on the most dramatic and negative consequences of a social problem to convince audience members to address the social problem. Rather than constructing extreme consequences, reformists mentioned the potential consequences of failing to remedy policies such as carding (Ballingall, 2020), which would include continued instances of biased policing. Organizational

reformists also touted the potential benefits of implementing policies such as diversifying the police service (Hasham, 2020; Keenan, 2020), which is claimed to usher in a new era of informed police recruits that will change the culture of policing to be less biased. In contrast, those in favour of abolition primarily focused on the profoundly negative consequences of biased policing. The following excerpt illustrates how claims-makers who call for abolition constructed these extreme consequences:

George Floyd was murdered on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis and a week later Chantel Moore, an Indigenous woman living in New Brunswick was *executed* by a police officer (who has not been named) during what was supposed to be a wellness check. A week after Chantel Moore was *murdered*, Rodney Levi was *executed* by police in New Brunswick. He too was *killed* during a wellness check — and again, the officer was not named (*The Toronto Star*, 11 July 2020, *emphasis added*).

All four individuals who died while interacting with police were members of racialized communities. The quote did not mention any of the unique circumstances of their deaths. As well, labelling the deaths as executions implies that there were hostile intentions by responding officers to these scenes. At the time of print, the criminal case surrounding George Floyd had not yet been concluded (Derek Chauvin was eventually convicted of Floyd’s murder; Forliti, Karnowski, & Webber, 2021). In the case of Levi, an SIU investigation concluded that prosecutors would not lay charges on the responding officers (Bissett, 2021). As demonstrated in chapter 6, provocative words such as “kill”, “execute”, and “hunt” were used by abolitionist claims-makers to highlight the extreme consequences and evoke an emotional response from the public. Readers do not want to be seen as supporting this type of heinous activity, which makes abolition harder to argue against. In one example, BLM activists chanted “Who do you call when cops kill?” (*The Toronto Star*, 19 June 2020), which implies that police benefit from a lack of accountability when using excessive force in Black communities. This is possible, as previously mentioned, only 3% of the 397 cases investigated by the SIU from April 1, 2020, through March

31, 2021 resulted in charges being laid (Special Investigations Unit, 2021). Loseke (2003) notes that an often-employed claims-making strategy is to focus only on horrifying consequences. Many claims made by abolitionists used this claims-making strategy in an effort to galvanize audience members to be concerned about the social issue of biased policing.

Claims-makers who pushed for organizational reform, on the other hand, did not use extreme consequences as a strategy. As discussed in chapter 5, claims-makers who constructed the defund movement as organizational reform framed their claims-making on the potential solutions as opposed to highlighting the extreme examples of the problem. As the goal of organizational reform is to keep the organization intact, it makes sense not to overtly vilify police in a way that would diminish public trust in the agency. For example, as discussed in chapter 5, claims-makers state that police response to mental health calls may not be necessary, as mental-health experts may be able to provide better care at the scene (Gillis, 2020). Rather than focusing on the officers themselves as the issue, claims-makers focused their ire on the policy that demands officer presence at mental health calls. As such, claims-makers in favour of organizational reform did not use dramatic language when referencing acts of police violence towards racialized community members.

Claiming at the Right Time

The second claims-making activity that was observed through the analysis process was the tactical timing of claims. Specifically, claims-makers utilized the principle of claiming at the right time (Loseke, 2003) in order to maximize the strength of their message. Loseke argues that claims are most effective when claims-makers are able to provide real-world examples to fortify their arguments. Pro-abolition claims-maker Desmond Cole stated:

Earlier this month, activist-journalist Desmond Cole gave a talk titled Abolition or death: Confronting police forces in Canada. "If you really listen to the political class in Canada,

they're not promising that any of these defunding reforms they're talking about are going to end the violence," he said. "What they'd like to do is say that they've done something. Move the conversation a couple of years down the road and hope that the incredible resurgence that we're all a part of right now simply fades away" (*The Toronto Star*, 25 September 2020).

This excerpt highlights the power of claiming at the right time. Desmond Cole openly laments that the defund police movement may be a movement that loses steam in the future, while at the same time claiming that politicians are encouraging that very outcome. The trend for social issues to rise and fall occurs frequently and is an example of competitions among social problems (Loseke, 2003). The public is not capable of giving every social problem their attention simultaneously, so social problems are always jockeying for relevance. When looking at the defund movement, in the American context, this trend is very apparent. What was once a rallying cry with widespread support is now considered “political poison”, as politicians and media personnel have deemed defunding the police very unfavourable and have since abandoned the movement altogether (DiManno, 2021).

Claims-makers in favour of organizational reform utilized the principle of claiming at the right time by making the majority of their claims shortly after the death of George Floyd. The number of articles printed in June (148), and July (57) 2020 heavily outnumbered the number of articles printed in August (57), September (20), and October (4) 2020. Pro-organizational reform claims-makers showed a considerable level of social awareness, as public outcry denouncing the police officers involved in the death of George Floyd saw claims as to what is wrong with policing and how society should remedy these problems. As the social movement progressed into the later stages of 2020, as evidenced by the number of articles printed above, the number of articles speaking about the defund movement decreased significantly.

The claims related to abolishing the police followed a similar path to those of organizational reform. Claims-makers made most of these claims shortly after the death of George Floyd, with articles discussing abolitionist claims tapering off toward the end of 2020. However, where abolishment claims differed from organizational reform was in events that transpired after the death of George Floyd. As discussed in chapter 6, those in favour of abolishing the police referenced events that involved police and racialized community members as reasons to dissolve the service. Put simply, when a member of a racialized community had a news-reported negative interaction with police, claims-makers used the opportunity to promote their abolition claims. In one example, the police-involved shooting of Black teenager Jacob Blake on August 23rd, 2020 in Wisconsin was directly referenced by claims-makers in five articles included in this study following the two-week period after the shooting.

Constructing Prognostic Frames

The final claims-making activity that was observed through analysis involved constructing prognostic frames. Prognostic frames tell readers what society should do to correct a social problem, and who is responsible for doing it (Loseke, 2003). It is in regard to prognostic frames that we see the greatest difference between the two camps of claims-makers, with one side focusing on policy change and another on defunding and abolishing.

A university professor speaking about police response to mental-health calls references multiple prognostic frames, stating:

"When you're approaching and providing services to a person, they're more than their mental-health crisis. It's important to approach that person holistically." Nevertheless, calling 911 is the only option most people have when faced with a public safety crisis, even when someone is clearly in mental distress, Lavoie says. Most cities have a patchwork of additional services that can respond to some emergency calls, but they are inconsistent and not always 24-hours, she notes. Lavoie would like to see more funding for crisis intervention teams that many police services have across the country (*The Toronto Star*, 18 June 2020).

As part of her research, Lavoie says she's developed a 40-hour training program being tested with Durham Region police in Ontario that uses scenario-based exercises with actors who portray "authentic mental-health crises." "That's the only way to really, I think, train officers on how to respond to a person in mental-health crisis" (*The Toronto Star*, 18 June 2020).

The first excerpt highlights the use of a prognostic frame. The identified social problem is police response to a person experiencing a mental health crisis. Dr. Lavoie claims that the remedy to this social problem should involve government and police services allocating more funds towards crisis intervention teams to assist or respond to mental-health calls in a specialized way. Thus, what should be done and who should do it are clearly evident, completing the prognostic frame. The second excerpt promotes expanding training initiatives, particularly focusing on mental health crises, as a solution to problematic police interactions with a civilian experiencing a mental health crisis.

Of the many solutions offered by those in favour of organizational reform, the leading solutions were to: reallocate funds to other social or specialized services (such as crisis response teams), enhance police training, and introduce policy reform. As discussed in chapter 5, claims-makers looked to the government to enact sweeping police reform. These prognostic frames were very popular among academics and politicians alike; however, governmental bureaucracy halted sweeping reform from rapidly occurring. When politicians were unable to successfully defund the police, claims-makers moved to asking for greater police accountability and transparency regarding police budgets. This prognostic frame follows the mentality that if police can not have their budget cut, members of the public should be able to see exactly how the service spends the money. The common theme in the prognostic frames from the organizational reform camp was that positive change is possible without losing officers or jeopardizing the safety of the community. Interestingly, issues surrounding the potential negative societal impact of lowering

the number of officers were seldomly discussed. An article discussing the likelihood of the TPS being defunded notes:

Abolishing the service would also come with questions about how violent crime like shootings and sexual assault as well as mental health crises should best be responded to and how to better maintain public safety - much of which has never been discussed at length by the board or council. (*The Toronto Star*, 29 June 2020).

Indeed, the potential ramifications of removing police from society were not discussed at length.

On the contrary, those in favour of abolishment typically offered a very simplistic approach to the social problem of biased policing, with BLM Toronto founder Sandy Hudson offering her proposed solution when she stated, “Let’s just get rid of the institution and create something new” (*The Toronto Star*, 2 June 2020).

Claims-makers in favour of abolishing the police shared some of the prognostic frames put forward by those who support organizational reform, however differed significantly on how the proposed solution should play out. Abolitionists supported taking money away from police and reallocating it to racialized communities. However, this is where the similarities between the two camps ended. As evidenced in chapter 6, abolitionist claims-makers had a caveat to their support of any social movement related to policing: defunding the police was a good idea, so long as it leads to abolishing the police (Gillis, 2020). When proposed solutions to the social problem of biased policing involved maintaining the structure of policing, abolitionists responded with dissent. For example, when responding to potential policy change, a BLM activist said “They need to defund the police. It's the only thing that's going to work. They've already tried all these types of reforms” (*The Toronto Star*, 12 August 2020). This response occurs because policy reform solutions have the intention of keeping police on the street, which directly opposes the abolition goal of removing police from society.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the various ways in which claims-makers constructed the social problem of biased policing through the lens of the Social Problems Game (Loseke, 2003). I divided the analysis into three sections. In the first section, I analyzed how claims-makers defined the social problem of biased policing. Those in favour of organizational reform framed the issue as systemic inefficiency, while those in favour of abolishing the police framed the issue as indicative of a fatally flawed policing system rooted in colonialism. In the second section, I analyzed how the identification of the parties involved in the social problem of biased policing took place. Claims-makers competed to establish who the villains were, while both camps agreed that racialized citizens are at a high risk of suffering police malpractice. The final section looked at the way claims-makers constructed extreme consequences, engaged in claiming at the right time and constructed prognostic frames.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

The defund police movement gained societal traction following the death of George Floyd in May 2020. As of August 2021, the movement is still in pursuit of reformatory change, albeit in a quieter tone. The fact that the defund police movement is still being spoken about one year onward, despite competing with a global pandemic for airtime, means that the social problem of biased policing is still very much at the forefront of the public's attention, most likely due to continued acts of police-involved violence and racial issues in Canada and America.

Research Contributions

The current study provided an in-depth analysis of the competing claims-making activities surrounding the defund police movement. Specifically, the study identified a competition *within* the Social Problems Game of defund the police within which defund the police was typified differently (organizational reform vs. abolish) and, as a result, provided different solutions that have significant implications for understanding the role of police in contemporary society. Throughout my research it became clear that the reformist camp and abolitionist camp were actively working against each other to establish what 'defund the police' means. Organizational reformists worked to highlight policy inadequacies and promote solutions to raise the legitimacy of policing. Abolitionists worked to discredit the police as much as possible, with the goal of dismantling the service. This claims-making competition has had unintended consequences, specifically in the American context, as politicians and members of the media have abandoned the topic due to its political and cultural unfavourability (DiManno, 2021).

As of November 2021, the defund police movement has been unsuccessful in either of its main goals of reallocating money from the police and towards racialized communities or

disbanding police services altogether. That being said, there have been some observed trends associated with the defund movement. In the immediate aftermath of the death of George Floyd, a large number of officers in America resigned, citing issues such as workplace safety and the politicization of police processes (Maxouris, 2020). In Toronto, a mental health call diversion pilot program is set to take hold in early 2022, which has civilian responders from multiple crisis support teams respond to mental health crises that are deemed non-threatening rather than police officers (Kopun, 2021). This pilot program is a welcome addition for organization reformists and abolitionists, who both called for non-police response options to these types of calls in chapter 5 and 6 (Gillis, 2020a; Gillis 2020b). However, protests calling for police to be abolished continue, with the most recent coming after the acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse who fatally shot two protestors during a protest against police in Wisconsin in 2020 (Deliso, 2021). The perceived lack of success of the defund movement highlights the significance of this study, as confusion between the two competing sides of the defund debate caused mixed messaging about how to solve the social problem of biased policing. A recently ratified RCMP pay increase, which sees officers obtain raises over \$20,000 starting in April 2022 (Tunney, 2021) is specifically *inconsistent with* the goals of the defund police movement. The inability of the defund movement to achieve its primary goal may be due to the claims-making competition chasing away potential support from individuals and institutions fearful of adopting a stance that is in line with potentially radical ideas.

Both sets of claims-makers argue that one of the steps of defunding the police is to redistribute funds and de-task police. They attempt to convince the public that policing in its current form is flawed, and that reallocating funds and de-tasking police will lead to positive change. Both sets of claims-makers argue to reallocate police funds to racialized communities

that have experienced the most collective harm from police officers. While both sides argued for the relocation of funds, the amount to be reallocated and the way in which to use those funds at times differed. Claims-makers in favour of organizational reform made claims that spoke to the perceived flaws in the system of policing. It is important to note that these claims specifically targeted fixable faults in the system, rather than focusing their attention on individual officer conduct. On the other side, pro-abolition claims-makers focused their attention on claiming the policing system itself was part of the problem. Claims-makers told the public that the system was not fixable, and the only way to make positive change was to get rid of policing as an entity.

As illustrated in chapter five, those in favour of organizational reform believe that police serve a vital function in society. While police may not be entirely effective in some circumstances, for example, during mental some health calls, police officers are necessary to protect the public from becoming victims of crime. In this framework, claims-makers do not vilify police officers, with the majority of rhetoric suggesting changes to the system of policing would yield positive results. Claims-makers in favour of organizational reform focused much of their attention on addressing their concerns to politicians, with the hopes of achieving governmental policy change. As such, claims-makers mobilized mass media consumers who supported organizational reform to place pressure on local government agencies, which resulted in governmental debates held in American and Canadian cities.

Abolitionists took a much different approach to constructing police. Through the abolitionist perspective, police, not the system, were directly responsible for the social problem. In essence, these claims-makers vilified police officers and the institution of policing in a way that made the presence of officers an inherent threat to the lives of racialized community members. As demonstrated in chapter 6, the rhetoric used by abolitionists suggested that the only

way to protect the lives of BIPOC individuals living in Canada and America was to get rid of police entirely (Gillis, 2020; Pagliaro, 2020). Thus, the meaning behind all solutions that were offered from the pro-abolition camp was to eventually dissolve the police service.

Previous academic literature surrounding the defund police movement focused on the potential solutions to the social problem of biased policing. As discussed in chapter 2, police in Canada and America were more likely to use force against Black residents compared to White residents. In response, scholars offered many solutions including amending police-involved mental-health card policies (Glauser, 2020), reallocating funds away from police and towards racialized communities (Ruffin, 2021; Watson et al., 2020), and severing police-civilian partnerships like school resource officers (Jacobs et al., 2021; Nijjar, 2021). As well, some scholars suggested that society reimagines policing, as historical discriminatory practices have created a systemic flaw demanding of radical change (McLeod, 2019). This thesis adds to academic literature surrounding the defund movement by displaying the process in which claims are made and highlighting how newspaper media sources covered the movement.

Limitations

While the present study makes an important contribution to our understanding of the defund police movement, it is not without its limitations. First, the thesis focused on only two newspapers, *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*. The study could have been strengthened by a larger data set – including smaller, niche news outlets. Second, while the Factiva database allowed me to do a deep dive into the newspapers, while avoiding the company’s paywalls, it did not allow me to capture the pictures that accompanied the articles. This meant that visual claims were not able to be addressed. The third, and final limitation to this study involved my positionality as a White male researcher. Although I took steps to account for my positionalities,

it is important to acknowledge that internal bias may have an impact on research outcomes (Charmaz, 2014; Kleinknecht, van den Scott & Sanders, 2018). Various discussions with my thesis supervisory committee, as well as reflexivity, allowed this limitation to be significantly mitigated.

Directions for Future Research

Future research into the defund police movement should focus on examining the effectiveness of the claims-making activities. As the goal of the current study was to discover how claims-makers constructed the proposed solutions, future studies may look at how, or if, public opinion towards the social problem of biased policing changes throughout this process. Future research could also look at the potential impact the defund police movement had on policing policies and procedures in Canada and America. A study looking at officer perceptions before and after the defund movement may shed light on this topic. Loseke (2003) states that the winning the Social Problems Game gives claims-makers the power to lead social change. Future research could look at other claims-making competitions to see how effective, or ineffective, these competitions are at achieving their goals.

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