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Black and Blue: Competing Social Constructions of Police On Instagram and Twitter

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BLACK AND BLUE: COMPETING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS
OF POLICE ON INSTAGRAM AND TWITTER

by

Mary Frances Thornhill

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School,
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and the School of Criminal Justice
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August 2017

BLACK AND BLUE: COMPETING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS
OF POLICE ON INSTAGRAM AND TWITTER

by Mary Frances Thornhill

August 2017

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ABSTRACT

BLACK AND BLUE: COMPETING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF POLICE ON INSTAGRAM AND TWITTER

by Mary Frances Thornhill

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Mass media outlets newspapers and television were traditionally where individuals gathered their news information; however, with the growth of new media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, individuals are now co-producers of the content that is seen by the public. Previous research indicated that media-generated images of the police influence public perception and that new media outlets are becoming increasingly influential, particularly in regards to social and political conflicts. This means that research on the role of new media outlets in socially constructing reality is essential, though not much of this research has yet been completed. This current analysis fills this gap in the literature by examining the question of how images of police are constructed by different social groups, using ethnographic content analysis on the social media platforms Instagram and Twitter in relation to police images with the #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter hashtags.

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DEDICATION

To mom and dad, thank you for everything you did to ensure that I finished my education. I could not have made it to where I am without your love and support.

To my siblings, Charity, Samuel, and Roger, and to my cousin Jessica, thank you for being there for me through drafts and breakdowns. I am grateful to have all of you to encourage me, and for helping me in any way possible.

For Aunt Clair.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

USM The University of Southern Mississippi

WCU William Carey University

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

On July 7, 2016, five police officers were killed, and seven officers and two civilians were wounded in a shooting in Dallas, Texas. This shooting happened during a peaceful protest over the recent deaths of two African American men in Minnesota and Louisiana – both of whom were shot by police officers (Achenback, Wan, Berman, & Balingit, 2016; Fernandez, Perez-Pena, & Bromwich, 2016). The Dallas shooter informed authorities that he was upset about the recent police shootings and wanted to kill white people - especially police officers (Achenback et al., 2016; Fernandez et al., 2016). “The shooting was the kind of retaliatory violence that people have feared through two years of protests around the country against deaths in police custody” (Fernandez et al., 2016).

While traditional media sources like television and newspapers covered the incidents, new media like the Internet and social media sites allowed witnesses to share personal testimonies in addition to the descriptive information about the shootings. Development of new media, including social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have influenced the way that individuals experience content in general. In the past, individuals received their news from traditional media like newspapers and television. The way in which information, including news media, is consumed has changed with the transition into new media or Web 2.0, where individuals can produce and distribute their own information. Through the use of new media, individuals are no longer passively receiving information from the media; instead, they are co-producers of the content that is presented.

According to Surette (2014), mass media provides a broadly shared common knowledge that exists independent of occupation, education, and social status. The media is where the majority of the public receives the information from which they form their opinions on any number of topics. The images that are presented by the media have the ability to influence the public's perception of reality; however, the media only presents a snapshot of reality that is reshaped to show a slice of the world, which may result in the blurring of fact and fiction (Surette, 2014). New media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow anyone to access, create, and distribute content that may garner more public attention and reach a larger audience than information produced by a more authoritative source (Kramer & Winter, 2008; Chadwick, 2009; Surette, 2014). This is also evident as mass media criminalized Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and the other shooting victims by the choice of images that portrayed the bias of African American men as criminals paved the way for the creation of the Black Lives Matter Movement (Lewis, 2014).

While much of the news presented on new media platforms is biased, there is a significant amount produced. The use of new media also allows for false information to reach a larger number of people, and this may affect their perception of events or situations (Best, 1987; Stalling, 1990; Pfeiffer, Windzio, & Kleimann, 2005; Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006; Sela-Shayovitz, 2007; Leverentz, 2012; Surette, 2014; Barlow, 2016). Most individuals do not question the accuracy of the information they receive through the media, even information that is not presented by a credible source. Information presented in traditional media gains validity through a review process; however, new media is composed of opinions, values, and beliefs, which can alter

people's perceptions of reality in ways that reflect what is presented in new media (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009).

Previous research has shown that images from the media shape public perception, especially in regards to the police and crime (Gamson, Croteau, Hoyness, & Sasson, 1992; Weitzer, 2002; Pfeiffer, Windzio, & Kleimann, 2005; Terrill, 2005; Leverentz, 2012). The public's understanding of crimes and criminals come from the images produced by mass media as the social phenomenon of crime occurs outside of public view. Thus the public has little knowledge of whether or not crime is declining or increasing (Pfeiffer, Windzio, & Kleimann, 2005; Surette, 2014). The advancements in new media have also changed the way the public receives their information about crime and the police. Criminal justice agencies are no longer the only ones with access to information regarding crime events, as new media provides their audiences with the ability to not only watch crime and justice but to also actively participate in the creation of crime stories (Surette, 2014). Media stories on crime or the police, especially instances of police misconduct, are popular because they draw in large audiences and high profile incidents are frequently reported in order to keep the public's attention.

There are conflicting representations of the police in the media, with the media sometimes showing the police as professional crime fighters while sometimes showing them as ineffective and incompetent, both of which can have an effect upon public perception (Chermak, McGarrell, & Gruenewald, 2006). When traditional media presents the public with conflicting images of police effectiveness, it places police legitimacy under public scrutiny (Chermak et al., 2006). The media gives the public a large amount of information on law enforcement although most of it is distorted if not entirely false.

Such misrepresentation of law enforcement causes the public to have a flawed view of the role of law enforcement in their community in ways that do not reflect reality (Surette, 2014).

There is a difference in the way the media presents routine crime reports and stories that are seemingly unprecedented. According to Chermak, McGarrell, and Gruenewald (2006), unlike routine crime reports, instances of police corruption or use of force are shown on the media frequently in a short amount of time. Media portrayals of law enforcement are the only source of information most of the public has regarding such issues and because of this the media plays an integral role in the public's attitude toward the police. Research has shown that media coverage of police misconduct affects citizen support of the police and increases the likelihood that they will see the police in a negative light (Eschholz, Blackwell, Gertz, & Chiricos, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). According to Weitzer and Tuch (2004), attitudes towards police are influenced by police misconduct represented in the media and minorities take longer to return to the levels of trust that existed prior to an incident.

When the majority of incidents of police misconduct reported by the media are faced by a member of a minority group, it perpetuates the unfavorable view of the police held by many minority groups, African Americans and other minority groups generally hold lower opinions of law enforcement, and African Americans, more than other racial and ethnic groups, believe the police treat them unfairly and stop them due to racial profiling (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004; Gabbidon & Higgins, 2008; Tyler, Fagan, & Geller, 2014). Highly visible incidents of police misconduct toward minorities negatively affect support from the community (Tyler & Wakslak, 2004). The growth of new media

technologies, such as phone cameras and the use of the Internet, has increased the chances that instances of police misconduct will be publicized and negatively affect the perception of the police and police misconduct especially by minorities (Brown & Benedict, 2002).

The growth of new media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram has created a venue where individuals can join together in sharing information, opinions, and ideas. Technologies, like smart phones, allow for individuals to have their social media sites readily available and to be informed of incidents as they happen. The Internet is a powerful site for social movements due to its instantaneous nature, social media sites, and the ability for individuals to communicate in real time across great distances (Juris, 2005). Harrison and Barthel (2009) acknowledge that regardless of a person's technical expertise they can utilize technology in active ways, due in part to social media sites now having a standard layout, which makes them more user friendly.

Through social media, anyone can use the Internet as a medium for mass communication (Harrison & Barthel, 2009). Individuals are more collaborative on the Internet through pooling their knowledge and constructing the content that they share with others, which can then be reconstructed, redistributed, and re-consumed by others (Harrison & Barthel, 2009). Social network sites make it easier to join together or connect with other individuals that share their same ideas and concerns. The networks are also where protests against social wrongs are staged to reach a larger audience than public protests alone could. Individuals can use the Internet to promote offline activism through online campaigns and email, or it can be used to create new forms of activism and resistance (Harlow, 2011). This was seen in the protests following the death of

Michael Brown in 2014; while the protests were happening in the streets, Twitter users used the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown to protest the image of Brown presented in the media.

Following the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the death of Trayvon Martin in 2013 and the death of Michael Brown in 2014 by police officer Darren Wilson, the African American community joined together on social media sites to speak out about the treatment of African Americans by the police. Aliza Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi formed the Black Lives Matter movement after George Zimmerman was acquitted of the death of Trayvon Martin as a way for the African American community to share personal stories and experiences (Langford & Speight, 2015). The Black Lives Matter movement grew from support on the social media sites Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram through the use of a hashtag as a way for people to actively involve themselves in the movement. The use of social media as a platform for activism allows the movement to reach across the country and keep supporters regularly updated.

The African American community began using the Black Lives Matter hashtag as a way to express their outrage over the perception of rising violence against African Americans by law enforcement and the perceived lack of punishment of those taking the lives of African Americans (Garza, 2014; Bailey & Leonard, 2015; Langford & Speight, 2015). The growth of new media has made the use of force against African Americans more visible to the public. Violent acts by the police cannot be hidden because there is a chance that individuals will document incidents of police use of force with photographs or videos and post it to the Internet where it can go viral and then be picked up for coverage by mainstream media (Langford & Speight, 2015).

After the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement and the adoption of the hashtag by the public, counter-movement hashtags were created on social media sites that played upon the phrase “lives matter”, such as #AllLivesMatter, #BlueLivesMatter, and #WhiteLivesMatter. The Blue Lives Matter movement is an attempt to reestablish the institutional system by saying that law enforcement lives are under attack by the Black Live Matter movement activists (Langford & Speight, 2015). The Blue Lives Matter hashtag comes into conflict with the Black Lives Matter hashtag because of the idea that the Black Lives Matter movement is endangering the lives of law enforcement officers as opposed to drawing attention to the danger to African American lives (Langford & Speight, 2015). This conflict regularly plays itself out in new media venues like Instagram and Twitter, and since the conflict revolves around the role of police, it makes examination of the debate an excellent field for studying the competing construction of police in new media.

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to look at the competing constructions of police using the images presented on the social media sites Instagram and Twitter. Individuals can easily express their opinions and beliefs to large audiences by using social media sites like Instagram and Twitter. The Black Lives Matter Movement was founded following multiple African American’s death by the police and grew into a large civil rights movement through the use of social media sites. The public is able to capture these moments through the use of cell phones and can post the images or videos on their social media accounts to be distributed to the public. The images presented by supporters of the Black Lives Matter most likely differ from the images of the police presented by

supporters of Blue Lives Matter. Therefore there will be competing constructions of the police presented by two movements that are in conflict with one another.

This thesis seeks to extend the knowledge of the use of social media sites by different groups to construct images of police by utilizing ethnographic content analysis to study images presented on the social media site Instagram and Twitter. Ethnographic content analysis developed by Altheide (1996) is used to allow themes to emerge from a large quantity of electronic documents. The data for this study will be gathered from Instagram and Twitter images of police from the hashtags, #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter. The goal of this thesis is to examine the different images of police as presented by two differing groups who are attempting to have their construction of police accepted by the public. This thesis also extends ethnographic content analysis to new social media platforms: Instagram and Twitter.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis will use the social construction of reality to explain why different groups of individuals construct competing images, and how those groups use social media to further their constructions. This chapter will explore the cultural criminology field of visual criminology to look at how images are used in cultures to construct meaning. Social construction of reality and the phenomena of claims makers and how they use media to create and distribute different social constructions to the public will also be explored. The evolution of traditional media to social media will be explored, as well as the use of media in the social construction of police. Finally this chapter will discuss the creation of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the counter-movement Blue Lives Matter.

Cultural Criminology

Cultural criminology examines at the ways cultural forces intertwine with crime and crime control in society and also seeks to understand crime in terms of human activity (Ferrell, Hayward, & Young, 2008). The focus is on subjects and cultural artifacts that are ignored by the dominant academic culture (Bevier, 2015). Cultural criminology builds on the notion that social interactions between individuals over time are where the meaning of objects is constructed (Ferrell et al., 2008; Bevier, 2015). According to Ferrell, Hayward, and Young (2008), cultural criminology uses a variety of perspectives to look at the social response to crime that can answer the late modernity trait that the world is always shifting and dealing with marginality and exclusion, but at the same time has a great potential to exceed past transgressions. Culture is ever changing

and evolving so it is important that cultural criminology seeks to reinvigorate criminology.

Cultural criminology evolved to help understand the current era late modernity, where “mass media, new media, and alternative media proliferate, forming a tangled spider’s web of constant, it virtual, interconnection” (Ferrell, Hayward, Young, 2008). In late modernity images are being used more regularly, with images of crime being presented frequently for the public. With the growth of images, criminology must evolve past the use of words and numbers to create a new foundation of visual criminology (Ferrell et al., 2008).

Visual Criminology

Visual criminology emerged from the efforts of cultural criminologists. The field of criminology has long preferred text to visual images, but in this age where images of crime are continuously being presented to the public through the media, criminology needs to take a closer look at the visual (Rafter, 2014; Barlow, 2016). Visual criminology developed as a criminology that has looked at the images that are presented in life (Rafter, 2014). According to Wheeldon and Harris (2015), visual criminology can be defined as,

...the use of any image (including, but not limited, to paintings, photographs, drawings, maps, diagrams, graphs, charts, and other visual/graphic approaches) to: collect information from participants; describe, present and analyze data; and/or examine or interrogate the meaning(s) of those data. (pp. 145)

Visual criminology is also used to study the ways that images and crime interact and shape each other (Rafter, 2014; Barlow, 2016). Images of crime have become as real as

crime and criminal justice due to the large number of images of crime that are present in society (Hayward, 2010; Barlow, 2016).

Images can be instantly accessible to viewers because of their ability to circulate from one source to another with relative ease (Ferrell, Hayward, & Young, 2008; Hayward, 2010; Jones & Wardle, 2010; Brown, 2014). “Visual criminology engages with the meaning, affect, symbolic power and spectacle of the ‘image’, thus encouraging a critical engagement with and expansion of the criminological imagination” (Barlow, 2016, pp. 171). Visual criminology includes the use of written texts, photographs, video excerpts, and interviews that are interconnected with links that allow numerous paths for interpretation, making it ideal for the study of elements like social media, which allows for all these elements within a single platform (Brown, 2014; Barlow, 2016).

Photography has the ability to record the truth authentically but also to capture hidden meanings in life, and images of suffering and violence can force the public to bear witness to the atrocities of the world (Jones & Wardle, 2010; Carrabine, 2014). It is important to understand how viewers perceive and interpret the images that they see (Hodgkinson, 2015). Photographs need interpretation because without a caption the audience does not know what they are seeing until they are told what it is (Biber, 2006). Photographs have the ability to capture the shared cultural meaning between the photographer and the subject of the photograph and reflect the moment of time that they were taken (Carrabine, 2014; Barlow, 2016).

Images get public attention because they cause an emotional response in the viewer, and due to this, images play a role in the construction of reality that can be used to shape the public’s opinions (Brown, 2014; Wheeldon & Harris, 2015). The uses of

images in law enforcement practices reflect the social constructed categories of criminality (Barlow, 2016). Barlow (2016), for example, used courtroom drawings to examine the construction of female co-offenders based on how they were portrayed by the artist. In her analysis of the courtroom depictions, she found that none of the women in the images were drawn as speaking but were instead depicted as listening, which she noted reinforces the maleness of the criminal justice profession. The images represented the women offenders as spectacles who are different than normal members of society (Barlow, 2016). This, in turn shows how female criminality is constructed and reinforced in drawings.

In a similar way, the police are constructed by the use of images presented both in fiction and non-fiction within different mediums like novels, film, television shows, and news stories (Garland & Bilby, 2011). The institution of policing has evolved over the years, and so has the image of the police held by the public (Bielejewski, 2016). Garland and Bilby (2011) analyzed the way police were portrayed in the BBC series *Life on Mars*, a show that places a modern day police officer in a 1970s police environment. The portrayal of the police in police procedurals reflects the current cultural atmosphere and the perceptions of the criminal justice system, law and order, and societal norms (Garland & Bilby, 2011). Similarly, Bielejewski (2016) did an analysis of the evolution of the portrayals of police in films and found that early images of the police in film focused on the strategy of policing as opposed to how currently the focus is on individual hero police officers fighting crime alone. Most people only see images of police through film and television, so these fictional portrayals are all the interaction they may have with police.

Images of police are not only shown on film and television, the police are seen regularly on news channels. Lee and McGovern (2013) looked at the image of police presented by public relations (PR) and media units within police institutions. The evolution of journalism and blogging has resulted in the ability for police departments to control the images of the police that are presented to the public (Lee & McGovern, 2016). Through the use of public relation (PR) and media units, the police are attempting to create the story before someone else does (Lee & McGovern, 2016). Controlling the information that is produced by the media affects how people see reality.

Social Construction

Reality is interpreted by individuals and is subjectively meaningful to them, as what they see as the world becomes real through their thoughts and actions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The way in which individuals view the world is based on their own social reality and, according to Quinney (1970),

Social reality is the world a group of people creates and believes in as their own. This reality is constructed according to the kind of 'knowledge' they develop, the ideas they are exposed to, the manner in which they are exposed to, the manner in which they select information to fit the world they are shaping, and the manner in which they interpret those conceptions. (pp. 22)

Social construction, which developed from Kantian philosophy, is the idea that an individual's observations of the world are based on their mental constructions of reality (Quinney, 1970; Cronley, 2010). According to Surette (2014), reality is seen by society as they have constructed it based on their own personal experience and knowledge from social interactions. While individuals' worlds differ to a degree, groups of individuals

who have access to similar knowledge and interact together will construct similar realities (Surette, 2014). Social construction is based on the notion that individual's experience reality differently and that meaning is based on interactions between and individual's interpretation of an experience and the social context that the experience occurs (Conley, 2010). "In sum, reality becomes a subjective, rather than an objective, experience that exists independent of people and communities" (Cronley, 2010, p. 320).

Individuals can create different social constructions after an event; however, the majority of society will only accept one construction at a time as reality (Best, 1987; Stallings, 1990; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Fulk, 1993; Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006; Sela-Shayovitz, 2007; Frailing & Harper, 2010; Cronley, 2010; Herd, 2011; Baldwin, Miller, Stogner, & Hach, 2012; Barlow, 2012; Surette, 2014; Surette, 2015). Competing social constructions offer different descriptions of the world and may argue for a set of public or individual policies be supported based on each construction (Surette, 2014). The dominant social construction has the greatest effect upon public policy. Social problems, such as crime, are subjected to competing social constructions, with groups competing for their reality to be considered legitimate. The likelihood that a construction will turn into reality relies heavily upon trends and social forces, as individuals may perceive the world to be in one state but instead the world is in another (Surette, 2014). Something may be considered a social problem at one time, but overlooked another time without any real change occurring to the problem (Surette, 2014).

Socialization is an important concept for social construction, as individuals are predisposed for socialization, and as individuals are socialized, they internalize the norms

of society (Zhao, 2006). Zhao (2006) notes that social interactions are where individuals gain the knowledge to construct meaning, with face-to-face interactions being the only way to interact. The Internet has changed the way social interactions and the way individuals construct reality, as everyday life is now organized around the 'here' and the 'there' of an individual's mediated reach (Zhao, 2006). Media now plays an important role in how individuals are able to get access to information on social constructs, and the amount of media attention allows a construct to become more visible and to become a part of the popular lexicon (Surette, 2015).

There is a gap between the newsmakers and academia on what is considered a real crime and justice problem, but news making criminology encourages criminologists to work with the media in the social construction process (Surette, 2015). Surette (2015), for example examined how social construction happens through the creation of copycat crimes. The idea of copycat crime was originally a vulgar insult used in the media that preempted its use in academia, which instead used imitation to classify crimes that shared similarities with first crime serving as the model for later crimes (Surette, 2015). Academic studies began using copycat crimes to refer to this phenomenon after the growth of its use in the media, which led to its acceptance in academia (Surette, 2015). Hence, the media contributes to the way that a society frames a problem of crime due to the way reports are presented to the public and the frequency that they are seen (Sela-Shayovitz, 2007).

As a result, the media has played a role in the creation of the social construction of gendered crime. Sela-Shayovitz (2007) studied the way that female suicide bombers were presented in the media. The images of female suicide bombers were shown as

distinctive of the traditional stereotypes of how Arab women should be in order to construct an explanation for the rise in female suicide bombers (Sela-Shayovitz, 2007). The media referenced the women's family background and physical appearance more frequently than for male suicide bombers and female suicide bombers were shown in traditional dress screaming and crying (Sela-Shayovitz, 2007).

Rindova, Pollock, and Hayward (2006) discuss how the media is used in the social construction of celebrities and how the ability to gain celebrity status is based on the carefully selected information broadcasted by the media. The media is able to construct celebrity based on a 'dramatized reality' that is itself based on a mixture of fact and fiction, emphasis on personal achievement, and a taste of their luxurious lifestyles, that combine to create a simplified portrait of a person (Rindova, et al., 2006). By the same token, the media can also be used to construct the way the public feels about certain social problems like homelessness and alcoholism. Cronley (2010) examined how the process of social construction and the external forces of the media, public relations, and political forces combined to shape perceptions of homelessness. Starting in the 1960s, homelessness was considered a result of both individual and structural factors, with skid row communities of makeshift houses being the early images (Cronley, 2010). The 1970-1980s individualistic culture of America and the neoconservative perspective of the Nixon Administration transformed the perception of homelessness to an isolated personal problem caused by individual factors such as personal problems and poor decision-making (Cronley, 2010).

Similarly to the construction of homelessness, Herd (2011) studied the construction of alcohol policies by social activists that were concerned with the role that

alcohol, drugs, and crime played in social disorder, the breakdown of community life, and the escalation of violence. Activists like Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), largely made up of white middle class women, focused on the criminalization of drunk driving and helped construct alcohol problems as an individual affliction (Herd, 2011). The public without the help of claims makers cannot accept social constructions, and the next section will cover the role that claims makers play in pushing the acceptance of social constructions.

Claims Makers

The creation of particular social constructions depends on the success of claims makers, who are promoters, activists, or anyone that is personally involved in promoting certain claims about a social problem (Surette, 2014). The goals of a claims maker is to convince others that there is a problem, define the problem, and suggest a solution or policy that will best solve the issue from their perspective (Best, 1987; Frailing & Harper, 2010). The claims maker is responsible for advocating for the acceptance of the social construction and will use resources such as the media to present their social construction to the public.

The rhetoric presented by the media plays a central role in the claims making process, as presented by a study on the claims of missing children to demonstrate the importance of the claims themselves (Best, 1987). The claims makers presented the tales of missing children by focusing on the blamelessness of the children, associating the missing children with other evils such as exploitative sexual deviance, and pointing out that the existing policies and resources cannot handle the increase in missing children that played on the public's sympathies toward children (Best, 1987).

Images also play an important role in the creation of social construction by creating image of a social problems that makes them more relatable to the audience and can encourage them to better understand how to properly respond to the problems. An example of this is the images presented by pro-choice advocates insisting that abortions be available for victims of rape while pro-life advocates present the image of women having abortions as doing so for their own convenience (Best, 1987). According to Best (1987), these images simplify the complex social issue of abortion into a concept that is more easily understood in order to create sympathy from the public for a particular claim. This function, images as simplified messages, is useful to claims makers because, images are not only reproductions of reality but are also mental pictures of something that is not real and can call attention to the significance of the visual and verbal imagery (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). The use of verbal imagery when discussing a social problem allows for the public to better envision the issue and what they believe to be the proper way to respond to it.

Another way that claims makers promote their social construction is through a phenomenon known as moral panic. Moral panics rely on the notion that a social problem will escalate and can bring an issue to public attention by making it appear as if the issue goes against social norms (Baldwin, Miller, Stogner, & Hatch, 2012). With moral panics, an issue that was not previously seen as a problem can quickly become something the public sees as a problem needing fixing. Moral panics need claims makers or moral entrepreneurs, who are outspoken against a certain problem and push for specific policy solutions, to be accepted by the public. Baldwin, Miller, Stogner, and Hatch (2012) did a study on Florida's passing of anti-rave laws with the use of moral panics, analyzing

official records and media articles for depictions of raves. The negative attentions presented by moral entrepreneurs that linked raves to drug and alcohol use caused the public to become hostile and increased their support for the passing of anti-rave laws (Baldwin et al., 2012). Claims makers use whatever tools are at their disposal to advance their social construction and the media is a powerful tool that claims makers can utilize to spread their claims to a larger audience.

Claims Makers and the Media

One way in which claims makers are able to present their claims to the public is through the media, because of the influence it holds in defining social conditions, teaching values and beliefs, as well as presenting a view of crime to the public (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Callanan, 2012). It is also an important information source for the public, with the ability to reach a large audience through newspapers or television programs – and increasingly, new media. The traditional media discourse is created by the careful selection of which news events, interviews, and experts are used to present a media story to the general public (Stalling, 1990). Claims makers can gain credibility to their claim with the ability to manipulate the media to present their claim as the dominant one. As previously mentioned, news reports shape public perceptions, so it is important that these reports resonate with the audience (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2008). Once a dramatic event occurs, there will be multiple claims makers appearing in order to present their claims. Claims that gain public acceptance use dramatic events to sway public attention and provide substantial proof that there is a problem that needs a solution (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2008).

Stalling (1990) studied the media discourse in the aftermath of bridges collapsing and the two separate explanations for why the bridges collapsed: the first claim portrayed human error as the cause, while the second claim held that it was due to natural causes (Stalling, 1990). The claims makers for the two competing frames used the media in order to sway public opinion towards their agenda. Having competing social constructions allows for media content to be more diverse and encourages media sources to make high quality content to keep their audience tuning in (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). According to Stalling (1990), successful claims need to connect the singular event to a pattern of similar events and to provide an explanation to the pattern that includes all of the events. For the bridge collapses to be considered a social problem in need of fixing the claims making needed to be successful in swaying the public; however, the bridge incidents were soon overlooked in the media (Stalling, 1990).

There is a struggle for meaning in media discourse due to the diverse access to resources and the power advantages some media outlets have over others (Gamson et al., 1992). Even if a claim is successful in getting featured in the media it does not guarantee that it will be the construction that is accepted by the public because a social construction needs to be internalized by the public in order to gain acceptance (Gamson et al., 1992; Fulk, 1993). According to Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson (1992) those who are in power control the lens through which the public acquires the images of the world. The public relies on the media professionals to provide experts on the events and to reassure the public that something is being done to solve the problem (Stalling, 1990). There is a difference between the individuals who are putting the information out in the media and the individuals who receive the information. Media professionals are information

gatekeepers whose duty is to keep the public informed, while the public, which is made up of individuals who are the audience members, are seen as passive and easily manipulated consumers of the information presented by the media professionals (Carpini & Williams, 2001).

Social Media

The growth of the Internet led to the movement away from traditional media to new media as the source for news. Claims makers use traditional media to present social constructions to a wider audience, though the media had control on what information was presented. Yar (2012), notes that traditional media produces and distributes information, which the audience receives and interprets based on their personal experiences. There are only a few media producers while there are numerous receivers; therefore, traditional media relies on one-way communication from the producers to the audience (Yar, 2012). At the inception of the Internet, websites were controlled by a select group of individuals and users were only able to read the information (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009). Technology has changed the way individuals interpret information as it can be expressed in multiple ways and the processes used by technology are constantly changing (Fulk, 1993).

In traditional media, the public was not involved in anything presented, but this changed with the evolution of the Internet to Web 2.0 (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2008). The term Web 2.0 was coined in 2004 and represented a change in the Internet where users can construct their own media narratives (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009; Stafanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2010). In Web 2.0 individuals do not create the content and applications presented. Instead they are continuously changed by the collaboration of

users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0 is based on the notion of User Generated Content (UGC), which is the sum of how users utilize the various forms of social media on the Internet (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social media are Internet-based applications that allow for UGC and are various technologies such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites, virtual worlds, and video sharing sites (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kane, Alavi, Lavianca, & Borgatti, 2014).

According to Kane, Alavi, Lavianca, and Borgatti (2014) there are four essential elements to social media sites:

- (1) [Users] have a unique user profile that is constructed by the user, by members of their network, and by the platform;
 - (2) access digital content through, and protect it from, various search mechanisms provided by the platform;
 - (3) can articulate a list of other users with whom they share a relational connection: and
 - (4) view and traverse their connections and those made by others on the platform.
- (pp. 5)

Today there are numerous social media sites that are used by millions of people such as MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn (Greenhow et al., 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kane et al., 2014). Social media allows for the public to have more personal control over the creation of a social construction.

Users of social media are involved in the creation of the content that is presented. News stories on social media sites maintain their relevance based on user created content instead of through the agenda of traditional media (Harrison & Barthel, 2009). The information that is presented on social media sites are controlled by the audience – who are now producers of self-generated content and are responsible for the distribution of the

content as well (Surette, 2014). Individuals are no longer just receiving their information from traditional media. Instead, with the new social media technologies they can now create their own information to present on the Internet. Utilizing Web 2.0 technologies, people will take something they see on the Internet and change it, combine it with other information, or add to it their own personal ideas to create something entirely new from what was already produced on the Internet (Weber & Mitchell, 2008; Lim, 2013).

The public is now more actively engaged with the creation of news stories and can also keep up with ongoing incidents in real time. The creation of Web 2.0 has led to the creation of countless sources for news; such as websites, social media sites, search engines, message boards, and blogs, all of which have the potential to defuse the gatekeeping function of the more traditional media (Maratea, 2008). With the everyday use of phones equipped with camera and video capability, can capture photographs or videos of news events (Ferrell & Van de Voorde, 2010). Due to the ability for anyone to have newsworthy information, the traditional media now must keep up with the demand. New media technologies, such as smart phones, have allowed individuals to influence the crime news gatekeeping process by bypassing the news industry (Surette, 2014). In traditional media, the public had little influence on what was produced, but the creation of the Internet and Web 2.0 has given the public more opportunities to be actively involved in the information that is received and target particular messages to consumers (Maratea, 2008).

Since the rise of the Internet, claims makers who can successfully persuade the public are proficient users of new media technologies and can manipulate their claims to better utilize the new media's structure of brief and viral stories to get more public

attention (Surette, 2014). The content presented on social media uses short sentences instead of longer paragraphs to better suit the shorter attention spans of the audience (Lim, 2013). It is now difficult to draw a line between the professional media and the consumer-created media, as they are becoming more connected with the help of media technology (Bennett, 2003). With social media photo sharing technology, a nonprofessional can upload and share an image that can be widely spread throughout the media (Ferrell & Van de Voorde, 2010), and thus participate in the social construction of reality.

The Social Construction of Police

Traditional media's portrayals of crime and law enforcement contribute to the public's social construction of the police. Sensational crime stories are presented in the media because they draw in more public attention, where the immediacy of the information draws in viewers, not whether the information is correct or misleading (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Pfeiffer, Windzio, & Kleimann, 2005). While the use of high profile crime stories may be a positive thing for network ratings, their repeated use can affect public perceptions of law enforcement. The actions that attract media coverage can dramatically affect citizen confidence with a single high profile event tarnishing the image of the police (Weitzer, 2002).

Large majorities of the general public do not come into personal contact with the police; instead they will get most of their information about police behavior through vicarious experiences or from what is reported in the media. According to Weitzer and Tuch (2004), when individuals see repeated instances of police misconduct or abuse presented in the media, they are more inclined to believe that there is a serious problem

with the police. Pfeiffer, Windzio, and Kleimann (2005) state that due to the limited scope of individual's personal experience with the police, the public is not able to make reliable assessments of the trends in the occurrence and gravity of offences instead individuals rely on what is reported by the mass media. The public is not aware of the reasons behind the increase or decrease in crime rates since crime occurs out of the public's view and their knowledge in this area comes from the media's representation of it (Pfeiffer et al., 2005; Yar, 2012).

If the media's representation of the police is repeated instances of the failings of law enforcement, the public's perception on the reliability of the police can be tarnished. The ability of the police to control crime is greatly affected if the public does not trust them as the police need to be seen as a legitimate authority in order for them to effectively do their job (Brown & Benedict, 2002). Legitimacy is based on the idea that legal authorities have the authority to dictate behavior (Tyler, Fagan, & Geller, 2014). If citizens have low perceptions of police legitimacy then they will be less willing to assist the police in criminal matters. Legitimacy has been linked to citizen behaviors that play a role in the success of police such as deference to police authority during personal interactions, the acceptance of police authority instead of private violence or disorder, compliance with the law, and the willingness to cooperate with police officers (Lawson, 2014).

Portrayals of crime in the media show the social construction of crime issues and the creation of narratives around crime, race, and class (Leverentz, 2012). There are many factors that can affect how individuals form their opinions on law enforcement. As Weitzer (2002) notes, there are a number of predictors such as age, race, class, personal

experience, and neighborhood characteristics that can shape an individual's opinion of the police. Individuals gain their perspectives on the legitimacy and legal authority of the police through processes that include childhood socialization and personal and peer experiences with the police (Tyler, Fagan, & Geller, 2014). African Americans and other minority groups have lower opinions of law enforcement as a result of their experience, either personal or vicarious, with the police.

The relationship between police and minority ethnic communities are marred by mutual mistrust, suspicion, and hostility (Garland & Bilby, 2011). There is the perception that minorities are more prone to criminal behavior, while the perception in minority communities is that they are aggressively policed by policies and procedures that target minorities specifically (Garland & Bilby, 2011). Interactions with the police where individuals are not detained or arrested and witnessing someone else interacting with the police can have a strong influence on an individual's views of the police (Tyler, Fagan, & Geller, 2014). The period of adolescence is seen as the key period where personal opinions are shaped, as adolescents will experience more frequent experiences with the police during this time (Tyler et al., 2014). The experiences of minorities with the police and the public outcry after so many deaths led to tensions between minority communities and the police.

The Black Lives Matter Movement

The tensions between the minority community and the police, the African American community took to social media to express their outrage. The Black Lives Matter Movement was founded following the deaths of African American's by the police and whether unjust or not, these deaths have caused tension in between the police and the

African American community. The Black Lives Matter Movement's demand for equality and the right for African American lives to 'matter' are reminiscent of the civil rights movements of the past (Yancy & Butler, 2012).

While the Black Lives Matter Movement itself is a new civil rights movement, its creation is rooted in almost 400 years of history of African American oppression and laws intended to discriminate against minority groups (Hoffman, Granger, Vallejos, & Moats, 2016). After President Obama was elected as the first black president, many believed that the United States had reached a post-racial society where racism is due to individual prejudice and ignores the racism that is in society (Hoffman et al., 2016; Larson, 2016). The seemingly increasing unjust death of African Americans by the police and the subsequent public backlash following the creation of the Black Lives Matter Movement demonstrate that there is no such thing as a post-racial society.

Historical Precedent

The Black Lives Matter Movement is picking up the mantle from the civil rights movements of the past to protest against institutional oppression from slavery to Jim Crow laws to mass incarceration. The Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery, but the creation of black codes and convict and vagrancy laws were created to control African Americans and keep them in a semblance of slavery (Alexander, 2012; Larson, 2016). Images of African Americans are used in order to justify the unequal treatment they face. Whites portrayed blacks as ignorant and childlike before the Civil War, but after the end of slavery they were seen as dangerous, menacing, and biologically predetermined to be violent (Alexander, 2012; Larson, 2016).

The current stereotype that African American men are aggressive angry predators more likely to resort to criminal acts can be traced to the images presented of African Americans following the end of slavery (Alexander, 2012). Similar strategies are used today in order to justify the violent responses to black citizens. When Rodney King was beaten in 1992, police officers were acquitted on their testimony that Rodney King had otherworldly strength (Larson, 2016). These are the same justifications used in the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Tamir Rice among others (Larson, 2016) Public backlash against the equality of African Americans led to the federal government no longer enforcing civil rights legislation, vagrancy and convict laws that placed the minority population slaves of the state, and the creation of Jim Crow legislation that separated blacks and whites (Alexander, 2012). The Civil Rights Movement grew from a small group of black students demonstrating peacefully to the large grassroots movement that protested against Jim Crow (Alexander, 2012). The Black Lives Matter Movement, like the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, is a grassroots movement.

The Black Lives Matter movement and the civil rights movement both had to face the racial indifference by the institutions, like the police, courts, and schools, which are supposed to protect them (Larson, 2016). However, some have criticized the Black Lives Movement for failing to remain non-violent, not adhering to black respectability, not having a hierarchical leadership stricter, and not having a clear agenda (Hooker, 2016). According to Hooker (2016), these critics have a romantic notion of how they believe the civil rights movements in the 1960s was, with narratives downplaying the disagreements between activists and the ineffectiveness of non-violence and instead they see civil rights activists as respectable protestors who engage in non-violent protests. The Civil Rights

Movement used grassroots organizing and the mobilization of public opinion, but recent years the Civil Rights organization has been regarded as a more professional movement (Alexander, 2012). The Black Lives Matter Movement has returned to the grassroots form of activism

The Black Lives Matter Movement

Founded by Aliza Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, the Black Lives Matter movement was established because African Americans' felt their lives were being systematically targeted for demise (Garza, 2014; Altman, 2015; Olteanu, Weber, Ingmar, & Gatica-Perez, 2015, Rickford, 2016; Cobb, 2016; Obsagie & Newman, 2016). The Black Lives Matter movement emerged after the acquittal of George Zimmerman of the death of Trayvon Martin in 2013 and gained legitimacy following the death of Michael Brown in 2014. The easy acceptance of self-defense as a justification for the deaths of unarmed African American men and women and the failure of the criminal justice system to prosecute those responsible, sends the message to the African American community that their lives are unimportant (Yancy & Butler, 2015). George Zimmerman's acquittal was seen as further evidence that the criminal justice system views black lives as expendable (Bailey & Leonard, 2015; Altman, 2015; Olteanu et al., 2015, Rickford, 2016; Cobb, 2016; Obsagie & Newman, 2016).

After the acquittal, Aliza Garza made a post of Facebook ending, "Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter", which was then reposted by Patrisse Cullors with the added hashtag black lives matter (Bailey & Leonard, 2015; Altman, 2015; Olteanu, Weber, Ingmar, & Gatica-Perez, 2015, Rickford, 2016; Cobb, 2016; Obsagie & Newman, 2016). Aliza Garza and Patrisse Cullors joined with Opal Tometi in the creation of the

social media campaign now known as Black Lives Matter which asks individuals to share their personal stories with the hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter, on their social media accounts (Langford & Speight, 2015). The movement was slow growing until the 2014 shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri by police officer Darren Wilson, which caused the Black Lives Matter hashtag to trend on social media and gain national press attention.

Following Michael Brown's death, African Americans took to Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to express their outrage over the attempt of officials to place the blame on Michael Brown for his own death and the practice of branding the victims as "criminals" and "thugs" as a way to devalue the black life that was taken (Bailey & Leonard, 2015). African American's are often seen through lenses that portray them as threatening even when they are unarmed, standing with hands up, or running away. "These figures are perceived as threats even when they do not threaten, when they have no weapon, and the video footage that shows precisely this is taken to be a ratification of the police's perception" (Yancy & Butler, 2015). The image of the black man is the image of the criminal in the minds of the public and the police, so that no matter what the man is doing, he is seen as a threat (Yancy & Butler, 2015).

The Black Lives Matter movement has reinvigorated activists, including the older generation, to retake the mantle of the 1960s and 1970s civil rights movement (Rickford, 2016). Olteanu, Weber, Ingmar, and Gatica-Perez (2015) looked at the twitter demographics of users that post using the Black Lives Matter hashtag and they found that African Americans are more active than other demographic groups. Women are more active in the hashtag than men, with the similar portions between African American

women and white women (Olteanu et al., 2015). Women have played an important role in the creation and continued function of the Black Lives Matter movement. The movement itself was founded by three women, two of which identify as queer, and the movement has worked to ensure that equality with an emphasis on gender and identity are the characteristics of the movement (Altman, 2015; Rickford, 2016; Cobb, 2016). Members of the Black Lives Matter movement who self-identify as feminists, LGBTQ, working class, and of low income identify with the movements fight to keep marginalized peoples stories from being erased (Rickford, 2016). Even though women created the Black Lives Matter movement, images of African American men facing police violence and death are constantly being presented in the media (Rickford, 2016).

The Black Lives Matter hashtag tends to be utilized more after incidents of African American death by police and the attention paid to the hashtag are representative of when the topic is considered a hot topic in the media (Olteanu, Weber, Ingmar, & Gatica-Perez, 2015). With the growing popularity of the Black Lives Matter hashtag, the phrase itself has become a rally cry for the movement as an expression of the outrage felt by the African American community (Altman, 2015; Rickman, 2016). Though the meaning of the phrase is a source of debate, as some activists define it as representing the fight against police violence while others use it to bring awareness to a wide variety of social injustices (Altman, 2015). However the phrase is defined, the Black Lives Matter hashtag is a demand for equality that reflects the past struggles of slavery, segregation, housing struggles, and the mass imprisonment of black lives (Yancy & Butler, 2015).

Activists and supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement are demanding accountability and an end to the death of black people by the police (Rickford, 2016).

Taking a stand against respectability politics is a central focus for the movement. Respectability politics is the notion that the only way for minority groups to properly respond to any form of racism is by behaving in a respectable way – to endear themselves to the dominant group (Rickford, 2016; Obasogie & Newman, 2016). Obasogie and Newman (2016) note that respectability politics are a survival technique used to fight against the violence faced by African Americans due to the stereotypes of racial inferiority. Lives should matter and should not automatically deserve deadly force because of perceived non-respectability (Obasogie & Newman, 2016).

Until the Black Lives Matter Movement articulates a clear analysis of the effect of the dominant white culture on the black community, the movement is unlikely to be able to create an agenda to create systematic change (Rickford, 2016). While the Black Lives Matter movement lacks a clear agenda, many of its activists are revitalizing civil rights activism. The Black Lives Matter movement is using a grassroots resistance that is based on the protest tradition of the civil rights era (Rickford, 2016). According to Rickford (2016), activists use disruptive techniques such as occupations of police stations, municipal buildings, and highways, “die-ins”, marches, and rallies. Due to the African American’s lack of faith in state or federal officials, the activists involved in the Black Lives Matter movement have embraced the street as the place where they will be able to spread their message (Rickford, 2016).

While the Black Lives Matter movement has followed a similar path as the Civil Rights movement in many respects, the organizational structure of the Black Lives Matter movement has deviated. Instead of having an individual or group of individuals who are considered the leader like in the Civil Rights era, the Black Lives Matter

movement follows a group-centered model of leaders that is based on the idea that no single person or group should make decisions on behalf of the movement (Harris, 2015; Larson, 2016; Hoffman, Granger, Vallejos, & Moats, 2016). Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, in an interview with Cobb (2016) notes that having a singular leader of a movement takes away control from the members of the organization and the community. While the group-centered model and the lack of definable agenda of the movement have helped in the growth, it has opened the movement up to criticisms. The lack of agenda and little to organization in the movement has confused supporters and opponents alike (Hoffman, Granger, Vallejos, & Moats, 2016; Larson, 2016; McWhirter, Fields, & Calfas, 2016).

There is concern in the movement on the right way to advance the cause, with peaceful protests turning violent and police deaths being attributed to the movement, making it clear that a specific agenda is almost impossible to distinguish (McWhirter, Fields, & Calfas, 2016). Following the shootings of police officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge, the black Lives Matter Movement has become labeled as “anti-police” with critics claiming that the movement is calling for and is responsible for the deaths of police (Altman, 2016; Rickford, 2016). Others claim that the recent scrutiny placed on police is the cause of the rise in violent crimes and police death (Altman, 2015). The public has expressed criticisms that the Black Lives Matter Movement has excluded other groups from ‘mattering’, so other hashtags were created to counter Black Lives Matter.

The Blue Lives Matter

Following the creation of the Black Lives Matter hashtag, a few counter movements were created that play upon the phrase, such as #AllLivesMatter,

#BlueLivesMatter, and #WhiteLivesMatter. These counter-movements shift the focus away from the violence and discrimination of black lives in favor of whiteness (Langford & Speight, 2015; Rickford, 2016). Garza (2014) notes that when the “Black” is dropped from the movement, it fails to acknowledge that it came from somewhere and it further erases African American lives and the contributions from the movement legacy. The use of hashtags like #AllLivesMatter or #BlueLivesMatter, misunderstands the scope of the problem, not because the hashtag is wrong, but because, in reality, not all lives are considered to matter (Yancy & Butler, 2015).

There has not been much research done on the Blue Lives Matter movement. This may be in part because Blue Lives Matter is not considered an organized movement. However, there is a community of individuals who use the phrase as support for the police, with merchandise to purchase to show support for police officers and Facebook groups where supporters can interact. According to Blumenthal (2016) the Facebook page Blue Lives Matter is where supporters have called for the group to organize in order to face the threat to police lives. There are some supporters of Blue Lives Matter that claim that the Black Lives Matter movement should be called a terrorist group that is trying to wage a war against the police (Blumenthal, 2016).

The #BlueLivesMatter hashtag is an attempt to reestablish the institutional system by saying that law enforcement are under attack from the Black Lives Matter movement activists (Langford & Speight, 2015). According to Langford and Speight (2015), the hashtag #BlueLivesMatter was first used by radio personality Barry Gadbois in 2014 and was utilized more than 120,000 times in the following four months. The phrase gained

more popularity following the creation of Black Lives Matter after Michael Brown's death in 2014 (Blumenthal, 2016; Izadi, 2016).

The #BlueLivesMatter hashtag creates a conflict with the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag with the notion that the Black Lives Matter movement is endangering the lives of law enforcement (Langford & Speight, 2015). The #BlueLivesMatter campaign presents the idea that the two movements are mutually exclusive and that the belief that Black Lives Matter means that police lives do not matter (Langford & Speight, 2015). After the death of police officers in Dallas, it would seem as though the phrase Blue Lives Matter is as needed as the Black Lives Matter phrase (Lennard, 2016). However, Lennard (2016) states that it is unnecessary to use the phrase Blue Lives Matter because it does not need to be said, as there is no doubt that police lives matter. After the death of police officers, there was immediate response from police and from government officials, with even President Obama making a statement about the deaths, which is what "mattering" means (Lennard, 2016). While the deaths of African Americans by police are considered normal and no one, police officers included, has faced consequences for their deaths (Blumenthal, 2016; Lennard, 2016).

There are four men who have been arrested for making posts on social media supporting the violence against the police, including one man who made a post claiming the man who killed the police in Dallas was a hero, though no one has yet to be arrested for their comments supporting violence toward Black Lives Matter supporters (Blumenthal, 2016; LaChance, 2016). The four men have not been charged, though the police chief in Detroit have stated that he wants the men charged with a crime (LaChance, 2016). Also, following the Dallas shooting, Louisiana has created a "Blue

Lives Matter” legislation that has likened police officers to oppressed minorities and protects them under hate crime laws (Blumenthal, 2016; Lennard, 2016; Izadi, 2016).

There are 37 states that have enhanced penalties for assaulting police, but Louisiana is the first state to make police a protected class (Izadi, 2016).

Blue Lives Matter does not have the same historical precedent that Black Lives Matter has which ranges from slavery, Jim Crow segregation, the Civil Rights era, and on to mass incarceration. The closest historical movement to Blue Lives Matter was the use of the “Support the Troops” slogan. The mainstream media used beliefs of citizenship in order to create support for war and to stigmatize those that opposed war (Coy, Woehrle, & Maney, 2008). The use of “Support the Troops” was what Coy, Woehrle, and Maney (2008) refer to as discursive legacies that are well-established repetitive ways of talking about a particular subject. Discursive legacies use emotion to gain support, and the “Support the Troops” slogan is a rhetorical statement that is meant to question individual’s patriotism (Coy, Woehrle, & Maney, 2008). Blue Lives Matter has grown from a reactive slogan into a pro-police movement that has affected policy in the creation of the Blue Lives Matter laws (Bacon Jr, 2016).

Summary

Reality is constructed based on individual’s personal experiences and observations of the world through face-to-face interactions or through the information they receive from the media (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Quinney, 1970; Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006; Zhao, 2006; Sela-Shayovitz, 2007; Cronley, 2010; Herd, 2011; Carrabine, 2014; Surette, 2014; Surette, 2015; Wheeldon & Harris, 2015; Barlow, 2016). Individuals have different experiences, so their realities may differ, though

individuals that share similar experiences will create similar realities (Quinney, 1970). African American's have a different experience with the police as opposed to whites; therefore, the reality of police as constructed by minority groups will differ from the reality created by whites (Weitzer, 2002; Garland & Bilby, 2011; Tyler, Fagan, & Geller, 2014). Public perception of the police can affect the ability for the police to properly control crime, so it is important for police to maintain a good relationship with minority communities (Weitzer, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004; Leverentz, 2012).

The rise in public outcry following the death of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown and subsequent lack of justice has created tension between the police and the African American community. The Black Lives Matter Movement is a reflection of the reality that the African American community face with the police, while the counter-movement Blue Lives Matter reflects an entirely different version of the police. The growth of social media sites allowed for images from major events to reach the public and has also allowed for individuals to join together and create a social campaign to take a stand against African American deaths. Black Lives Matter used social media sites like Instagram and Twitter to present images from protests, their thoughts and opinions, and appeal to a larger audience all while being in complete control of the content that was presented (Fulk, 1993; Maratea, 2008; Gabbidon & Higgins, 2008; Weber & Mitchell, 2008; Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009; Harrison & Barthel, 2009; Ferrell & Van de Voorde, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Stafanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2010; Lim, 2013; Kane, Alavi, Lavianca, & Borgatti, 2014; Surette, 2014). Images of the police are regularly presented in the Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter hashtags on

Instagram and Twitter, because the police are at the forefront of the conflict in the African American community and regularly appear at protests.

Previous research has looked at images of the police that are presented in media such as novels, films, television shows, and the use of law enforcement public relation units to regulate law enforcement on news media (Garland & Bilby, 2011; Bielejewski, 2016; Lee & McGovern, 2016). There has not been any research done on the images of police being presented on the social media sites Instagram and Twitter, or on images of police as constructed by two competing groups. This research will use an ethnographic content analysis to analyze images of police from Instagram and Twitter that are used with the competing hashtags Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter to look at the competing constructions of police by two opposing groups.

CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

Content analysis, which was first completed in 1941, is the systematic reading of texts, images, and symbolic matter (Krippendorff, 2013). It is used as a method for analyzing written, verbal, or visual communications (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Content analysis was first utilized for hymns, newspapers, and magazines but evolved with the growth of other mass media (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Krippendorff, 2013). According to Krippendorff (2013), in the 1930s and 1940s the public felt that mass media was the cause of social problems and there was no information on the use of mass media and what it was capable of. Content analysis used mass media as data for testing hypotheses and for evaluating the use of mass media (Krippendorff, 2013). Early use of content analysis was limited to a quantitative research method, but now content analysis can be used for qualitative research methods (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

A researcher using content analysis should become immersed in the data so that insights and theories have a chance to emerge (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Qualitative content analysis encourages data to emerge from the reading of the text and inferences are drawn from verbal, pictorial, symbolic, and communication data (Krippendorff, 2013). Content is not universal because people differ in their interpretation of texts, so messages sent in mass media may be interpreted by the audience differently than intended (Krippendorff, 2013). There is not an established manner to use content analysis as a research method, since researchers have the ability to judge the variations that are most appropriate for their problem (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Krippendorff (2013) acknowledges that qualitative content analyses have been criticized for not having a systematic way of analyzing and

interpreting data. Proponents of qualitative content analysis argue that each text is unique and has the possibility of multiple interpretations (Krippendorff, 2013).

This study will be done using the ethnographic content analysis (ECA) methodology developed by David Altheide (1996). Ethnographic content analysis (ECA) blends the traditional quantitative content analysis approach with participant observation by tracking discourse, which is a process that allows key themes to emerge and symbolic connections to become apparent (Grimes, 2010). With the use of ethnographic content analysis (ECA), documents can be used to place symbolic meaning in context, track the process of the documents creation, and let understanding emerge from a detailed investigation (Altheide, 1996).

This study will follow the Altheide's (1996) five stages of ethnographic content analysis: documents, protocol development and data collection, data coding and organization, data analysis, and report. Ethnographic content analysis (ECA) offers a different view for studying the use of visuals and text in media reports (Altheide, 1996). Ethnographic content analysis focuses on emerging themes and requires the researcher to be immersed in the content and then theoretically sample and search through the content (Altheide & Coyle, 2006).

The aim of this study is to look at how the police are portrayed in images on the social media sites Instagram and Twitter using the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter. Instagram is a mobile photo and video capturing and sharing site that provides an instant way for users to take photos and share them with others (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). Since its creation in 2010, Instagram has over 150 million users and an average 55 million photos uploaded each day (Hu, Manikonda, &

Kambhampati, 2014). The key features of Instagram are the manipulation tools, including filters to change the original image and the ability to share an image from Instagram to a number of other social media sites instantly (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). “It also allows users to add captions, hashtags using the # symbol to describe the pictures and videos, and tag or mention other users by using the @ symbol (which effectively creates a link from their posts to the referenced user’s account) before posting them” (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014, p. 596). Twitter, created in 2006, has become the second most popular social media site after Facebook (Bruns, 2011). Twitter users are able to make a 140-character post that can be visible to the public or can only be viewed by their approved list of ‘followers’ (Bruns, 2011). Like Instagram, Twitter uses hashtags, which are “shared keywords or abbreviations that is preceded by the hash symbol ‘#’ which enable the manual or automatic collation of all tweets containing the same #hashtag, as well as allowing users to subscribe to content feeds that contain only those tweets which feature specific #hashtags” (Bruns, 2011, p. 1).

The first step for the ethnographic content analysis is to gather the relevant documents, which in this case are Instagram images of police from both the #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter hashtag. The next step, constructing the protocol for this study is to list several items or categories to guide the data collection, and then to draft a data collection sheet. Then collecting data from several documents to test the protocol; and themes, frames, and discourse will be used in order to define situations and provide much of the rationale for document analysis. Then arrive at a sampling rationale and strategy that will allow comparisons and contrasts of the facts.

There needs to be a wide range of samples in order to allow for meanings and themes to emerge.

This study will use progressive theoretical sampling, which is based on emerging understanding of the topic and to select images based on conceptual or theoretical relevant reasons. There will be 300 total images gathered from Instagram and Twitter, with 100 coming from Instagram and 200 coming from Twitter. The images that will be collected in relation to the #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter hashtag will be images of police or things related to the police and any other relevant images that may appear once data collection takes place. The most recent 100 images will be taken from Instagram, as it is not possible to access images from a specific time frame on Instagram. Both the Instagram image and the caption on the photo will be taken in order to establish the context of the document.

Images will be taken from Twitter, with 100 from the time frame of June 22, 2016 to July 5, 2016 and 100 from July 6, 2016 to July 20, 2016. These dates were selected because they are two weeks before and two weeks after the death of Philando Castile in Minnesota. Officer Jeronimo Yanez shot Philando Castile seven times during a traffic stop on July 6, 2016, after Castile informed Officer Yanez that he possessed a concealed carry permit and that he had a gun in his pocket (Capecchi & Smith, 2016). The time frame selected also includes the July 5th death of Alton Sterling by police officers, the July 7th police shooting in Dallas, and the July 17th police shooting in Baton Rouge. The dates were chosen in order to assess the difference in images presented under the hashtags before and after high profile incidents.

The data is collected based on the protocol created and about halfway through the collection examine the data to allow for emergence, refinement, or collapsing of categories and then make adjustments to the rest of the data. Images selected from Instagram and Twitter were images of police officers or anything related to law enforcement that have the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter. Atlas.ti, qualitative analysis software, was used to code the images. The images were open coded based on the content of the photo. Once images were open-coded the codes were then combined in order to create categories, which were then used to create the themes.

CHAPTER IV – FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The social construction of police has been aided by the growth of social media. Images of police are no longer only seen through traditional media like television and newspapers. Individuals now have the ability with social media to present images of their own personal experiences with police for public consumption. The images of police presented reflect the differing experiences of the individuals posting the images. This study looked at two competing hashtags that reflect two different groups, #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter. The results show that each hashtag presented different constructions of police. The findings from the analysis will be presented along with the construction of police developed by the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Blue Lives Matter Movement.

Black Lives Matter

There were 150 images of police taken from Instagram and Twitter that used #BlackLivesMatter to caption their photos. The images were open coded based on the content of the photos. The codes were then combined into categories that make up the themes. There were four themes that emerged from the #BlackLivesMatter images. The first theme is the celebration of excessive force where the police were shown taking pride in their use of force against suspects. The second theme is racial animosity, which shows a possible relationship between the police and the African American community. The third theme is police as social justice disruptors, which shows how the police disrupt individuals expressing their socially progressive viewpoints. The final theme is that the police are community oriented, which shows an attempt at building police-community

relationships. Table 1 presents the categories and codes that make up the four themes of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Table 1

Themes from #BlackLivesMatter

Theme	Category		Codes	Frequency
Celebrating Excessive Force				106
	Use of Force	94	Arrest Injury Non-Lethal Round Pepper Spray Property Damage Resistance Scream Use of Force Weapon	
Racial Animosity	Civil Rights Movement	12		328
	Lack of Accountability	34	Black Death Civil Rights Movement Death By Police Injustice	
	Racial Motivation	62	Arrestee Concern Discrimination Indifference Oppression	
	Fear	78	Annoyance Arrest Black Death Bombing Bullet Holes Death Death by Police Fear Pain Shooting	
	Untrustworthy	154	Anger Camera Cellphone Censorship	

			Crowd	
			Dash Camera	
			News Report	
			Newspaper	
			Protest	
			Recording	
			Suspicion	
			Video Camera	
Social Justice				454
Disruptors				
	Protests	149	Artwork	
			Civil Rights Movement	
			Confrontational	
			Contempt	
			Conversation	
			Protest	
			Women's March	
	Crowd Control	305	Baton	
			Cop Car	
			Crowd	
			Motorcycle	
			Non-lethal Round	
			Pepper Spray	
			Para-military Units	
			Protection	
			Protest	
			Riot	
			Riot Gear	
			Road Blocking	
			Taser	
			Use of Force	
			Water Spray	
			Weapons	
Community				45
Oriented				
	Police-Community	45	Community	
	Relations			
			Friendly	
			Happy	
			Hug	
			Vigils	

Celebration of Excessive Force

The first #BlackLivesMatter theme that emerged from the data is the celebration of excessive force. Police use of force is force that is proportionate to the threat faced by police and uses the minimum amount of force required to control the situation (Gerber & Jackson, 17). Excessive force cannot be justified as proper procedure and is when the amount of force used by the police exceeds the seriousness of the threat (Smith & Holmes, 14; Gerber & Jackson, 17). The images of police officers in the #BlackLivesMatter in Twitter and Instagram show the police officers celebrating their use of excessive force on individuals being arrested or at involved in protests. The construction of the police that is created by the #BlackLivesMatter images show the police as being excessively violent and aggressive when handing arrests and protestors. The images portray the police as untroubled and even cheerful when they are engaging in excessive force.

In 94 of the 150 images, police are shown to be engaging in some form of force when dealing with the public. These images include pictures of forceful arrests, police inflicting injury, and officers using weapons like batons and pepper spray to control situations. Of all the #BlackLivesMatter pictures, 12 of them were from the Civil Rights era, there are 6 of police officers beating and arresting civil rights activists. The images of the Civil Rights Movement show white police officers arresting and using excessive force against both African American and white protestors. A few of the images from the Civil Rights Movement are images of leading figures of equality movements. In an image of Susan B. Anthony, which according to the caption takes place as she is attempting to vote, she is seen laying on the ground with her hands protecting her face while a group of white police officers loom over her with fists and batons raised. In another image, Martin

Luther King Jr. is being arrested and shoved forward over a counter with his arms being twisted behind his back. Another image is of a still from a dash camera of police officers in the middle of beating Rodney King. In one photograph the police are arresting and fighting a group of protestors who are chained together and one officer is seen arresting, as identified in the comments of the photo, a young Senator Bernie Sanders.

There are other images that are from the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s that are seen in #BlackLivesMatter, with these images portraying African American protestors being arrested by white police officers. An image shows a singular white police officer in the middle of a fight with three African American men, with the officer holding on to one man's shirt and swinging a baton to strike the man, while the other two men are in the background destroying property. The Civil Rights Movement images shows the police and protestors at odds, with police officers always shown in engaging in physical altercations with both African American and white protestors. An image of a Time's magazine cover with a black man running away from a crowd of police with the caption "America, 1968" with the 1968 crossed out and 2015 written in its place reflects the idea that America has not changed much since the 1960s in terms of African American relations with police.



Figure 1. Black Lives Matter, Twitter, Image 135.

This is reflected in the more recent images of the police engaging in excessive force with protestors, and shows that regardless of the progress that came from the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Lives Matter Movement still feels as though the police are mistreating members of the African American community.

Though the majority of images of use of force in #BlackLivesMatter show white police officers with African American individuals, the images also include instances of police using what appears to be excessive force on white individuals as well. One image shows a woman at a protest screaming and being dragged away by police officers. The caption under the photo states that the woman was shot by a non-lethal round at a protest for the inauguration of Donald Trump. A comment for the picture, “Fuck rubber go lethal and people not to fuck around”, which demonstrates the idea that excessive force, is being glorified. It is difficult to tell in just a snapshot of a moment whether or not the

force used by the police is actually excessive. In some of the images, it states in the captions and comments that these are acts of excessive force, but in others it is impossible to tell; however by the expressions on the faces of the police officers and in some comments the celebration of the use of force by the public and police officers is what is being shown. Images had captions such as “you’ll be purple when I’m done beating you” and one picture showed a cake with a drawing of a police officer tazing someone with “I’m sorry I tazed you”. These comments show how use of force is being trivialized and normalized as just a normal occurrence.

One photograph that illustrates this shows a man of indeterminate race on the ground struggling with two black police officers kneeling above him with the caption, “NYPD officer who stomped on suspect’s head will not abide by ‘unlawful’ order to resign from the force.” This gives off the impression that the police officer involved in this situation does not see that they are in the wrong and that in fact the office is the victim for being asked to resign over incident. Figure 2 shows an image of a group of three police officers and a man in civilian clothes that have restrained a black man face down. The man in civilian clothes is holding the restrained man’s feet in the air, while a police officer is smiling for a picture holding the man’s arms and the back of his pants up.



Figure 2. Black Lives Matter, Twitter, Image 117.

In other images within the excessive force theme, police officers use weapons to restrain individuals. In one such example a white male police officer has a black man positioned on the ground with a gun pressed up against the back of his neck while another man stands nearby with a gun aimed at the ground. Another image takes place after a police officer tackled a black woman in a bathing suit in a residential area. The woman is seen on the ground screaming in pain while the police officer is leaning down to grab her arm with a gun gripped in his hand. An image of newspaper article on the shooting of Alton Sterling is another example of the police using excessive force. The article is captioned in bold letters “His hands were empty” and showed Sterling laying on his back dead from a gunshot wound with a white police officer on his side on the ground with a gun aimed directly at the wounded Sterling.

The individuals facing excessive force from the Civil Rights Movement images are shown fighting against the police officers but the individuals facing excessive force in the more recent images are shown as more non-resistant. The images show police officers

engaging in aggressive physical altercations with individuals who appear to be unarmed and not resisting police authority. The images in the #BlackLivesMatter tag constructs police officers as indifferent and in some instances celebrating the need to use force. The police are placed in an antagonistic position as they are shown in the images as being aggressive with citizens who are either protesting or are being non-resistant.

Racial Animosity

The second #BlackLivesMatter theme that emerged from the data analysis is racial animosity. The photographs taken from the #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter and Instagram reveal a friction between the police and the African American community. The racial animosity that is presented is a bi-directional relationship, with the police being fearful of African Americans and African Americans fearing the police. In the 150 images of police in #BlackLivesMatter, there were 328 instances of racial animosity. Racial animosity as a theme is made up of the categories: lack of accountability, racial motivation, fear, and police as untrustworthy. The images show the strain in the relationship between these two groups, the call for the police to be more accountable for their actions towards the African American community, and highlights how the public views the police as untrustworthy.

Images tagged with #BlackLivesMatter, attempted to demonstrate that the racial motivation of the police is something that the African American community must be wary of. The construction of police presented in the images highlighted the fear in the African American community that law enforcement targets them specifically due to their race. One example of this appears in an image of a cartoon of an African American man and a white man holding a sign between them that reads 'Equal Justice'. Two white

police officers are shown standing next to the African American man and asking him if he had a permit while ignoring the white man that is doing exactly the same thing. The images portray a dichotomy between the way that law enforcement treats African Americans and minorities compared to white citizens. One image shows the difference between the way police interact with the Black Lives Matter Movement protestors and images of police at a Klu Klux Klan (KKK) protest. In the image from the KKK protest, the police are seen standing intermingled with the protestors; but in the images from Black Lives Matter Movement protests the police are dressed in riot gear and shown in standing in a line in front of the protestors.

The #BlackLivesMatter images underline the assumption that the police are treating the Black Lives Matter protestors as a threat while the police are shown to be protecting the white protestors. This is also evident in images from the Women's March in Washington, where police are shown in the middle of the protests with friendly smiles and some are seen in the Women's March signature pink hat. This is opposed to the police at Black Lives Matter protests, where they are shown wearing full riot gear with shields, weapons, and encircling the protestors. These images present the idea that police officers need to be vigilant around African American's because they are more likely to cause problems. This is illustrated in an image of a group of police officers surrounding an African American child on a bicycle with the caption: "police be like, officer needs assistance, suspect armed and dangerous." This image is a parody on the idea that police believe that a suspect will be more dangerous to them because they are African American.

Minority families must manage with the reality that the police may consider them, including their children, to be a threat to law enforcement safety. There are two images that emphasize the caution that Black Lives Matter feels that families must take in educating their children about law enforcement. One cartoon shows the difference between a conversation between a father and son where the white father's talk with his son reflects the traditional birds and the bees while the African American father's talk with his son is about the criminal justice system and the danger that he may face with the police. Figure 3 is an illustration that shows an African American family with the parents somberly explaining to their son about a news report on their television that shows a white police officer and a young African American boy. Minority families have to face the reality that law enforcement may not have their best interest in mind, so they need to have a specific conversation with their children about the possibility that the police may target them due to their race. Due to the seemingly increasing rates of African American's deaths at the hands of police, many African American families may feel as though their children need to be cautious in their encounters with a police officer.



iammstavariholiday Yes, we still live in a world where black people and people of color are forced to have conversations with our children about the dangers of police. #thenewjimcrow #modernslavery #amerikkka #murderersinblue #biggestganginamerica #blacklivesmatter #brownlivesmatter #indiginouslivesmatter #racismisaliveandwell #freeyourmind #openyoureyes #staywoke 🇺🇸

Figure 3. Black Lives Matter, Instagram, Image 31.

Images tagged #BlackLivesMatter call out the police’s lack of accountability for any of the issues. Many of the signs at the protests call for “Justice for Philando”, “Am I Next?”, “This isn’t something we just let go”, and “No more.” These reflect the frustration in Black Lives Matter about the continuing deaths, injuries, and perceived injustice faced by minorities. Another images show a line of police officers blocking a protest and a protestors standing near them with ‘too many cops too little justice’ on a sign. Images of graffiti on the wall that also reiterates the notion of the lack of justice that comes from the increased amount of police officers. One graffiti questions: “who will protect the public when the police are the ones violating the law?” Figure 4 is an image of a black woman that is holding a sign that says, “You’re only Blue 40 hours a week, I’m Black 24/7 365” in front of a large group of police officers. So the implication is that

while the police may feel as though they are in danger when dealing with minorities, for minorities the threat of a negative run-in with the police is something they face daily.



Figure 4. Black Lives Matter, Twitter, Image 231.

Through the images presented in #BlackLivesMatter, the public are constructing an image of the police as unaccountable for their actions against the public. A post shows four images of groups of police officers with the satirical caption: “I love the How to Get Away with Murder cast,” which plays on the notion that the police are able to essentially murder African Americans and not face any form of punishment. The distrust in the police has led the Black Lives Matter Movement to feel that they must film or take pictures of their encounters with the police to protect themselves. There are 53 instances where individuals are seen in images using some form of media like a cell phone or camera during an incident. Recording the encounters with the police allows them to have physical evidence to protect them from the police or to release to the public. In one image two white police officers are on the ground restraining a black woman while a shadow of

a person holding what appears to be a cell phone up recording the incident. Another is of a large group of protestors handcuffed and sitting in the middle of the street while a crowd of people watch with cell phones pointed at the protestors to record the arrests. In a similar situation, protestors are being handcuffed in the median of a highway while two women are standing on the side with cell phones either taking pictures or recording the arrest. The incidents may not have been reported on in traditional media; but because individuals can post the images or videos on social media sites, they are accessible to the public.

Police as Social Justice Disruptors

The next #BlackLivesMatter theme that emerged from data analysis is that police are shown as being social justice disruptors. There were 149 occurrences of some form of protests seen in the 150 #BlackLivesMatter images. The majority of the protests were in relation to the Black Lives Matter Movement as protests over law enforcement's unequal treatment toward minorities. Individuals gathered together to protest social justice issues like human rights and inequality. In the images of protests, there is a large police presence and they are shown being aggressive and arresting protestors effectively keeping the protestors from engaging in free speech.

The images of protests show police in riot gear with bulletproof vests, helmets, shields, batons, zip tie handcuffs, and other weapons that make them appear militaristic. At protests the police are typically shown in large groups lined up in a way that makes quite the intimidating presence. Figure 5 shows a line of police officers shoulder-to-shoulder dressed in body armor, helmets, and holding clear shields in front of them, while behind them in the distance is a group of protestors gathered together. Another image

shows a group of police officers dressed in riot gear with full body clear shields in front of them with two officers in front holding a weapon.



Figure 5. Black Lives Matter, Twitter, Image 145.

The police come to protests in riot gear as if they suspect that the protests are going to become violent. Figure 6 is of a man at a protest holding up a mirror with “want to see who came to riot look for who dressed for a riot” and in the mirror you see the reflection of a group of police dressed in riot gear.



Figure 6. Black Lives Matter, Instagram, Image 35.

The construction of police presented in #BlackLivesMatter is that the police are blocking their attempts at effecting social change because their presence might deter individuals from attending protests or because they police are arresting protestors. Images show police controlling the crowds at protests with non-lethal forces like water cannons and other weapons like guns, which can be perceived as intimidating to protestors.

There are various images that show the police at Black Lives Matter protests dressed in riot gear; but even when not dressed in riot gear, the police are shown surrounding protestors and barricading them from the rest of the public. One image shows a line of police officers on motorcycles blocking a road, while another shows a line of police officers on bikes and officers standing blocking another road. One image shows a group of people protesting about justice for Philandro Castillo in the middle of an empty highway, with police cars lined up blocking the road. Another image shows police cars and police lined up barricading another protest march coming down a road in the middle of a city.

Community-Oriented

The final #BlackLivesMatter theme that emerged from data analysis is that the police are community-oriented. Not all images using the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on Instagram and Twitter portray the police in an antagonistic light, with 45 of the 150 images show the police actively engaging with the community. The police are shown as willing to communicate and be involved in creating a bridge between the police and minority communities. The images show the police attending social gatherings with the public, vigils, at community meetings, and as less of a physical threat than at protests.

Law enforcement relies on cooperation with the community in order to do their job, but the tension between the police and the public could impede on the police's effectiveness (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Lawson, 2014). It is important for the minority community to see the police engaging positively instead of the images of police killing or injuring individuals. These positive images of the police can help foster more positive interactions in the future. Police officers are shown getting more involved in the community, with images showing them visiting different community organizations and being willing participants in creating open communication with the public. An image shows a group of police officers at a school assembly while another shows a group of police officers and government officials walking together. In Figure 7 a police officer sits at a table with three women in what the caption says is a meeting with community members to discuss Black Lives Matter.



Kaila DeRienzo @KailaDeRienzo · 19 Jul 2016
Right Now: Chief Goldsmith from @NorfolkPD is speaking to a round table of city leaders about #BlackLivesMatter. - at Slover Memorial Library

Figure 7. Black Lives Matter, Image 215.

A police officer stands at a press conference flanked by Black Lives Matter activists.

These images show an attempt between the police and the Black Lives Matter activists to

come together to create a possible solution to the tension between the police and the minority community.

There are plenty of images that show the police engaging with Black Lives Matter protestors instead of just surrounding them in riot gear. A police officer directing protestors at a train station for the Women's March is shown happily dancing and smiling at protestors. While three policewomen happily pose with protestors and two policemen give a thumbs up while wearing the Women's March pink beanies. There are even images of the police actively involved in the protests, with one images showing a group of protestors gathered together in discussion with a police officer joining them in the conversation. Additionally a white police officer stands next to a black woman with #Black Lives Matter written on a cardboard sign. The police are shown to even join together with Black Lives Matter activists at a candlelight vigil. There are police officers seen standing in line with activists holding hands with candles. The support from the police to the Black Lives Matter protest show a willingness of the police to commit to building the relationships between the communities.

The images also show the police interacting with citizens not just at protest. A police officer is shown in Figure 8 giving a little boy on his father's shoulders a high five while another police officer is shown holding a baby.



Figure 8. Black Lives Matter, Instagram, Image 49.

There are also images that show police officers and the public hugging. A black police officer is shown hugging a black woman, a white police officer hugs a black child, and another white cop hugs a black man at a vigil. These images are an attempt to show that the Black Lives Matter community does not hate police, but that they just want to achieve equality and for the police to be held accountable. Other images show the police holding a public barbeque and interacting with the public. In one image a police officer is taking a picture with a black man and three children, while another shows a police officer happily engaging conversation with some men and children. These images portrayed police as willing to engage with the community in order to build more positive relations.

#BlackLivesMatter Construction of Police

The Black Lives Matter Movement generally constructed police as being antagonistic especially in their relationships with the minority community. The images portray a celebration of officers using excessive force, which has caused this animosity between the police and the community. The public fear that encounters with police will be violent and could potentially end in death. The images of multiple individuals with

cameras and phones pointing at police officers in the middle of incidents suggest that the public need to have photographic evidence of their encounter in case the situation escalates to a potentially dangerous situation for them. The lack of justice for the deaths of individuals by police officers has caused the public to protest for justice for the victims, which ultimately led to the creation and continued growth of the Black Lives Matter Movement. These images suggest that while there is this animosity between the police and the African American community, the tension is not a product of police officers as individuals but as a system.

The police are also constructed as militaristic and faceless antagonists that are impeding on the Black Lives Matter Movement's attempts to cause social change. The images of police in riot gear standing in uniform lines wearing helmets make them appear unapproachable and something to be feared instead of giving of the impression that they are there to protect the public. The police are portrayed as blocking the Black Lives Matter protestors from furthering their mission for social equality. However, Black Lives Matter does not solely construct police as antagonistic, as police are also presented as being willing to engage with the community. So while law enforcement as a system is constructed as being antagonistic and dangerous to minority individuals, Black Lives Matter recognizes that not all police officers are a danger and are willing and open to mending the tensions.

Blue Lives Matter

There were 150 police images taken from the social media sites Instagram and Twitter that had #BlueLivesMatter in the caption. The images were coded based on the content present in the photograph, caption, and comments into categories that made up

the emerged themes. There were three themes that emerged in the #BlueLivesMatter images. The first theme that emerged is police being shown as victims, with images highlighting police death and the dangers faced by police officers. The second theme that emerged is the humanization of police by Blue Lives Matter, to have the public acknowledge that the police are people as well and not just their job. Police as a symbol of patriotism is the final theme that emerged from #BlueLivesMatter, and shows how police officers represent the notions of patriotism as well as being used as political leverage to stress a message. Table 2 presents the three #BlueLivesMatter themes and the categories and codes that make up each theme.

Table 2

Themes from #BlueLivesMatter

Theme	Category		Codes	Frequency
Police as Victims	Police Loss	60	Dallas Shooting Funeral Grief Police Death Police Shooting Remembrance Sacrifice	88
	Police Safety	28	Danger Death Threats Fire Police Safety	
Humanize	Family	29	Children Engagement Family	72
	Police-Community Relations	43	Community Friendly Happy Hug	

Symbol of Patriotism			188
	Patriotism	88	American Flag Capitalism Eagle Fireworks Hero Honor Parade Patriotism Statue of Liberty
	Politics	50	Inauguration Obama Photo Op Politics Trump War on Police White House

Police as Victims

The first #BlueLivesMatter theme that emerged from the data analysis is the police are constructed as victims. In the 150 images police as victims is represented 88 times as images portray police death in the line of duty, public remembrance for fallen officers, and the public’s concern over police safety. The images construct police officers as being the victim in the tensions between law enforcement and minority communities. The #BlueLivesMatter photographs do not reference any of the issues presented by the Black Lives Matter Movement but instead focus on the sacrifices made by police officers.

There are 60 instances of police loss present that show police officers death, funerals, family grief, and public remembrance. Images from police officers’ funerals are seen with the #BlueLivesMatter tag – the images of funerals portray the respect and grief felt by law enforcement for the loss of their own but also the grief of the families. Police funerals are shown with the casket covered with an American Flag and officers in dress

uniforms. Figure 9 is of a police officer's funeral with fellow officers lined up in uniform and carrying the American Flag draped casket followed by the grieving family.

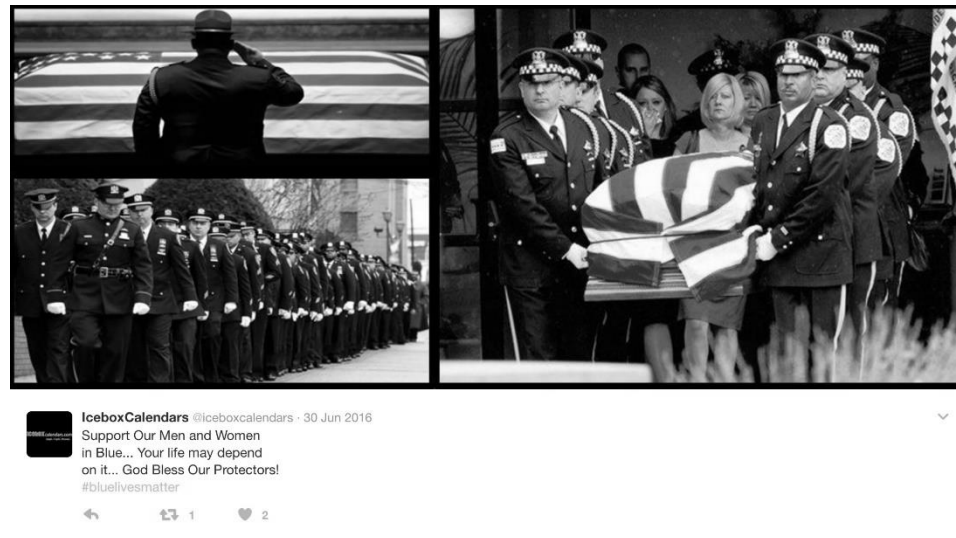


Figure 9. Blue Lives Matter, Twitter, Image, 168.

Images of reports of police officer's deaths are also seen in #BlueLivesMatter, with these announcements telling the officer's name and how they were killed. Announcements were seen for Officer Darrin Reed who was shot at a fast food restaurant, Deputy Sherriff Daryl Smallwood who was shot during a neighborhood dispute, Sergeant Kevin Miller who suffered a heart attack during training, and Captain Robert David Melton who was shot assisting an arrest. The announcements ask for information regarding their deaths, a plea to remember their sacrifices, and to pray for their families. These images draw attention to the death of police officers and create sympathy in the audience and create awareness over these deaths and what they mean for families and fellow officers.

The #BlueLivesMatter images also take the narrative of the Black Lives Matter Movement and attempt to frame it as an issue faced by Blue Lives Matter. Blue Lives Matter is attempting to frame the tensions between the police and minorities as a threat to

law enforcement. The images suggest that Black Lives Matter protests are ultimately a dangerous situation that the police have to face. Screenshots of news reports on the death of police officers in the shootings at Black Lives Matter protests in Dallas and Baton Rouge, show that for Blue Lives Matter their issue is the death of police officers. None of the images in #BlueLivesMatter reference any of the issues between the minority communities and law enforcement. An image of a sign states that 126 cops were killed in 2014 and asks if the public can name all of them. Blue Lives Matter images suggest that the deaths of police are being overshadowed in the media by the reporting on the victims of police violence, and instead the public should be aware of the police officers that are killed in the line of duty.

There are also images that place an importance on remembering the sacrifices made by police officers that are killed. Images of memorials like blue and black ribbons tied on posts and badges with a black band through them reflect the notion that there is an increase in police officers deaths. Blue Lives Matter demonstrates the construction that police officers are in danger of being injured and even killed by the public. The images are used to solicit compassion toward the risks police officers take daily just doing their job. Many of the images commented that the police are doing a very dangerous job but they are not getting any appreciation from the public. Figure 10 shows a group of police officers with the comment that police cannot properly do their job due to the restrictions placed on them and because of that they are being killed



Figure 10. Blue Lives Matter, Twitter, Image 254.

According to the #BlueLivesMatter images, instead of being praised for protecting the public they are walking around with a target on their back and potentially walking into danger daily. One image shows a police badge with “It’s a shield not a target” written over it, while another is cartoon drawing of a police officer and President Obama standing together with Obama sticking a piece of paper with a target drawn on it on the policeman’s back. The construction of police as victims shows them unable to adequately do their job protecting the public because they are being restricted and even targeted for death for doing their duty.

Humanization of Police

The second #BlueLivesMatter theme that emerged from data analysis is the humanization of police. There were 72 of the 150 images that demonstrated the Blue Lives Matter Movements attempts to humanize police officers. Since the death of Michael Brown in 2014, the media has placed law enforcement in a negative light and the continuous portrayal of police officers as unjust killers is damaging to their reputation.

The images presented with #BlueLivesMatter make police officers more sympathetic by making the public recognize the common humanity between themselves and the police.

The use of images of families is one way that Blue Lives Matter humanizes police, as this forces the public to recognize that these are real people who have real families as well. In figure 11 an older man and a young woman are seen dressed in patrol uniforms standing in front of a police car with the caption ‘like father like daughter’.



Figure 11. Blue Lives Matter, Instagram, Image 52.

Other images show police officers in photographs with their wives and children. A police officer is shown in a vehicle dressed in uniform while playing with a young baby. The image shows the officer smiling while the baby is playing with his glasses. Another image shows a police officer by a patrol car, with a teenage girl sitting in the car leaning out of the window. Despite being in uniform and presumably on the job, the officers are seen smiling and giving off the impression that they can easily be approached. In the #BlueLivesMatter tag on Instagram and Twitter, police officer self-portraits or selfies are shown, both in uniform and out of uniform. These images force the public to reconcile

that police officers are not always in uniform and live ordinary lives as well. They are a way of humanizing the police by showing to the public that while they are police officers in uniform, they are also a part of the community as well.

The images of police show them reaching out, establishing relationships, and creating an open communication with the community. There are images of police officers speaking at community gatherings – in one a police officer addresses a crowd gathered outside and in another a police officer is seen answering questions from journalists. A police officer is photographed with a student at an event and Sherriff David Clarke is seen visiting an elementary school and interacting with the students to help build relationships with students. Another image shows four police officers having dinner with a little boy in the picture they are holding hands and praying. There are also images of police officers participating in vigils with the community following the police shootings in Dallas and Baton Rouge. In one image police officers are scattered throughout a group of people all with their heads bowed in prayer. One image shows a police officer standing with a solemn expression while church members place their hands on his shoulder as they pay tribute to the police lives lost in Dallas. These images show that police officers are active members of their communities and are willing to create relationships with those communities.

The ongoing tension between the police and minority communities has caused fear that the public may attempt to harm police officers. The notion that the public cannot support both the Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter Movements has further increased this tension. There is alienation between the two groups that has resulted in law enforcement being viewed as the enemy and a target for minority aggression. Due to this

alienation, when police officers are being seen injured or killed there is little sympathy shown in the media. Instead of an intimidating group of police standing together with stoic expressions, there is an image of a group of police standing together laughing and just generally looking like a group of friends. Figure 12 shows a group of police officers standing together, smiling, with some on each other's shoulders. The comment written on the image says, "we love, we laugh, we have families, we come in all shapes and sizes, we don't deserve to be murdered".



Figure 12. Blue Lives Matter, Twitter, Image 175.

Another image shows a group of police officers standing together with their arms around each other showing off superhero shirts under their uniforms. The officers are smiling and laughing together. Blue Lives Matter images are attempting to humanize police officers and create a deeper understanding between the conflicting groups to maybe deescalate the tension and aggression between them.

Symbol of Patriotism

The final #BlueLivesMatter theme is that police are constructed as a symbol of patriotism. Patriotism is a feeling of attachment and support of the culture, a concern for the defense, and a willingness to sacrifice for one's country (Patriotism, n.d.). In the Blue Lives Matter images symbols of patriotism are seen in 88 of the 150 images. Images like the American flag, Statue of Liberty, the White House, and Bald Eagles are typically seen as symbols of patriotism, and are seen throughout the images found in #BlueLivesMatter.

The American Flag was seen 41 times, with some of the images of the flag incorporating the concept of the Thin Blue Line. Thin Blue Line flags were shown multiple times, the flag following the American Flag design. Instead of red, the Thin Blue Line flag has a black background representing fallen officers and a blue line in the middle of the 13 stripes to represent the camaraderie between officers. Figure 13 is of a Thin Blue Line flag is shown with a police badge in the middle and 'honor the lives that protect yours' written above it.



Figure 13. Blue Lives Matter, Twitter, Image 172.

The images found in the #BlueLivesMatter hashtag on Instagram and Twitter combine patriotism and policing together to where they become synonymous with each other. Law enforcement is used in the images to promote politics and is used as a campaign strategy to appeal to the public. There are 18 images of Donald Trump and police officers; these photo ops are shown with groups of police officers posing with Donald Trump. Some of the images take place in front of Trump's private jet, as shown in Figure 14, and a few are taken at what is commented as debates or political rallies. Some images comment law enforcement's support of Donald Trump as a presidential candidate, suggesting that law enforcement as an entire group supports his presidential bid, due to Trump being the only candidate that has law enforcement's best interest at heart.



Figure 14. Blue Lives Matter, Twitter, Image 198.

Other politicians are seen using law enforcement as a means to attract public support for their campaigns. Pat McDonough's campaign ad for Congress shows a picture of a

Maryland police department badge with ‘support our police’ written next to it. These images suggest that police themselves are a symbol of patriotism due to their sacrifice for the public as well as the public’s attachment toward police.

This perception is reflected in the images that suggest an anti-police rhetoric that is being presented by the media that created a War on Cops that led to police officers being murdered. Images of police officer funerals with captions stating their deaths were due to the War on Cops. The #BlueLivesMatter images suggest that President Obama is responsible for escalating the anti-police sentiment. A cartoon drawing of President Obama standing next to a police officer placing a piece of paper with a target drawn on it on the officer’s back. Blue Lives Matter suggest that it is unpatriotic to not support the police with many of the #BlueLivesMatter images show the public’s pleas for police officers to stay safe.

#BlueLivesMatter Construction of Police

The #BlueLivesMatter images from Instagram and Twitter construct police as victims. The images portray the police as being in more physical danger due to the recent racial tensions between police. Police are being killed because of the ongoing War on Cops. The police are shown as attempting to do their job and protect the public but that they are doing so with a target on their back. The images portray police as being selfless, doing a dangerous job but not receiving any sort of appreciation from the public. Blue Lives Matter is also using these images in an attempt to humanize the police, to cause the public to recognize that police officers are humans as well. The construction of police as victims is an attempt to show that police officers are not expendable, that they are people just like everyone else.

Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter

The images taken from Instagram and Twitter were separated by their use of either #BlackLivesMatter or #BlueLivesMatter. Of the 300 images used, 11 images had both #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter used in their comments. These 11 images were used to troll, the use of a post on the Internet to deliberately offend or cause an angry response from someone, either the Black Lives Matter or Blue Lives Matter Movements. Out of the 11 images, seven were deliberate provocation posts used to elicit an angry response from the other group. There were 2 images that were meant to provoke Blue Lives Matter supporters, four that were aimed at Black Lives Matter, and one image that was aimed at either group. The groups the images are intending to provoke are able to access these images due to the use of that group's hashtag.

The images are similar regardless of which movement the user was intending to provoke. They are antagonistic images that ignore either message and are intended to invoke an emotional response from the viewer. Figure 15 intends to provoke Black Lives Matter supporters, is a cartoon of a Black Lives Matter protestor with a 'kill cops' shirt cowering behind a police officer begging him to protect him from flying bullets.



Figure 15. Black Lives Matter, Twitter, Image 228.

Another image praises a supposed law that will cause protestors arrested to be charged with economic terrorism and claims protestors are entitled. Another cartoon image shows a white cop dead on the ground with a black man holding a gun over him saying 'because black lives matter'. This image is intending to enrage either Blue Lives Matter because of the deliberate killing of the cop or Black Lives Matter as an erroneous portrayal of the Movement. The user who posted these images may not even be a supporter of either movement and is just using the images in order to cause a response. There were only seven images of the 300 that were provocation and all seven had both hashtags in the comment, which made them available for both movements' followers to access them.

Competing Social Constructions of Police

Images of crime are regularly presented in the media and are easily circulated between social media sites (Ferrell, Hayward, & Young, 2008; Hayward, 2010; Jones & Wardle, 2010; Brown, 2014). Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter present their constructions of the police through images on Instagram and Twitter. The images presented on #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter are a snapshot of a reality but can be interpreted numerous ways by the viewer (Carrabine, 2014; Hodgkinson, 2015; Barlow, 2016).

The public's perception of police is influenced by the presentation of the police in media (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Callanan, 2012). Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter used the media to present their construction of the police with the goal of lending credibility to their construction and used images of dramatic events like police funerals or police using excessive force on protestors in order to gain public acceptance of their construction (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2008). Images are used to garner public attention because they can cause an emotional response in the public (Brown, 2014; Wheeldon & Harris, 2015). The growth of new media and social media sites, which are used by millions of people, has allowed individuals to create their own narratives and present them to the public (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009; Stafanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2010). The images in the #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter hashtags are created by the users through the use of smart phones that allow them to capture incidents as they happen and upload the images to their social media accounts (Ferrell & Van de Voorde, 2010; Surette, 2014).

Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter have created two competing social constructions of police officers. The competing social constructions presented by Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter offer differing descriptions of the police that reflect the reality of the two groups (Quinney, 1970; Cronley 2010; Surette, 2014). The Black Lives Matter hashtag grew out of the African American communities negative experiences with the police. African Americans have a different experience with the police compared to whites; therefore their construction of police will be different (Weitzer, 2002; Garland & Bilby, 2011; Tyler, Fagan, & Geller, 2014). Blue Lives Matter was a counter-movement that was created in response to Black Lives Matter and has turned into a pro-police movement.

Black Lives Matter has created the construct of police as mostly being antagonistic and aggressive toward the minority community. The construction of police presented in the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag reflect the mutual mistrust and suspicion between African Americans and police (Garland & Bilby, 2011). The images of police arresting and being aggressive toward minorities illustrate the perception that African American's have that they are more aggressively policed (Garland & Bilby, 2011). Competing with the image of police presented by Black Lives Matter, Blue Lives Matter has constructed police as being the victims. This corresponds with Blue Lives Matter's attempts to redefine the recent incidents as law enforcement being under attack by supporters of Black Lives Matter (Langford & Speight, 2015). Images in the #BlueLivesMatter hashtag also showed a lot of public support of police officers (Blumenthal, 2016).

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION

The purpose of this analysis was to examine the competing social constructions of police in images presented on social media by different social movement's hashtags. Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter are social movements that grew through the use of social media. Black Lives Matter was created following the growth of racial tension between the police and the African American community; while Blue Lives Matter is a counter-movement used to show support for law enforcement. Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter supports have differing perceptions of police; therefore the images of police reflect these different views. This study intended to access how Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter construct police by analyzing the images that are presented on Instagram and Twitter.

This thesis seeks to extend to extend the knowledge of the use of social media to create social constructions. This study used ethnographic content analysis (ECA) to analyze images of law enforcement on Instagram and Twitter that used #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter were analyzed. Previous literature has looked at how police are represented in traditional media like novels, film, television programs, and news media (Garland & Bilby, 2011; Bielejewski, 2016; Lee & McGovern, 2016). This thesis fills the gap in the literature on the use of social media in social construction and on competing social constructions of police.

Different social groups construct police based on their own perception that is based on their own personal experience and from the information that they gather from the media. Black Lives Matter constructed police as being antagonistic and aggressive toward African Americans, while Blue Lives Matter constructs police as being a victim

while also humanizing them. The police were constructed as being social justice disruptors due to the images presenting police as being an obstacle for Black Lives Matter protestors. It was interesting to see that the Black Lives Matter construction of police was not all negative; they constructed police as being community oriented and willing to build relationships with the minority community.

The Blue Lives Matter constructed police as being victims especially as victims of the racial tensions between the police and minority communities. The images portray the loss of police officers and the dangers that officer's face while doing their job. The Blue Lives Matter images were attempting to humanize the police by making the commonalities between the police and the public more apparent to reduce the aggression toward the police. Also interesting are the images that had both #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter, these images were an attempt to provoke an angry response from either Black Lives Matter or Blue Lives Matter.

Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter through the use of images created two competing social constructions of police. Black Lives Matter constructed the police as being antagonistic, aggressive, but willing to engage with the African American community. Blue Lives Matter constructed police as victims, highlighting loss and attempting to humanize police officers. The constructions of police presented by Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter compete with one another as they show the police on opposites ends of a spectrum. The image of police that is presented by both groups contradicts one another. On one hand the police are shown to be heroic and patriotic, willing to do a dangerous job to keep the public safe. The other side of the spectrum

shows the police as being violent and aggressive toward the public, especially the African American community.

The social construction of reality has evolved due to the growth of new media like the Internet and social media sites. Individuals can now use social media to create their own information to present to the public, which can be used in the creation of a construction of reality. Individuals used images in Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter were able to create their own construction of police based on the information that each group presented instead of based on the information that they received from traditional media.

There are numerous social media sites where individuals can instantly access information as it happens (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kane, Alavi, Lavianca, & Borgatti, 2014). Social media sites have millions of users, Instagram has over 150 million users and Twitter is the second most popular social media site (Bruns, 2011; Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). It is on social media sites where Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter have constructed two competing images of police. The public no longer just receives their news from traditional media like television; instead they get their news from the Internet and social media sites. Police departments should become more aware of the role social media plays in the social construction of police.

Some police institutions have public relations and media units that are used to control the images of police that is presented to the public (Lee & McGovern, 2016). While these public relations units are able to control the information that gets out to traditional news sources, it does not control the information that is presented by

individuals on their social media accounts. Police institutions should not ignore the importance of the image of police being presented in social media due the large audience that social media sites generate. In order to combat this, police departments should consider educating public relation and media units about social media.

Police rely on public support in order to control crime, but the image of police presented through social media can affect public support (Weitzer, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004; Leverentz, 2012). Police need to be aware of how to use social media to create a positive branding of law enforcement. The police need to utilize social media by creating police department social media counts to foster positive interactions with the public. Police departments can use social media accounts to present their own information and to establish relationships with the public that can lead to the growth of trust between the police and the public. Police departments should also consider creating social media policies for police officers personal social media accounts. It is important that if an officer is going to present themselves as a member of a police department that their social media accounts stay professional.

Limitations

This analysis had multiple limitations that should be mentioned. The current study had a limited sample size, with 150 images taken from Instagram and 150 from Twitter with a total of 300 images. Additionally only two social media sites were analyzed in this study, Instagram and Twitter. There are numerous other social media sites that could be analyzed. A limitation was also present in the use of Instagram for data. There was no way to filter images by time frame as Instagram only filters by hashtag, which possibly affected the type or quality of images selected.

One limitation was this study only took images from a limited time frame; this could have limited the quality and the generalizability of the analysis. This thesis used ethnographic content analysis, which is a purely descriptive method so it does not give an accurate reflection of reality and therefore cannot necessarily be generalized to a wider population.

Future Research

There is little research on the social construction of police using social media or on the competing social constructions of police in general, so future research should explore other social media and their role in creating social constructions of other criminal justice officials. This thesis only used two social media sites, Instagram and Twitter, to look at how they socially constructed police. There are numerous other social media sites that could be used for analysis like Facebook, LinkedIn, Reddit, Tumblr, or Pinterest – just to name a few where – individuals can come together to share their own personal content. Future research could look at these social media sites to see if they play a role in social construction.

In addition, future research can look into more hashtags that are related with Black Lives Matter. This study only used #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter; but there are numerous other counter-movement hashtags. Hashtags like #AllLivesMatter, #WhiteLivesMatter, or #PoliceLivesMatter could be analyzed in future research to study their competing constructions of police. Future research can also look at more than just the images that are presented on the social media sites. Users post videos, gifs, memes, and news stories on these sites that could help provide insight into the creation of different constructions of police officers.

Different social groups construct competing images of police in #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter on the social media platforms Instagram and Twitter. Both Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter constructed the police based on their personal experiences and knowledge of the police. The Black Lives Matter construction of police reflected the African American communities' conflict with the police. Blue Lives Matter's construction of police expresses a more supportive portrayal of the police. These conflicting groups used separate hashtags on Instagram and Twitter in order to present their constructions of police to the public.

In conclusion, if police departments do not take steps to understand and utilize social media, the tensions between the police and the public will not improve. Police departments need to understand the role that social media plays in the construction of police. The image of police that is presented through social media reflects the public's opinion of law enforcement. Police institutions can use social media to build a more positive and understanding relationship with the community.

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