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DO BLACK LIVES MATTER IN AMERICAN MAINSTREAM NEWS MEDIA? TWO CASE STUDIES OF POLICE-INVOLVED SHOOTINGS OF BLACK MEN EXPLAINING A RACIST MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

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DO BLACK LIVES MATTER IN AMERICAN MAINSTREAM NEWS MEDIA? TWO
CASE STUDIES OF POLICE-INVOLVED SHOOTINGS OF BLACK MEN
EXPLAINING A RACIST MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Communication and Information
at the University of Kentucky

By
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Lexington, Kentucky

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Lexington, Kentucky

2016

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

DO BLACK LIVES MATTER IN AMERICAN MAINSTREAM NEWS MEDIA? TWO CASE STUDIES OF POLICE-INVOLVED SHOOTINGS OF BLACK MEN EXPLAINING A RACIST MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

This dissertation examines two cases of fatal police-involved shootings of Black men in order to expose the power structures perpetuated through racist media narratives assuming the officers' behavior was justified and the unarmed men the officers killed somehow were complicit in their death. In reporting on police-involved shootings, mainstream media practices that privilege elites and officials as primary sources of information may produce a dominant media narrative that masks the marginalization and mistreatment of minorities at the hands of these officials and their institutions. The two cases under consideration here examine the "floating signifier" of race in media coverage of (1) the shooting death of Walter Scott at the hands of North Charleston Police Officer Michael Slager in North Charleston, SC on April 4, 2015 and (2) the off-campus shooting of Samuel Dubose at the hands of University of Cincinnati Police Officer Ray Tensing on July 19, 2015. Using critical discourse analysis, the purpose of this dissertation is to offer critical inquiry into these media narratives as a necessary tool for dismantling these hegemonic media structures.

The dissertation analyzes the narratives of these cases as presented in mass media to show how, if left unchecked, allowing elites and officials (particularly when they are representative of the individuals in the case) to define the narratives of such events can lead to misrepresentation of the narrative of the events. Only when video evidence disputing the police officers' version of events did mainstream journalists begin to question the veracity of the officers' claims their decisions to shoot these men were justified. The analysis examines the shifting discursive positions of the police, public officials, and media representatives over time in response to new (video) evidence and argument from the #BlackLivesMatter social protest movement members.

The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the implications of this media environment and its semiotic practices on those groups concerned with seeking change around issues of police violence and abuses of power. For social movements like Black Lives Matter, a sympathetic or alternative media space that gives publicity to counter narratives is necessary to challenge mainstream media hegemony.

KEYWORDS: Mass Communication, Case Study, Media Representation of Race, Police Brutality, Critical Discourse Analysis

Alfred J. Cotton III

August 26, 2016

Date

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To my mother, Frenchella Strickland

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Chapter One: Introduction

I continually struggle with the fear that on any given day, there is a possibility I could be driving home from work, driving to the grocery store, walking through a park, or engaging in any number of normal public behaviors and be subject to a random police interrogation simply due to the fact I am a Black man living in the United States. This fear Black men in this country experience: of being pulled over, stopped, or interrogated for no reason or cause and the potential results of those stops and interrogations, is not at all uncommon. This phenomenon is well-documented in both the popular and academic literature on the contemporary experiences of Black men in the U.S. (Bradford, Jackson, & Stanko, 2009; G. R. Brown, 2015; Campbell, 2012; Chaney & Robertson, 2013, 2015; Davis, 1994; Graziano, Schuck, & Martin, 2010; Harris, 1997a, 1999; Holmes & Smith, 2008; Sigelman, Welch, Bledsoe, & Combs, 1997; Skogan, 2006; Smith & Holmes, 2014; Stewart, Baumer, Brunson, & Simons, 2009; Tuch, 2004; Warren, 2011; Wu, 2014; Wu, Sun, & Triplett, 2009). Policing and criminal justice scholars have noted a major contributing factor to this fear rises from an ever increasing mistrust in police among the U.S. public (Brunson, Braga, Hureau, & Pegram, 2013; Dowler, 2003; Tuch, 2004). This is particularly the case for Black Americans for whom the distrust manifests itself in worries of discriminatory practices and racial profiling (Ayala; Brunson et al., 2013; Chaney & Robertson, 2013, 2015; Correll et al., 2007; Davis, 1994; Dowler & Zawilski, 2007; Fine et al., 2003; Gabbidon & Higgins, 2008; Gelman, Fagan, & Kiss, 2007; Glover, 2007; Holmes & Smith, 2008; Lundman & Kaufman, 2003; Payan & Unfollow; Saleem, 1997; Schuck, Rosenbaum, & Hawkins, 2008; Sigelman et al., 1997; Skogan, 2006; Smith & Holmes, 2014; Stewart et al., 2009; Tuch, 2004; Warren, 2011;

Weitzer & Tuch, 2004; Wu, 2014; Wu et al., 2009). Within the media studies literature, scholars have argued media representations and media narratives unsympathetic to concerns that the rules and norms for Black and for white Americans differ when it comes to interactions with authorities (Harris, 1999; Jordan, 1974) perpetuate the notion Black fears are irrational, unfounded, and invalid (The Washington Post Editorial Board, 2016). The American criminal justice system, as represented in mainstream mass media, does not discriminate (Bantz, 2015; Campbell, 2012; Dixon, 2013; Kleis Nielsen, 2014). In the mediated version of this world, all Americans experience the same application of law and law enforcement regardless of race. In the mainstream mass media's version of reality, victims of police violence are not victims but suspects. In this reality, police officers are given the benefit of any doubt about their actions when they harm or kill a civilian on the street or during a traffic stop, whether that "suspect" is armed or unarmed. To media members discussing police use of force, race is not an indicator of differential treatment or bias in policing.

However, there is evidence of this differential treatment in police practice. The phrase "driving while black," for example, refers to a well-known and well-documented (Garcia, 2007; Geiger-Oneto & Phillips, 2008; Harris, 1997a, 1997b, 1999; Lundman & Kaufman, 2003; Russell, 1998) phenomenon in the United States where police officers stop drivers, question them, and often search "black drivers who have committed no crime, based on the excuse of a traffic offense" (Harris, 1999, p. 265). In many parts of the country, most famously in New York City (Gelman et al., 2007; Kalhan, 2014; Saleem, 1997), police departments have used a policy called "stop and frisk;" for "temporarily detaining, questioning, and, at times, searching civilians on the street"

(Spitzer, 1999, p. 1). In practice, the policy often results in officers racially profiling minority (mostly Black) pedestrians who “fit the description,” are engaging in “suspicious behavior” (Kalhan, 2014), or are dressed in a way as to cause a police officer to become suspicious (Kalhan, 2014; Saleem, 1997). In most cases, these police stops produce no evidence of a crime having been committed (Kalhan, 2014). However, the physical, psychological, and social effects of these interactions on Black men particularly can be severe (Johnson, 1994).

Johnson (1994) likened the practice of racially profiling Black men as suspicious or as criminals to a type of social annihilation where “black men have become an ‘endangered species’” (p. 629). The term “endangered” here referring to the process whereby The United States’ “war on drugs” and the modern era of mass incarceration (Coates, 2015) have substantially reduced the number of Black men in America living at home; not in jail, prison, or dead. Indeed, Black scholars, journalists, writers, witnesses, and average citizens have long said to the world this is our lived experience (Associated Press, 2015a; Chaney & Robertson, 2014, 2015; Davenport, Soule, & Armstrong, 2011; Edmonds, 2015a, 2015b; Gabbidon & Higgins, 2008; Gibbs, 1988; Harris, 1997a, 1997b, 1999; Huspek, 2004; Johnson, 1994; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2010; Stewart et al., 2009; Unnever, 2008; Wu, 2014). For other journalists, scholars, writers, and citizens, however, this phenomenon has been identified as a series of isolated incidents with little or no connection to grander American social practices (Gershman, 1980; The Washington Post Editorial Board, 2016).

Only recently, with the rise in popularity of social media and technologies with which citizens can document these unlawful stops (G. R. Brown, 2015; Kelly, 2012), has

the larger societal-level conversation in the news and popular media about police practice and police brutality acknowledged the differences in experience faced by Black men and women versus the rest of the American public in interactions with the police.

There are a number of reasons researchers argue the wider American public has yet to accept the fact that Black men and women are treated less fairly by police and the justice system compared to their white counterparts (W. Lowery, 2015; Mustard, 2001; Unnever, 2008; Unnever & Hembroff, 1988). Media images in both American news and popular culture that promote an ideology of Black inferiority (Barkan & Cohn, 2005; Bowling, 1993; Dowler, 2003; Hunt, 1999; Johnson, 1994; Unnever, 2008) and the residual effects of the United States' unjust racial history all allow this narrative of Black criminality to persist. This, in turn, allows the non-Black viewing public to see the act of racial profiling and other objectively unfair police practices as permissible behaviors; alternatively, their position of privilege allows them to ignore the existence of these phenomena altogether. If non-Black audiences are unsympathetic to our plight and the mainstream news media reinforce the notion this problem does not exist, the only way we can make this reality knowable to those not experiencing is by speaking up on the phenomenon ourselves. Hence, the need for this dissertation and other discourse expressing the fact this is a real occurrence and real problem.

This dissertation challenges narrative assumptions of Black Americans' experiences with law enforcement by showing how American mainstream news media practices are racist and produce racist content. I accomplish this by analyzing two cases of police-involved killings of Black men. The dissertation's case studies depict these two events as representative of how American news media's norms and practices perpetuate

the above-mentioned perceptions of Black male criminality in the American “mainstream news media. For purposes of this dissertation, I refer to American “mainstream news media” as large-scale, commercial media produced for a mass audience. Such mainstream news media are defined by media scholar, John Downing (2008), in contrast to “alternative media,” which are media produced for and by social movements. These discourses are sometimes picked up and coopted by mainstream media, though only when certain unique and salient reason exists for this change in the discourse. Herzog Herzog (1987) argued media give attention to social protest only when they are associated with a major social shift or social event. Through a detailed case study of these killings as media events, I demonstrate in detail how American mainstream¹ news media allow racist representations of Black males to persist, often furthering that persistence. Additionally, I show how alternative discourses coming from activists, such as those associated with the Black Lives Matter movement, and other social media discourses can challenge the dominant hegemonic representations of Black Americans recirculated by commercial news media. What follows is a rationale for the case studies, an explanation of the significance of the cases, and a preview of the critical discourse analysis in the subsequent chapters.

Rationale

The aim of this dissertation’s analysis is to illuminate the role mainstream American news media play in representing the experiences of Black Americans,

¹ The term “mainstream” is conceptualized in this dissertation consistent with Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli (1984) “as the aggregate common patterns of images and values that pervade television” (p. 286). Further, critical media scholars have defined the term in the literature as privileging a white, male, and corporate worldview (Katz, 2003; Shah & Thornton, 1994).

particularly in the context of Black Americans' interactions with law enforcement. Specifically, the analysis of the news media discourse provides evidence mainstream news media have functioned not only collectively as a representative entity, but also how American news media have both fueled and hindered progress for African-Americans. This is a critical examination, which is axiologically uninhibited and able to place value on these representations as, for instance, "harmful" or "helpful." Therefore, the dissertation provides for the interpretation and analysis of the texts by identifying evidence for my claim American mainstream news media are racist due to their "raced ways of seeing" the world (Hunt, 1999). The evidence is in the media discourse surrounding two recent cases, or "focusing events" (Birkland & Warnement, 2013; Birkland, 1997, 1998), of white police officers killing Black motorists.

This dissertation's analysis concludes by presenting evidence of emerging social media's power to challenge these racist representations. For contemporary Black social movements, the slogan "Black lives matter" and its hashtag, "#blacklivesmatter," are important discursive concepts for Black activists. Using Hall's argument with these terms, it is arguable that the words "black lives matter" are meaningless without a system of understanding that gives the words meaning. Through social media discussions, activists give meaning to the slogan by connecting it to real-life issues and events, as a word without a referent and context is meaningless. Thus, #blacklivesmatters becomes the "floating signifier" for discussions of race, police brutality, and the Black body.

This dissertation concludes arguing that recent cases in American news media of police-involved killings of Black men demonstrate the unjust, unequitable, and racist representations of the Black experience. The response to such media representations, as

evidenced in alternative media, indicate that Black Americans view mainstream American news media as unrepresentative of their perspective, particularly when discussing issues depicting Black American life. Thus, Black media producers and consumers migrate to alternative and social media to see “accurate” depictions of black life. Black media consumers have been and as a whole are becoming more aware of how the white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchal (hooks, 2003, 2013) nature of American news media erases the “true” experiences of Black lives and Black social movements, particularly when discussing conflicts involving institutions of “authority.”

Race and Social Movements in the U.S. News Media

Historically, social movements for Black civil rights in the United States have had a complicated relationship with American news media. From abolitionist and secessionist newspapers of the 19th century (Rapporteur, 2001), broadcast television images of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, to present-day protests over police brutality, and the Black Lives Matter movement, Black activists seeking to find a voice for our concerns have struggled to find an avenue through which they can express that voice in mainstream American news media. American news media have been portrayed as both a driving force for change and a hindering one when it comes to how they have depicted these movements (Back & Solomos, 2002); to say nothing of the complicated and problematic ways American news media have represented Black America broadly (Hunt, 1999).

In order to analyze how significant social issues for critical scholars appear in mass media, it is important to look at one specific social construct: race. Race has semiotic power as a clearly observable indicator of who a person is for many people.

This operates to allow individuals with similar characteristics to connect with one another. It also allows individuals the ability to single out and isolate those they see as different than them, then making judgments about those people or engaging in actions toward them. For the purposes of this dissertation, race, is the social construct around which all discussions in the text are being held.

Race as a Floating Signifier. Stuart Hall conceptualized race “as a floating signifier” (Jhally, 1997c) by arguing race has become a concept by which major societal difference and organization have become pervasive. This signification process occurs both in the legal realm where laws are enforced and punishments handed out in ways that segment individuals into groups, within society, around this construct. Hall also notes that race itself is not something that has been or even can be grounded in hard science or biology. He says all tenable definitions of race come from the social or cultural ways individuals understand it. This, naturally, identifies the notion of race as a semiotic artifact. Hall argues race is only useful or autonomous as a reference to a system or representation, “it can only be tested, not against the actual word of human diversity, but within the play of the text, within the play of the differences that we construct in our own language” (Hall, as quoted in Jhally, 1997c, p. 10). This is where the notion of race as a “floating” signifier becomes important. This is not to say race is meaningless or nonexistent as a sign or as an indicator of something else. This simply supports the notion race only exists and can only be understood within a system of other ways of representing the human experience.

Historical Representation of Black Civil Rights Movements. Historically, the discourses of Black civil rights movements of the 1960s focused on police brutality,

voting rights, as well as giving us equal access to facilities and legal protections. Long after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Black civil rights movements continued to demand news media attention to these issues of discrimination and racial injustice(Andrews, 1997; Belton, 2015; Clay, 2012; Cumming-Bruce, 2015; Harris, 2015; Ross, 1998).

Particularly within the context of Black criminality, communication scholars have discussed the biases and stereotypes of these representations both in entertainment media (Hunt, 2005; Mitchell, 2005) and news media (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2006; Coffey, 2013; Dixon, 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Dixon & Azocar, 2007; Fujioka, 2005; Hunt, 1999). These scholars have analyzed the presence and absence of Black figures in media representing everyday experiences. The historic absence of Black figures on television, in advertising, and in newspapers has been part of this legacy, even before scholars considered the significant question of the roles and gained presence in shifting Black visibility in media with the development of minority/ethnic media, progressive alternative media, and the expansion of civil rights that brought African-Americans and our lives into the “frame.” Importantly, racist ideology and the representation of race in mediated communication historically is, as Downing and Husband (2005) suggest, “not a one-size-fits-all-forever phenomenon” (p. 39). Rather, the varied racist representations are part of a system that include contested images, as well as narratives and counter narratives, with many of those racist narratives challenged by people of color seeking to distance ourselves and others like us from those images.

The discourses of Black civil rights movements have also offered alternative discourses to media representations of Black citizenship. However, these discourses

present a sometimes fragmented version of Black public life, which can serve both to promote progress and stymie integration into mainstream spaces, as Squires (2002) noted:

Reviewing and comparing periods of “fragmentation” reveals that multiple, simultaneous Black publics emerge in different historical periods. Instead of “the” black public sphere or counterpublic, one should speak of multiple Black public spheres constituted by groups that share a common racial makeup but perhaps do not share the same class, gender, ethnic, or ideological standpoints. (p. 452)

These alternative discourses found in the Black press and Black-owned media challenged the status quo and often sought redefinition and reevaluation of the Black lived experience. However, these discourses were often not carried in broad scale commercial news media messages in a concerted manner (Squires, 2002). This dissertation examines modern depictions of Black male criminality in mainstream news media and its counter discursive formations from the #BlackLivesMatter movement to examine the functioning and strategies of civil rights movement discourse in the modern era.

#BlackLivesMatter as a Modern Civil Rights Movement. The social movement, Black Lives Matter, emerged as a response to the 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman, the Florida neighborhood watchman who killed Black teenager Trayvon Martin in February of 2012. Alicia Garza, then an organizer with the National Domestic Workers Alliance, crafted a passionate post on Facebook lamenting Zimmerman’s acquittal and the ease with which the American criminal justice system dismissed the deaths of young Black men and women as common social practice (Belton, 2015). According to online Black publication, *The Root*, “Garza’s post pushed back against those who mocked the anguish that many black people expressed and the victim-blaming ‘respectability politics’ arguments many were pushing” (Belton, 2015, para. 30). Garza’s post ended with the line, “We matter. Our lives matter. Black lives matter” (para. 32).

Patrisse Cullors, of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, found the post inspiring and transformed Garza's words into a hashtag: #blacklivesmatter (Belton). The Facebook post became widely recirculated and use of the hashtag proliferated, such that Garza, Cullors, and Opal Tometi, the executive director fo the Black Alliance for Just Immigration, started their own online and offline social campaign using the hashtag as a slogan through which they could organize a campaign with a strong network of communication (Belton, 2015). The campaign and its participants have used the mantra to bring about change in and protest issues of unequal treatment of Black men and women in the United States. As Belton noted, "Participants in the campaign have blocked highways and taken down the Confederate Flag in South Carolina, marched on Wal-Marts and shut down the Mall of America. It's become both a movement and a social media rallying cry" (para. 34).

Against the backdrop of the Trayvon Martin killing and continued cases of police brutality against African-Americans the period that followed, 2015 evidenced a rise in special media attention paid to instances of deaths of Black men and women (mostly men) at the hands of or in the custody of police and other figures of authority in this country. Many of these killings have been described as unjust from the perspective of activists and many in the Black community. Even President Barack Obama expressed concern over both the practices of policing Black men and Black communities and the perceptions of those practices. Speaking at a press conference addressing the response to the death of Freddie Gray in police custody in Baltimore (Joseph, 2015), the President urged protesters to avoid looting and not turn their protests violent:

The lawlessness that has swept Baltimore reflects a rising belief that police forces across the United States have been unjustifiably killing black men at a rate that is only starting to come into focus.

President Barack Obama gave voice to the perception Tuesday, saying that, since the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, “We have seen too many instances of what appears to be police officers interacting with individuals - primarily African-American, often poor - in ways that have raised troubling questions. And it comes up, it seems like, once a week now, or once every couple of weeks.”

Highlighting the role of social media and ubiquitous video recorders in disseminating information, Obama added, “This has been a slow-rolling crisis.

This has been going on for a long time.” (NYDailyNews Editorial Board, 2015)

Benjamin Crump has been another person outspoken against the treatment of Black men and women at the hands of police. Crump was also the lawyer for Trayvon Martin’s family and has represented other families of victims of police violence. He wrote in *USA Today*, on the decision of the Justice Department not to indict Darren Wilson; the Ferguson, MO police officer who shot and killed Michael Brown in 2014, that “I was not surprised but was extremely disappointed. This underscores the need for change in the federal law and reform of an unjust system” (Crump, 2015, p. 7A). The Black Lives Matter movement emerged as a response to these high profile deaths, with activists asking the rest of the country to pay attention to the concerns Black Americans say we have about dealing with law enforcement officials in this country.

It is possible to question whether there has been a rise recently in police killings and harassment of Black men or if the ubiquity of mobile video recording equipment and social media tools that allow citizens and activists to share their footage has finally allowed the rest of the country to see what Black Americans have been saying has been happening for decades. Citizen journalists have identified how African-Americans have been burdened with the responsibility of explaining the existence of a phenomenon the rest of America sees as new. As Steven Thrasher, 2012 National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association Journalist of the Year and prominent social critic wrote in *The Guardian*:

It was was [*sic*] really bad that Deters [Cincinnati prosecutor for the Samuel Dubose case] denied reality when he said: “This doesn’t happen in the United States. This might happen in Afghanistan.” For Deters to say that Americans don’t die because of a routine traffic stop was particularly egregious the week after Sandra Bland’s funeral; and, his implication that unjust, inhumane torture and death in Afghanistan are somehow unrelated to the United States was laughable. (Thrasher, 2015, paras. 4-5)

The Black Lives Matter movement has since tackled a number of important occurrences of police brutality and excessive use of force that have become focusing events for scholars, activists, media members, and policy makers (Birkland, 1998). A focusing event is a crisis or social event defined by its suddenness, rarity, magnitude, and salience for policy makers and the public (Wood, 2006). A focusing event is a concept originating from the risk and crisis communication literature. Based on agenda setting theory but more narrowly construed, focusing events are defined as “[serving] as an impetus for bringing an important issue to the public's attention and in creating acceptance for the issue in the public-policy arena” (Fishman, 1999, p. 353). Though primarily associated with disaster studies, the applicability of the focusing events framework to police excessive use of force is clear when taking into account Birkland’s (Birkland, 1997, 1998) arguments focusing events are public events, media events, and potentially policy-changing events. Such events as the recent police-involved killings of Black men and boys such as Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Harris, Freddie Gray, and others. These cases where Black men have died while being detained or in police custody resulted in Black Lives Matter movement members protesting for justice and, maybe more aptly, against injustice in these cases and for charges against the officers involved. The movement is very much a 21st century social movement; namely that even though it does exist in traditional brick-and-mortar spaces with over 24 chapters based in the United States and abroad, its primary arenas of mobilization are in social

media spaces (Belton, 2015). Even with regular appearances at protests both related and unrelated to police-related killings of Black men and women, the social media presence of the movement has multiplied the attention paid to the movement and its issues, hastened mobilization efforts, and “displaced the top-down approach of old guard civil rights movements” (Harris, 2015, p. 37). Harris also noted, “What the Black Lives Matter protests have done, however, is not only put police reform on the policy agenda but demanded that American society reconsider how it values black lives” (p. 34). This is important to understand when considering how this movement situates itself among other movements for Black civil rights in the spaces of large scale commercial news media.

Representation and the Racial (Racist) Status Quo in News Media

Although communication scholars have historically been concerned with how race is represented in mass media, much of that focus has been on both the linguistic processes of that representation (what is said) and the broader discursive representation of race (how it is said). Much of this recent scholarship is influenced by the work of Stuart Hall. Hall (1985) argued:

Language and behavior are the media, so to speak, of the material registration of ideology, the modality of its functioning. These rituals and practices always occur in social sites, linked with social apparatuses. That is why we have to analyze or deconstruct language and behavior in order to decipher the patterns of ideological thinking which are inscribed in them. (pp. 99-100)

In this context, Hall was not using the term “media” here to mean the mediated technologies of concern to this dissertation but to the mediating process of language itself. The statement above identifies contemporary mass media as the “social sites” wherein these ideologies originate and operate. Hall outlines the need for a literacy of

mass media and its representative properties such that readers and scholars can break down these codes of representation to understand how it occurs.

The discursive properties of representation are such that existence of a cultural phenomenon or a concept such as race is dependent on the way meaning is constructed through the linguistic process mentioned by Hall (1985). Hall (1996b) later argued the discursive is necessary for construction of the boundaries of social life:

Thus, while not wanting to expand the territorial claims of the discursive infinitely, how things are represented and the ‘machineries’ and regimes of representation in a culture do play a constitutive, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event, role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation— subjectivity, identity, politics—a formative, not merely an expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life. (p. 444)

This idea lends credence to the notion that representations of race, specifically within the context of crime and criminality, are able to define the social and political realities for consumers of particular media content. Further, scholars have identified common tropes in media images in both American news and popular culture that present a narrative of Black inferiority (Dowler, 2003; Hunt, 1999; Johnson, 1994).

Hunt’s (1999) research documents the ways that American mass commercial media operate through “raced ways of seeing” (p. 181). He argues that, due to the ease with which racial identifiers (e.g., skin tone, racial and ethnic naming patterns, neighborhood) can be used to mark who is whom in a news story, “race exerts itself as a powerful *representation*—as a common-sense, irresistible, *and* [emphasis in original] self-reproducing framework for explaining and justifying inequality in society” (p. 9). This process is central to the way journalists package their products (the news) to their audiences. One way news stories are made palatable to audiences (Hughey, 2012) is

through the process of identifying the race of an individual so readers know with whom they should identify.

Consistent with Bik and Goldstein's (2013) narrative paradigm, from a theoretical perspective I assume that human beings experience and understand reality as a series of ongoing narratives. These narratives have characters and conflicts and each have their own beginning, middle, and end. Similarly, news stories about criminality are constructed to help the public make judgments about the reasons for police officer's and criminals' decisions in cases; these stories compete in a broader information environment where people make sense of stories by providing information about history, culture, and perceptions about the status and character of the other people involved to help viewers and readers claim reasons for their perspectives.

This dissertation takes a critical look at two exemplary cases that demonstrate how media depictions of police use of force against Black men in the United States reaffirm dominant narratives on racialized criminal justice, are mediatized (Dixon, 2007; Dixon & Azocar, 2007) to create a false consciousness for audiences (Adoni & Mane, 1984), and how social movement discourse can disrupt these practices and representations (Downing, 2008, 2014). Using critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001) as a methodology, I will conduct two semiotic case studies to answer the following research questions:

RQ1a: How did U.S. news media narrate the April 4, 2015 police-involved killing of Walter Scott? What were the prominent semiotic features of the news stories?

RQ1b: How did news media narrative representations of the Scott killing shift over time?

In addressing these questions, this dissertation also examines the consistencies in the narrative of the Scott shooting with the systematic practices of representation of Black men and Black criminality in American news media. The second case study addresses the following two research questions:

RQ2a: How did U.S. news media narrate the July 19, 2015 police-involved killing of Samuel Dubose? What were the prominent semiotic features of the news stories?

RQ2b: How did news media narrative representations of the Dubose killing shift over time?

In addressing these questions, the case study also observes the consistencies and differences between the Dubose shooting news narrative with the systematic practices of representation of Black men and Black criminality seen in American news media.

In answering these questions, this dissertation also examines the entry point of Black Lives Matter protestors in the news media discourse, the representations of the story in alternative news spaces, and begins to explain how discourses of members of the Black Lives Matter movement can challenge these systematic practices of representation that perpetuate archaic and racist notions of Black criminality particularly in cases of police use of excessive force against Black men and women. Additionally, these cases help identify the role alternative and social media can play in challenging the hegemonic practices of media representation that perpetuate these notions.

Explanation of Cases

As mentioned above, mainstream news stories and reports rely on perspectives from authority figures (Lawrence, 1996; Schudson, 1982), who have every reason to

present an explanatory narrative of events that makes those authority figures look the best. Take two very recent cases of death of Black men at the hands of American police officers: Walter Scott and Samuel Dubose.

Walter Scott was a Charleston, South Carolina man pulled over by police on April 4, 2015 for a nonworking brake light. Scott exited his car and ran from the officer while he was pulled over and a chase between the two ensued. The chase ended minutes later when the two became involved in a physical struggle. Scott broke away from the officer's grasp, began to run again, and was subsequently shot in the back five times while fleeing again; killing him.

On July 19, 2015, a University of Cincinnati campus police officer stopped Samuel Dubose for a missing front license plate. After a series of questions by the officer initiating the stop, the officer pulls on Dubose's car door handle attempting to get Dubose out of the car. Dubose held onto the door trying to stop the officer but the officer then reached into Dubose's car to get him to stop and, within a matter of three seconds from initially grabbing the door handle, shot Dubose in the head; killing him.

In both cases, the officers made the claim in their initial police incident report that they shot the men out of self-defense. The officer who shot Walter Scott claimed Scott took his Taser during their initial struggle and he was forced to shoot an "armed subject." The officer who shot Samuel Dubose claimed he was being dragged by Dubose's car during the stop and had to shoot him. In both, the narrative portrayed by the police reports was the narrative initially circulated by the local press (Edmonds, 2015).

Not until cell phone video from a bystander witness to the Scott shooting and body camera footage from the officer involved in the Dubose shooting was released did

the dominant narrative in these cases begin to change rapidly, resulting in a similar media dynamic. Thus, these two cases demonstrate how news media rely on police reports as unassailable journalistic evidence that shapes the initial development of a crime news story. How this occurs in the context of crime reporting on race and new social movements is important to consider. Counter-evidence in the form of police and public video recordings may disrupt these narratives and be re-circulated in news media as police, public defenders, activists, journalists and media critics further attempt to complete the picture of the events.

In examining the two cases, I will show how increased agency and presence for marginalized voices such as those making use of the hashtag #blacklivesmatter can disrupt the semiotic media processes that marginalize those perspectives. As Downing and Husband (2005) argued:

The mediation of racism via mass media of all kinds is not the only source of its devastating impact, but it also operates in a molecular and penetrative fashion throughout the capillaries and pores of today's world, as—in varying forms—it has done through five centuries since the onset of European colonial expansion. (p. 25)

Both cases show how, if left unchecked, the system of representation and depiction that sees official and elite sources of information as authority can lead to the incorrect version of events becoming the dominant narrative, thereby reinforcing and reaffirming the white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchal (hooks, 1984) status quo. The dissertation also considers the vividness of the Black Lives Matter social protest and how media cover social protest; the ability for the social movement to utilize alternative (social movement) media to produce counter narratives, and the ways that these narratives sometimes were picked up in the mainstream media discourse and sometimes were not is also considered in the context of understanding the asymmetries that exist in the U.S. media system.

Summary and Overview of Chapters

This chapter introduced the problem and critical argument at the heart of the dissertation. Namely, I presented the argument that mainstream American mass media operate through racist practices, particularly with news narratives involving African-American actors, and especially when those narratives are of crime events. The chapter that follows explores in further detail how these practices are connected to the phenomenon of primary definition that privileges elite and “official” sources of information as the definers of these crime narratives. When these mediated events involve actors who are involved officials as part of the story, this manner of operation allows narratives around a particular media issue or specific event to fit within hegemonic structures that support and reinforce the status quo. For the cases I will discuss in the dissertation, I argue these narratives are indeed problematic due to the discrepancies between the “official” version of events and video evidence of the events. Additionally, there exists evidence these narratives and representative practices are problematic when they reaffirm racist notions about the subjects of these events: Black bodies encountering police officers and racist narratives of aggressive Black male criminality.

In Chapter Two, I review the relevant literature that provides the basis for this dissertation’s inquiry. The literature review includes explorations of scholarship in mass media and its semiotic and representative properties in constructing realities for its audiences. I accomplish this by discussing the literature around media framing and focusing events and how the framing process contributes to the construction of the social reality of a particular media event or issue. Additionally, the literature review examines

critical race and media scholarship to historicize the representations present in two media events analyzed in the case studies in Chapters Four and Five.

In Chapter Three, I outline the methodological approaches by which this dissertation structures its analysis of the cases. The methodology chapter includes a thorough look at critical discourse analysis as the method by which I will interpret the news articles that define the narratives of the dissertation's two cases. Second, I discuss the specific case study approach techniques useful for this dissertation's approach to the cases. I conclude the chapter by outlining the different types of data used in the analyses.

Chapters Four and Five are the two case studies themselves. In Chapter Four, I discuss the media narration of the shooting death of Walter Scott at the hands of North Charleston Police Officer Michael Slager in North Charleston, SC on April 4, 2015. Chapter Four's case study involves a look at how mainstream news media described the event both prior to and after the public release of bystander cellphone video contradicting the version of the story purported by the North Charleston Police Department (NCPD) and Officer Slager and perpetuated by the local Charleston media. Chapter Five involves a similar analysis of the off-campus shooting of Samuel Dubose at the hands of University of Cincinnati Police Officer Ray Tensing on July 19, 2015. In Chapter Five, I describe the media construction of the shooting both prior to and after the public release of Officer Tensing's body camera footage.

In Chapter Six, I conclude with a discussion of the cases and the analysis accomplished in the previous two chapters. This includes a discussion of the significance of the cases by outlining what the dissertation set out to do, how it addressed the research questions, and a discussion of the similarities and differences of both cases. Chapter Six

also includes the discussion of race as it applies to and affects the media narrative of the two cases. Additionally, in Chapter Six I discuss the importance of alternative media discourse from activists and those involved in the #BlackLivesMatter movement in bringing critical commentary of the mainstream media narratives to the mainstream. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations and implications of the dissertation as well as concluding comments.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The present chapter surveys the available communication scholarship crucial to continuing this dissertation's discussion of the power of social movement discourse to disrupt hegemonic constructions of race, particularly those discussing Black Americans, as they appear in U.S. news media. By examining the process of representation that legitimizes the linkages between Blackness and criminality, for instance, and problematizing those representations, this dissertation is able to use the critical discourse analysis methods introduced in the next chapter to craft analyses that challenge the narratives presented in those cases under examination in this dissertation.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the process of news media framing of social reality that sets up the dissertation's discussion how narratives on race and criminality are constructed for various publics in the U.S. news media. Second, I introduce the critical problems scholars have identified with respect to how contemporary U.S. news media utilize the concept of race as a "floating signifier" (as described in Chapter 1 with scholarship from cultural critic, Stuart Hall) in their primary definition of Black male criminality in juxtaposition to police officers in U.S crime news stories. In examining the problem of primary definition, the chapter also considers the literature on how news constructions of race legitimize the problematic and stereotypical linkages many audiences have between minorities and crime. Third, the chapter considers how social movements produce media and use alternative media, including social media, to disrupt the dominant ideological practices of large-scale commercial media. Finally, the chapter concludes by briefly describing how case studies of focusing events may

illustrate these aforementioned cultural and communicative phenomena structuring U.S. news media representations of black male criminality.

The Process of Framing Social Reality through Mass Media

An important aspect of how American news media operate relates directly to how news organizations construct reality (Adoni & Mane, 1984) for their audiences, or social constructionism. Social constructionism, as described by Adoni and Mane, is a paradigm of communication research that argues reality is constructed in the social interactions (communication) between people. In Adoni and Mane's words, "the social construction of reality is a dialectical process in which human beings act both as the creators and as products of their social world" (p. 325). They argue symbolic expressions formulated in mass media function to develop a "false consciousness" in the social environments of individuals. One way this is done is in "how they decide not only what events, but what sources and ideas journalists include in and exclude from the news" (Lawrence, 1996, p. 437). Journalists typically rely on official elite sources (e.g., politicians, police officers, government spokespersons) for information. Likely, Ewart, Cokley, and Coats (2004) noted, "Authoritative sources possess certain 'qualifications' or 'credentials' that allow them to speak to news workers and be quoted in the news. These 'qualifications' include the source holding a position of power – whether economic or social – and being a representative of a major societal institution" (p. 35). This reliance on elites places a privilege on information supplied by pro-status-quo groups, in turn lessening the legitimacy of marginalized or alternative voices. Working from the assumption plurality, debate, and a diversity of perspectives are necessary for social change, this reliance on elites as sources of information is problematic for groups seeking social change because

“when elite consensus reigns, the range of debate in the news narrows to reflect that consensus” (Lawrence, 1996, p. 438). Other factors such as the episodic nature of television news and a lack of context combine with this reliance on elite voices to “create news that is biased in favor of official control over the definitions of public problems” (Lawrence, 2000, p. 34). This bias does not shape the meanings of the events for various groups, either for change or for the status quo. The framing of bias does, however, shape what meanings become prominent and salient for audiences on either side.

In his constructionist approach to framing, Van Gorp (2007) argued that not only do frames make information more salient but they become the building blocks of culture and reality, allowing events to be presented in different ways depending on the frame used. Van Gorp identified how those salient messages being framed by a media outlet can lead to culture and reality construction. Frames are used in mass media to define issues, make moral judgments, and identify or diagnose the cause of social issues (Entman, 1993). Consistent with this definition of a frame, Gamson’s (1989) definition of framing entailed “a central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue” (p. 157). Reese (2007) argued framing involves making certain products of reality more salient to audiences. Similarly, for Entman (1993), “framing essentially involves *selection* and *salience*. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text [emphasis in original]” (p. 52).

Framing is a process marked by being active, involving “agency and contention at the level of reality construction” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). This is the case for both elite official sources and social movement activists. The framing process becomes

contentious when both those forces attempt to use mass media to frame events and issues in conflicting ways. These “framing contests” (Benford & Snow, 2000) end when the frames from either perspective resonate with audiences.

Critical Problems in Race and Representation

Researchers taking a critical approach to understanding the process of communication in construction of reality study how journalists can intentionally or unintentionally use frames to give meaning to certain events, eliciting behavioral, cognitive, and affective responses from their audiences (Van Gorp, 2007). Media routines and procedures, media-workers, and outside organizational influences all work to structure the frame of an issue (McQuail, 2010; Van Gorp, 2007). This is of particular importance when studying mainstream American media, as these large-scale commercial media have a particular organizational structure, routines, procedures and distinct corporate influence compared to other forms of news media (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

One critical problem scholars have identified with source selection processes that privilege elites in mainstream news media is the lack of diversity in the sources chosen (Brown, Bybee, Wearden, & Straughan, 1987). Brown et al. found that experts are most likely white males in executive positions. They argued that journalists chose this demographic due to availability and suitability; that men in executive positions tend to be perceived as more suitable and credible to journalists. Reese and Gandy (2001) observed, “Minorities are considered less credible, and in stories about race minorities are often seen as incapable of being objective” (para. 42) and that this practice further delegitimizes statements from minority spokespersons. In their analysis of political news stories between the 1970s and 1980s, Reese and Gandy found no difference in the

demographics of expert sources chosen; that is, regardless of the race or gender of the experts, their role in the news narrative was to delegitimize the racial minorities when narrated as the criminal subject within the story. Importantly, Dan Berkowitz (1987) also established how in television news, the news casts would use more government sources, stick with traditional channels, use more executive sources to frame the news stories. Indeed, he noted agenda-setting effects of the reporting resulted from the overuse of the same type of “expert” source.

Specific to crime stories, more recent research reaffirms how journalists routinely seek out police as sources for the official account of events (Lawrence, 1996, 2000). This process of source selection has contributed to a “culture of fear” (Glassner, 1999) that perpetuates notions of Black male criminality, white victimage, and a link between the two. Glassner argued the lack of attention police paid to Black victims of crime over white victims was a primary motivator for journalists’ inattention to the same occurrences. Further stretching the discussion around race and source selection in the news, Poindexter, Smith, and Heider (2003) found discriminatory practices in how local news outlets use perspectives from racial and ethnic minorities when presenting information. They found:

...African Americans were more likely to be newsworthy because they had committed a crime [...] there were fewer opportunities for African Americans to be a source for the news when a story contained only one source [...] the use of African American sources increased only when two or more sources were used [...] In these data, racial and ethnic minorities were often missing from local newscasts, and even when covered, were overrepresented in stories about crime. (pp. 533-534)

Traditional social scientific examinations of media effects identify the implications of this type of news structuring. Dixon (2008a, 2008b) studied the relationship between exposure to news representing Blacks and crime. In his research, he found “exposure to

Blacks' overrepresentation as criminals was positively related to perception of Blacks as violent" (2008a, p. 119). This seemed to be connected to the seriousness with which viewers consume crime news. This allows for the strengthening of those cognitive linkages between Blacks and criminality (Dixon, 2008a) for audiences because they trust these sources and the activation of those links between Black and crime are already primed.

Additionally, when Dixon (2008b) controlled for his subjects' "racial prejudice and conservatism" (p. 331), he still found significant evidence of a link between "network news exposure and racialized perceptions" (p. 330). After controlling for these factors, Dixon came to the conclusion, "the most likely reason for the current findings is that network news exposure shapes racial perceptions" (p. 331). discussed, salience is the premise of both agenda-setting and priming. Thus, it would follow that the initial priming of those connections between Blackness and criminality for audiences is necessary for individuals subsequently to frame these events within those constructs.

Archetypes of Black Men and Stuart Hall's Process of Primary Definition

A second critical problem researchers have uncovered in narratives of black criminality in the U.S. news media is the minimization of Black victimization (Dixon, 2015). In fact, when coverage in news media is dominated by a reliance on police experts there is a countervailing "slighting" of Black victimage in the crime reporting. Understanding this narrative process in the contexts of how it draws on archetypes of Black masculinity to minimize such victimage is important. Related to how race functions as a "floating signifier" as illustrated by Hall's (1985, 1991, 1996a, 1996b, 1997; Jhally, 1997b, 1997c) conceptualization; it can only be understood within a system

of other ways of representing the human experience. Here, I argue how Hall's concept of primary definition is theoretically important to understanding the relationship between the ways racial archetypes of Black male criminality are defined and dramatized in U.S. commercial news media's coverage of police-involved shootings of Black men.

Race as a floating signifier. Black in reference to race, as a floating signifier, in Hall's terms (1985, 1996a; Jhally, 1997c) is a "mark of difference" (Hall, 1993, p. 110) that operates similarly to language. Stuart Hall argued race is "a floating signifier" (Jhally, 1997c): a concept existing and useful only in its relation to other "concepts and ideas in a signifying field... Their meaning is subject to the constant process of redefinition and appropriation" (quoted in Jhally, 1997c). For the purposes of this project, the idea of race as a floating signifier does not minimize the importance of racism and racial violence by perpetuating its semiotic definition. On the contrary, Hall argues race has discursive qualities such that it only gains meaning when "organized within language, within discourse, within systems of meaning" thus regulating conduct, manifesting itself in racist practices and ideologies. These "racist practices" will be discussed next when articulating the ways the mainstream news media represent Black individuals connected to crime stories and the ideological assumptions resulting from that representation.

Taking this conceptualization of race into the digital media world, digital tags and specifically hashtags, can be seen as signifiers in their own right. Researchers have examined the usefulness of hashtags in empowering and connecting social media activists (Bik & Goldstein, 2013; Jensen, 2015). Hashtags allow cohesion and community building for activists using social media. When news breaks or new discoveries emerge,

users can attribute that information to a particular hashtag. Then users who follow that hashtag can be made aware of the new information and subsequent discussions around it. This is that semiotic process Hall discussed in action.

The signification process whereby race becomes a sociocultural category begins with an identification of race. Typically presented as, and likely intended as, a practice whereby journalists attempt to present as vivid and detailed a description of an event as possible, identifying an individual in a news story by race signifies difference to audiences. That difference, taking into account the perpetuation of the connection between Blackness and crime in mainstream news media, has a tendency to “stimulate negative emotions” (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 91). Chiricos and Eschholz (2002) argued there are two dominating social scientific perspectives on the representation of race and crime, “The first assumes that crime is stereotypically portrayed as a Black phenomenon, and the second assumes that Blacks are disproportionately portrayed as criminals. These could be termed, respectively, the *racial typification of crime* and the *criminal typification of race*. [emphasis in the original]” (p. 402). After that initial signification occurs, there must be some meaning making around the terms such that news audiences feel informed about the particular event or the context of the crime. As stated above, the word Black only has meaning in a system of related terms and concepts that allow that meaning to exist and persist. In the case of Blackness in 2015, the system of representation and racist practices of mainstream news media have “typified,” to borrow from Chiricos and Eschholz (2002) again, crime and Blackness as inextricably linked terms. Adding to that the construction of reality that occurs through media representation of individuals and people, the language of crime news becomes the

language of race whereby we know what types of people commit specific types of crimes. This system of representation and racist practices makes symbolic Blackness as a stand-in for criminal. As mainstream news media become social canon, their discursive practices of reality construction “manufacture consent” (Herman & Chomsky, 2010) for dominant racist ideologies to persist.

Primary definition. Hall et al.’s (2013) theory of primary definition argues media production operates from a set of practices that situate official sources of information as valid over other potential perspectives, or in Hall et al.’s words, “to *reproduce the definitions of the powerful* [emphasis in the original]” (p. 60). Hall and colleagues argue this practice allows journalists access to new topics for their editors and managers from “reliable and institutional sources” (p. 60). They argued this practice originates from 1) “the internal pressures of news production” (p. 60) and 2) “the fact that media reporting is underwritten by notions of ‘impartiality’, ‘balance’ and ‘objectivity’” (p. 60).

Hall et al. (2013) argued that though the principle of media balance asks journalists to seek out alternative sources for the sake of objectivity, this quest for objectivity is merely a smokescreen “to enhance its newsworthiness” (p. 61). What actually happens in this process is these journalists and producers end up dramatizing the media events such that the primary definers “establish the initial definition or *primary interpretation* of the topic in question [emphasis in original]” (p. 61) and force any contributor with a perspective counter to this initial definition to begin their discussion from the defensive. Thus, all discussion around the issue begins from the assumptions that the primary definition is the norm and counter arguments are at a significant

disadvantage. Hall et al. stated this process sets the primary definition as the norm, “by *framing what the problem is*. This initial framework then provides the criteria by which all subsequent contributions are labeled as ‘relevant’ and ‘irrelevant’—beside the point [emphasis in original]” (p. 62). Further clarifying, Hall et al. said, “the media are frequently not the ‘primary definers’ of news events at all; but their structured relationship to power has the effect of making them play a crucial but secondary role in *reproducing* the definitions of those who have privileged access [emphasis in original]” (p. 62).

In the context of contemporary reporting of police brutality, Glassner (1999) pointed to one significant case of a police shooting of a fellow officer as an example of how news media may provide a primary lens for evaluation of victimage:

The tendency to slight black victims extends even to coverage of undeniably newsworthy crimes such as shootings of police by fellow officers. In 1996, after a white New York City police officer, Peter Del-Debbio, was convicted of shooting Desmond Robinson, a black plainclothes transit officer in the back, wounding his kidneys, liver, lungs, and heart, reporters and columnists evidenced a great sympathy for Del-Debbio. They characterized him as having made an innocent mistake and suffering overwhelming remorse. The agony of Robinson and his family, by contrast, received more modest attention. Few reporters seriously questioned—and some overtly endorsed—the official spin from the district attorney, mayor, and defense attorneys that the shooting had nothing to do with race and was largely the victim’s fault—even though in testimony Del-Debbio recalled having reacted not to seeing just any man with a gun but “a male black with a gun.” (p. 114)

This representative tactic allowed public sympathy to lean toward the officer in the Del-Debbio case; a phenomenon not at all uncommon in media portrayals of Black men in the news, particularly given the close connections between “‘crime beat’ reporters” (Campbell, 2012, p. 5) and the police sources they cover. For victims of shootings by police, Campbell’s thesis argues their portrayals are not presented in a manner consistent with other types of murder victims (read: unfair). When those victims are minorities,

Campbell said print media, specifically, do a lot to perpetuate public perception consistent with racial and cultural stereotypes of those minority groups' associations with criminal behavior. She cites a number of sources as supporting this notion of Racialized representation within the context of minority criminality which lead mainstream audiences to be become less sympathetic to minority victims of police violence:

Among the values linked to news narratives, ethnocentrism and allegiance to maintaining the social order are two of the most prominent values (Gans 2004). Black suspects in crime news narratives, in particular, who fail to exemplify these values are usually regarded and portrayed as outsiders (Dovidio et al. 2010: 242-43) while a pattern of racial stereotyping develops that encourages implicit comparisons to Whites. These, in turn, reduce Whites' empathy and heighten animosity toward Blacks (Entman & Rojecki 2000: 91). (Campbell, 2012, p. 7)

This, hand-in-hand with the media's role in influencing public perceptions of police, has the effect of potentially "[promoting] public tolerance for police violence" (Hirschfield & Simon, 2010, p. 179).

General tolerance of police misconduct stems from media portrayals of Black criminality (Chaney & Robertson, 2013, 2014, 2015). Stepping outside of the mediated world of criminal justice and into the courtrooms, Chaney and Robertson (2014) argued "members of law enforcement, judges, and jurors find it difficult to empathize with Black defendants and usually believe that members of this group 'get what they deserve'" (p. 111). Pointing to the late Rodney King's plea for us "all to get along," Chaney and Robertson (2014) stated not everyone is honoring that, particularly "white members of law enforcement against Black bodies" (p. 120). Other analyses from the authors revealed respondents to a survey on public perceptions of police as "agents of brutality" at a rate of 44% (16 out of 36 bloggers) felt officers were "purveyors of unchecked violence" (p. 30) and included personal accounts where those individuals were directly violated or someone with whom they were acquainted was violated (Chaney &

Robertson, 2013). Additionally, the authors noted non-Black perceptions of police typically saw them as people in whom they held confidence of their ability to perform the functions of their duty. Their approach was heavily informed by critical race theory in order to hammer home the notion these ideas about Black criminality and police infallibility are so engrained in American culture that many structures of our society (e.g., law, social interaction, media), “[exacerbate] the expression of White hegemony and ostensibly increasing the likelihood of disparate treatment of marginalized societal groups (e.g., Black males and other men of color) to keep them subjugated” accepting Hall et al.’s (2013) view on this process of primary representation, is not without understanding the social implications. It may be possible that the officials and elite groups from whom journalists receive information about police abuses of power are inclined to perpetuate viewpoints that uphold the law enforcement-sympathetic status quo. Related to this dissertation’s focus on race, Hall et al. provided an example to highlight how this practice functions to perpetuate hegemonic media structures:

For example, once race relations in Britain have been defined as a ‘problem of numbers’ (i.e. how many blacks there are in the country), then even liberal spokesmen, in proving that the figures for black immigrants have been exaggerated, are nevertheless obliged to subscribe, implicitly, to the view that the debate is ‘essentially’ *about numbers* [emphasis in original]. (pp. 61-62)

The practice of “framing what the problem is” affords those primary definers control over media narratives. Related, scholars have argued the commodification of the Black male body through those connections mainstream media audiences have with Black men and crime has served as a financially beneficial approach for content producers;

Hogrobrooks quotes a news director who acknowledged that “young black men—the unwitting ‘media darlings’ of the explosion of America’s ‘real-life, prime time crime’ programs—are, in reality, victims of character assassination by a greedy television industry, hungry for higher and higher ratings” (Hogobrooks 1993, p. 167; as cited in Brooks & Hébert, 2006)

This commodification runs akin to bell hooks' assertions:

one could talk about American culture and mainstream culture as being obsessed with blackness, but it is blackness primarily in a commodified form that can then be possessed, owned, controlled, and shaped by the consumer and not with an engagement in black culture that might require one to be a participant and therefore to be in some way transformed by what you are consuming as opposed to being merely a buyer. (Jhally, 1997a, p. 21)

Both news and entertainment media organizations run by corporations have an obligation to their organization's bottom line; that is that in a market-driven news environment the profit-centered nature of news as a business (McChesney, 2008; McManus, 1994). The question remains what reason does a ratings-driven industry like the American corporate news media have to represent Black men in a light counter to stereotypical assumptions? Before addressing this question based on the social scientific literature, I turn to evaluating alternative and social media for their potential to disrupt dominant commercial media narratives and social movement organizing. Blackness and the ways media discuss Blackness as a cultural phenomenon

Alternative Media and the Potential for Organizing

Large-scale, commercial media are clearly not the only narrative producers in the case of controversial police officer-involved shootings. Indeed, alternative and social media are available to give publicity to alternative viewpoints in the United States. The practices of primary definition mentioned above serve to privilege elites as official sources of information for news events. Alternative media, however, exist for the sole purpose of inverting "the hierarchy of access" afforded to these elites (Atton, 2002, p. 10; as cited in Atton & Wickenden, 2005). Additionally, Downing (2008) noted alternative media allow for political mobilization and social change around specific issues underrepresented in mainstream mass media. Alternative media gives voice, presence,

and agency to groups “marginalized by the mainstream media” (Atton & Wickenden, 2005, p. 349) when this hierarchy is overturned. Groups labeled by mainstream commercial media or expert officials as “deviants” or “counter-cultural” (Atton & Wickenden, 2005) have a platform in alternative media. This process is crucial to consider when contrasted with the process of primary definition mentioned above that essentially silences those voices or, at best, situates them as secondary or merely responding to the concerns of the truly important mainstream perspectives. For Atton and Wickenden, it is civic journalism that provided political power to the voiceless. Presently and in situations like those discussed in the cases under study in this dissertation, social media also become the avenue for these voices to step out of the margins.

This dissertation additionally explores whether and how alternative media and social media do have some power to disrupt general audience news narratives about Black male criminality in the U.S. One important mediated signifier is the practice of tagging, specifically hashtags as signifiers in their own right. Scholars have explored the usefulness of hashtags in empowering and connecting social media activists (Parmelee & Bichard, 2011). Hashtags allow cohesion and community building for activists using social media. When news breaks or new discoveries emerge, users can attribute that information to a particular hashtag. Then users who follow that hashtag can be made aware of the new information and subsequent discussions around it. This is that semiotic process Hall discussed in action. For contemporary Black social movements, the slogan “Black lives matter” and its hashtag, “#blacklivesmatter,” are important discursive concepts for Black activists. Research in the area of social movement discourse has

argued slogans work as frame amplifiers; “accenting and highlighting some issues, events, or beliefs as being more salient than others” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 623). Using Hall’s floating signifier framework with these terms, I could argue the words “black lives matter” are meaningless without a system of understanding that gives the words meaning. A word without a referent and context is meaningless. Thus, #blacklivesmatters becomes the “floating signifier” for Black activists seeking to motivate action around the issue of police relations with the Black community when, and only when, followers of the hashtag understand the context within which the hashtag operates. This floating signifier can also be considered a “collective action frame” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 198). Collective action frames “mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 198). Gamson (1992) argued collective action frames have a semiotic power in that they are the result of negotiated shared meaning among members of the movement. Whether a “collective action frame” or a “floating signifier,” #blacklivesmatter offers significant discursive power for activists in the digital era seeking to motivate change around this issue both within the movement and as the movement seeks to garner outside support and integrate with the public.

Social movements as producers of alternative media

Social movement discourse has a history of conceptualization within the context of media framing (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow, 2004; Snow & Benford, 1988, 2000). In this literature, the authors noted slogans gain semiotic power through the framing process, giving agency to those in the movement. Specifically, Benford and Snow (2000) noted “collective action frames” work to bring complex, general, or neutral ideologies

into digestible phrasings for audiences following or sympathetic to a social movement. This perspective argues collective action frames additionally become mobilizing forces for those interested by “[rendering] events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action” (p. 614). These particular frames also work “to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 198).

Historically, social pressure and boycotts from consumers brought on by social movements, and competition from alternative media have generated pressure on U.S. news media to improve its inclusivity. Research on social movements in mass media generally focus on movements as social and information ecologies (Treré, 2011) wherein the practices of collective organization through media create systems of diversity, coevolution of different parts or genres of the movement, identify several “keystone species,” and create a sense of locality. Social movements whose adherents are well-versed in the use of media create what Treré called, “keystone species” who are people essential the ability of the movement to sustain itself in its current form and additionally allow it to evolve. With regard to diversity, Treré argued, “different kinds of people and different kinds of tools interact in multiple ways [...] Actors continuously merged several platforms and technologies during their daily activities” (p. 7). A sense of locality is also crucial to activists and their ability to mobilize in these digital realms. By creating a sense of digital presence within these online arenas, users and activists were able to maintain connections and “a sense of belonging that other people from different collectives ignored” (p. 10) but provided a means for those involved with a cause the ability to coalesce locally by using the tools of the ecology.

Specific to the media practices, they found best approaches to social media movement media use included those that allowed members of these movements to act as media producers themselves. This occurs with activists embedding themselves as practicing journalists and media practitioners as well as forming relationships with journalists and media practitioners who, if not sympathetic to the cause, see the cause as useful for their purposes of career advancement and connections. Further, Mattoni and Treré (2014) argued the mediation of social movement messages can be crucial to providing mainstream legitimacy, “Communication supported through mediation is a means—activists use the media to communicate a message through which they achieve something—but also an end—activists use the media and in doing so they constitute flows of media production, circulation, interpretation, and recirculation” (p. 260). Understanding mediation is a circular process, Mattoni and Treré noted media-savvy activists can adapt to the presence of mass media as both “objects and messages” (p. 259).

Social Media are a Platform for Social Activism

Given the desire by many social activists to produce media and to distribute viewpoints counter to what appears in commercial mass media spaces, social media stands out as a particularly useful platform for activists. Consider the 2009 Twitter Revolutions (Segeberg & Bennett, 2011), where social movements centered around protests against the London G20 Summit, the political unrest in Moldova, and the Iranian Revolution of 2009. Authors like Segeberg and Bennett have argued Twitter specifically has the ability to function as an “organizing mechanism” that can represent tools with which organizers and activists can use to create cohesive networks, become a

part of the gatekeeping process for attended audiences, and can be their own social compass (p. 212). Though the authors caution these processes do not always occur for every case. Regardless, this shows the ability Twitter as a platform has to challenge dominant narratives about an issue while simultaneously shutting down hegemonic narratives of a social justice issue.

There are critics of Twitter's real impact. Hale (2013) argued Moldova's political changes were more to do with "elite [offline] network coordination and succession politics than with Twitter or any other new social media" (p. 22) and questioned the popular press and academia's rush to assign Twitter such power and influence (Poell & Borra, 2011) compare YouTube, Twitter, and Flickr and found that social media did not facilitate the crowd-sourcing of alternative reporting, except to some extent for Twitter. As with many previous alternative journalistic efforts, reporting was dominated by a relatively small number of users. In turn, the resulting account itself had a strong event-oriented focus, mirroring often-criticized mainstream protest reporting practices" (p. 695). Thus, they caution, it is easy for citizen journalists who operate only in alternatives spaces (read: The Twittersphere) to fall victim to the same pitfalls of sensationalism by focusing on violence as their traditional news brethren do. More recently, Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith (2014) saw evidence of Twitter as "broadening the range of voices in the news" (p. 493). This particular study was focused primarily on what Twitter could do to social progress, using the Arab Spring as a case study:

Our findings raise a question of the potential impact of these messages on the content and tone of other media reporting, given the large number of journalists, editors, and news outlets who monitored his feed. The feed developed into a central node in information cascades on the Arab Spring on Twitter through Carvin's practice of reposting content and referencing its source. Our findings raise questions as to how far this style of reporting on Twitter can reshape the news, by giving voice to the voiceless and challenging institutional elites. (p. 493)

Their assertions were that while the traditional processes of gatekeeping are alive and well, even on social media, a new process of gatekeeping emerges that creates a place for alternative sources of information. This is not to suggest Twitter is a true panacea to this problem of primary definition. Wallsten's (2015) research detailed how, during the 2012 U.S. election coverage, even on Twitter journalists privileged elites in their reports.

However, there is some evidence from journalism researchers have established ways citizen journalists can find ways to break through and challenge their limits of access (Reich, 2008). Reich (2008) argues that, in theory, social media affords citizen journalists the opportunity to and platform from which these journalists can breakthrough to the mainstream without posing too much of a challenge to the hegemony; more to serve as a compliment to mainstream journalism. Twitter has also been conceptualized as a medium where actual journalism happens (Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012). Cautioning journalists use Twitter in varyingly different ways and with differing intensities and that "j-tweeters" have a greater tendency to express opinion, Lasorsa et al. noted how these journalists were able to pull back the curtain of the news production process, which could be crucial to those seeking access.

The process by which journalists and mass media as a social institution allow certain information to penetrate the public agenda is called "gatekeeping" (Bowman, 2008). The gatekeeping process is crucial to the function of American mass media

(Bowman, 2008; McQuail, 2010), particularly for maintaining the status quo. Scholars such as Owens and Palmer (2003) saw anarchist and counter-public discourse online as having the potential to challenge that gatekeeping process. They argue, “The success or failure of protest depends in part upon public image. The media have historically acted as the gatekeeper between movements and the public, deciding which protests are covered and how” (p. 356). They further make the point that the Internet and (for them, “emerging”) technologies can change the media world for protesters and activists by giving them “more power to shape their own media image” (p. 356). Additionally, the argument for Twitter to assist in maintaining strong networks for activists, documents events in real-time, and allow activists to create their own “gates” is another common statement made about social media (Hermida, 2013). Additionally, tweets and hashtags can signify interest in a discussion around an issue and bypass traditional ways of sourcing information (Bruns & Burgess, 2012).

Although hashtags work as a specific type of collective action frame in the world of social media, Segerberg and Bennett (2011) note a debate among scholars on their reach and effectiveness. On one hand, optimists see social media’s ability to mobilize collective social action with the hashtag feature present in sites like Twitter. However, the authors also note overuse of slogans and hashtags over Twitter could result in devaluing Twitter streams or feeds from professional journalists and activists when the use of hashtags becomes too much for the general public to manage. They also caution discussing Twitter and Facebook activism without attention paid to both the social *and* technological contexts of the medium. Bajpai and Jaiswal (2011) attempted to create a framework for understanding and analyzing how tweets can become collective frames

around which activists can rally support for their causes. In their framework, they offer novel approaches to understanding these processes by stating 1) scholars should see Twitter and other similar platforms as providing opportunities previously unavailable with traditional data sources and 2) this new conception of Twitter should open up a new “narrative turn” (p. 8). Although a broad-scale analysis of social media coverage of police shootings is beyond the scope of the current project, how social movement activists produce and utilize media to counter dominant media representations of race and criminality is clearly relevant and important for researchers examining issues of race and representation in contemporary U.S. media to consider.

Primary Definition of Black Male Criminality in U.S. News Media: A Study of Two Significant Focusing Events

This dissertation examines two cases of media reporting on police-involved shootings where police departments initiated a narrative in defense and justification of an officer-involved shooting of unarmed Black men in the United States. In so doing, it examines these two cases as “focusing events” to examine the contemporary theoretical problem of “primary definition” in the fragmented U.S. news media environment, and the ways that social justice movements, and in these cases the #blacklivesmatter movement, was able to draw publicity to a counter-narrative and use alternative media to draw attention to alternative explanations of evidence and evidence in support of their claims. As Wolfe (2012) argued, focusing events can bring new attention to issues not discussed in the mass media, thereby leading to increased enthusiasm and attention of governing bodies (Downs, 1972; as cited in Wolfe, 2012). More clearly, the dissertation asks

whether and describes how the increased media attention on the issues surrounding police use of force with African-Americans shifted over time.

This chapter highlighted specific areas of inquiry relevant to this dissertation's study. Of particular use to me are issues related to the semiotic characteristics of mass media. An understanding of the semiotic nature of mass media representation is crucial to this dissertation operating in a manner consistent with both methodological approaches used in this dissertation: the case study approach and critical discourse analysis described in Chapter three. The linkages between theory and method as shown in these first two chapters should produce robust case studies that highlight how this process of semiosis can allow media producers and officials contributing to those texts to define the social reality for their audiences, often toward problematic ends.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter introduces the dissertation's methodology and the critical argument at the heart of this dissertation. In prior chapters, I presented the argument that American mass media operates in such a way that privileges elite and "official" sources of information. When these mediated events involve actors who are, themselves, officials as part of the story, this manner of operation allows narratives around a particular media issue or specific event to fit within hegemonic structures that support and reinforce the status quo. That reinforcement of the status quo is not itself inherently problematic, though it does exist in contrast to perspectives consistent with a critical paradigm. For the cases I will discuss in the dissertation, however, I argue these narratives are indeed problematic due to the discrepancies between the "official" version of events and contradictory evidence of the events.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Media and Case Study Methodology

Case study research involves a close and thorough examination of unique cultural situations and events with an emphasis on the generalizability of the implications of those events onto other similar events. There are five components of the case study design according to Yin (1992, 2002, 2008, 2013): 1) the research question or questions, 2) the propositions of the research question, 3) the units of analysis, 4) an assessment of the linkages between the data and the propositions, and 5) the interpretation of the findings (those linkages). Yin argues these propositions are based in the theoretical literature around a particular scientific inquiry. For the purposes of this dissertation, I am using focusing events research, which is based on agenda setting theory, as my propositional background to argue for a proposed link between past and future cases. Linking the data

to the propositions involves defining what each piece or each type of data mean to the arguments presented, or “pattern matching,” as Yin (2008) refers to it. This is where the literature on semiotics and mass media allow me to cement those connections between the reference and the referent. Finally, interpreting those findings involves making an argument as to what the case means for future and extant cases of a similar nature.

The stories of the shooting deaths of Walter Scott and Samuel Dubose operate as part of a larger discourse connected to the Black social movements; namely, today’s Black Lives Matter movement. Importantly, as this dissertation will detail, what these cases present is an ugly reality of race relations in America: there is a certain social presumption against a narrative indicating that a police officer acted outside of the boundaries of his or her official position of authority; instead, presumption in stories of Black male criminality would hold a Black man responsible for a police-involve shooting. In cases of police excessive use of force or police brutality, there is typically an assumption of the officer’s virtue and the victim is either identified as lying in an attempt to capitalize from their crimes or that the officer’s actions are justifiable either in the court of public opinion, the court of law, or both. What casual readers may know about the specific cases under examination in this dissertation is if there had been no video evidence of what actually happened in either of these cases, the narratives presented by the officers and their colleagues’ reports would have become the dominant stories presented in the media and most likely accepted as fact by a large number of audiences. These narratives are consistent with common media narratives about Black masculinity and its assumed links with aggression and unlawfulness (Harris, 2006; Staples, 1986).

The dissertation will also use these cases to identify how Stuart Hall has argued race operates as “a floating signifier,” a concept existing and useful only in its relation to other “concepts and ideas in a signifying field. The methods I outline in this chapter will allow me to demonstrate how, in these cases, the police officers participate in the discursive practices of racism when they file their reports claiming they acted in self-defense. The meaning of race in these reports become mediatized in the press; recirculated, defended, redacted, and redistributed for broader audience consumption.

Relevance of The Case Study Approach

As stated above, the case study approach is useful when answering how and why questions. Yin (1992) argued case study propositions derive from theory, Tellis (1997) argued the research questions themselves can guide the propositions. Polkinghorne (1983) noted that the formulation of research questions themselves should derive from theory. Therefore, if the research questions derive from theory and the propositions come from the research questions, naturally the propositions are a product of the theory. How and why questions are basic ways of understanding complex phenomena. They are the foundation of most, if not all, social science research. When asking why questions, researchers are trying to find out the reason a particular phenomenon occurs or the reason something exists. Using the case study approach allows researchers to point to specific instances of those occurrences and investigate the rationale. “How questions” involve figuring out the way something occurs. Case studies focusing on “how questions” are trying to propose or investigate the cause of a phenomenon or phenomena.

Additionally, when the events or the units of analysis for a case study include contemporary events, the case study approach proves itself most useful. This, in turn,

allows researchers to have a clear understanding of the applicability of the implications of a case to other cases.

Why is the case study approach best here? The theoretical background of the dissertation is in the focusing event research, which is influenced by agenda setting research (though, as detailed in the previous chapter's review of the literature, using focusing events as a theoretical basis does not necessitate using agenda setting as a supporting theory). Focusing events are those events so large-scale, rare, salient, and relevant to audiences, they become significant media events and remain present in the public sphere (Birkland, 1997). Focusing events are important because they provide prominent and accessible examples in addition to convenient cases from which to pull information about an issue. As Yin (1992) said, a case study is an attempt to understand contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts.

Specific Useful Case Study Techniques

Yin (1981a, 1981b, 1992, 2002, 2008, 2011) emphasized three primary analytic techniques useful to case study researchers. The first is the pattern matching technique. In this technique, the "chain of evidence" results in the ability to compare predicted and observable patterns of action. This predictability results from theory and the observation is empirical in nature. The second technique is referred to as "explanation building" where the aims are to reflect the propositions that arise from theory against the extant data. For this dissertation, the technique involves clearly stating the propositions of focusing events' theoretical concepts then discussing the data in terms of those concepts while attempting to generate explanations for what comes from that data. This is most useful considering this dissertation uses a multiple-case study approach. The third

technique involves a time-series analysis. This involves creating a narrative over time or series of events that define the case(s). From this narrative, I will look for trends in the timeline that present interesting or unique insights into the phenomena under study.

Qualitative Media Discourse Analysis

Tracy (2001), defined discourse analysis within the communication discipline as “the study of talk (or text) in context, where research reports use excerpts and their analysis as the central means to make a scholarly argument” (p. 726). This definition of discourse analysis contains three important communication components necessary for completion of the analysis in the present dissertation: the *context*, the *excerpts*, and the *scholarly argument*. The context in this dissertation is the mass communication context, a common context for qualitative discourse analyses (Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2008; van Dijk, 1985). For example, in his seminal publication, *Racism and the Press*, van Dijk (1991) examined the meaning created from news reports surrounding representations of racial minorities in news media. For him, the excerpts were the media texts or news reports themselves. This can also include the transcripts of those texts. The texts are often the units of analysis for the study (Edwards, 2003; Edwards & Lampert, 1993). The scholarly argument is the research question, assumption, or hypothesis that guides the research. Discourse analysis, Tracy adds:

provides communication researchers with a compelling way to study how people present themselves, manage their relationships, assign responsibility and blame, create organizations, enact culture, persuade others, make sense of social members’ ongoing interactional practices, and so on. Stated a bit differently, taking talk seriously has enabled communication researchers to reframe and address long-standing disciplinary concerns in powerful, persuasive new ways. (p. 734)

The research questions for this dissertation seek to do precisely this. By exploring how media reports of these instances of police brutality define and challenge notions of Black

criminality, this dissertation seeks to understand how news representations of these cases can assign responsibility and blame.

Though discourse analysis is the larger communicative genre of textual empiricism for this approach, this dissertation uses media discourse analysis specifically. Media discourse analysis is discourse analysis specific to the mass communication context. Cotter (2008) argued, “those who have explored media discourse tend to select and utilize data that will allow answers to fundamental questions about language, about the nature of the news and the media, and about more abstract issues of language, action, thought, and society” (p. 423). For this dissertation, the answers sought-after are specific to the language of the journalists writing the texts in the dataset and how that language constructs a social reality of Black identity.

Critical discourse analysis. One of the goals of this dissertation is to promote a critical reading of these texts. Critical discourse analysis is a method of reevaluating those texts and the events around which those texts were written in order to promote “alternative readings or readings by particular others” of those texts (Krippendorff, 2012, p. 65). Krippendorff outlined a rationale for critical discourse analysis as the preferred method when seeking to reevaluate the effectiveness of mainstream or status quo readings of texts when he said, “critical discourse analysts offer accounts of the roles of language, language use, and (in)coherences and of the communicative uses of texts in the (re)production of dominance and inequalities in society” (p. 65). This is the intended outcome of the dissertation. By specifically looking at the language used in both the police reports and media reports of the incidents, this dissertation will uncover the role of that language in reinforcing hegemonic structures of race and policing in this country that

place African-Americans, specifically African-American men, as naturally at-odds with law enforcement.

Critical discourse analysis allows us to see “all practices are practices of production” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 122) and in seeing all practice as practice of production, we give voice to the voiceless and meaning to the perspectives of those typically represented as meaningless in the “mainstream” mass media. The “critical” in critical discourse analysis separates this method from other forms of discourse analysis by, as Locke (2004) stated, “[opening up a] space characterized by an unstable and complex interplay of discursive relationships” (p. 29). Locke was discussing critical discourse analysis as a Foucaultian analysis that forms, transforms, and correlates a grand, all-encompassing “episteme” of a set of texts that acknowledges “the divergence, the distances, the oppositions, the differences, the relations of its various scientific discourses” (Foucault, 1991, p. 55; as cited in Locke, 2004) .

Fairclough (2001) said, “Discourses are diverse representations of social life which are inherently positioned” (p. 123). The diversity of texts is one of the fundamental analytical concepts understood by competent critical discourse analysts. This concept is lost in the myopic approaches inherent in non-critical content analysis methods. Of direct importance to this dissertation, Fairclough also stated, “the lives of poor and disadvantaged people are represented through different discourses in the social practice of government, politics, medicine, and social science, and through different discourses within each of these practices corresponding to different positions of social actors” (p. 123). Thus, critical discourse analysis research allows those researchers to formulate research questions that seek to ask about the “interdiscursivity” and

“intertextuality” necessary to explicate *real* meaning from the language of the texts.

There is an inherent diversity and plurality to this meaning; a semiosis looking to explain, in as many variations as necessary, or the what and the how of a phenomenon. The explanation of “the what” and “the how,” as mentioned above, is central to the case study approach.

The Critical Discourse Method to the Dissertation

Fairclough (2001) outlined a framework for critical discourse analysis based upon Roy Bhaskar’s (2009) “explanatory critique.” I will modify this framework for the purposes of my dissertation. In order to answer the “what” and “how” of the process of news representation of Black criminality and Black men within the context of police brutality and excessive use of force, my framework for analysis is as follows:

1. Focus on a media case that has a semiotic aspect (for both cases)
2. Identify the narrative ingredients in the story as well as challenges to that story through analysis of:
 - a. The argumentative practices and semiotic practices located within the story (floating signifiers)
 - b. Discuss how these systems of practices are similar or different from practices in other secondary mediated texts (social media or alternative media)
3. Consider what alternative narratives exist to disrupt the initial representation in and of the media case.
4. Identify shifts in the discourse over time and possibly ways that this works or happens.
5. Reflect critically on the analysis. (adapted from Fairclough, p. 125)

As stated above, this dissertation is inherently political and, as such, brings with it axiologically value-laden approaches to its analysis and interpretation. Step 1 asks the researcher to concentrate on the semiotic nature of the case. Fundamental to this step is providing the rationale as to why this case is a social problem. Fairclough went on to state, “this begs a question: a problem for whom?” (p. 125). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this dissertation presents the problem of inaccurate media representations of

events of police brutality that portray the offending officer as victim prior to potentially exonerating evidence for the *real* victim (e.g., bystander video footage, dash cam footage, and body camera footage) as a result of the journalistic practice of exalting police and elite voices as authority; giving them an assumed benefit of the doubt. Steps 2 and 4 above provide the researcher both relational and dialectic (Fairclough, 2001) aspects that diagnose the supposed problem as well as ways for identifying what exactly is or has become problematic about the status quo. Step 3 asks the researcher to consider whether the status quo or, for the purposes of this dissertation, a certain system of misrepresentation (or system of representation that has no need for the truth), relies upon this problem persisting then thinking of the ways alternative narratives can challenge these hegemonic practices of representing Black men and women. The literature review of this dissertation expanded upon what was discussed earlier in this chapter's statement of the problem and critical argument to explain how the "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 2013, p. 1) under which these journalistic practices exist to perpetuate the current social order. The final step (5) asks the researcher to take a reflexive look at the analysis and determine whether it "does or can contribute to social emancipation" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 127) by examining the effectiveness of the analysis' critique of the problem.

In this way, this dissertation uses a case study approach to examine two crucial and recent mediated events of police brutality against African-American males. Through the use of critical discourse analysis as the theoretical perspective for the approach to

analyzing the media case study (Fairclough, 2001),² the dissertation takes a semiotic approach to understand how the discourse in these media texts situates the actors and events in a context wherein Black men are marginalized as lesser-than others who interact with law enforcement. This is accomplished by analyzing the system of signifying practices located within and elucidated by these texts. Additionally, the dissertation follows with prescriptive arguments discussing how to challenge that system of representation. Finally, each case study ends with a critical reflection of the analysis that assesses the effectiveness of the case study's critique.

Case Study Procedures

Because case studies aim to generalize the implications of an examination of cultural events onto similar events that have previously occurred, extant, and future events (Yin, 1992, 2002, 2008), for this dissertation, I will produce two case studies: one analyzing the Walter Scott shooting from April 4, 2015 and another analyzing the Samuel Dubose shooting from July 19, 2015. Each case study (Chapters Four and Five) involves a critical discourse analysis that includes Yin's (1992) five components of the case study design. Each case includes clearly articulated research questions, the propositions of those questions that "point to what you should study" (Yin, 2013, p. 30), a clear description of the definitions and boundaries of the case: the units of analysis, a foreshadowing of the data analysis: namely, "linking data to the propositions" (p. 35),

² Fairclough (2001) argued critical discourse analysis is "as much theory as method" (p. 121). He emphasized the dialogical relationship critical discourse analysis has with other theories and methods. Additionally, he suggested researchers approach these analyses with a "transdisciplinary" approach as opposed to an interdisciplinary approach. This, he argued, allows the researcher to shape the relationship between those theories and methods, thereby providing illuminating assessments of that relationship and in turn, advancing both theory and method.

and the interpretation of the findings. In order to fulfill the requirements of that final component of Yin's (1992, 2002, 2008, 2013) case study design: the interpretation, the dissertation follows the framework for critical discourse analysis described above.

Dataset

For each case study, I have collected data from mass media outlets: newspaper articles, online news articles, broadcast news reports (television and radio), and online news videos; police reports from the respective departments involved in each case; social media messages from activists and concerned parties; citizen video taken by bystanders and witnesses to the events; as well as police surveillance footage including body cameras and police car dashboard cameras. A graphic depiction of the breakdown of the data, by type, can be seen in Table 3.1.

Newspaper articles. For both of the cases examined in this dissertation, newspapers represent the historical record (Franzosi, 1987) of a social event for publics and audiences. In the digital age, many news outlets have digital companions, allowing researchers a wider array of sources from which they can gather information for their inquiries (Ridout, Fowler, & Searles, 2012). This dissertation collects both print and online news articles using a number of collection methods. To collect these newspaper reports, I used electronic news databases LexisNexis, ProQuest's Newsstand and 'News & Newspapers' database, NewsBank's 'Access World News,' and EBSCOhost's 'Newspaper Source' and 'News' databases; as well as the online search engine Google.

I searched these databases using relevant keywords and key phrases for each case. For articles discussing the Walter Scott shooting, I conducted searches in these databases using the phrases, "walter scott," "north charleston police shooting," "ncpd shooting,"

and “south carolina police shooting.” I modified the search in each database to be specific to the time period pertinent to the case. For the Walter Scott case, I initially limited the searches to include only those articles published between April 4, 2015 and April 10, 2016. Those dates correspond with the date of the shooting of Scott and three days after the date Michael Slager was charged with murder for the shooting. This initial search resulted in 176 newspaper articles after filtering duplicates. Next, I expanded the dates of the search to include articles up to January 5, 2016. This date was the day Officer Slager was granted bail and released from prison on a bond. This search resulted in an additional 74 articles after filtering for duplicates and irrelevant articles. I also included in this category of data, “web news” sources such as those from The Huffington Post as they operate the same way as traditional news sources. This resulted in an additional 95 results after removing duplicates and irrelevant articles.

For the Samuel Dubose Shooting, I conducted a similar search using the same databases. For this search, I used the phrases, “samuel dubose,” “sam dubose,” “university of cincinnati police shooting,” “ucpd shooting,” and “cincinnati police shooting.” This search was also modified to coincide with the relevant dates of the case’s events. This search initially included the dates July 19, 2015 to August 1, 2015. These dates correspond with the day Officer Ray Tensing shot Dubose and two days after Tensing was charged with murder, respectively. This initial search resulted in 225 unique results from newspapers. After collecting these documents, I expanded the dates of that search to January 20, 2016, which is two days after the family of Dubose reached a financial settlement with the University of Cincinnati. This expansion of the search resulted in an additional 93 articles relevant to the case.

Broadcast News Transcripts. In addition to newspaper articles serving as the basis for the media perspective that completes the narrative of the case, I also collected transcripts from broadcast news media that discussed the case. I collected these transcripts from the LexisNexis database. For both cases, I conducted an individual search using the same keywords I used while searching the newspaper archives as mentioned above; “samuel dubose,’ ‘sam dubose,’ ‘university of Cincinnati police shooting,’ ‘ucpd shooting,’ and ‘Cincinnati police shooting,’” as well as; ‘Walter Scott,’ ‘North Charleston police shooting,’ ‘NCPD shooting,’ and ‘South Carolina police shooting.’ For the Scott case, I constrained the search to the dates April 4, 2015 to January 5, 2016 consistent with the date of the shooting and Officer Slager’s release on bond respectively. For the Dubose case, I conducted the search for broadcasts aired between July 19, 2015 and January 20, 2016 consistent with the date of the shooting and the day the Dubose family financially settled with the University of Cincinnati respectively. This search resulted in 213 transcripts discussing the Walter Scott shooting and 169 transcripts referring to the Samuel Dubose shooting.

Police Reports. As discussed briefly in this chapter and in more detail in the literature review, mainstream mass media and often members of the general public seek out officials as sources of information. In a number of contexts, due to the status these officials (e.g., police officers and legal personnel) titles confer, these sources are considered more legitimate than news media and public texts. For this dissertation, it is important to include this information for the purpose of highlighting the potential inequities and contradictions in the representations of these events. For each case, I collected the police reports for both incidents. These documents provide first-hand

accounts of those events from the officers responding on the cases. This included commentary from the officers that pulled the trigger in each case as well as those officers' backup and support. Even though this dissertation is a critical discourse analysis case study of media reports on two police shootings, the inclusion of the police reports are necessary to complete the full picture of the narrative of each case. The police reports serve as supplemental material in each case showing what version of the narratives would have persisted prior to the public release of video evidence contradicting the story depicted in these reports.

The police report for the Walter Scott shooting, titled "incident report" was made available on the 11alive.com website, which is the website for an Atlanta-based NBC affiliate. The full nine-page version of that document without redactions was available in PDF form. I retrieved the police report for the Samuel Dubose shooting, titled "information report," from the University of Cincinnati website. The full three-page document was also available without redactions and in PDF format.

Social Media Messages, Citizen Video, and Police Surveillance Footage. The final type of data collected for this dissertation were "alternative" sources of information. This data included social media messages; primarily tweets from Twitter as well as status updates and posts on Facebook. This information was contrasted against mainstream media and those official reports from the respective police departments. One of the research questions guiding this dissertation is concerned with the potential of social media messages to disrupt the hegemonic structure of mainstream mass media. In order to assess that disruption, I used archives such as the Internet Archive's 'WayBack Machine' which allowed me to access a number of social media archives such as

Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities and the University of California at Riverside's open source Twitter archives. Searching with these resulted in literally millions of Tweets that were pared down to a manageable number using the computer program Python; an application that allows researchers to search through and filter Twitter data for the most useful hits on tweets about a particular case. After that filtering process, I again combed through the remaining tweets to remove "retweets" or posts on Twitter which are not original posts but are tweets repeating or promoting what another Twitter user has already tweeted. This left me with approximately 700,000 original and relevant social media posts for the Walter Scott case and approximately 900,000 for the Samuel Dubose case. One option available with the Python application is the ability to output tweets not as individual blocks of 140 character text content, but by tweet ID. A tweet ID is a multi-digit number unique to each tweet irrespective of the Twitter user's handle or ID. Having a list of tweet IDs which provide no indication as to the content of the tweet presents an objective method of sampling tweets for the analysis. For purposes of this analysis, the researcher randomized the occurrences of tweets by ID. Then, the researcher examined the first 1500 randomized tweets and selected a subset of relevant cases (including terms #BlackLivesMatter or referenced either Samuel Debose or Walter Scott by name or the city locales by name) to include in the dataset. After further social media message selection (see, Table 3.1), 1,535 social media messages were read and considered as part of this analysis.

Additionally, I analyzed citizen bystander video for the Walter Scott case and officer body camera video for the Sam Dubose case. I used this data primarily to

determine if there were inconsistencies with this objective evidence of these cases' series of events and the description of events as told by officers in the respective police reports.

Dataset Summary

A diversity in the type of documents that comprise the dataset is necessary to create as accurate a description of the events as possible. Yin (2013) argued, “documents must be carefully used and should not be accepted as literal recordings of events that have taken place” (p. 107). He went on further to state researchers should concern themselves with the validity of any document as it could contain inaccuracies, deliberate edits, as well as inconsistencies with other data documenting the same event.

Considering one of the primary arguments of this dissertation is that descriptions of events coming from official documents (e.g., police reports) could provide narratives of those events inconsistent with eyewitness statements as well as video evidence of those events, this is a necessary factor to consider. See Table 3.1 for a detailed description count of the data by type.

Table 3.1. Summary of Data Collected

Data Type	Case #1 (n)	Case #2 (n)	Total (n)
Newspaper Articles	345	318	663
Broadcast News Transcripts	213	169	382
Police Reports	1	1	2
Social Media Messages	663	872	1,535
Independent/Citizen Video Footage	1	0	1
Police Surveillance Footage	2	2	4
Total	1,125	1,362	3,534

Analysis and Interpretation

In conducting a case study using critical discourse analysis as my method, I must follow the procedures and include all the components of the process outlined above.

Specific to the case study approach, this involves 1) making sure the data are pertinent and relevant to the dissertation's research questions and their propositions, 2) clearly articulating the units of analysis, 3) providing a clear linkage between the data and those propositions, and 4) interpreting the meaning behind those linkages (Yin, 1992, 2002, 2008, 2013). Specific to critical discourse analysis, the analysis and interpretation process involves 1) clearly articulating the semiotic nature of the events of the case, its actors, its context, and the setting, 2) identify the system(s) of practices that allow those components of the case their semiotic power, 3) a consideration of alternative texts as well as alternative interpretations of the narrative, 4) potential shifts present in the discourse as presented in the data, and 5) a critical and reflexive interpretation of that analysis (Fairclough, 2001). Completing the steps above will give this dissertation the much-needed richness of narrative, which will result in an even richer analysis of that narrative whereby I can provide a fully explored interpretation of the events of both cases.

Conclusion

This chapter included an explanation of the methods used to complete this inquiry. I discussed the use of the case study approach in communication and provided a rationale as to why this approach is best for my study. Additionally, I provided rationale for the use of critical discourse analysis as a “transdisciplinary” (Fairclough, 2001) process through which these texts can elucidate competing and conflicting narratives for each case. The chapter concluded with a summary of the data used and the processes through which that data was collected, as well as how it will be analyzed and interpreted.

The next chapter is the first of the two case studies: the case of the shooting death of Walter Scott at the hands of North Charleston Police Officer, Michael Slager.

Chapter Four: Case #1 – Walter Scott and The North Charleston, SC Police Department

on April 4, 2015

“If not for the video, we would still be following the narrative from the officer. If not for this video, the story would be entirely different.” - North Charleston Pastor, Nelson Rivers (Knapp, 2015c)

On April 4, 2015 in North Charleston, SC, Officer Michael Slager of the North Charleston Police Department (NCPD) shot and killed Walter Lamar Scott. According to the initial police incident report (Gann, 2015), the encounter began when Officer Slager pulled Scott over for a malfunctioning brake light at around 9:30 that morning. The police incident report (Gann, 2015), and Officer Slager, himself, through his attorneys and NCPD spokespersons (Knapp, 2015a); Scott followed the officer’s order to pull over by pulling off the busy street on which he was traveling and into a nearby store parking lot but when Officer Slager, in his vehicle, pulled up behind Scott’s car, Scott exited his vehicle and ran south toward a residential neighborhood. According to Officer Slager’s version of events, he chased Scott and eventually caught up to him. Officer Slager claims once he caught up to Scott, the two began to struggle and Scott ended up with the officer’s stun gun (Gann, 2015; Knapp, 2015a). The officer further claimed he felt threatened during the encounter and was forced to shoot Scott (Knapp, 2015a). However, there was a bystander in the area: a young man named Feidin Santana walking to work, who happened to capture the confrontation on video with his cell phone (Parker, 2015). Santana’s video appeared to contradict many parts of Officer Slager’s version of the story. In Santana’s video, Officer Slager and Scott do appear to be engaged in a grapple or struggle (The New York Times, 2015). However, contrary to Officer Slager’s account of the struggle resulting in Scott ending up in possession of the officer’s Taser (Gann), on

the video it is clear to the casual observer that Scott broke free from Officer Slager's grasp and begins running away from Officer Slager. Officer Slager then pulled his gun from his holster, fired eight shots, five of which hit Scott and killed him (The New York Times, 2015). Officer Slager's bullets hit Scott when Scott was approximately 15 feet from Slager (Knapp, 2015b; The New York Times, 2015); a distance where Scott posed no threat to the officer.

Of relevance to the current case study is the fact that the fatal shooting of Walter Scott by Officer Michael Slager was the 11th time an officer had shot someone in South Carolina in 2015 as of April 4 (Berman, Lowery, & Kindy, 2015; Elmore & MacDougall, 2015; Reuters, 2015). The shooting occurred amid increasing salience with the public of the issue of police use of excessive-force against citizens and suspects, particularly Black citizens or suspects. Walter Scott and the way his shooting death is represented in mass media reports of the incident have implications for not only how people reading these texts will think of Walter Scott, Michael Slager, North Charleston, SC, and its police force, but also how people will think of the larger issue of excessive use of police force within The United States, particularly when the victims of that force are Black men and women.

This chapter presents the shooting death of Walter Scott by North Charleston Police Officer Michael Slager as depicted in mass media texts (i.e., newspaper articles, online news articles, and television broadcasts) from local, national and international news media. In addition to those media texts, the chapter supplements the presentation of the event with documents from the NCPD (i.e., the police incident report filed immediately after the shooting and Officer Slager's dashboard camera footage) as well as

video footage from a bystander who happened to be walking by at that moment to document the encounter. Finally, the chapter considers the ways that alternative news media sources, including #BlackLivesMatter activists in social media, disrupted initial news media accounts of the news narratives.

The chapter shows how the case is exemplary of racist media practices (Hunt, 1999, 2005) that privilege official and elite sources as the primary definers (Hall et al., 2013) of what happens in cases of police brutality and abuses of power (Lawrence, 1996, 2000). Lawrence (2000) said, “the news about police use of force is generally contained by a combination of routine police communication strategies, the routines and culture of mainstream journalism, and a larger political culture preoccupied with fighting crime. These factors create practical and ideological constraints on what is said in the news” (p. 112). In the case of the shooting of Walter Scott, when journalists followed these routines and presented the narrative of the events in the mass media texts discussed in this chapter through the eyes of officials, these “constraints” resulted in incomplete and inaccurate depictions of the event.

This chapter establishes how these storytelling practices led to journalists publishing inaccurate and unsympathetic portrayals of Scott not as a victim of police brutality and abuses of power or a justice system that punishes people, particularly Black people, for being poor (Picchi, 2015) or as a man with a “rap sheet” and multiple convictions (Knapp, 2015a) who “would be alive if he had stayed in the car” (CNN, 2015e, para. 69). The phenomenon of primary definition (Hall et al., 2013) results from customs of journalistic practice (Aday, Livingston, & Hebert, 2005; Atton & Wickenden, 2005; Bennett & Lawrence, 1995; Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2006; Carlson,

2009; Clayman, Heritage, Elliott, & McDonald, 2007; Harcup, 2003) wherein journalists maintain high levels of access with city government leaders and police department officials by affording them that priority status in constructing a narrative around an event (Bennett et al., 2006; Lawrence, 1996, 2000; Poindexter et al., 2003). Again, with the case of the death of Walter Scott, this chapter demonstrates how these powerful men and women are officials connected to the NCPD. The status and titles of these sources in their official presentation of evidence as part of a crime story provide a veneer of credibility and trustworthiness to the discourse contained in the news articles and broadcasts to which they contribute. Additionally, this chapter is consistent with scholarship arguing for mass media texts' ability to define not only the narrative of an event for audience members, but the social reality (Adoni & Mane, 1984) for attended readers. Lawrence (2000) said:

The media largely determine what the general public learns about street cops' daily experience with criminals and the underclass, as well as what the middle-class public learns about other groups' experiences with police. While the news media are generally preoccupied with crime, they are not generally preoccupied with police behavior in fighting crime. Police brutality therefore usually becomes an "issue"—in the news as well as in other public arenas—only occasionally, in the aftermath of certain dramatic and controversial use-of-force incidents. (p. 28)

These practices also result in the marginalization of voices who might present information contradictory to the "official" constructions of an event's narrative. The resulting representation renders an incomplete picture of a social event to readers and viewers and, importantly, the picture's incompleteness is concealed through its narrative structuring and only "occasional" (Lawrence, 2000) presentation of social problems as real problems.

To be clear, neither this chapter nor this dissertation are studies of media effects or audience reception. I mentioned the mediated social construction of a dominant reality

(Adoni & Mane, 1984), above because the false representations of Walter Scott and what Officer Michael Slager did to him on April 4, 2015 in mass media turned the fatal shooting into a focusing event (Birkland, 1997, 1998) around which activists and groups such as The Coalition, National Action Network, Blind Justice, and The Charleston Civil Coalition for Reform rallied for changes in policies around how NCPD officers approach the communities they are charged with protecting (Boughton, 2015a). In this chapter, I discuss the events of the case as they are presented in the media texts published prior to the release of the bystander cell phone video, as well as the version of events as presented in these texts after the video was released. Structuring the narrative this clearly delineates the major shifts in the narrative to address the study's research questions, and so that readers may see exactly what spawned the frustrations and protestations of Black Lives Matter and other activist groups. One such protest statement, among the many I present in this chapter, indicative of this frustration with media representations came from Muhiyidin D'Baha, a member of Black Lives Matter Charleston when speaking during a press conference at North Charleston city hall on April 9, 2015, five days after Officer Slager killed Scott. *CNN* identified how this Black Lives Matter Charleston activist "criticized the media for 'perpetuating falsehoods' about the black community and accepting accounts offered by law enforcement as truth. 'Your cameras may leave, but we'll still be here making this city a safer place,' D'Baha said" (*CNN*, 2015c, para. 6). D'Baha's statement is a clear reminder of how race may function as a floating signifier (Jhally, 1997c) in that D'Baha's direct criticism of how the Black community was presented in mass media discourse of the Scott shooting and strategic use of the word "we," demarcated race, specifically Blackness, as the discursive concept around which

the 24-hour news narratives of criminality are defined, presented, and represented (read: signified).

In examining this case, I describe how those narratives are replete with floating signifiers that present Blackness as dangerous, inferior, and inseparable from criminality. Second, I take a semiotic approach to critical discourse analysis to describe with the case study how this signification and the process of primary definition contribute to the representation of the events and actors. A semiotic approach to critical discourse analysis sees media texts as operating within a system of representation. This system contains the texts, their authors, the actors in the texts, the themes of the texts, and the implications drawn from the texts. These components interact in an arena of forces providing the material from which readers learn about the event. Fairclough (2001) said of critical discourse analysis, “Its particular concern is with the radical changes that are taking place in contemporary social life, with how semiosis figures within processes of change, and with shifts in the relationship between semiosis and other social elements within networks of practices” (p. 123). For the texts related to the Walter Scott shooting, my primary concern is how these texts are situated within the broader context of police violence and abuses of power, particularly against the Black community.

What follows here is a critical discourse analysis that seeks to explore how representation by journalists writing about Walter Scott contribute to the ways audiences read about this case and similar stories of police violence. I accomplish this by using an approach to critical discourse analysis that asks the researcher to identify how the texts under analysis are representative of the social problem, the network of practices that create the texts and texts like them, the semiosis or nature of the discursive

representation, and the possible alternative methods of textual representation. The chapter concludes by examining the implications of this analysis of the case.

The Shifting News Narratives in the Scott Case

From the outset of this case study it is important for the casual reader to observe the presence of multiple conflicting narratives of the same public event. These versions are represented through primary texts retrieved through public sources (described in Chapter 3) in the form of news reports, government documents, as well as digital video evidence. In each narrative, people representing typical official elite personas presented information to journalists about what happened between Walter Scott and Michael Slager. The first narrative published by print media includes the version of events told by Officer Slager and a fellow officer of an aggressive Walter Scott and a threatened Michael Slager that portrays Officer Slager as justified in killing Scott. A final narrative portrays Officer Slager as violating his duties such that, either negligently or maliciously, Officer Slager ended up killing Walter Scott in cold blood. What follows is an account of the initial news narrative and how it challenged and shifted over time.

Initial Narrative of Events as Presented by the North Charleston Police

In what was described by the NCPD as “a traffic stop gone wrong” (Boughton, 2015c, para. 4; Elmore & MacDougall, 2015, para. 2), Walter Scott was killed on April 4, 2015. Police, in news stories published in Charleston, SC’s *The Post and Courier* the day of and days immediately following the shooting but prior to the release of the bystander cell phone video, claimed Scott ran from Officer Slager after he pulled him over for a broken brake light. Authors of those initial articles in *The Post and Courier* included Andrew Knapp, Christina Elmore, David MacDougall, and Melissa Boughton. The

reason for the stop was not known until two days later, on April 6, in Knapp's (2015a) first article on the incident. An article from Elmore and MacDougall (2015), in *The Post and Courier*, quotes a statement made by a North Charleston police spokesman claiming Scott, "ran from the traffic stop and an officer [Officer Slager, though not yet named in this article] deployed his department-issued Taser in an attempt to stop him" (para. 11).

The journalists continued:

That did not work, police said, and an altercation ensued as the men struggled over the device. Police allege that during the struggle the man gained control of the Taser and attempted to use it against the officer.

The officer then resorted to his service weapon and shot him, police alleged. (para. 12-13)

The narrative in these early stories was consistent with the incident report filed (but not released immediately) on the day of the shooting by Sgt. James Gann, an officer responding to the scene. Importantly, the location of the incident and the rationale for officer-requested "backup" was narrated in news coverage to "race" the crime scene: "According to Officer Kidd, Third Street has "a reputation for being a pretty bad area" and there have previously been police runs in that area for "shots fired" so he and Lindenschmidt decided to proceed in that direction to provide back-up for Tensing" (Kroll, p. 29).

In the incident report, Scott was described as attempting "to overpower [Slager] and take his Taser" (Gann, 2015). In the ensuing struggle, according to these early articles as well as the police report, Scott ended up with the Taser and tried to use it against Officer Slager (though the officer's name was not released to the public until April 6). According to statements by Officer Slager to Officer James Gann, who filed the police report (Gann, 2015), once Scott had control of the officer's Taser, Slager pulled out his service weapon and shot Scott. Elmore and MacDougall (2015), in their April 4

Post and Courier article, noted, “It was not immediately clear how many times Scott had been shot or where on his body he was wounded” (para. 14). The number of times Officer Slager shot at Scott and the number of times he hit him would not appear in *The Post and Courier* or any other publication until Andrew Knapp provided the information in an April 7 article in *The Post and Courier* (Knapp, 2015c). According to his supplement to the incident report, Officer Clarence Habersham arrived on the scene after Officer Slager shot Scott and, “attempted to render aid to the victim by applying pressure to the gunshot wounds and directing the best route for EMS and fire to take to get to the victim faster” (Gann, 2015, p. 5). Elmore and MacDougall, in their April 4 *Post and Courier* article noted, “officers tried to revive him prior to the arrival of paramedics, police said. But their efforts were in vain. He was pronounced dead at the scene ... Police did not immediately specify whether he was armed” (para. 3).

The Post and Courier, Charleston’s local newspaper, published three articles (Boughton, 2015c; Elmore & MacDougall, 2015; Knapp, 2015a) on the shooting prior to the release of the bystander, Feidin Santana’s, cell phone video footage. In each of those articles, the authors relied on officials, primarily statements from NCPD spokespersons, as definers and meaning interpreters of the incident’s events.

In stories published in *The Post and Courier* between April 4 and April 6, 2015, prior to the citizen cell phone footage of the Scott shooting being made public, the paper’s writers seemed to offer descriptive information about the case from a neutral tone. The first story from Elmore and MacDougall (2015) began with the police perspective of the shooting; citing their assertion Scott fought with Officer Slager over Officer Slager’s Taser, resulting in Scott’s death by Officer Slager’s handgun. They

further mentioned police gave no other comments outside of that account. A portion of Elmore's story includes the perspective of and statements from Scott's family and mourners she was able to interview. Scott's family members, however, were skeptical and television reporters invited their commentary on the events to provide their readers with more information. In interviews with family members and community leaders, the reporters supplemented the narrative with information about Scott, the man who died. Elmore and MacDougall interviewed Scott's cousin, Samuel Scott, who said, "He's not a violent guy – never seen him argue with anybody. I just can't see it" (para. 10). Boughton (2015c), for *The Post and Courier*, interviewed Scott's older brother who called for "justice to be taken, for justice to be served, and we would like for the truth to come out" (para. 2). The television and newspaper stories during the three-day period after the event depicted a conflict between official sources of information and non-privileged commentary, with police testimony offered as evidence for Scott's guilt against the words of Scott's family. The Scott family voiced their skepticism of the police narrative, and couched their criticism in consideration of the need for a full investigation in search of "truth" and "justice" given their personal knowledge of their brother and other cases of police brutality.

Even with the family's perspective present, the bulk of the early news reports rely on information from police sources as fact finders. The inclusion of the police perspective first and more often throughout the story legitimizes their status as "primary definers"(Hall et al., 2013) of the case. These primary definers set the frames through which readers will view the story. In the case of Walter Scott, his portrayal as, "not a violent guy" in his brother's eyes is inconsequential in the context of the larger article

which fills-in the image of the narrative with official accounts of the incident from the police perspective, which, at the time, argued Scott was the agitator and posed a threat to Officer Slager. Boughton (2015c) takes the same approach to defining the narrative of the case in her article, “Family of man shot by North Charleston officer: All we want is the truth.” From the title, a reader might assume the focus of the article would be on the perspectives and reactions from Scott’s family members. That information was included in the article. However, the story made a point to repeatedly include the perspective of law enforcement officials who were advocating caution in rushing to judgment about the, then unnamed, officer’s actions. Boughton made a point to include commentary from community members and relatives of Scott that seemed to reinforce the official point of view. She quoted a local pastor who “urged the community to remain calm” (para. 19) and Scott’s cousin saying, “We don’t want to make this a black and white thing” (para. 23). This reinforces the notion readers should accept the official version of events prior to new information being presented.

A third *Post and Courier* story described the event primarily from the perspective of Michael Slager and the North Charleston Police. The article, “Attorney: North Charleston police felt threatened before fatal shooting” (Knapp, 2015a), highlights the events of the case as they were understood prior to the release of the citizen cell phone video but after the release of the official police report (Gann, 2015). In this version of events, the reporters’ comments include statements such as, “Officer Slager thinks he properly followed all procedures” (para. 3). The second paragraph of the article introduces Officer Slager as, “Patrolman 1st Class Michael Thomas Officer Slager, a former Coast Guardsman” (para. 2). This is a direct juxtaposition between Officer Slager

and Scott, who the author notes, “has been arrested about 10 times in his lifetime, mostly for failure to appear for court hearings and pay child support” (para. 8), though the author makes note the only assault charge on his record is almost 30 years old but following that with a mention of Officer Slager’s honorable military service. Knapp even writes Officer Slager “has never been disciplined during his time on the force” (para. 11), though we now know Officer Slager had two official citizen-complaints on his record (Fears & Tacopino, 2015; McShane, 2015; Steinbuch & Fears, 2015), one of which was an excessive-force complaint from another Black man (Blinder, 2016; Blinder & Williams, 2015; Lowery & Berman, 2015). Knapp did go on to discuss, briefly, the complaints made against Officer Slager but seemingly downplaying the veracity of those complaints with commentary from official reports noting Officer Slager’s exoneration.

What the writers from those early *The Post and Courier* articles did in their narrative construction is consistent with literature on the relationship between journalists and police when reporting on crime and the effect of that relationship on how those journalists construct their stories (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989, 1991; Fishman, 1980; Lawrence, 1996). The literature argues police versions of events become canon even when journalists include comments from nonofficial. Lawrence (1996) argued:

When meting out legitimacy to officials and nonofficials in news about police use of force [...] the presumed legitimacy of the police weighs heavily [...] Journalists undoubtedly develop routine ways of handling police use of force news—stock plots and stereotypes, standard sources—which protect their relationship with the institutions they cover. Not surprisingly, the police version of alleged acts of brutality often wins out in news portrayals. (p. 443)

This can be likened to the phenomenon of assimilation noted by McQuail (2010). He conceptualized journalistic assimilation as both blatant and subtle forms of collusion between source and reporter. Specific to the subtler assimilation, he said:

Less obvious collusion arises in routine news coverage where reporters depend on sources likely to have both inside information and an interest in the way it is published. This applies to sources such as politicians, officials and the police [...] it also conflicts with expectations of critical independence and professional norms. (McQuail, 2010, p. 273)

By inclusion of testimony taken from interviews with Walter Scott's family, the writers of those early *The Post and Courier* articles attempted to fill-in an incomplete picture of the criminal event. These interviews did not necessarily contribute to our factual understanding of the shooting but did supplement the narrative with information about Scott, his character, and one of the main actors of the case narrative.

Throughout this initial three-day period of the media coverage of the event, the Scott shooting was an exclusive narrative told by *The Post and Courier*. However, the news attention and narrative shifted and gained national or international traction after the cell phone video footage captured by bystander Feidin Santana was released on April 7, 2015 (Buchanan, 2015). Santana showed the video to the Scott family after he heard the dominant police narrative of the shooting in the news media (Otis, Goldstein, & Siemaszko, 2015).

Narrative After the Release of Bystander Cell Phone Video

What Feidin Santana told the Scott family became a matter of public record on April 7th, 2015. He reported that he was walking to work the morning of April 4, 2015 when he happened upon the scene of a man "grappling" with a police officer. Santana decided to take out his cell phone and begin recording the altercation. According to Santana, "They were both down before I started recording [...] I remember the police officer had control of the situation ... (Scott) was just trying to get away from the Taser" (Otis, 2015 para. 4). Santana's view of the altercation gave him no reason to believe Officer Slager, as he claimed in his version of the story, was being threatened by Scott.

As Santana told NBC “The police officer just shot him [...] I knew right away I had something in my hands,” Santana told NBC” (Otis, 2015 para. 6). Santana did not immediately come forward with the video, however. He told the *New York Times* that he waited until he felt there was a need to release the tape (Robles & Blinder, 2015).

According to Robles and Blinder’s report in *The New York Times*:

Mr. Scott [Walter’s father] and Mr. Santana made a gentleman’s agreement after viewing the video on Sunday [April 5]. They would wait another day to see if there was any need to release it: If the police stuck to the struggling-for-the-Taser story, then Mr. Santana would give the video to the family, despite his trepidation that the officer would come after him. (para. 26)

Santana felt it was his responsibility to release the video after hearing the version of events dramatized by the North Charleston Police Department, “When reports of Scott’s shooting death made the news, and he heard Officer Slager claim the man had been grabbing for his Taser, Santana contacted the victim’s attorneys” (Otis, 2015 para. 7).

After Santana sent the video to the Scott family, he allowed their lawyer to send it to *The New York Times*, who published it on their website in the evening on April 7, 2015. *The New York Times*,’ publication of the video was the catalyst for the national and international media attention of the shooting. On the night *The Times* released the video, the 24-hour cable networks immediately reported the development of both the video release and Slager’s murder charge. CNN opened their 7 p.m. show, *Erin Burnett Outfront*, with the breaking news of the video’s release and Slager’s murder charge (CNN, 2015c). MSNBC’s *The Rachel Maddow Show*, led their 9 p.m. show with the “breaking news” of the video’s release (MSNBC, 2015). CNN’s 10 p.m. show, *CNN Tonight* anchored by Don Lemon opened their show with the revelation as well that night (CNN, 2015f). Even on Canada’s broadcast channel CTV, there was interest in the release of the video and implications on Slager, race, and American policing (CNN,

2015a). The interest shown in the video by these programs is evident of the importance the video's release held for the national conversation around the case. As noted by the *Times'* editorial board the day after the video was published, "The shooting death of Walter Scott on Saturday would have passed into the annals of history unremarked upon had a bystander not used a cellphone to document what happened" (New York Times Editorial Board, 2015, para. 3).

Description of the video. Santana's video begins with a shaky visual of his view walking down a wooded residential neighborhood. Around the 10 second mark, Santana's view moves from a fence slightly obscuring to a tree behind that fence, then pans up to capture a man in a green shirt (Scott) and dark pants pulling away from what appears to be a grapple with a police officer (Slager) (The New York Times, 2015). At the 13-second mark, Scott turns away from the police officer and begins to run. As Scott begins to run, Officer Slager reaches toward his waist and pulls his gun from his holster. At the 14-second mark, Scott has taken 4 steps away from Officer Slager while the officer already has his gun pointed toward Scott (*The New York Times*, 2015). At the 15-second mark, Officer Slager begins firing. Between the 15-second mark and the 18-second mark, Officer Slager had fired what *The New York Times* reported was eight shots toward Scott. While Officer Slager is shooting, Scott can be seen flinching, apparently hit by the bullets, and started falling to the ground as the officer fired his eighth shot (The New York Times, 2015). With Scott lying on the ground, Officer Slager appears to re-holster his gun and walk toward Scott's body. Officer Slager appears to then call into his radio, "shots fired," while walking toward Scott's body. As Santana's view follows the officer, the video becomes blurry and the view is obscured. From the footage it is unclear

how quickly Officer Slager came to be standing above Scott's body or whether Scott was alive at this point. By the 35-second mark, Santana's footage clears up and the footage shows Officer Slager standing above Scott grabbing Scott's arms apparently placing handcuffs on him (The New York Times, 2015). At this point in the video, Officer Slager is not visible in the shot but can be heard yelling to Scott, "put your hands behind your back" multiple times while placing him in the handcuffs. Scott is lying face down and in handcuffs 53 seconds into the video. Officer Slager then walks back toward the spot where he and Scott were originally entangled and at the 1:03 (one minute and three seconds) mark, Officer Slager reaches down to pick up a small dark object off the ground (The New York Times, 2015). Santana's video then pans left back toward Scott's body to find another officer walking toward Scott at 1:07 (*The New York Times*). This officer, the *New York Time* later identifies to be Clarence Habersham, places a call on his radio requesting "a kit." At 1:24, Officer Habersham appears to reach down near Scott's body, pick something up off the ground, then place that item in his waist (The New York Times, 2015). By 1:26, Officer Slager has returned to where Scott's body lies and appears to drop a dark object near Scott's body (The New York Times, 2015). For approximately 13 seconds, Habersham stands above Scott while Officer Slager paces around the body (The New York Times, 2015). At 2:00, Habersham, now wearing blue latex gloves he pulled from his belt 35 seconds earlier, bends down to kneel at Scott's body, placing his hands on Scott. Santana's view does not give a clear image of what Habersham appears to be doing to Scott. At the 1:58 mark, Officer Slager reaches down again to pick something up off the ground, then places that item in his waist (The New York Times, 2015). At no point in the first three minutes of the video do either Officer

Slager or Habersham appear to render aid to Scott or resuscitate him. At the 3:00 minute mark, Officer Slager reaches a hand toward Scott's neck in what looks like an attempt to check for a pulse (The New York Times, 2015). Santana's video cuts out shortly after three minutes.

Santana's presence as an actor in the narrative is also important to note. Speaking up against police misconduct can bring with it the possibility of retribution, particularly for racial minorities (Barkan & Cohn, 2005; Bjornstrom, 2015; Nelson, 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). This was something of which Santana indicated he was very aware, though he still made the decision to take his video public even with that potentially frightening possibility (Norman, 2015).

Although reporters initially gathered most of their information through interviews with officials, the office information updates and narrative did shift in this case after the release of the amateur video footage that challenged the initial incident report's account of events.

Thom Berry, a spokesman for the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED), was cited in a number of news stories (Berman, Lowery, et al., 2015; Berman, Wesley, & Guarino, 2015; Robles & Blinder, 2015) as providing up-to-date progress reports on the investigation. One such quote, "We have a very active and ongoing investigation [...] and are continuing to conduct interviews, not only with Michael Slager. [...] We are still in process of gathering information from as many sources as we can." (Robles & Blinder, 2015 para. 36). Berry was also cited as declaring the investigation as "still very much in progress" (Berman, Lowery, et al., 2015 para. 28) just four days after the shooting. Berman, Lowery, et al. (2015) placed this statement within

the context of stating the Scott shooting was the 11th officer-involved shooting of a civilian in South Carolina that year up to that point.

Other officials declined to provide specifics about the investigation. Keith Summey, the mayor of North Charleston, and Police Chief Eddie Driggers, was one of those declining to give specifics; only speaking to make statements of reassurance such as, “we’re gonna [*sic*] continue to strive to do what’s right” (Otis et al., 2015, pp., para. 27). Chief Driggers deferred questions related to the state’s investigation to Thom Berry, often citing legal limitations to what they could discuss. Berry and other officials with SLED used this platform to emphasize the investigation would be thorough and independent (Blinder & Santora, 2015).

Reporters made note of what they considered North Charleston’s quick response to the shooting, which they also stated could have been hurried-on by the emergence of the citizen video recording of the killing (Berman & Mark, 2015; Robles & Blinder, 2015). Some reporters even seemed to judge the approach by North Charleston as measured and strategic:

Unlike officials in Ferguson, who were criticized for taking a pro-police stance immediately after Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was shot to death by a white officer in August, officials in North Charleston have sought to calm tensions; offered condolences to the victim's family; made no attempt to publicly defend the officer; and said they handed the investigation over to the state, though they were not obligated to do so, to ensure an impartial and independent inquiry. The department will also provide a police escort for Mr. Scott’s funeral on Saturday. (Robles & Blinder, 2015, para. 11)

This comparison between the events in North Charleston and those in Ferguson surrounding the shooting of Michael Brown, one of the most prominent recent instances of a cop shooting a civilian, was another reoccurring aspect of the news representation.

Media reports also shifted to telling the story of the effect of the case on the local police department. Officials used their access and presence to make the case Officer Slager's actions should not be seen as an indictment on the entire North Charleston police force. A Berman, Lowery, et al. (2015) from the *Washington Post* read: "City officials stressed that the episode was not indicative of the entire police force of 342 remaining officers, calling it a singular 'bad decision' by one officer" (para. 12). Journalists noted NCPD Chief Driggers made attempts at portraying the department as somewhat sympathetic to Scott, his family, and the public, saying at a press conference, amid boos and interruptions from the public, the video made him sick (Steinbuch & Fears, 2015). Other officials, like Mayor Summey, were quoted in articles as taking an authoritative and punitive stance in their comments. Summey was quoted as saying "we do not condone wrong, doesn't matter who it is" (Steinbuch & Fears, para. 3). This appears to be a concerted effort by North Charleston officials to make use of their media presence and attempt to distance themselves and the police force from Officer Slager.

Many in the national media echoed these calls not to indict all officers for the behaviors of a few bad cops. Sendhil Mullainathan was one such person. In an October 18, 2015 article in *The New York Times*, Mullainathan, a Harvard economics professor was asking what the statistics of police shootings said about the relationship between American police and the African-American community when he wrote:

If the major problem is then that African-Americans have so many more encounters with police, we must ask why. Of course, with this as well, police prejudice may be playing a role. After all, police officers decide whom to stop or arrest.

But this is too large a problem to pin on individual officers. (Mullainathan, 2015, paras. 11-12)

Like Mullainathan's, other articles published late in 2015 approached the issue with nuance; asking questions related to the causes, effects, and impacts of police brutality, with many attempting to answer those questions. Gerry Spence in *USA Today*, for example, suggested on November 30 better testing of potential candidates would be the best method to weed out the potential problem officers (Spence, 2015). Spence wrote:

How do we save ourselves from the brutality and murders of our own employees – the police?

Instinctively, we take comfort in our sacred rights as Americans. But when we face an arresting police officer, we could discover that our rights are on the order of a ripped out page from yesterday's newspaper blowing down the street. (Spence, 2015, para. 6-7)

Similar to Mullainathan's article in *The Times*, mentioned above, Spence was quick to clarify he was not placing a judgment on all police officers, "Moreover, at the outset I would be doing the police a gross disservice to argue that all officers are villainous crooks wearing a badge, and that the word "cop" and "killer" are synonymous. Such is not my belief" (Spence, 2015, para. 10).

The video footage also sparked a change in policy, and news media reported on official reports that the North Charleston police department pledged to provide body cameras to their entire police force (Adams, 2015; Berman & Lowery, 2015; Blinder & Santora, 2015; 2015; Otis et al., 2015; Robles & Blinder, 2015; Stuckey, 2015).

As crucial as commentary from officials may have been for audiences, this dissertation is informed by Lawrence's (2000) arguments that legitimizing official perspectives over others marginalizes those other perspectives. Working under this assumption is particularly important for spontaneous and unexpected events such as cases of police shooting of unarmed civilians which provide journalists more opportunity and

impetus to seek sources and information from public and non-official sources (1996, 2000).

In contrast to the initial efforts by North Charleston police department offices to “go public” after the shooting, after the amateur video was released and the shooting became a national story about police brutality, it is important to note that news narratives after the video’s release notably lacked commentary provided by these same officials. Reporters noted how North Charleston officials frequently avoided, refused, and deferred questions on details of the shooting. Mayor Summey, Chief Driggers, and other North Charleston public figures routinely avoided questions pertaining to Officer Slager’s use of his Taser (2016; McLeod, 2015), whether officers attempted to give Scott CPR (Reuters, 2015), discrepancies between the official police report and video evidence (Fernandez, 2015), and the racial components of the case (Mullainathan, 2015), among other issues. It may be the case that these officials were making measured attempts at not speaking before having all their facts available or a respect for the investigative process and Officer Slager’s presumption of innocence. However, this lack of communication is also consistent with the “culture of silence” (Lawrence, 2000; Skolnick, 2002; Westmarland, 2005) that scholars have argued pervades police departments embroiled in controversy. This culture of silence or “blue wall of silence” (Lawrence, 2000) asks officers to stand in solidarity with their brothers and sisters in blue and not speak about the use of force of other officers. Lawrence equates adhering to this code with an implicit condoning of police brutality. This code or culture of silence may also be why Officer Clarence Habersham’s entries in the official police report seemed to be

inconsistent with the video evidence but very consistent with Officer Slager’s assertion of how the event unfolded.

Consistent with Lawrence’s (2000) claim, “critical citizen voices are not completely absent from the news about policing, but they are generally not granted the same place in the news” (p. 31), the comments in these news reports lacked any real diversity. There was some commentary from civil rights leaders like Al Sharpton and the lawyers for Scott and his family. However, most of the information that defined the case came from those official sources mentioned above.

Event	Time	Date
NCPD Officer Michael Slager pulls Walter Scott over for a broken taillight	9:33 a.m.	April 4, 2015
Scott exits his Mercedes-Benz and begins running	9:36	
Officer Slager fires eight shots at Scott, hitting him five times	9:38	
Officer Slager radios to dispatch “Shots fired. Subject is down.”	9:38	
Radio dispatch radios to Slager asking if everyone is OK	9:40	
Ambulance arrives to the scene of the shooting	9:45	
Officers radio requesting a coroner	9:55	
Feidin Santana shows his cellphone video to Scott’s family		
Scott family provides the video to SLED		
NCPD announce Slager has been charged with murder		
<i>The New York Times</i> publishes the cellphone video footage online		April 8
U.S. Justice Department announces independent investigation into the shooting		April 10

Figure 4.1: Timeline of the shooting of Walter Scott

An Alternative Interpretation of the Racially Signified News Narrative

The news reports of the Walter Scott shooting do not exist or operate in isolation from one another. Consequently, it is important to examine this case in the context of a media system where these texts are at times providing interpretations conflicting with other forms of evidence; namely, the conflicts of interpretation at the level of the medium. Important to this notion are the concerns of expression. As Hjelmslev (1961) stated, “there can be no content without an expression, or expressionless content; neither can there be an expression without a content, or content-less expression” (p. 49). This, in turn, begs a number of questions essential to the analysis of this case; specifically, “How have cell phone videos, citizen journalism, and social media changed society’s perception of policing?” or “How do these reports operate to represent Black issues for specific audiences?”

There is not one code or system of representation at work with this body of texts. If Anderson (1996) said public knowledge was, “an articulated understanding marked by the authority, voice, and process of its articulation and by the collective semiotic resources in which understanding can be placed” (p. 48), the present set of texts is ripe for a semiotic postmodern empiricism. This empiricism sees meaning as a product of cultural forces with unsecure and epistemologically open interpretations (Anderson, 1993). Examining race as the “floating signifier” (Jhally, 1997c) provides a useful starting point to look across media texts at significations of race.

Analysis Through the Lens of Race as Floating Signifier

Few reporters discussed the shooting without paying attention to the fact Walter Scott was a Black man and Officer Michael Slager is a white male. This observation can

be found in the lede of television broadcast and newspaper articles on the shooting describing Scott as “a black man” (Berman, Lowery, et al., 2015; McLeod, 2015; Milbank, 2015; Santaella, 2015; Stuckey, 2015; Tacopino, 2015) prior to providing any other information about who Scott was. These reporters also contrasted this with Officer Slager’s whiteness; namely being “a white cop” (Ohlheiser, 2015; Reuters, 2015). Rarely do news reports give insight into Walter Scott’s occupation.

What are our collective resources (Anderson, 1996) for understanding the system within which these signs operate? The answer to that question may be subject to understanding something about the person reading the reports or watching the videos. For many Black audience members (readers), the imagery of Black men and women being subject to unchecked abuses of police power is all too familiar (Gay, 2015; Gay & Staff, 2015; Harris, 1997a, 1997b, 1999; Lundman & Kaufman, 2003; Morton, 2015; Mullainathan, 2015; Susman, 2015; Unnever, 2008; Webb, 1999; Wu, 2014). For these audiences, their interpretation of the texts requires little cognitive effort to reach the conclusion of complete semiosis or meaning. For Black audiences familiar with the history of unfair treatment of African-Americans at the hands of the police, the narrative of the Walter Scott shooting prior to the release of Feidin Santana’s phone video would have seemed suspect from the onset. This is consistent with polls and research asserting Black men and women have much less favorable opinions (Ayala; Holmes & Smith, 2008; Ritchie & Mogul, 2007; Saleem, 1997; Spitzer, 1999; Susman, 2015; Tuch, 2004; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004; Wu, 2014; Wu et al., 2009) of police action and the tendency or potential of police to behave within the boundaries of their position. On the contrary, some of the reports on the Scott shooting argued white Americans may not have been as

outraged without the video evidence to support the idea Slinger's killing of Scott was unjustified;

For some, the video evidence will make Mr. Scott's story seem more like the story of 12-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, or 43-year-old Eric Garner in New York. In each of those deaths of African-Americans at the hands of white police officers, the gruesome videos caused even white Americans who had no sympathy for Mr. Brown to react in horror at the callousness caught on camera. (The St. Louis Post-Dispatch Editorial Board, 2015)

The implication here is two-fold; one related to the content-expression dimension and another situated at the site of the individual. On the content-expression side, we can see how the medium itself has become the message (McLuhan, 1964). Bystander cell phone video has been one of the major contributing factors in recent years to how Americans have shifted their perceptions on how police do their jobs, particularly with respect to their use of force (Alysen, 2009; Apuzzo & Williams, 2015; G. R. Brown, 2015; Chistyakova & Robertson, 2012; Kelly, 2012; Wilson & Serisier, 2010). Though still an emerging area of study, scholars and journalists alike have questioned the ability of "counter-surveillance" (Wilson & Serisier, 2010) video to challenge the potential of police abuse of power. With regard to the implications for the individual, these reports support the assertions in Anderson's (1996) conjunctive model of communication where the individual "is seen as the site of the intersection of material, cultural, and social influences" (p. 86).

Walter Scott's story is not an unfamiliar one. His, like Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, and others' is essentially a story of a man victim to the system. It might be easy to dismiss these news reports of Scott's story as those of an isolated incident involving a single officer making a poor decision in the line of duty. News reports of Scott's history of dealing with the police are evidence of this larger

phenomenon. Robles and Blinder (2015) noted Scott's lengthy police record; "when Mr. Scott, who had a long arrest record, mostly for failing to pay child support or show up for court hearings, was pulled over for the traffic violation, he called his mother to let her know. 'I guess he did that [ran] because of the outstanding child support warrant,' Anthony Scott said. 'He probably thought he was getting arrested'" (para. 18).

This type of story is not uncommon in the U.S. Many Black Americans live as victims of a legal system that punishes people for being poor (Staples, 2015). For many people like Scott, it begins with a single ticket they cannot afford to pay on time. The late fees on that ticket become so great they often eclipse the original cost of the ticket. Often these are traffic tickets, which, after those fees remain unpaid, turn into license suspensions and revocations (Picchi, 2015). This puts people like Scott in a predicament. This system forces them to choose between driving with a suspended or revoked license where the risk is being caught by a police officer and arrested or losing their job for failing to show up to work because they have no license, worsening their inability to pay for the original ticket. For Scott, it was back child-support not traffic violations but the system operates the same for both. Scott's fear of being arrested again for, in its simplest conceptualization, not having enough money, was so great he was willing to run from a police officer at a traffic stop. He ran while being completely aware of the larger social context of the risks that come with being a Black man running from police. Sausser (2015), quoting Scott's brother Rodney in *The Post and Courier*, said pretty much that:

"He said that's what he would do, he would run, because he's not going to jail for child support," his brother, Rodney Scott, told MSNBC on Wednesday. Walter Scott, father of four, was a wanted man. Like untold thousands of other South Carolinians, a warrant had been issued for his arrest because, once again, he hadn't paid his child support. (para. 11)

In the same article, another of Scott's brothers, Anthony Scott, echoed Rodney's sentiment, "I know why he ran away. We know why he ran away. Everybody knows why he ran away now," Anthony Scott said. "I wasn't saying it before, but it's out there now" (para. 34). This is evident of the ability of this shooting to operate as a focusing event such that it sparks conversation about a social issue. Consistent with the purpose of a critical discourse analysis, these articles that feature a sympathetic perspective on Scott, his family, his troubles with money and the law, and ultimately his death gain meaning and end up being about more than the events on April 4, 2015. The media texts become part of the larger conversation on the changes society is making and seeking to make around a particular issue; this issue being police brutality primarily but we are also presented with perspectives on other social ills such as the systematically "dogged" system that punishes the poor for being poor (Sausser, 2015) and, according to Scott's brothers, was the reason he ran from the officer.

We can also look at Boughton's June 8, 2015 article also in *The Post and Courier* (2015b). In it, she reported on first town hall meeting of the North Charleston Civil Coalition for Reform. The meeting was held to inform citizens of North Charleston of the group's proposals for reform they sent to North Charleston Mayor, Keith Sumney.

Boughton wrote:

The 11-point list covers a range of social and police initiatives, including investigations into alleged brutality and patrolling tactics said to have unfairly burdened poor black communities and contributed to North Charleston Patrolman 1st Class Michael Slager's deadly encounter with Walter Scott, a black man. Officer Slager, who fatally shot Scott on April 4, has since been fired and was indicted on a murder charge hours before the meeting. "We want to build trust and legitimacy," said Muhiyidin D'Baha, of Black Lives Matter Charleston. "The police aren't perfect, the policies aren't perfect, our community is not perfect — we don't live in a perfect world."

But, he said, there has to be some middle ground, which is what the reforms seek to find and establish.

Local activist Denise Cromwell, who also spoke at the meeting, said that in North Charleston, “justice is not blind when it comes to minorities and poor people.” (para. 9-13)

It is important to note, D’Baha is the same person mentioned earlier in the chapter who publicly expressed frustration at the media presentation of Scott’s death and police brutality broadly. What Boughton indirectly showed here is these news reports mobilized activists and those seeking change in North Charleston to implement real plans for reform. This is more evidence of why this critical discourse analysis is necessary.

Implications of the Case Study for Encoding Race in Media

The nature of this shooting has implications for the larger context of the policing of Black bodies and excessive use of force as well our understanding of that context. To understand that context, scholars need to know more about the process of representation wherein the social actors relevant to the case encode the messages of the case with meaning for the readers of the texts of the case. Following that, scholars must also understand how readers decode those messages for meaning and greater understanding themselves of the case. Reading traditional media texts offers this study a legitimacy necessary to make arguments for the potency of those texts’ messages. The encoding process of communication (Hall, 1980) tells us those constructing media messages imbue those messages with meaning. The meaning of the text is in the reading of that message as intended by its sender. The journalists crafting the stories included in this dissertation’s dataset primarily come from national news outlets with a few from local organizations in South Carolina and elsewhere. Working within this model, the encoding of meaning comes from the discursive practices (Hall, 1980). These practices make primary the perspectives and standpoint of those the journalists include as sources (Hall

et al., 2013), which in this case more often than not came from official elite sources (e.g., politicians, government spokespersons, and law enforcement personnel). Chapter two extends the consideration of this practice in a second case of police killing of an unarmed black male, the case of Samuel Dubose who was killed by a University of Cincinnati police officer.

Chapter Five: Case #2 – Samuel Dubose and University of Cincinnati Police July 19,
2015

“I need to see the statement. I need to see the video. Why is the video being held as long as it is?” Samuel Dubose's fiancée, Abijah Reid (Jones, 2015)

Samuel Dubose was shot and killed by University of Cincinnati Police Officer, Ray Tensing on July 19, 2015 (WCPO Staff, 2015c). Tensing originally stopped Dubose for not having a front license plate on his car. During the stop, Officer Tensing notified Dubose of the reason for the stop, letting him know the front plate was required and then asked him for his license. Dubose did not have his driver's license on him. Upon hearing this, Officer Tensing grabbed the car's door handle then asked Dubose to take off his seat belt. Dubose, resisting the officer's request, reached for the door lock, tried to hold the door closed with his hand, then started up the car's engine. Officer Tensing yelled at Dubose to stop then, about two seconds after the ignition turns to start, Tensing shoots Dubose in the head with a single shot, killing him (Law, 2015; WCPO Staff, 2015d). Officer Tensing claimed he was being dragged by Dubose's vehicle and was almost run over. He stated to his colleagues he was forced to shoot Dubose fearing he would be dragged by the vehicle.

The family of Samuel Dubose, the victim of the shooting, questioned (Felton, 2015b; Mansoor & Staff, 2015; NPR, 2016) this initial version of events reported to the local and national news media by the University of Cincinnati Police Department (UCPD) and the Cincinnati Police Department (CPD). The family felt the behavior UCPD and Officer Tensing claimed Dubose displayed, namely putting a police officer's life in danger by attempting to “drag” (LaFleur, 2015; Noble & WCPO Staff, 2015; WCPO Staff, 2015b) him or “run him over” (Kraemer & WCPO Staff, 2015; Leggate,

2015; Millward & WCPO Staff, 2015; Noble & WCPO Staff, 2015; WCPO Staff, 2015f), was not consistent with the man the family knew (Felton, 2015b). Inundated with requests from Dubose's family and the local news media, the UCPD and CPD. Ten days later, the University of Cincinnati Police Department completed their investigation of Dubose's death and released the officer's body camera footage. The footage seemed to contradict the initial news media reporting (Jackson, 2015; Laughland, Gambino, & Lapinski, 2015; Leggate, 2015) of Officer Tensing's assertion he was being dragged by Dubose's vehicle and he was forced to shoot Dubose. The body camera footage shows no indication Officer Tensing was being dragged or in any way endangered by Dubose's vehicle, which was not moving and had been started up for less than two seconds prior to Tensing firing his weapon (Laughland et al., 2015; M. Lowery, 2015; WCPO, 2015b, 2015c). On the contrary, the video showed Officer Tensing was in no immediate danger of being run over by Dubose's vehicle (WCPO, 2015b). He simply shot Dubose in the face as Dubose attempted to start his car, in what some assume was an attempt to run from the officer after not being able to produce his license (WCPO, 2015b) or possibly because he may have had marijuana in his possession (WCPO Staff, 2015d).

As previously mentioned, the Dubose family (Cornwell, 2015a; Slattery, 2015), protesters from Cincinnati (McKee & WCPO Staff, 2015b; Pfeffer, 2015b; Wartman, Eaton, & Knight, 2015; WCPO Staff, 2015b) and around the country (Wartman et al., 2015), UC President Santa Ono (WCPO Staff, 2015f), and an increasingly inquisitive local and national news media (WCPO Editorial Board, 2015) pushed hard for the release of Officer Tensing's body camera footage (WCPO Staff, 2015e). After initial claims from the prosecutor the video becoming public would "jeopardize [the] investigation"

(Jason Williams, 2015) and holding off was just “common sense,” (Molski & Knight, 2015) the UCPD ended up releasing the video to the media and public on Wednesday, July 29, 2015 (Horn & Brennan, 2015; Pfeffer, 2015a; WCPO Staff, 2015e).

This chapter first looks at the shooting of Samuel Dubose as an example of primary definition (Hall et al., 2013). Primary definition is the media phenomenon whereby journalists privilege officials and elites as the primary sources of information for their reports. This is particularly the case for stories involving crime, where journalists find performing their duties is dependent on access to government and political institutions, their officials, and the information those officials hold (Lawrence, 1996). In following this practice, journalists often write their reports solely based on these officials’ interpretation and what they consider facts (Glassner, 1999; Lawrence, 1996, 2000; Wallsten, 2015). This process of privileging officials in turn subjugates the voices and perspectives of those outside of the official bubble, effectively silencing criticism of the status quo. In this chapter, I present the events of the media construction of this shooting as a case study into the implications this process can have on journalists’ content when reporting on issues of police brutality and excessive use of force. The case study process here is in accordance with the methods outlined in Chapter Three and similar to the case study in the previous chapter. As with the previous chapter, the purpose of this case study is to analyze the coverage of this event to explain how this process of privileging elites initiated a false narrative defining the what happened during the shooting, which, as I will discuss further, is detrimental to events of police brutality considering the police are players in the narrative themselves. Secondly, the case study explores how Samuel Dubose’s name and picture became a floating signifier for protesters and activists both in

Cincinnati and nationally. His name and likeness were used by people seeking to challenge the hegemonic structures of the media representation of Black men as inherently connected to and predisposed to criminality (Dixon, 2007; Dixon & Azocar, 2007; Hurley, Jensen, Weaver, & Dixon, 2015; M. Lowery, 2015). Thirdly, this case study explores the ability of media texts to represent social concepts and issues outside of the events and individuals in those texts (Durham & Kellner, 2006; Kellner, 2002).

Narrative of the Case

What follows is a description of the events of the present case: the shooting death of Samuel Dubose at the hands of University of Cincinnati Police Officer Ray Tensing. Additionally, the chapter identifies how social media actors represented the case as part of a broader discourse about police interactions with Black men (and women), from the perspective of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Similar to the previous, this chapter presents two different versions of what happened on the evening of July 19, 2015 by examining the primary texts of this case: news reports, the police incident report filed by one of Tensing's fellow officers, Eric Weibel, Tensing's radio call to UCPD dispatch immediately following the shooting, and the footage from Tensing's body camera. The first version of the event is what was originally presented as the official version of events according to Officer Weibel's report and statements from Officer Tensing at the scene. The description of events becomes reaffirmed by popular mass media accounts of the shooting. The story shifts, however, after evidence emerges challenging the primary narrative account. The shift offers evidence of a second, reconsidered narrative defined by what appeared in the footage from Officer Tensing's body camera.

Prior to Release of Officer Body Camera Footage

On July 19, 2015 at approximately 6:30 p.m. (Weibel, 2015), University of Cincinnati Police Officer Ray Tensing spotted a car driving through the University campus without a front license plate (Edmonds, 2015). Officer Tensing initiated a stop, asking the driver to pull over. The driver, Samuel Dubose, drove for “another mile” (Edmonds, 2015) after being signaled to pull over until he finally came to a stop. Once he pulled over, “he and Officer Tensing struggled” according to an early CNN report (CNN, 2015b), after Dubose refused to exit his vehicle during the stop. According to that CNN report, the police report filed by responding officer, Eric Weibel, and other early news reports (Associated Press, 2015a; Rogers, 2015; Weibel, 2015), Officer Tensing claimed he was “dragged” by Dubose’s car “and was forced to shoot the driver” (Weibel, 2015), firing a single shot and killing Dubose.

The reports from the *London Evening Standard* (Edmonds, 2015), *The Washington Post* (Associated Press, 2015a), and the original CNN story (2015) all identified Dubose’s lengthy criminal history. One such example: “According to Cincinnati police, Mr. Dubose, who had been arrested more than 60 times...” According to each of those news reports, Dubose handed the officer a bottle of alcohol when the officer asked to see Dubose’s license. Additionally, one news report made a point to discuss Officer Tensing’s previous positive reviews and job ratings (Cornwell, 2015a). These early reports also failed to mention Tensing, a university police officer, pulled Dubose over outside of campus with some going as far as saying “Tensing was at the edge of campus” (Associated Press, 2015b, para. 9; Cornwell, 2015a, para. 2) when he

was, in fact, off campus in an area UC officials later would confirm was not on “the edge of campus.”

Officer Weibel’s police report (2015), which was the official canonical documentation of the incident, seemed to corroborate Tensing’s claim of being dragged by the car. In it, her reported: “Looking at Officer Tensing’s uniform, I could see that the back of his pants and shirt looked as if it had been dragged over a rough surface” (p. 2). Weibel’s report also stated that when he arrived on the scene, he could see “a Male Black slumped over motionless with a gunshot wound to the head” (p. 2). Officer Weibel also mentioned in the incident report another officer on the scene could back up Officer Tensing’s claims, “Officer Kidd was on scene with OIT Lindenschmidt. Officer Kidd told me that he witnessed the Honda Accord drag Officer Tensing, and that he witnessed Officer Tensing fire a single shot” (p. 2). Further cementing, at least initially, the notion Officer Tensing was justified in killing Dubose was his radio call to UCPD dispatch notifying them of “shots fired” during the altercation. In the radio call, after making the “shots fired” statement, Officer Tensing asked the dispatcher over three minutes into the call (at around the 3:40 mark) to send a medic for Dubose (WCPO Staff, 2015g). The dispatcher asks Officer Tensing who was injured and he responds, “I’m not injured. I almost got run over by the car. He took off on me. I discharged one round and shot him right in the head” (3:53 – 4:01). It is important to note both the police incident report and the radio call were not released to the public or to media outlets until Thursday, July 23, four days after the shooting occurred.

Event	Date
UCPD Officer Ray Tensing shoots Samuel Dubose in the head during traffic stop	July 19
Dubose's family and UC students hold rally on UC campus in the name of Dubose	July 21
<i>The Cincinnati Enquirer</i> files lawsuit for UCPD to release Tensing's body camera footage	July 24
Dubose family and #BLM activists protest and march on UC campus	July 26
Samuel Dubose's funeral service is held	July 28
Officer Tensing is indicted for murder by a Hamilton County grand jury	July 29
Tensing turns himself in	July 29
Tensing's body camera footage is released to the public	July 29
Tensing enters a plea of not guilty	July 30
UCPD officers Kidd and Lindenschmidt are placed on paid leave	July 30
Hamilton county grand jury begins hearing testimony in the case	July 31

Figure 5.1. Timeline of the shooting of Samuel Dubose

These primary reports from the news media and the University of Cincinnati Police tell the narrative of an officer attempting to make a stop on a vehicle violating a traffic offense (driving without a front license plate). Instead of complying with the officer's orders, the driver continued driving before pulling over. Once the driver pulled over, he continued his noncompliance by handing the officer a bottle of alcohol instead of his driver's license as the officer asked. When the officer asked the driver to step out of his vehicle, the driver attempted to drive off, dragging the officer, and the officer, fearing for his life, was forced to shoot the passenger, killing him. This was the series of events on the evening of July 19, 2015 according to those initial texts.

After the shooting, public unrest began to grow in Cincinnati. On Thursday, July 23, 2015, the same day the police incident report and the dispatch call were released, a small protest consisting of approximately 20 people gathered (WCPO Staff, 2015e) outside the office of Hamilton County Prosecutor Joe Deters, who was charged with

investigating the shooting, urging him to release the body camera footage. University of Cincinnati President, Santa Ono, echoed the protesters' pleas in a tweet that read, "I have encouraged the Hamilton County Prosecutor to share the incident video with Samuel Dubose's family in view of their requests" (Ono, 2015). At the protest, Ohio State Senator Cecil Thomas described a "groundswell of anger" (WCPO Staff, 2015f, para. 8) from the protesters' frustration at the UCPD's refusal to release the body camera footage. Thomas urged, "Release the tape and let the people decide" (WCPO Staff, 2015f, para. 11). The frustration was not simply based on anger at the UCPD but at the perceived doubts about the veracity of Officer Tensing's claims. Dubose's sister was one of the more outspoken voices asking for the release of the body camera footage, stating, "I'm so upset about them not letting us see the video...My brother wasn't violent. He never resisted arrest. I have to assume the cop killed my brother. If they don't want me to believe that, then show us the video" (Slattery, 2015, para. 3). A close friend of Dubose's, Nygel Miller, also expressed distrust in the official version of the events of the shooting, "'I'm trying to figure out how you can be drug by a vehicle and get your weapon -- right it to shoot -- at the same time,' Miller said." (Noble & WCPO Staff, 2015, para. 17). Even with lawsuits pending from Cincinnati's CBS affiliate, WCPO and other outlets (Kraemer & WCPO Staff, 2015; Millward & WCPO Staff, 2015), Deters refused to release the video claiming it "could taint the ongoing investigation" (Kraemer & WCPO Staff, 2015 para. 5; Millward & WCPO Staff, 2015 para. 15).

On July 26 and July 27, 2015, days after news stations including WLWT, WCPO, WKRC, and local newspaper *The Cincinnati Inquirer* litigated (Kraemer & WCPO Staff, 2015) over the release of body camera footage, the local Cincinnati chapter

of #BLM held a rally {Molski, 2015 #2026; Petracco, 2015 #2027; (Felton, 2015c; Millward & WCPO Staff, 2015) on the UC campus. News media covered the protests (Jackson, 2015; Laughland & Felton, 2015; Millward & WCPO Staff, 2015). News media also covered the family members frustrations at the police response to the shooting and the subsequent investigation (Felton, 2015b; Mansoor & Staff, 2015; Phillip, 2015).

Deters released the footage from Officer Tensing's body camera the day after the grand jury investigation was complete and came back with an indictment but in the case of Sonny Kim, the Cincinnati police officer shot and killed a month prior to Dubose, video was not released until December, almost six months after the shooting. Deters stressed to the media after releasing the Sonny Kim footage, he wanted the footage edited and was concerned with "bloggers" and other people online using the footage inappropriately, though he seemed not to have those same reservations concerning footage of an unarmed Black citizen of his city being shot in the face by a UCPD officer. There was debate in legal circles surrounding whether Deters should have released the footage immediately or whether he was correct in waiting until the investigation was complete. One article from the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, noted, "Most prosecutors agree with Deters that body- and dash-cam footage shouldn't be released until the investigation is closed, one national legal expert [David LaBahn of the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys] said" [Williams, *Enquirer*, para. 12]. In that same article, Williams cited Ohio University law professor, Tom Hodson, who claimed body camera and dash cam footage should be treated the same as 911 and emergency transcripts. He went on to argue, those types of documents are typically "released immediately upon public request and not

withheld for investigation purposes” (para. 15) and ““keeping it private is not the norm of what other states are doing.’ Hodson said.” (para. 36).

In a WCPO article focusing on Officer Tensing’s attorney, Stew Mathews, and Mathews’ expectations for the case, Mathews stated he had seen the body camera footage. He stated he went over the video personally with his client and continued to perpetuate the narrative Officer Tensing was being “thrown” from the car, specifically that the fall from this throw occurred before the gunshot (McKee & WCPO Staff, 2015a). The July 28 article included commentary from Mathews only, as he had been the only person to see the video besides the prosecutor. Even after claiming his client was thrown and that the end-result of the incident was due more to his assertion “Dubose didn’t like being told to step out of the vehicle” (McKee & WCPO Staff, 2015a para. 6), Mathews said he expected an indictment (McKee & WCPO Staff, 2015a; Millward & WCPO Staff, 2015).

Not everyone in the UCPD and CPD stood firmly on one side of “the blue line.” Cincinnati Police Chief Jeffrey Blackwell, was one of the first on the police department’s side of the issue to come close to a condemnation of Officer Tensing’s actions saying he was worried protests and unrest would grow. Blackwell had seen the video prior to its release and said, it’s “not good” {WCPO Staff, 2015 #2028}. Blackwell would be fired in September of the same year following complaints of poor morale and an inability to work with his officers. Blackwell had many supporters among Cincinnati’s African-American community (Knight & Williams, 2015), particularly after this event. One noteworthy occurrence came on July 30, after Officer Tensing had been indicted. Students held a vigil on campus after the indictment and Officer Tensing’s subsequent

firing. Blackwell made an appearance at the vigil in an effort to express to the student body his department's commitment to keeping the peace and to tell them their concerns would be heard (WCPO, 2015a). Blackwell expressed transparency and concern for the frustration and pain of the student body, "people are hurting and they have a right to voice, not only their opinion, but their frustration. I always say what affects us anywhere, affects us everywhere. The people you see here are hurting not only by what happens in our community but by what happens in our nation" (WCPO, 2015a, 1:01-1:17).

According to the proceedings that ended in a no-confidence vote, a first for a CPD chief, Blackwell's officers saw him as "gruff," and that his "focus on community policing" was problematic (Hunt, 2016). A city councilwoman was quoted as saying Blackwell's firing was political and those concerns about morale were "red herrings:"

She said Blackwell was never embraced by officers in part because he was an outsider. Before the 2001 race riots in Cincinnati, police chiefs had been promoted from within the department. City voters approved a charter amendment in 2001 that opened the selection process nationwide rather than limiting it to in-house candidates. (para. 19)

This is not to say, with any certainty, CPD Chief Blackwell was fired due to his vocal criticisms of Officer Tensing and push for moving the city's body camera program forward (Coolidge, 2015, para. 2). It is, however, worth noting the most prominent and senior person within either police force expressing criticism and not simply towing the blue line (G. R. Brown, 2015; Correll et al., 2007) was let go and replaced by someone seen as more concerned with his officers than the community.

Narrative After the Release of Officer Body Camera Footage

The actual body camera video footage would not be released until July 29, 2015, 10 days after the shooting. The prosecutor in the case, Hamilton County, Ohio's Joseph Deters, released the body camera footage after the initial grand jury investigation of

Officer Tensing came back with an indictment (Howie, 2015). As I mentioned above, Officer Tensing's lawyer, Stew Mathews, claimed he felt there would be an indictment though he was apparently surprised by what Officer Tensing was indicted for, "I kind of expected he would get indicted for something, but I certainly didn't think it would be murder" (Howie, 2015). Mathews further went on to claim Officer Tensing was "being thrown under the bus" (The Nation, 2015, para. 21) and the decision to indict was nothing but political (Wagner, Murphy, & Siemaszko, 2015).

Events according to Ray Tensing's body camera footage. The video footage from Officer Ray Tensing's body camera released by the city shows a drastically different series of events than what was mentioned in the police report as well as Tensing and his fellow officers' statements to the city and to the media. The video (WCPO, 2015b) begins with a view looking out the windshield of Officer Tensing's police car. In the first 30 seconds, there is no audio. Officer Tensing types something into his computer then proceeds to travel down a street at what looks to be a high speed. At about the 31 second mark, Officer Tensing's hand reaches up to the camera and the audio turns on. Tensing radios out he is proceeding with a traffic stop on "Thill st, just off of Vine" [0:37]. He makes a left turn then continues down that street. While he makes his way down this street, the dispatcher can be overheard asking Officer Tensing for clarification and he repeats, "affirm. Thill street, just off of vine" [0:52]. For the next twelve seconds, Officer Tensing continues down this street then radios in, "We're slow to stop [meaning the driver was slow to pull over for him]. We're on Rice street, just off of Thill" [0:54-1:10]. At the 1:10 (one minute and ten seconds) mark, Officer Tensing's car comes to a stop and he exits his vehicle. At the 1:24 mark, Officer Tensing is approaching the car he

has pulled over and begins talking to the man in the car. The conversation begins cordially with the two exchanging greetings. Officer Tensing begins, “hey, how’s it going, man?” (1:24).

The man in the car responds, “hey, how’s it going” (1:25).

“Hey, Officer Tensing, UC Police. Do you have your license on you?” (1:25-1:27).

“Yeah, what happened. What’s this about?” (1:28-1:29).

“Is this your car?” (1:29).

“Yeah” (1:30).

“It’s coming back as a female actually” (1:31-1:33).

“It’s my wife’s. Her name is DaShonda Reid” (1:33-1:37).

“OK. Well, you don’t have a front license plate on your car” (1:38-1:40).

“It’s in my glove box. I have it” (1:41-1:42).

“What’s that?” (1:43).

“It’s right here. I just...” (1:44). The man proceeds to reach into the glove box and starts moving aside papers or whatever else may be in the glove box.

“OK, well. That’s gotta go where the front plate is supposed to go” (1:46-1:49).

“Well, I didn’t know that” (1:49).

“You don’t have to reach for it. It’s OK. Do you have your license on you?” (1:49-1:53).

Up until this point in the video, the interaction appears to be proceeding as any traffic stop typically might go. Officer Tensing was, if not friendly, polite to the driver. He asked him questions and gave him ample opportunity to explain his answers,

especially as to why he did not have a front license plate. After asking the driver for his license, this is the point in the video where the situation began to “spiral out of control” (Horn & Sparling, 2015, para. 3).

After being asked if he has his license, the driver responds with a timid and slightly unsure “uh yeah” then proceeds to reach around in his pockets or pantomiming as if he’s looking for his license.

By the two minute mark in the video, Officer Tensing has moved closer to the driver and is standing inches from the door. He asks the driver, “what is bottle on the floor there?” (2:00).

“That’s just a bottle of air freshener” (2:02).

“Bottle of what?” (2:03).

“You can smell it. It’s just air freshener. You can smell it. It’s not any liquor or nothing” (2:04-2:06). The driver hands Tensing the bottle and the officer lifts it into view of the camera and we see a bottle labeled “Barton Gin” filled with a light brown liquid.

“OK,” Officer Tensing continues as he places the bottle on top of the car. He then goes on to continue his line of questioning. “Do you have your license on you?” he asks again (2:08).

Officer Tensing stands by the car door watching the driver as he moves around in his car, reaching back into the glove box then apparently under the seat before turning his focus back to Officer Tensing. When the driver doesn’t produce the license, Officer Tensing asks him a question, “Do you know...[inaudible]... is that or, or what?” (2:17-2:19).

The driver responds, “I got my...[inaudible]... and stuff in there” (2:20-2:21).

Officer Tensing's responses to the driver become noticeably less polite at this point and he says to the driver, "OK. I'm going to ask you again. Do you have your license on you?" (2:22-2:24).

The driver responds, "I have a license! You can take... run my name" (2:25).

Officer Tensing cuts him off then asks, "So do you not have your license on you? I'm asking you a direct question. Do you have your license on you?" (2:26-2:31). At this point, we see in the video Officer Tensing's body gestures becoming more exaggerated with a lot gesticulating of his hands; something he was not doing previously.

The driver seems to become nervous at this point, "Uh... I thought I did... [inaudible mumbling]... I mean, what did you pull me over for?" (2:32-2:35).

"Again. Your front tags" (2:36).

The driver responds, his voice cracking, "But it's not illegal to not have a front tag in Cincinnati" (2:37-2:41).

Officer Tensing, becoming increasingly frustrated, tells the driver, "OK. Actually it is. I'm going to ask you again, Do you have a license on you?" (2:43-2:45).

"I have a license. You can run my name" (2:45-2:47).

"OK. Is that not on you then?" (2:48).

"I don't think I have it on me" (2:49-2:50).

"Be straight up with me. Are you suspended?" (2:51-2:53).

"No, I'm not suspended" (2:54).

"Why don't you have your license on you?" (2:55-2:56).

The driver sounds and appears dejected, mumbling something else inaudible, then says, “Because uh, I just don’t...uhh...I’m sorry man...I’m just trying to get to the house” (2:57-3:02).

“OK. Where do you stay at? Down here?” (3:03-3:05).

“It’s right around the corner” (3:06).

“OK. Well, until I can figure out if you have a license – license or not, go ahead and take your seatbelt off for me” (3:07-3:12). At 3:09, Officer Tensing has his right hand on the roof of the car as he tells the driver he wants to figure out if he has a license. Then, at the 3:10 point in the video, the camera pans down and we see Officer Tensing’s left hand is pulling the car’s exterior door handle as he asks the driver to take off his seatbelt (see Figure 5.2).



Figure 5.2. Screenshot #1: Officer Tensing’s hand placement at 3:10

As Officer Tensing starts pulling on the handle, the driver grabs the door at the window opening with his left hand. While trying to hold the door shut, the driver says, with desperation in his voice, “but I ain’t even do nothing” (3:13). As he says this, we can see him reaching for the ignition switch with his right hand (see Figure 5.3).



Figure 5.3. Screenshot #2: Samuel Dubose reaches for his vehicle’s ignition

Officer Tensing continues pulling on the door handle, “go ahead and take your seatbelt off” (3:13). Then at the 3:14 mark, we hear the car’s ignition start.

Between 3:14 and 3:16 in the video, Officer Tensing performs a series of very important movements. First, once the driver turns the key at 3:14, Officer Tensing reaches into the car at the driver (see Figure 5.4). Additionally, about six video frames into the 3:15 second; a fraction of a second before he reaches into the car, we have the final glimpse of Officer Tensing’s right hand still on the roof of the car as it has been since 3:09. Officer Tensing could have moved his hand at the exact moment his hand

was off-screen or that right hand could have stayed until just as he pulls his left hand off the door handle.



Figure 5.4. Screenshot #3: Officer Tensing reacts to Dubose starting the vehicle

Within the 3:15 second, Officer Tensing's left hand is inside the car grasping at the driver (see Figure 5.4). Tensing then yells, "Stop!" as he reaches into the car with his left hand. Still within the 3:15 second, he yells "Stop!" one more time and, though the view of the scene through the camera is shaky, we can see Officer Tensing's right hand appear from the right side of the screen holding his pistol (see Figure 5.5). During the 3:16 second, we see Officer Tensing's left hand reaching at the driver (see Figure 5.6) and right hand point his pistol at the driver's head. With no hesitation, in what accounts to most of 3:16 and a handful of frames into 3:17, Tensing has pulled his gun from his holster and shot the driver in the face (see Figure 5.7). More specifically, within 24 frames of a video with a framerate of 30 frames per second, Tensing reaches (off-screen)

into his holster, pulls his pistol out, points it at the driver—*inches from his head*, and pulls the trigger.



Figure 5.5. Screenshot #4: Officer Tensing’s pistol pointed at Dubose



Figure 5.6. Screenshot #5: Officer Tensing grabs Dubose



Figure 5.7. Screenshot #6: Officer Tensing shooting Dubose in the head

Looking at the video slowly, as Tensing shoots the driver, we can immediately see the driver's head cock back and his body slump over. By 3:19, the video is still shaky as Officer Tensing is falling backwards away from the car as we hear the car's engine rev and the car pulls away. At 3:20, from Officer Tensing's point of view, he's seated on the street with his pistol still in his right hand and finger still on the trigger. As Officer Tensing gets back up to his feet, he yells something that sounds like, "come here!" though he seems out of breath so it is difficult to understand him but we do hear in the background someone yelling, "shots fired! Shots fired!" between 3:20 and 3:26.

Between 3:20 and 3:39, Tensing gets to his feet then begins running in the direction of the vehicle. At 3:34, he yells to another officer off-screen, "no...[inaudible]...I thought I was getting run over." At 3:42, the camera focuses on the vehicle he just stopped. The car has hopped a curb and sits idling at a street corner. Also, at 3:42, we see another officer enter the frame from the right side of the screen. Tensing and the other officer, both with their guns drawn, approach the vehicle; Tensing

from the rear and moves around towards the passenger side and the other officer from the passenger side of the car. At 3:47, we can hear the other officer yell something into his radio then ask for a medic. By 3:49, the other officer has holstered his pistol but Tensing is still approaching the vehicle with his gun drawn, though the body camera does not provide a clear image of the condition of the driver. From 3:51-3:54, Officer Tensing calls into his radio police codes and tells dispatch, “the far side of Valencia and Rice. One shot fired.” Still with his gun drawn, he walks closer to the car until 3:58 when he lowers his gun out of the frame and tells the other officer he’s going to turn the car off. By 4:07, we are looking through the driver side window into the car to see the driver seated in the driver seat but his upper body slumped over to the passenger seat, motionless. At 4:12, we hear Officer Tensing breathing heavily then the car’s engine shuts off. Tensing is still facing the car and the angle of the camera gives us an even closer view of of the interior of the vehicle with what looks to be blood on the passenger seat, though the driver was wearing an all-red outfit and with the grainy video, it is difficult to be certain. At 4:14, Officer Tensing is breathing heavy then stands back up, leaning against the car, “ahh! I thought he was going to run me over.”

There are now two officers at the scene, both standing by the passenger side of the vehicle. One asks Officer Tensing, “Are you OK?” (4:16).

“I’m good,” Officer Tensing replies, still out of breath (4:17). He then walks around to the passenger side of the vehicle and calls into his radio again, “33. Start a medic this way. We got a gunshot wound to the head” (4:21-4:25). We can hear bystanders in the background yelling. At 4:35, Tensing calls into his radio again, “I almost got ran over by the car. He took off on me. I discharged one round. Struck a

male in the head.” He then turns to the first officer who appeared on the scene with him and says, “Oh. I thought I was gonna get run over,” (4:52-4:53) sounding relieved. Officer Tensing turns back toward the car while still talking to the other officer, “He didn’t reach for anything” (5:00). The bystanders on Valencia street are still shouting intermittently during this. Whether they are shouting at the officers or at the situation, it is difficult to tell. Officer Tensing then shouts back at the bystanders to, “stand back! Stay back!” (5:01-5:02). He continues to explain the situation (to which officer he is speaking, it is unclear because he is still facing the car), “I just got tangled under the car. I thought I was gonna get run over” (5:04-5:07). In the rest of the footage made public, Officer Tensing continues talking to his fellow officers already there and others as they arrive on the scene.

There’s a strange moment in Officer Tensing’s body camera footage at the 5:55 mark. Tensing is standing on Rice street, a few feet away from the passenger side door of the vehicle. He walks toward the car and though we cannot tell whether Tensing himself walked closer to the car to look inside and get a closer view of the driver’s body but the camera moves closer toward the car and we can see the driver hunched over, his right arm and head in the passenger seat. The camera lingers on that shot for about seven seconds and, though the footage is grainy and low resolution, we can see the passenger seat is covered in blood. At around 6:23, an officer responding to the call asks Officer Tensing off camera, questions we can assume regarding what happened and if he’s OK. Tensing replies, “ugh. I thought he was going to run me over. He was dragging me. Yeah, he took off on me. My hand was caught inside. Yes. I fired off one round. My arm just got caught in the steering wheel or something” (6:23-6:36). For the next few

minutes, Tensing and the other officers continue to secure the perimeter of the scene. While they do this, Tensing regularly mentions to the other officers that he's OK, how shaken up he is, as well as making sure to reiterate his contention that the driver was dragging him, that the driver "kept reaching around saying he couldn't produce a license. That's when he put it in drive and started taking off. I reached in and..." (7:12-7:19). He pauses to catch his breath then, as a hunter would recounting the tale of a memorable hunt, he continued, "I shot one round in him then he took off on me and I got my hand caught in the car" (7:23-7:26).

At around 7:30, another officer appears at to the scene. Officer Tensing begins, unprovoked, to explain his story to him. At 7:33, this other officer is standing beside the stopped vehicle and Officer Tensing starts, "I almost got ran over by him-" but the officer cuts him off. He raises his hand at Tensing and says, "OK. Relax. Just don't... don't say anything" (7:34-7:38). This officer looks at the car for a few seconds then turns around to walk back with another officer toward his car on Rice street. As the officer who told him not to say anything is walking away, we hear Tensing telling someone else who is off-camera how he was being dragged by the vehicle. Other officers appear and begin asking him questions; whether he needs medical attention and if this all initiated from the traffic stop. Officer Tensing goes on to begin telling his version of the story; he saw the car driving down Vine street with no front license plate, he initiated the stop but the driver was slow to pull over so he followed him to Third street. Officer Tensing is telling this story to another UC police officer when a Cincinnati Police officer walks over and asks him if he's hurt. Officer Tensing responds again with the story of how his arm was caught in the car as the driver "took off on him" (9:55). For the next ten minutes, Officer

Tensing walks with the CPD officers to give them his “rundown” of the incident. He details how the driver was slow to pull over, he mentions again how he was being dragged, his arm was caught in the car, telling that last part of the story not only to the CPD officers on the scene but the paramedics as well. Around the 22:30 point in the video, he gets into a CPD car with an officer who is escorting him away from the scene. Whether official questions or just small talk during their ride, the CPD officer in the car asks him a few questions like whether he had been in a situation like that before, saying it’s going to be a long day, and they continue driving through Cincinnati as the officer tells Tensing they’ll get him a shower, let him make a phone call, then he’ll have an interview. The rest of the ride the officers are speaking low or not at all. The video ends with Tensing’s body camera looking through the windshield of the car as they enter the University of Cincinnati hospital to park.

Reaction to the footage. Those who had seen Officer Tensing’s body camera footage prior to it going public had similar reactions to that of then Cincinnati Police Chief Jeffrey Blackwell who told WCPO three days before the video was released it was “not good” (WCPO Staff, 2015a, para. 11). Both Blackwell and Hamilton County Prosecutor Joe Deters knew how incriminating the footage was and the implications it would have on Officer Tensing, the UCPD, and potentially the Cincinnati Police Department. Throughout the beginning of the process, however, Deters held strong with his decision not to release the footage (WCPO Staff, 2015e). Deters felt releasing the footage to the public before the grand jury made a decision whether to indict could hurt the integrity of the case and Officer Tensing’s ability to receive a fair trial. Some did not feel the decision to withhold the footage was best for the community of Cincinnati. Many felt

releasing the videos would do more to relieve the tensions that were rising in the city.

State Senator Cecil Thomas, for example, said:

We as a community have been very comfortable with the way the Cincinnati Police normally conduct their business in these situations. The videos, if there are any, are released almost immediately if not within 24 hours. All of a sudden, we have a situation where Cincinnati is involved, but the prosecutor has chosen to take control of this. And, it is fostering a tremendous amount of distrust, which is what we wanted to make sure we could avoid going forward from 2001.” (WCPO Staff, 2015e, para. 11-12)

Additionally, though they said they expected protests to be peaceful, many people were worried the unrest may get a bit intense once they release the video (Millward & WCPO Staff, 2015), some politicians going so far as to make statements “demanding” peace. As Councilman Christopher Smitherman said, they will support peaceful protesters but ““Those who get even a millisecond outside those parameters, expect to be arrested and expect to be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law” (Millward & WCPO Staff, 2015 para. 8).

On July 29, 2015, the grand jury indicted Officer Ray Tensing on murder and voluntary manslaughter. His bond was set at \$1 million dollars (Grasha & Coolidge, 2015). The footage from his body camera overwhelmingly contradicted Officer Tensing’s original assertions he was being dragged by Dubose and was forced to shoot. The prosecutor came out very strongly against Tensing, even stating he would pursue a life sentence (Grasha & Coolidge, 2015). He didn’t mince words in his press conference addressing the indictment, “I’ve been doing this for over 30 years. This is the most asinine act I’ve ever seen a police officer make,” Deters said (The Cincinnati Enquirer, 2015d, para. 3). He went on to say, “He should never have been a police officer... The policemen I know and the investigators I work with everyday, this situation would never

have escalated like this” (para. 7). This is where we begin the exploration of what we know about the situation after seeing the body camera footage: escalation.

The above description of the events of the stop attempted to show what happened during that traffic stop gone awry based only on that information as evidence. The almost 70 page independent investigative report of the shooting by Kroll Inc. argued Officer Tensing’s escalation of the situation, as well as his inability to de-escalate the situation was the primary reason Dubose is dead (Kroll, 2015). Though they do mention Dubose should not have attempted to start the ignition or pull the door closed as Officer Tensing reached for it, the report does point out Tensing was ultimately responsible for de-escalating the situation. The report pointed to specific actions Tensing took that went against proper police procedure. For example:

Rather than de-escalating the encounter and allowing Dubose to drive away and subsequently calling in a request for assistance, Tensing escalated the situation by improperly reaching into the car in an attempt to restrain Dubose. This violated standard police practice, critical to officer safety, which is taught as part of basic training in the police academy and is reinforced by UCPD Field Training Officers on patrol with Officers-in-Training. (p. 5)

Officer Tensing, a man with “more than five years of experience in law enforcement” (Greene & The Associated Press, 2015, para. 22) could not even follow “basic training” procedures during the traffic stop. The Kroll report also directly addresses a number of inconsistencies with Officer Tensing’s story both in official reports and on the scene as captured on the body camera. They point out:

In his statement to CPD detectives on July 21, Tensing explained that he was “holding on for dear life” and “getting dragged” by the [Honda] Accord as Dubose attempted to flee the traffic stop. Tensing further stated that, had he not used deadly force under the circumstances, he may have been killed or seriously injured. The evidence Kroll reviewed and analyzed does not lend support to these statements ... Contrary to Tensing’s statements, at no point in the body camera video footage does it appear that Tensing’s arm is lodged or caught in the steering wheel of the Accord or other aspect of the car’s interior. A split second before Tensing discharged his weapon, Tensing appears to have been in complete control of his arm and hand movements, with no part of his body caught or lodged in the car. (p. 6)

As I mentioned above when describing the footage, Officer Tensing continually stated to anyone on the scene who would listen that he was “being dragged” by Dubose’s car.

There was no point during the, barely two-minute, traffic stop where Officer Tensing was caught by the car or being dragged by it. The Kroll report even attempts to give Officer Tensing the benefit of the doubt claiming his initial inaccurate statements may have been due to stress and the shock of the incident, they noted he doubled down and repeated the claims he was being dragged by and caught in Dubose’s car.

Had Ray Tensing not been equipped with a body camera, he may have gotten away with murder. Every officer on the scene who saw Dubose’s body in the car, how far away from the initial stop the car was, and who heard Tensing repeat his story to everyone on the scene multiple times believed the officer in the moment. He even had an “eye witness.” UC Police Officer Phillip Kidd was the first person to respond to the scene after Tensing fired his shot. He can be heard on Tensing’s body camera video and his own that was released shortly after, saying “I saw it” (WCPO, 2015b, 5:46; 2015c, 3:36) multiple times, referring to seeing Officer Tensing being dragged by Dubose’s car. Even more troubling was Kidd appeared on the scene to provide backup for Tensing with a trainee, Officer in Training, David Lindenschmidt. Think of this: Officer Kidd repeated several times at the scene of the incident, he saw Tensing being dragged by Dubose’s car.

If the trainee knew Kidd was lying or as the Kroll report put it, made statements containing “normal discrepancies associated with human observation and recollection of fast-moving events” (Kroll, 2015, p. 7), what is he being trained to become? Lindenschmidt could perhaps be learning the rules of the “blue code” that govern police behavior, letting him know that he must have his fellow officer’s back regardless of the situation. Though, considering Kidd, “he properly clarified any ambiguities or questions concerning what he did and did not observe” (Kroll, 2015, p. 7), we could give him the benefit of the doubt he was only reacting to what he saw in the moment. However, I feel an officer in Kidd’s position; charged with training another officer, should be held to a higher standard than other officers considering the lasting impact of poor judgment by an officer when another officer is learning from that person. Dubose’s family felt similarly about Kidd. The family wanted him fired for the statements he made in the police incident report and on camera at the scene (Noble & WCPO Staff, 2015). He was not fired (Berman & Mark, 2015) but after an investigation by UC, he was placed on administrative leave (Noble, 2015; Noble & WCPO Staff, 2015; Pitman, 2015). Joe Deters’ office declined to press charges against Kidd and Lindenschmidt for their false statements because he apparently did not feel the statements made at the scene and included in the initial report mattered, “The prosecutor said there was ‘some confusion over the way the initial report was drafted’ but added the document was ‘not a sworn statement by the officers’ and ‘merely a short summary of information’” (Felton, 2015d, para. 23).

Implications of this Case for Understanding Representations of Criminality and the Black Male in U.S. News Media

The case study presents a news narrative that offered a primary definition of Debose as a criminal, against a backdrop of media floating signification on race where Black male criminality is naturalized as part of the crime story order. Such a narrative view becomes naturalized and unchecked by editors who fail to question the assumptions which lead journalists to discuss the lives of victims of police violence, not within the context of racist social structures that demonize Blackness, but within the context of the victim's complicity in their own fate. The way journalists in this case discussed Dubose's criminal record is a case in point. In articles released prior to the body camera footage becoming public, journalists regularly discussed Dubose's "extensive" (WCPO Staff, 2015c, para. 8) and "lengthy" criminal record (CBS News, 2015), made a point to note he "had been arrested more than 60 times" (Edmonds, 2015), "charged more than 70 times" (Felton, 2015b), "charged more than 75 times" (Rogers, 2015), or as WCPO wrote the immediately following the shooting:

According to court records, police pulled Dubose over and charged him with not having a license 13 times between 1995 and 2009. He was charged four times with not having a proper license plate on his vehicle between those dates. He was also charged with driving under suspension eight times between 2005 and 2011. (WCPO Staff, 2015c, para. 20)

It is important to note the reframing of Dubose's character occurred even after the indictment. In a Guardian article, "Members of DuBose's family have disputed [Officer Tensing's] narrative, arguing that despite his criminal history, which includes over 75 charges in Hamilton County for traffic and drugs charges, he was not a violent man" (Laughland et al., 2015, para. 10). The Dubose family was aware of this possibility and expressed concern it could hinder justice being served:

Dubose's family members and friends have said he wasn't a violent person, but he struggled with drug problems until about two years ago. They were concerned, however, that his lengthy rap sheet – the Cincinnati Enquirer reported Dubose has been charged over 75 times for non-violent crimes and his license was also suspended indefinitely this past January - would improperly shift attention away from the nature of the incident. (Felton, 2015a, para. 11)

Whether before or after the indictment of Tensing, this process of discussing Dubose's arrest record served no real purpose. Mentioning Dubose's history with law enforcement doesn't give nuance to Officer Tensing's decision to pull the trigger. This is particularly the case considering many journalists that mentioned Dubose's arrest record chose also not to specify the arrests were for non-violent offenses. The only purpose mentioning the arrest record was to lend some sympathy to Officer Tensing's actions.

From a narrative perspective, why should any audience empathize with a man with a record as lengthy as Dubose's? The larger conversation of police violence against Black men is heavily influenced by the words written by these journalists. Readers of all races and ethnicities are reading these stories published in newspapers, magazines, television and online for the purpose of learning about these issues. Perhaps there is a silver lining in that as the news narrative shifted the stories clarified how Officer Tensing and Officer Phillip Kidd, who reportedly corroborated his story, did not get away with filing an incident report which made DuBose out to be a someone trying to harm an officer. However, as chapter 6 will explore in greater detail, taking refuge in this minor victory can only be had “by having very low expectations of what justice should be and what it should look like for African-Americans” (Thrasher, 2015, para. 2-4). Overall, the body camera footage from the day Ray Tensing shot and killed Samuel Dubose, offered important evidence to counter a troublingly problematic occurrence when it comes to instances of police misconduct and police brutality. To put it plainly, had there not been

any video evidence to show Officer Tensing was not justified in pulling the trigger, he would not have been charged with murder. As chapter 6 discusses in further details illustrating the implications of these cases of mainstream media discourse on public considerations of black male criminality, these police surveillance videos “advertised” and exposed the weaknesses in dominant narratives of black male criminality which then sparked social media publicity and counter protest narratives from #BlackLivesMatter social movement activities.

The conclusion of this dissertation considers the ways that U.S. news media hegemony is not final. Additionally, it asks how and whether the media narratives that they are producing offer not merely “focusing event” analysis, but also a process of narrative coverage where there are possibilities for narrative disruption and change of time. This may particularly be the case for public shaming of dominant news media hegemony that may go viral via social media to expose the rough threads of an erroneously dominant news media narrative.

Chapter Six: Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze two extant cases of police brutality as narrated in U.S. news media. The analysis involves a close examination of the discourse of the cases in order to determine how racist journalism practices perpetuate racist representations of Black men and women, particularly when those Black men and women are victims of police brutality.

In order to analyze these cases properly and thoroughly, the dissertation employed a case study approach which allowed for a comprehensive and robust discussion of the events of the case, the players involved in the case, and the mainstream news media's narrative structuring of the events of the case. By taking a comprehensive and robust approach to studying these cases, the dissertation was able to answer the research questions with the nuance and precision necessary for a critical discourse analysis involving sensitive race-related issues.

The research questions:

RQ1a: How did U.S. news media narrate the April 4, 2015 police-involved killing of Walter Scott? What were the prominent semiotic features of the news stories?

RQ1b: How did news media narrative representations of the Scott killing shift over time?

RQ2a: How did U.S. news media narrate the July 19, 2015 police-involved killing of Samuel Dubose? What were the prominent semiotic features of the news stories?

RQ2b: How did news media narrative representations of the Dubose killing shift over time?

sought to determine the representations of Black men that came from the news narratives of the shootings of Walter Scott and Samuel Dubose. To answer these questions, I employed in this dissertation a case study approach to critical discourse analysis methodology in order to understand how the discourse present in those media narratives for each shooting (case) highlighted inequities with the representation of Black men as the victims of these events. The dissertation situated the representations of Scott and Dubose within the context of the historical representations of Black men and women in mainstream American news media. With scholarship (Hunt, 1999) in the literature review supporting the claim mainstream American news media has historically perpetuated racist linkages between Black men and an inherent tendency toward criminality, the analysis further showed how consistent those linkages remain presently, particularly with the two cases under study in this paper. The final purpose of the dissertation is to examine the implications of these mainstream media narratives and the ways discourse from #BlackLivesMatter was able to disrupt these racist and stereotypical representations from mainstream news media with counter narratives in alternative media.

Thus, this final chapter considers the way that the mainstream news media narratives on Black male criminality may not be “final.” Indeed, after describing the shifting narratives of Black male criminality in these mainstream news narrative cases, I describe these news media representations and their counter narratives on Twitter. In examining this discourse, the dissertation concludes by offering an assessment of how #BlackLivesMatter was able to use mainstream news coverage and tweets of the two

police-involved shootings to expose the seams in the mainstream news media narratives and offer a counter narrative supportive of social justice goals.

Shifting Narratives of Black Male Criminality

In addressing these questions, the dissertation looked to the major shifts in the representations of the shooting victims. With both cases, the primary shifts in the narratives occurred as a result of the release of video evidence contradicting the original narratives purported by law enforcement and perpetuated by both local and national news media. Additionally, with both cases, there were major shifts in the extent and expanse of the coverage after the release of video. The release of contradictory video evidence in both cases defined the cases as controversial for journalists covering the case. The release of the video shifted the reporting from stories about traffic stops gone wrong to stories about the controversy itself. North Charleston's *Post and Courier* writer Glenn Smith, for example, only asked "experts" whether the killing was justified after the release of the cell phone video (Smith, 2015). *The Post and Courier* did not ask whether the killing was justified in the three days prior to the release of the video. The only reference the paper made to charges against Officer Slager was in mentioning the shooting was under investigation (Elmore & MacDougall, 2015), though they did not explore the possibility Slager may have acted outside of his duties. The only reference to any perspectives critical of the NCPD after the Scott shooting came when interviewing Scott's family. *Post and Courier* reporters also did not discuss video from Officer Slager's dashboard camera being potential evidence of what happened. With the Samuel Dubose shooting, a similar phenomenon occurred. Writers for the local Cincinnati newspapers and television outlets focused on the controversy of the case only after the

release of the video. With the reporting in Cincinnati, however, there was some acknowledgment the officer's body camera footage existed and would be used to corroborate Officer Tensing's claims he was in danger (Williams, 2015a).

This discursive shift allowed journalists to deviate from their typical practices and begin challenging the institution of police as well as the ways officers police Black communities. This apparently occurred earlier in Cincinnati with the coverage of Dubose's shooting. These two narratives went from the crime pages where beat reporters chronicled the events as they happened to the national and opinion pages with journalists asking questions about our trust in police, the practice of fitting officers with body cameras (Barrett, 2015; Berman & Lowery, 2015; Blakely, 2015; Coolidge, 2015; Latta, 2015; M. T. Moore, 2015; Nasheed, 2015; Palmer, Democrat, Dover, & N.H, 2015; Pérez-Peña, 2015; Seitz & Gnau, 2015; St. Martin, 2015), how these officers approach the Black male body (Evans, 2015; Laughland & Felton, 2015; CNN, 2015d), and broader questions about the relationship between police and the Black community (Hunt, 2016; Knight & Williams, 2015; CNN, 2015d; McKee & WCPO Staff, 2015b; McWhorter, 2016; Thomas, 2015). Additionally, this shift provided legitimacy in the mainstream for the discourse of the #BlackLivesMatter movement (Dvorak, 2015; Elmore, 2015; Hall, 2015; Jason Williams, 2015; Molski & Butts, 2015; Packnett, 2016; Petracco & Hamrick, 2015; NPR, 2015b; Stephenson, 2015; The Cincinnati Enquirer, 2015a; WCPO Staff, 2015a).

Journalists in the mainstream began co-opting the discourse of the #BLM movement as well (Packnett, 2016; Pérez-Peña & Williams, 2015a; Stephenson, 2015; The Cincinnati Enquirer, 2015a). Their framing of both the events of the narratives as

well as the ways they framed and discussed those broader societal questions and issues became more critical (Clark, 2015; Cornwell, 2015b; Felton, 2015b; Gambino & Felton, 2015; Johnson & USA Today, 2015; Lahore, 2015). Journalists covering the shootings began interviewing activists in the movement (Allen & Cohen, 2015; NPR, 2015a; Gambino, 2015; Harris, 2015; Jackson, 2015; Lambert, Sweigart, & McCall, 2015; NPR, 2015b; Smith, 2016; Susman, 2015; Swaine, 2015b). They referenced the social media discourse of the movement (Cox, 2015; McLeod, 2015; NBC News, 2015b; The Cincinnati Enquirer, 2015c; Williams, 2015b). This allowed the discourse of #BLM to move from social media on the periphery to the mainstream.

The representations of the Black male body in the narratives prior to video being released mimicked historical racist representations of the Black male as predisposed to criminal behavior early in the coverage. *The Post and Courier* in North Charleston, SC, did the investigative work necessary to report on Walter Scott's criminal background as early as April 6, 2015, two days after the shooting (Knapp, 2015a). *The Post and Courier* did not mention previous claims of excessive force against Officer Slager until April 9, after he had already been arrested (Knapp, 2015d). This is consistent with representations in mass media that assume the police officer is justified and the Black victim had it coming. Evidence of this can be found in the imagery used in the news coverage of the two cases. When referencing the Samuel Dubose shooting, national and local Cincinnati news outlets "juxtaposed an image of murder suspect Ray Tensing in front of a flag with a police mugshot of shooting victim Samuel DuBose" (The Cincinnati Enquirer, 2015b). This pattern of signification was evident to a number of observers and critics on social media. For instance, when NBC News posted on their Twitter account

their announcement of Officer Tensing’s indictment on murder charges, they posted a side-by-side image made up of Tensing’s UCPD photograph in his uniform beside a photograph of one of Dubose’s mugshots (NBC News, 2015a, see Figure 6.1). This post, in particular, generated much negative feedback from users on Twitter who felt the post sent an obvious racist message. Those tweets ranged from the outright offended, “I condemn any news outlet circulating pictures of this murderer cop in a uniform and Sam Dubose in a mug shot! Terrible journalism” (Poetic Justice, 2015) to the sarcastic, “Out of all the pictures you could've gotten for Mr. Dubose, you chose his mugshot. How noble” (Coretta, 2015; see: Figure 6.2 for more examples). The NBC News tweet was not an isolated occurrence. On television and online, news organizations made the decision to place a photograph of a man convicted of murder in uniform and posing in front of a U.S. flag beside the mugshot of the man he is convicted of killing (The Cincinnati Enquirer, 2015b). This is clear evidence of the racist practices in which mainstream American mass media engage.



Figure 6.1. NBC News’ tweet: Flag photo for murder suspect, mugshot for victim

The online Black press was also critical of the signification behind NBC News' tweet. Richard Prince of Black news website, *The Root*, made note of the inherent and seemingly obvious problems with this juxtaposition:

A fatal shooting in July underscored the need for sensitivity in photo selection. National news outlets including NBC and CNN juxtaposed an image of Ray Tensing, a University of Cincinnati police officer who shot and killed an unarmed man during a traffic stop, in front of a flag. However, his victim, Samuel DuBose, was shown in a police mugshot. (Prince, 2015c)

Another *The Root* writer, Yesha Callahan, detailed the scathing Twitter reaction to the NBC News tweet:

Many people questioned why Tensing, someone who was just charged with murder, would be pictured as patriotic, while Dubose, the victim, would be portrayed using a prior mug shot? (Callahan, 2015, para. 4)

An interesting part of the drama over photograph selection for mainstream news coverage of Dubose and Officer Tensing was only one outlet, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, had a member of their staff documented as stepping up in those early moments to include a picture of Dubose that was not a mugshot. Michael McCarter, the paper's interim editor made the active choice to include a picture of Dubose that was not a mugshot (Prince, 2015b). McCarter explained his paper's process for selecting the photograph of Dubose that eventually made it into *The Enquirer* as his, that of a Black editor, argument that a sensitivity toward the potential implications of the mugshot of a shooting victim for a case that potentially could be argued and "tried" in the public.

Gino The Ghost @GinoTheGhost Follow

so why does the cop look like the victim? RT @NBCNews Cincinnati cop indicted for murder in death of unarmed motorist




RETWEETS 94 LIKES 26

11:57 AM - 29 Jul 2015

EMANI SUNDAY @EmaniSunday Follow

Why are you using a mugshot of the victim, but not the mugshot of the MURDERER? @NBCNews #SamDubose



RETWEETS 500 LIKES 169

11:42 AM - 29 Jul 2015

Rigel Robinson @RigelRobinson Follow

Hey @NBCNews, I went ahead and fixed this one for you. Do better. #SamDubose



RETWEETS 12,819 LIKES 10,605

12:21 PM - 29 Jul 2015

Josephine Appleby @posydozy Follow

@NBCNews You couldn't use this picture of Samuel Dubose? No you use an old mugshot, despite the fact he's the victim.



RETWEETS 28 LIKES 16

11:45 AM - 29 Jul 2015

Ryan Dalton @capetownbrown Follow

Disgusting choice of pictures, @NBCNews.



RETWEETS 586 LIKES 833

11:14 AM - 29 Jul 2015

Brenda Johnson @TucsonVoice28 Follow

.@NBCNews "@Bipartisanism: Here is the mugshot that media SHOULD be using when posting about #RayTensing....."



RETWEETS 22 LIKES 11

11:24 AM - 30 Jul 2015

#GracesGranddaughter @iemubienne Follow

Will you post Tensing's mugshot, too? @NBCNews



RETWEETS 7 LIKES 32

11:25 AM - 29 Jul 2015

Bipartisan Report @Bipartisanism Follow

@CNN, @FoxNews, @NBCNews. How about you use the mugshot of the cop if you're going to use the mugshot of #SamDubose?



RETWEETS 840 LIKES 583

12:35 PM - 29 Jul 2015

mocha latte hatte @DaraWilson - 29 Jul 2015

@NBCNews using the "victim's" mugshot and murderer's smiling cop pic is as disgusting as it is predictable. #SamuelDubose

RETWEETS 0 LIKES 14

Suburb Boomin @MiffisticJJC - 29 Jul 2015

@NBCNews where is the pic of #SamDubose with his family or fishing? Why the mug shot?

RETWEETS 8 LIKES 15

Figure 6.2. Reactions to NBC News' tweet in Figure 6.1

Similarities and Differences in Case Events

The shootings of Walter Scott and Samuel Dubose are similar in a number of ways. Namely, both shootings were of Black men by white police officers. In both cases, the victims attempted to run from the officers; Scott leaving his car and Dubose attempting to drive away. Both of the officers tried to cover up their crime by saying Scott and Dubose posed some threat to them so they were forced to shoot. In both cases, video evidence surfaced showing the officers to be lying. Additionally, both shootings occurred in cities with complicated racial histories. Finally, both Scott and Dubose had an extensive criminal record of nonviolent offenses prior to being pulled over.

With those similarities, the cases are notably different in a few ways. As mentioned above, Walter Scott attempted to run on foot whereas Samuel Dubose tried to drive away. Walter Scott was shot in the back from about 15 feet away while he ran from Officer Michael Slager. This occurred after a brief struggle between the two men. Samuel Dubose was shot in the face within two seconds of turning the ignition in his car before he could drive away. The most notable difference in the cases was Walter Scott was shot by a police officer with the city of North Charleston, SC, while Officer Ray Tensing, Samuel Dubose's shooter, was a campus police officer with the University of Cincinnati Police Department. Another important difference with the cases is in the types of video evidence that challenged the police officers' initial claims. For the Walter Scott shooting, cell phone footage from a bystander walking by the altercation was what showed Officer Slager to be lying in that case. For the killing of Samuel Dubose, it was Officer Tensing's own body camera footage that showed Dubose posed no threat to the officer prior to being shot.

Similarities and Differences in Media Narration

The media discourse of the shootings contained notable similarities and differences as well. Many of the similarities were in how the journalists covering the cases chose to describe what happened. Early on with both shootings, the narrative was about a traffic stop gone wrong (CNN, 2015b; Edmonds, 2015; Elmore & MacDougall, 2015; Felton, 2015a; Rhodes, 2015; Rogers, 2015). Typical with the framing of Black men when involved in confrontations with law enforcement, these narratives either asked about the victims' complicity in their deaths or implied they were complicit prior to any exploration of some fault in the official narrative being perpetuated by law enforcement in North Charleston and Cincinnati (Jackson, 2015; Palmer et al., 2015; Swaine, 2015a).

What set the narrative framing of Walter Scott and his death apart from the shooting of Samuel Dubose was the timing of the two events. The shooting of Dubose occurred about three months after Walter Scott was killed. Due to that, Scott's killing became a focusing event affecting how journalists discussed the shooting of Samuel Dubose in July of 2015. The shooting of Walter Scott provided a knowledge framework which journalists writing about Samuel Dubose referenced. That reference point made the discourse in the second case markedly more sympathetic than that of the first (Rhodes, 2015). Many of the local Cincinnati reporters covering Dubose's shooting referenced Walter Scott's death even prior to the release of Officer Tensing's body camera footage. They said the shooting seemed familiar to the shooting of Scott in April 2015. Numerous articles about Dubose referenced Scott's killing (M. Lowery, 2015; O'Neal, 2015a, 2015b; Pérez-Peña, Williams, & Mura, 2015; The New York Daily News Editorial Board, 2015). Though these journalists did not go so far as to question the

UCPD openly, they did mention some of the questions being asked by Dubose's family, members of the community, and activists. They did not, however, afford these questions the same legitimacy as the perspectives from officials they interviewed. This dissertation works with a clear acknowledgement that prior to Officer Tensing's body camera footage being made public, the only available version of what happened was that in the police report. To ignore that fact would start the entire work from a fallacy. However, even with evidence as recent as Scott's shooting three months earlier to suggest some critical exploration of a possible counter-narrative, journalists failed to pursue the story past the police report.

The most obvious discursive shift in both cases occurred after the release of the video footage in both cases that challenged the narrative fed to the journalists by their police sources. With Walter Scott's death, Feidin Santana's cell phone video was a bombshell revelation when it was originally published on *The New York Times'* website. This was the catalyst for other news agencies' increasing coverage of the story. Scott's death was the top story on most television news broadcasts in the days after the video was released.

Race as the Floating Signifier

If race is our signifier and our sites of interpretation allow us to continue reading these texts through our own interpretive lenses, how are we to make sense of these signs and the system of codes within which they operate? Pérez-Peña and Williams (2015b) claim audiences are already beginning to re-interpret these texts within the context of already changing ideologies:

Those videos, all involving white officers and black civilians, have become ingrained in the nation's consciousness -- to many people, as evidence of bad police conduct. And while they represent just a tiny fraction of police behavior -- those that show respectful, peaceful interactions do not make the 24-hour cable news -- they have begun to alter public views of police use of force and race relations, experts and police officials say. (para. 2)

There is evidence of this in the Twitter conversations about the cases. From this perspective, semiosis involves a close adherence to Anderson's (1996) comments on semiotic engagement. Anderson argued cognitive structures are necessary elements of the semiotic process such that the implications of those structures drive our understanding of a phenomenon. In other words, readers with an understanding of the history of the systemic ways Black men and women have been treated by the police could reach a different semiosis than others reading these same texts who are without that background. Additionally, Anderson contended critical analyses should focus on "cultural totalities" (p. 89) as shaping how we approach the subject under study. With evidence of competing perceptions of whether certain police actions, such as use of force and profiling are just, tend to fall along racial lines (Dang, 2015; Dixon, 2008a; Dowler & Zawilski, 2007; Graziano et al., 2010; Mears, Pickett, Golden, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2013; Nelson, Paul, Block Jr, & Brown-Dean, 2002; Payne, 2007; Sigelman et al., 1997; Stewart et al., 2009; Tuch, 2004; Warren, 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004; Wu, 2014), Black readers of these texts would look at them much differently than non-Black audiences. If reading them consistently with these perceptions on policing, Black audiences may have been skeptical of those initial reports of Scott's shooting. Further, even with the seemingly obvious evidence of Slager's guilt, Black readers can only look to the cases of Eric Garner and Tamir Rice to know video evidence is often not even enough to convict a police officer of killing an unarmed civilian (Weitzer, 2015).

Of relevance, the deaths of Walter Scott and Samuel Dubose were not the only high profile killings of Black men at the hands of police in recent years. Between 2013 and 2015, the stories of Eric Garner in New York, Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, Freddie Gray in Baltimore, and Tamir Rice in Cleveland; all Black men and boys (Rice was only 12 years old) killed at the hands of police (The Associated Press, 2016), also became focusing events for the issue of police brutality and the connections between race and policing or, depending on the framing of the news article, race and criminality. What sets these two cases apart from the others is the presence of visual evidence leading to a criminal charge.

In two of the three cases mentioned above, video evidence of the killing was made publicly available. Eric Garner was killed by a NYPD officer in Staten Island, NY on July 17, 2014. The altercation between him and police allegedly began after he was accused of selling bootleg items and loose cigarettes on the city street. The interaction between Garner and police became verbally hostile and NYPD Officer Daniel Pantaleo approached Garner from behind and placed him in a chokehold (Goodman et al., 2015). While Garner was in the Pantaleo's choke and as he fell to his knees then fully prostrate on the ground, Garner can be seen and heard in cell phone video captured by a bystander yelling, "I can't breathe" 11 times before he loses consciousness (Goodman & Moynihan, 2015). Officers did not perform CPR on Garner while he lay on the ground and he would be pronounced dead at the hospital about an hour later (Goodman & Moynihan, 2015). Though there was video evidence of Officer Pantaleo placing Garner in an illegal chokehold as well as the audio of Garner throughout the encounter yelling, "I can't breathe," a grand jury in NY's Richmond County declined to indict Officer Pantaleo.

The shooting of Tamir Rice by Cleveland Police Officer, Patrolman Timothy Loehman on November 22, 2014 was another police involved shooting that received major national and international media coverage. Two officers, Loehmann and Patrolman Fran Garmback, responded to a report of a black male pointing a pistol at random people in a park. In surveillance video recovered from near the park, the officers are shown arriving at the park in their vehicles near Rice (Peterson, 2014; The Associated Press, 2015). Within two seconds of arriving and stepping out of his car, Patrolman Loehmann has already shot Rice (Logan, 2015). Even with video evidence of the lack of hesitation Patrolman Loehmann showed when shooting Rice, the fact Rice was only 12 years old, and that Rice's gun was actually a replica, a Cuyahoga county grand jury declined to indict Loehmann (Fantz, Almasy, & Shoichet, 2015).

Though the killing of both Rice and Garner were evidenced on video, the two officers who ended those lives were not not charged with killing them. Thus the rationale for this investigation is apparent. The cases of Walter Scott and Samuel Dubose are unique in that they show two cases very similar to others in recent history. Yet, with these cases, there was an indictment after the video evidence became public. Look at the case of Freddie Gray in Baltimore who died in police custody without video evidence of who was responsible. As of this writing, two of the six officers who were charged with being responsible have been acquitted. With Garner and Rice, there was video evidence and no indictment. With Freddie Gray, there was no video but indictments with acquittals. This forces us to ask what about the cases of Walter Scott and Samuel Dubose is different.

Significance of Cases

The media narratives of Scott and Dubose killings are different from the others just discussed. In each of these cases, many of the same media practices discussed here in the dissertation were present. Journalists attempted to portray the victims in each of these cases as somehow complicit in their own deaths (Peterson, 2014; The Associated Press, 2015). Journalists asked if Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old, should be playing with toy guns (Peterson, 2014; The Associated Press, 2015). They asked if the officers in that case should be given the benefit of the doubt because Rice was considered slightly tall for his age (Fantz et al., 2015). Journalists asked what Freddie Gray and Eric Garner were doing to become involved with the police in the first place. These narratives, however, were challenged on social media (Demby, 2016). In Twitter conversations around the shootings, activists and people concerned made hashtags such as #handupdontshoot and #icantbreathe rallying cries for the BLM movement.

Alternative Media as Challenge to Representations

The most telling aspect of the Scott and Dubose killings was the Twitter conversations seemed to have some impact on both the case itself and its coverage. Twitter and Facebook were crucial for activists and concerned participants in “Black Twitter” (Demby, 2016; Gambino, 2015; Kang, 2015). The conversations they were having online served to dispute many of the problematic claims perpetuated by the mainstream news media. Early in the analysis for this dissertation, a survey of the national news media conversations about these two killings for example seemed to show both Scott’s and Dubose’s killings received little national media coverage outside of North Charleston and Cincinnati, respectively. However, this was not the case on social

media where people were asking why this was the case. To be more precise, as described in Chapters 4 and 5, the national news media did not cover these two killings much until it became widely known there was video evidence that the officer-supplied narratives presented in the media may not have been what actually happened. This complaint is consistent with what users were saying about the media coverage around other instances of police killing Black men. Take, for example, this November 2014 tweet about the media coverage of the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson (see Figure 6.3; April, 2014):



Figure 6.3. Twitter response to CNN coverage of police brutality

Similar to the Ferguson case, activists and Black Twitter users were pessimistic with regard to mainstream media coverage of the Charleston and Cincinnati shootings. Prior to the release of the cell phone, dashboard camera, and body camera footage of these shootings, users questioned whether what was going on, as shown in the coverage, was really what happened. Some took to Twitter to predict how the mediating process would play out. When the indictments did arrive, there was also social media publicity

and mixed expressions of relief and concern that the indictments would not lead to conviction, even in the wake of clear video evidence.



Figure 6.4. Twitter commentary on the lack of Dubose coverage

Alternative Media as a Check on Mainstream News Media

Alternative publications, namely Black publications, were critical of mainstream news media's biases toward officials as the primary definers of the events of the cases. This was particularly important when discussing the guilt of the officers and the implied complicity of Dubose and Scott in their own deaths. The *Atlanta Black Star*, wondered if the lies told by law enforcement officials and perpetuated by mainstream news media in the Walter Scott case coming to light implied there were similar cases where police officers may have killed Black men and gotten away with a lie (Chiles, 2015). The publications framed this as a uniquely Black problem. Chiles wrote in the *Atlanta Black Star*, for example, "When the power to construct the narrative is in the hands of law

enforcement, never will the final story be to the benefit of the Black man at the other end of the officer's gun" (Chiles, 2015, para. 23). Here there is acknowledgement from the Black press that while the mainstream media may be the first to define police-involved shootings of Black men, their struggle to correct their story and their challenge by the Black press, itself, was assisted by the clear video evidence of the events. *The Root* noted Mitch Pugh, *The Post and Courier's* executive editor, claimed his newspaper's investigation into the Walter Scott shooting is something "it would not have done previously," (Prince, 2015a, para. 33) following that up by saying, "The Post and Courier reported 3.9 percent journalists of color in the 2015 ASNE newsroom diversity census" (Prince, 2015a, para. 35).

The question of the diversity of *The Post and Courier's* newsroom is an important question to ask. Jenkins (2012) noted that contemporary initiatives and pushes for racial diversity in American newsrooms have occurred with the goal of fair representation of minority concerns. As exemplified in the above discussion of photograph selection for Samuel Dubose in Cincinnati, Black perspectives in the newsroom could lead to more sympathetic portrayals of Black death at the hands of police. In the Cincinnati Enquirer case the newspaper initially published a mugshot of the victim alongside the official police photograph of the perpetrating officer; however, a Black journalist within the newsroom may have been instrumental in shifting the paper's depiction of the victim to a photo supplied by the family. Along similar lines, alternative news website, *All Digitocracy*, asked why NBC's Today show felt it was appropriate to broadcast, in the midst of their coverage of the Dubose case, a segment where a white news anchor role

played a scenario with a Black police officer about how people should behave in interactions with police officers:

The Today Show's Jeff Rossen is stuck in the reality that if you just do what the police say everything will be fine. Today's Rossen Report reinforced the idea the fault in fatal encounters between police and civilians in traffic stops is always the fault of the dead citizen. Rossen's clip was introduced with video from Sandra Bland's encounter with Texas Trooper Brian Encinia (she later died under suspicious circumstances inside a Texas jail) and former University of Cincinnati officer Ray Tensing stopping Samuel Dubose. Then Rossen goes into helpful mode 'to demonstrate what you are required to do when the police pull you over.' ANSWER: Provide your license and proof of insurance and get out of the car if instructed. In other words, if these people had just behaved, they would be alive. But how can he make such a claim? The video of these stops has given America a glimpse [*sic*] driving while black.' (J. M. Brown, 2015, para. 1)

The argument here is this tone deaf coverage does more harm than good when well-intended white journalists purport to discuss social phenomena unique to a Black perspective through their white lens. J. M. Brown (2015) further argued:

Somehow [the actual facts of the case contextualized around race] all escaped Rossen and his producers, since they thought it would be a good idea to explain to how behave [*sic*] when stopped. The segment was inane journalism that offered nothing toward a constructive conversation. Worse, it colored the news coverage, suggesting that both Bland and DuBose [*sic*] were responsible for their own deaths." (J. M. Brown, 2015, para. 3)

The lack of empathy in The Today Show's coverage of Dubose's killing can be seen here as being closely tied to another concept discussed in this dissertation; the assumption that Black men and women are to blame when we die in police custody.

The *Atlanta Black Star* challenged why mainstream news organizations felt comfortable repeatedly playing video footage of the shooting death of Dubose and Scott, often on a loop (A. Moore, 2015). This question was asked in the context that mainstream news media avoided broadcasting the deaths of a Virginia news reporter who was shot on air, while questioning the lack of backlash at this inconsistency.

Mainstream news media did cover the protests immediately following the release of the police reports framing the victims as aggressors. However, this coverage discussed this commentary with the same framing they discussed the protests as existing prior to the protesters having the full story. Finally, in both of these cases, activists challenged the early police narratives perpetuated by local and national media that portrayed Scott and Dubose as the aggressors and the officers as justified in shooting them. During an April 9, 2015 protest outside of Charleston, SC, for example, members of Black Lives Matter Charleston “criticized the media for ‘perpetuating falsehoods’ about the black community and accepting accounts offered by law enforcement as truth.” (CNN, 2015c, para. 6). In Cincinnati, protestor Brian Taylor was included in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* coverage of the UCPD’s response after the shooting, “It’s not a surprise that they had called for stepped up harassing in working-class communities surrounding the university and it’s also not a surprise that they lied” (Murphy & Grasha, 2016).

In many ways then, this dissertation addresses the question of how, then, do Black Americans combat this system and counter the mainstream media’s presentations of racialized crime stories in a system of oppression rigged against Black victims of police violence? American media is predominantly corporate and those media voices coming from the dominant corporate and government powers will seek to further the media status quo, which is pro-white/anti-Black, pro-corporate/anti-citizen, and otherwise promoting a capitalist hegemony “induc[ing] individuals to adapt to the social conditions of capitalist societies” (Kellner, 2002, para. 15). However, there is also some evidence that Black voices or perspectives sensitive to the Black experience in this country may leak in to the narratives constructed by mainstream media. That is, in these cases of police-involved

shootings against Black American men, the hegemonic depictions of black male criminality and responsibility for the police-involved crime were not final. A discursive struggle ensued after the official police-provided narrative of events as mediated and accepted as initially true by the mainstream press was, in fact, uncovered to be false. Video evidence of the events that became public through the help of citizens and officer-body camera evidence helped disrupt the initial news narrative. However, as Chapters 4 and 5 detail, this disruption was given force by the insistent counter-narratives provided by family members, Black Lives Matter activists, and reporters in social and alternative media, the Black Press, and by national media outlets who challenged the initial local media depictions. The mainstream news outlets responded, often coopting and explaining the story to retain their agency as storytellers. This function and capacity suggests the Legitimate power of social media and networks to penetrate this larger mainstream media landscape; the power to change these mainstream news media storytelling norms may lie in role of social movement-supported alternative media spaces, including social media, calling out racist news storytelling practices, and stimulating and challenging mainstream news organizations to “get the story right.”

One limitation of this study is the focus on Black men as victims of police violence and the use of two case studies that depict unarmed Black men who were killed by police officers in 2015. A reason for this is the amount of scholarship on the associations between criminality and media representations of Black masculinity. However, instances of Black women being victims of police violence or dying in police custody exist as reason these racist media constructions should be addressed. When discussing these issues, a particular attention to a feminist perspective on race should be

paid so that the intersectionality of race and gender can be addressed in only the way a feminist perspective can.

Limitation: Blackness and Media from a Feminist Perspective

The intersectionality between race and gender is an important benefit of a feminist perspective on media discourses. Authors like bell hooks and Patricia Hill-Collins are two Black scholars championing the recognition of these compounding oppressions. hooks (1984, 1989, 2014) was additionally influential in setting up a modern Black feminist perspective on issues of media representation. In “The Oppositional Gaze,” hooks (2003) discussed how in talking with Black women, there was a consistent perception that American media did little to attempt to portray Blackness, particularly Black femaleness, “that most of the women I talked to were adamant that they never went to the movies expecting to see compelling representations of black femaleness. They were all acutely aware of cinematic racism—it’s cinematic erasure of black womanhood” (p. 96). Springer (2007) conducted a survey of recent pop culture representations of Black women and found feminist and post-feminist movements can do a great deal to challenge these images. To combat these problematic representations, scholars have offered a contemporary Black feminism that poses a challenge to both racism and patriarchy (Collins, 2004, 2006).

Considering this dissertation focuses on two police-involved shootings of Black males and how those shootings were discussed in the social movement discourse of a movement started by Black women (Garza, 2014), it would make sense to include a feminist perspective focusing on the associations between representations of Black female criminality in the literature. Collins and hooks’ research clearly serves the

purpose of highlighting the importance of intersectionality when discussing unjust social structures and institutions, which is a clear area for future research. Speaking specifically to the Black Lives Matter movement, Mayo (2015) noted the movement's focus on intersectionality has been present throughout its existence, "Ferguson protesters insisted on the recognition of the particular racialization of that police state [...] and insisted on a strong intersectional understanding of what the diversity of Black lives are" (p. 247). This gives hope the movement has potential to sustain longer than social movements that have preceded due to this heightened awareness of how the specific structures (namely, the police state) the movement is protesting subjugates and marginalizes Black men and Black women. Additionally, Embrick (2015) argued we need to make intersectionality a focal point in discussions of race and criminality; that focusing solely on race can ignore the dual oppressions Black women face when put in similar situations as the Black men discussed in the case studies under analysis in this dissertation. Black feminist critique positions itself at a unique point in the academic social justice landscape. There is an acknowledgement in the literature that Black women have been ignored both in the critical race scholarship that privileges minority men as the individual sites of action and feminist scholarship that privileges white women's perspective (Brooks & Hébert, 2006).

From the perspective of intersectional research on gender and race in media, examining the role social and new media plays, and the ability of Black feminists to mobilize, is also an important area of concern. Looking at the role social and new media has played in the ability of Black feminists to mobilize, Rapp, Button, Fleury-Steiner, and Fleury-Steiner (2010) have demonstrated how new media may be utilized to give Black women the voice and opportunity to perpetuate and promote discourse supporting

feminist causes on a broader scale and reach a greater audience. That line of research combined with the current dissertation's study provide scholarly evidence that social movement discourse may indeed disrupt and gain publicity in mainstream media and alternative media systems. They argue segmentation within social media spheres of influence can become communities of their own for Black women to have discussions in spaces they feel safe and accepted. This necessitates the inclusion of Black feminist discourse as well as potentially a study examining the issues of this dissertation entirely from a feminist lens.

Conclusion

I began this dissertation lamenting the existence of fears Black men have of interactions with law enforcement. Being a Black male in the United States means living in a reality where police-involved killings of Black men and the destruction of our bodies by police and authority figures is sanctioned. American mainstream news media are often not sympathetic to this plight nor do media recognize the legitimacy of our fears or publicize them in media reports. For the shooting deaths of Walter Scott and Samuel Dubose, the mainstream news media constructed narratives supporting the notion these men were somehow complicit in their own demise. These news reports operating from the assumption the officers who killed them were justified in fearing for their life and shooting these unarmed men reinforce notions of an inherent association between Black men and criminality; that a police officer's fears of what a violent Black suspect may do to him are more likely to be realized than the fears a police officer may assault or murder an unarmed Black man. In this racist media environment police officers who kill unarmed Black men are often afforded the benefit of the doubt while their news routines

produce stories that malign the reputation of the men these officers killed. In the two case studies considered in this dissertation, it took the attention of family members, social protestors, and near-indisputable evidence contradicting the initial reports from law enforcement to challenge these initial media depictions. The evidence presented in this analysis also provides support that news media perpetuate dominant hegemonic discourses wherein race, particularly Blackness, is understood only within the context of its relation to other concepts. The role Blackness plays in these news reports is to legitimize both the actions of the officers and the mainstream media's racist representations of the men killed by police.

This dissertation also details how the racist power structures of the mainstream mass media offer a great many complications and barriers for social movement activism and political involvement; two goals of social movement and alternative media discourse according to Downing (2008). However, the availability and reach afforded social movement discourse through the utilization of social media platforms can take back some of that power. There is evidence presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 that Twitter and other social media tools gave voice to individuals and groups who otherwise would not have had the ability to define and construct their own counter narratives to the dominant discourses perpetuated in mainstream mass media. This benefit is uniquely 21st century in what is afforded modern social movements compared to the tools available to members of social movements prior to the digital era.

Finally, the dissertation established how mainstream news media outlets rely heavily on the input their official sources can provide. This process of news assimilation gives and inherent assumption of honesty and trustworthiness to the police reports

detailing a violent Black male attempting to harm a police officer and that officer's response with force justified in allowing that officer to protect himself. However, one of the conclusions drawn from analysis of the shifting discourses of the cases is that the mainstreaming of the social media commentary from activists and Black social media can have a chance at changing these hegemonic constructions. This is possibly the most optimistic perspective of the possibility of changing these racist constructions of Blackness and crime presented and represented in mainstream U.S. news media.

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Education

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Communication, 2010
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Journalism, minor in English Literature and Language, 2008
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Academic Employment

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Teaching Assistant

Graduate Program in Communication
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Senior Thesis Committee Member

Mark Taylor. "The Influence of Hip-Hop Culture"
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Adjunct Faculty

Department of Communication
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Primary Instructor

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Academic Honors, Awards, and Funding

College of Communication and Information Research Fellowship

University of Kentucky, 2012-2013

Research Grant – Case Study Investigator

National Center for Food Protection and Defense: Center of Excellence
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Publications

- Cotton III, A. J., Veil, S. R., & Iannarino, N. T. (2014). Contaminated Communication: TEPCO and Organizational Renewal at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. *Communication Studies*, 66(1), 27-44.
- Iannarino, N. T., Veil, S. R. and Cotton III, A. J. (2015), Bringing Home the Crisis: How US Evening News Framed the 2011 Japan Nuclear Crisis. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*.

Conference Presentations

- “Opening the *Gates* to the Gaming World: An Analysis of the Interacting Arguments of *GamerGate*.” Panel Presentation. Central States Communication Association Annual Conference, 2016.
- “Foodborne Danger and Medical Expertise: How A Daytime Talk Show Can Affect Food Policy.” Poster Presentation. National Center for Food Protection and Defense Biennial Conference.
- “Bringing Home the Crisis: How U.S. Evening News Framed the 2011 Japan Nuclear Crisis.” University of Kentucky, Communication Graduate Symposium, 2012.
- “Bringing Home the Crisis: How U.S. Evening News Framed the 2011 Japan Nuclear Crisis.” International Communication Association Conference, 2012.
- “The Expert Paradigm Reimagined: Expert Source Selection in Traditional and New Media.” University of Kentucky, Communication Graduate Symposium, 2011.
- “The Commodification of Rap Music: How White Youth Interest and White Corporate Control Changed the Face of Hip-Hop.” Eastern Communication Association Conference, April 2010.

Invited Lectures

- “Media Issues: Sex and Gender in Media Literacy”
University of Kentucky, Spring 2015
- “Conducting a Rhetorical Analysis”
University of Kentucky, Spring 2015
- “Ethics of Social Media Use for Black Journalists”
University of Kentucky, Fall 2013
- “Feminist Scholarship in Communication Research”
University of Kentucky, Fall 2013