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Yet Another Ferguson Effect: An Exploratory Content Analysis of News Stories on Police Brutality and Deadly Force Before and After the Killing of Michael Brown

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Yet Another Ferguson Effect: An Exploratory Content Analysis of News Stories on Police Brutality and Deadly Force Before and After the Killing of Michael Brown

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology
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DEDICATION

As a survivor of police brutality, completing this research was not just a difficult ordeal, but also sometimes a torturous one. This academic experience pales in comparison, however, to the pain and suffering of the many victims and families referenced in these pages. As such, my work here was more privilege than predicament and it is to the survivors, the deceased, the disabled, the disgruntled, the disillusioned and the dispossessed that this dissertation is dedicated.
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Another dissertation could easily be written simply to give credit where credit is due here. While any mistakes within these pages are my own responsibility, anything worthy of merit is a result of a lifetime spent learning with and from a host of incredible people. In the process, the student loans that have proven most beneficial are those stipends of intellectual, emotional and personal support without which this task would have been insurmountable.

Early on, my father, Carl Root, taught me to question authority and encouraged education. He and my mother, Esther Thomas, passed down a set of values that leave me convinced that raising a little Hell will not necessarily keep you from Heaven. Her children, Carol, Mary, Naomi and Ross provided me with love, guidance and support even throughout and beyond a particularly prolonged and troublesome adolescence. From them, I learned the timeless lessons of staying true to oneself, hard work, humility, and perseverance. Likewise, they have convinced me that the unwavering love and support of family could be the only thing that allowed me to do my time in criminological institutions in Eastern Kentucky and South Florida instead of continuing studies in the School of Hard Knocks.

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At USF I was met by a host of academics who would shake my foundations and challenge me every step of the way. Drs. Lyndsay Boggess and Kim Lersch extended patience along with opportunities of professional and pedagogical development as I earned my keep. Dr. Shayne Jones made connections between disciplines and bodies of knowledge that still sometimes keep me up nights. Dr. Wesley Jennings convinced me that he can see The Matrix through a set of eyes I only vaguely understand. Dr. Wilson Palacios extended my understanding of qualitative research and showed me a level of respect, support and professionalism that I may not have deserved or yet earned. Dr. Michael J. Lynch pointed out limitations in my radical ideas, and even my ideas of “radical,” and expanded upon them in ways that continue to change my mind. Drs. John Cochran and Max Bromley were always kind and insightful whether in copy room conversation or the more formal comprehensive exam defense and both stepped up in the seventh inning stretch to help me finish this game. Last, but certainly not least, Dr. Lorie Fridell jumped into the driver’s seat of my dissertation committee and provided me with mountains of constructive criticism and essential feedback helping me make more sense of my research and writing than I ever thought necessary or possible. Her patience with me throughout this process was astounding and appreciated.

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Of course I have saved the best for last, the woman who time and again saves me from myself, my wonderful wife Danielle. You deserve an honorary degree in Awesome. While I may never deserve you, it will be my life’s work to earn the masterpiece that is your love, admiration and accompaniment. You are my reason for living and here’s to our future!
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This research examined the police-media relationship through an exploratory content analysis of news articles indexed as police brutality and/or deadly force published in six newspapers (The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Denver Post and USA Today) between August 9th, 2013 and August 9th, 2015. This timeframe was selected in order to determine whether significant differences exist between articles published in the year before the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9th, 2014 compared to those published in the year afterward. Specifically, this research examined whether and how news stories pre and post-Ferguson exhibited characteristics of Lawrence’s (2000) event-driven model of news production. Event-driven news stories are indicated by increased frequency of coverage and differences in the types of voices and views represented.

Content analysis indicated significant increases in overall reporting on police brutality and deadly force were found in the year after the killing of Michael Brown compared to the year before. Also, there were increases in the types of voices and views associated with the event-driven model of news production (critical nonofficial voices and systematizing views) in the year after the killing of Brown compared to the year before. Finally, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) results indicated considerably different discourse construction in news stories indexed as police brutality or deadly force in the aftermath of Brown’s killing compared to similar articles published the year before. Specifically, racial categories are more emphasized and victims of
police brutality and deadly force are constructed as more passive and sympathetic after Brown’s killing compared to the year before.
CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

Just after noon on August 9th, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri Officer Darren Wilson shot and killed 18-year-old Michael Brown. Brown was unarmed. Wilson fired 12 shots, with at least 6 hitting Brown. The encounter lasted less than 90 seconds (Davey, 2014; Mejia, 2014). In spite of the brevity of this encounter, regarding recent police history and resulting discourse, it is not hyperbolic to state that these were shots heard around the world. As Brown’s body lay in the street for over four hours, citizens of Ferguson gathered and expressed their shock and anger at the situation. Protests began and lasted for weeks. The Governor deployed the National Guard. More protests followed the November 24th announcement that the grand jury had decided not to indict Darren Wilson. Around the clock media coverage fueled often-divisive discussions regarding whether or not this killing was justified. The protests that began in Ferguson and spread far beyond frequently included the rallying cry “Hands up don’t shoot,” a reference to witness testimony that Brown had his hands raised in the air when Officer Wilson shot him. The initial protests in Ferguson were met with a massive display of militarized police force (Stillman, 2014). Police in riot gear perched atop armored personnel carriers and pointed machine guns at peaceful protestors in the street. Hundreds of demonstrations have occurred worldwide since.

Public and media reaction to the police response was immediate. The Twitter hashtag #blacklivesmatter, which originated in 2013 with volunteer neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman’s acquittal for the killing of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was reinvigorated. So
much so that the American Dialect Society chose it as their “word of the year” for 2014 (Steinmetz, 2014). Iconic images proliferated throughout the American mediascape and both public and political discussion of police use of force seemed to increase and intensify. In the following weeks, the incident generated a considerable amount of coverage in both old and new media, print journalism and the blogosphere exploding simultaneously with tensions in Ferguson (Carr, 2014). Conversations involving racial discrimination with regard to decisions to arrest, use force and other policing issues seemed ubiquitous from the pages of The New York Times to Comedy Central’s The Daily Show (Macatee, 2014; Wines, 2014). Amongst these conversations, the concept of increasingly militarized policing was scrutinized as pundits, politicians and various interviewees expressed alarm and dismay at the heavy-handed police response to protests in the aftermath of Brown’s shooting in Ferguson and across the country (Beavers and Shank, 2014; Paul, 2014).

The increased attention to these policing issues facilitated several policy initiatives to address problems with police use of force, militarization and racial discrimination. For example, Rep. Hank Johnson (D-GA) drafted a bill called the Stop Militarizing Law Enforcement Act, Rep. John Conyers (D-MI) called on the House Judiciary Committee to hold a hearing on excessive force and various other legislators penned or publicly professed similar statements (Bendery, 2014). Drs. Peter Kraska and Victor Kappeler of Eastern Kentucky University were invited to Washington DC to testify about their research on police militarization at a Senate hearing and a White House policy review respectively. Even the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) urged investigations stating:

The Committee remains concerned at the practice of racial profiling of racial or ethnic minorities by law enforcement officials, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation
(FBI), Transportation Security Administration, border enforcement officials and local police (United Nations, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2014:3).

This type of political and media response to police violence is not typical. Historically, police and government forces have defined such incidents for the media, and by extension the public, as individualized, isolated and/or deviant acts. Indeed, many scholars have argued that media accounts often serve to legitimate police-constructed versions of events (Chibnall, 1977; Chermak and Weiss, 2005; Hirschfield and Simon, 2010; Lawrence, 2000; Lee and McGovern, 2014; Linnemann, Green and Wall, 2014; Mawby, 1999; 2010; 2014). Occasionally, however, extraordinary events occur that create a space for more critical and structural narratives to emerge. Such critical and structural narratives problematize the individual and isolated accounts and instead examine the potential institutional level issues illustrated by such events, issues with training and/or police culture, for example (Mills, 1959).

Examining police use-of-force events and their resulting narratives is important since mass media informs public opinion sometimes focusing public and political attention on particular issues and events (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). This is especially true with regard to issues and events related to crime and justice (Surette, 1998). Sensationalism is ever present with news media criticized for following an “if it bleeds it leads” approach to reporting. Critics exist at multiple points on the spectrum arguing that the media reports either too much or too little regarding certain issues of crime and justice. These opinions are informed by the understanding that media plays a role in matters of visibility, accountability and legitimacy where public institutions dealing with crime and justice are concerned. Indeed, the roles and relationships between the media and criminal justice, particularly policing, are complex, as Lee and McGovern (2014) explained:
Since the advent of modern police services relationships between the police and the media have been complicated. Like lovers too blinded by their passion, each needs and is made stronger by the presence of the other. Yet there are the fights. Silent treatment. Cheating. The spreading of innuendo. They can’t live together, yet they are compelled to speak daily. Yes, their tangled history is as complex as is their present (p. 8).

It is a persistent metaphor, as Surette (1998) also referred to this relationship as a “forced marriage,” and prior to that Sir Robert Mark from Scotland Yard called it “an enduring, if not ecstatically happy marriage” (in Chibnall, 1977:173). In spite of these issues the police and media relationship is an important one, especially as it pertains to public opinion and police legitimacy. Strecher (1971) explained how public perceptions of police and policing are more often based on general attitudes than personal experience. Often media informs such attitudes. This relationship remains largely ignored in the academic literature overall and in criminological research in the United States more specifically. Fortunately, a handful of scholars have examined the topic and interest appears to be increasing in this area.

Lee and McGovern’s analogy of the police and media as conflicted lovers is confirmed by the research of Chibnall (1977) who studied police in the UK and found that, while the nature of the relationship is in essence symbiotic, the police have the upper hand in the power dynamic with news reporters. This is because police stand as gatekeepers to stories of crime and justice on which reporters rely. Describing the evolution of this asymmetrical arrangement Mawby (2010) found that the same dynamic exists with police in England, Wales and Scotland. More recently, Lovell (2003) and Mawby (2014) explained how focus on public relations and communications in policing have increased both impression management strategies and the distance between professional crime reporters and police. This phenomenon has taken to the Internet as well,
Lee and McGovern (2014) explained how the innovations of social media have resulted in police actually becoming news producers themselves.

All of these authors are also quick to explain that while this relationship seems to be dominated by police that it is always a negotiated and contested arrangement. Lovell (2003) describes this arrangement as “central to police administrative and strategic reform” (p. 4). As the singer songwriter Leonard Cohen (1992) wrote, “there is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in.” So it is with the police-media relationship. While the majority of media coverage portrays perspectives of policing approved of by police (sometimes literally, through press releases and other public relations strategies) occasionally events occur that seem to open a window of opportunity for more critical perspectives (Lawrence, 2000; Lee and McGovern, 2014). Lawrence (2000) refers to this latter type of coverage as “event-driven,” in contrast to the more common “institutionally-driven” news stories. This is consistent with the consensus in communications research that most news is “officially dominated” (Barak, 1994; Fishman, 1990; Gans, 1979; Hall et al., 1978; Lawrence, 2000; Schudson, 2011). Lawrence and others have shown that most news coverage of use-of-force by police is officially dominated, or institutionally-driven. That is, the story is constructed by official sources within the involved police agency and/or the greater criminal justice system. There is one subgroup of these incidents, however, that, Lawrence claims, are event-driven. These are the high-profile and controversial stories of police use of force. These event-driven news stories often involve conflicting accounts and other “story cues” that provide journalists the opportunity for “a good story” (Lawrence, 2000:87). These stories are driven more by the events themselves, opening the door for more perspectives and interpretations than just those offered by official sources.
The goal of this study is to determine through both quantitative and qualitative analysis whether or not the killing of Michael Brown constituted such an event-driven story. Measures to assess whether the news coverage of this incident was event-driven or institutionally driven are both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitatively, this research measures whether or not there was an increase in the frequency of reporting related to police, police use of deadly force and/or brutality in the aftermath of this event controlling for those stories focused exclusively on the killing of Michael Brown. Qualitatively, this research evaluates whether or not there were significant differences in the discourse before and after the events in Ferguson, Missouri, focusing on constructs that distinguish event-driven and institutionally-driven news stories. Specifically, if the rhetoric used to describe police brutality and/or deadly force as well as those subjected to either changed significantly. This is achieved through a mixed methods content analysis of newspaper articles from August 9th, 2013 through August 9th, 2015. This timeframe spans from one year prior to one year after the Brown incident. This allows enough data points in the form of weekly units for possible future time-series analysis.

The benefits of this research are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the analysis adds to a growing body of literature concerned with the ways in which the media contribute to public discourse regarding issues of crime and justice and more specifically the role played by the media in legitimating state power and force (Hirschfield and Simon, 2010; Richardson, 2007). Likewise, it further extends the event-driven model of news production as it relates to police use of force. Illustrating several different approaches to the social construction of news related to police use of force, research by Lawrence (2000) revolving around the Rodney King case as well as Hirschfield and Simon’s work involving the police shooting of Amadou Diallo and Linnemann, Wall and Green’s (2014) analysis of the police killing of Rudy Eugene provide
a strong foundation on which this research will build. The mixed methods design of this study combines and elaborates upon elements of each.

Regarding more practical concerns, this research contributes to a broader understanding of the police-media relationship in an age of increasing attention to and interaction with various types of media. Specifically, what it is about certain police-related events, or their presentation by journalists, that allows for critical dialog to emerge regarding police issues and how these issues affect public relations, perceptions and legitimacy of police as well as strategies and policies regarding policing. This type of information is important for academics, activists, politicians, police and other concerned citizens interested in an honest and critical examination of these issues.

This chapter introduced the topic and the purpose of this research with a brief discussion of the theoretical foundation, relevant literature and applicable methodology. Chapter 2 presents a more exhaustive review of the literature necessary to situate this work into the larger body of knowledge. Chapter 3 describes in detail the proposed methodology including data collection, sampling and data coding and analysis. In Chapter 4, the results of this analysis are presented and discussed. Finally, Chapter 5 interprets these results, draws conclusions and discusses the implications and limitations of this research.
CHAPTER TWO:
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter covers the consistent and consistently evolving history of the relationship between the police and media institutions utilizing a heuristic organizational scheme developed by Kelling and Moore (1988). Then, the literature describing the social construction of news is discussed as well as what research indicates about the role of social institutions (such as policing) in this construction. The official dominance, or institutionally-driven perspective and the event-driven model is discussed in turn and evidence provided for each.

A Brief Evolving History of the Police-Media Relationship

The history of policing and media in the United States unfolded concurrently. As such, both are examined in the context of three eras of police history provided by Kelling and Moore (1988). Parallels in the development of each institution are discussed in turn. Finally, the role of the police-media relationship with regard to public opinion and political reform of policing is reviewed.

Kelling and Moore’s Three Eras

The great American author William Faulkner (1951) once wrote, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past” (p. 92). So it is with the police, the media and the relationship between the
An influential interpretation of police history by Kelling and Moore (1988) titled “The Evolving Strategy of Policing” divided this history into three eras, as they describe:

The political era, so named because of the close ties between police and politics, dated from the introduction of police into municipalities during the 1840s, continued through the Progressive period, and ended during the early 1900s. The reform era developed in reaction to the political. It took hold during the 1930s, thrived during the 1950s and 1960s, began to erode during the late 1970s. The reform era now seems to be giving way to an era emphasizing community problem solving (p. 2).

This framework has been criticized as omitting important parts of the history of policing in the United States. Williams and Murphy (1990) pointed out the exclusion of the issue of race, for example, and how prior to the establishment of municipal police departments in the American northeast slave patrols in the south provided the foundation for some of the earliest police departments. Strecher (1991) questioned the validity of this framework going so far as to label it a revision of history. He used the analogy of a string of sausages to illustrate how history was seldom so neatly encased and cautioned against this interpretation being accepted uncritically. With these criticisms and cautions in mind, Kelling and Moore’s eras can still serve as an important heuristic device for outlining how the history of policing, and reform in policing, is necessarily intertwined with the police-media relationship.

The defining characteristic of the political era is just what the label implies—the relationship between the police and politics. While Kelling and Moore wax nostalgic for the community service role of police during this timeframe, they also recognize the problematic nature of the close relationship to police and political power. Issues of corruption, inefficiency and disorganization emerged from this arrangement eventually resulting in attempts at reform.
Similarly, the early history of journalism in America was intimately tied to politics. The first colonial newspapers worked very hard at maintaining a neutral perspective by reporting mostly foreign news, but this attempt at neutrality changed once conflict emerged between the colonies and Great Britain. The pamphleteer Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* was reprinted in newspapers throughout the colonies and clear political positions on the conflict were widely published. Still, political criticism was a somewhat one-sided affair with treason and sedition statutes such as the 1798 Sedition Act criminalizing writing against the government of the United States. For most of the next century political partisanship was evident in the press with journalists literally bought and paid for by particular political parties. The most notable example of this influence is in the “yellow journalism” of William Randolph Hearst often credited with causing and sensationalizing the Spanish-American War (Schudson, 2011).

Toward the end of the 19th century, due to both political reform and an evolution in the culture of reporting, the press reevaluated this partisanship in an attempt to move toward a more professional and objective model of journalism. By the 1920s, professional associations had emerged in the field of journalism promoting codes of ethics and an ideology of objectivity (Schudson, 2011). This evolution parallels the changes in policing that Kelling and Moore refer to as the reform era. In much the same way, police were attempting to distance themselves from the corruption of the political era by professionalizing and promoting adherence to the rule of law as the basis of their legitimacy, not politics. This was meant to improve the damaged image of police in the eyes of the public and increase trust and legitimacy in the institution. Likewise, the ideology of objectivity was exemplified in the image of the reform era police officer; as Kelling and Moore state:
During the era of reform policing, the new model demanded an impartial law enforcer who related to citizens in professionally neutral and distant terms. No better characterization of this model can be found than television’s Sergeant Friday, whose response, “Just the facts, ma’am,” typified the idea: impersonal and oriented toward crime solving rather than responsive to the emotional crisis of a victim (p. 6)

These changes in ideology and approach also occurred alongside innovations in technology that significantly altered the relationships between the institutions of policing and media and the public.

In policing, the automobile, the two-way radio and the telephone created an entirely different dynamic between police and citizens, with the birth of the now taken-for-granted phenomenon of “calling the cops” and the expectation of rapid response. Walker (1984) described this impact as “paradoxical,” explaining how this brought police and citizens into more intimate contact while the shift from foot patrol to automobiles simultaneously isolated police from the public. A similar technological paradox occurred in the delivery of news with the advent of radio and television. While millions more people were exposed to information through these new media, a different relationship exists between engagement with them and with print. Marshall McLuhan (1964) referred to print as a “hot” medium and television as “cool” using these different degrees of heat as a metaphor for the activity in the brain. Reading is seen as “hotter,” requiring more energy and active engagement (particularly in those parts of the brain responsible for logic and reason) whereas watching television is seen as much more passive and less engaging. While progress was clearly made in the professionalization of both institutions, these reforms and innovations led to problems of their own.
Particularly in the 1960s, emerging social movements began to publicly challenge various social institutions and the media and police were not exempt. Kelling and Moore describe how professional reforms in policing began to falter in the 1960s and 70s for multiple reasons, including these public challenges to police legitimacy with emerging civil rights and antiwar movements. Similarly, these challenges were extended to the media and the process of newsmaking. For example, the war in Vietnam, the Pentagon Papers and Watergate challenged the legitimacy and trustworthiness of official sources (Schudson, 2011). Both the police institution and the news media would change as a result of these social movements and their associated challenges.

Each institution looked back to their public, their audience, in an attempt to regain trust and legitimacy by addressing these concerns with various strategies for more community-oriented reform. For policing, this would be the community problem-solving era where police and the public were encouraged to create partnerships to address issues of crime and order maintenance. Likewise, media increased focus on public interest stories sometimes at the expense of more investigative journalism. Discussing the changes from “Watergate to the Web,” Schudson (2011) explains how this era in news is seen by critics as either “dangerously critical” or on the other hand as “soft news” or “infotainment” (p. 83). In short, investigative journalism focused on issues of ineptitude or corruption in major social institutions was considered politically problematic, but so was avoidance of such issues with more popular, less political, fare. This criticism has been countered with claims that it is simply old wine in new bottles, as similar arguments existed with the penny papers of the early 19th century. Likewise, the community-problem solving era in policing has been critiqued as built upon nostalgic historical analysis that is “pure fantasy” at best and mere posturing and impression management or a velvet
glove on an iron fist of neoliberal policing at worst (Herbert, 2001; Klockars, 1988; Manning, 1978; Walker, 1984). To sum, the appeals to a purer past relationship between police and the public they serve are problematic to most historians, describing more myth than reality. Still, most agree that significant changes have occurred in the organization and strategies of policing over time. As those critics of Kelling and Moore pointed out and as Faulkner wrote these pasts are not past, so putting them behind us is difficult. In spite of this difficulty perhaps recognizing the progression for context is important, especially as this context pertains to the consistent history of police reform.

**Media, public opinion and police reform.**

The overlap in police history and media history is not merely one of parallel frameworks and developments. In fact, the two have coexisted in a dialectical relationship since birth. As stated before, the history and evolution of policing is necessarily intertwined with its relationship to media. Likewise, both reflect the changing public perception associated with both institutions. Police authority and legitimacy has been contested throughout US history with the earliest establishments of formal departments opposed as too similar to the previous occupying British troops. This is similar to the hesitancy of British citizens that resulted in Robert Peel’s recommendation of blue uniforms to contrast with the red military uniforms (Wadman and Allison, 2004). This historical and cultural opposition and reluctance to accept police authority is important since in situations and areas where public acceptance/opinion are low, police may resort to force to assert authority and legitimacy whether with individuals or groups (Reisig, McCluskey, Mastrofski & Terrill, 2004; Van Maanen, 1978; Westley, 1959). When increases in such force are sustained and recognized over time they are often addressed in the media, which
sometimes results in enough political pressure for formal investigations, commissions and so forth.

Media coverage played a role in the first official investigation of police violence in the late 19th century as the pages of *The New York Times* began to fill with letters and editorials from citizens concerned with police brutality. Johnson (2003) describes two different perspectives on the issue: that of the working class and that of the middle class. The former often focused on the use of police to break strikes or repress labor-related protest and viewed police as tools of the capitalist class (Harring, 1983). In comparison, concerned citizens from the middle class were less interested in these collective uses of force and instead wrote about more individual instances of police violence, particularly those involving “respectable persons.” Middle class critics of this type of brutality viewed police not as tools of the oppressor, but as dumb, animalistic brutes and it was in this context that the term “police brutality” was first used (Johnson, 2003). In 1894, these concerns along with those involving the corruption of the Tammany Hall political machine led to the formation of the Lexow Committee, which would be the first formal investigation of police violence. Senator Clarence Lexow noted that even criminals were undeserving of such brutal treatment and that equal protection under the law extended even to those committing crime (New York State Legislature, 1895).

These kinds of public and political responses and their resulting coverage in the press played a considerable role in the transition of policing from the political era to the reform era. The 1920s and 1930s saw the formation of the American Civil Liberties Union and the Wickersham Commission in response to police excesses during Prohibition. The report “Lawlessness in Law Enforcement” was completed and released in 1930 and dealt with multiple issues of police misconduct, including “the third degree,” the use of brutal interrogation to coerce
confession. The commission framed this as a civil rights issue, unconstitutional and particularly damaging to police legitimacy (National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, 1931). During the Great Depression, public and media concern shifted back toward a more working class concern as labor unions, organizers and radicals took to the streets to protest economic conditions and were often met with overwhelming force.

Similar concerns surround the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s. Images of police violence against marchers in Birmingham and Selma, Alabama were widely circulated in news media and considered influential in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Lee, 2002). The decade provides another example of iconic police violence with the response to protests outside the 1968 Democratic National Convention. The Walker Report investigating the handling of the protests deemed the violent police response, including televised beatings and arrests which caused over 1100 injuries, a “police riot” (Walker, 1968). Even journalists attempting to cover the protests were injured, and one journalist explained the radicalizing political effect witnessing this event had on him writing how he had gone to the convention as a journalist and left a “cold-blooded revolutionary” (Thompson, 2001). According to Culbert (1998), “an estimated 90 million Americans saw this coverage on the night Humphrey was nominated, and television showed violent highlights the next day, the next year, and then in countless documentaries since” (p. 438).

Another example of the importance of media to police reform is illustrated by the whistleblowing of New York Police Department (NYPD) detectives Frank Serpico and David Durk resulting in the formation of the Knapp Commission. Serpico and Durk’s whistleblowing on rampant corruption in the NYPD made the front page of The New York Times on April 25th, 1970 (Burnham, 1970: 1). Reported by investigative journalist David Burnham, this was the
inspiration for the film *Serpico* directed by Sidney Lumet and starring Al Pacino as the title character. The name Frank Serpico has since become synonymous with the whistleblower cop (or “lamplighter” as Serpico prefers due to his interpretation of the activity shining light where there is darkness) and can be used as a compliment or an insult in police culture depending upon context. Serpico and Durk brought the story to the press after repeated attempts to address the issues internally were ignored. The Knapp Commission report confirmed the allegations of widespread corruption throughout the entire New York Police Department and offered suggestions for reform. It also gave us the categories of “grass eaters” and “meat eaters” and resulted in permanent institutions such as a special prosecutor’s office and a monitoring commission for the NYPD (Armstrong, 2012).

A similar situation is reflected in the case of Rodney King and the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). On March 3, 1991, one of the most infamous couplings of police violence and media coverage began when members of the LAPD beat motorist Rodney King while several others stood by watching. Local resident George Holliday filmed the incident from his apartment nearby. Initially, Holliday attempted to turn the footage over to LAPD but was refused. He then shared it with local media and the footage was subsequently broadcast widely across national media. A conversation on police brutality resulted in op-ed pages and nightly news and four officers involved in the beating, Koon, Powell, Briseno and Wind were indicted on multiple charges including assault with a deadly weapon, excessive force, filing a false report and acting as an accessory after the fact. By April, L.A. Mayor Tom Bradley created an independent commission on the Los Angeles Police Department known as the Christopher Commission. On April 29th, 1992 three of the four officers were acquitted and the jury could not agree on charges for the fourth. Riots ensued in Los Angeles and other locations across the
country in response to the verdict. Eventually, the four officers would be indicted on federal charges of violating King’s civil rights. Koon and Powell would be convicted Briseno and Wind would not. The Christopher Commission confirmed the existence of systemic brutality within the LAPD and offered suggestions for reform.

As a result of the Christopher Commission the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act granted the Department of Justice (DOJ) investigative authority over law enforcement agencies regarding potential systemic issues. The DOJ has performed nearly 70 such investigations since, with some departments such as Cleveland, Miami, New Orleans and New York being investigated twice (Childress, 2015). These investigations are often the result of high-profile incidents of excessive force and/or racial discrimination that have been scrutinized by the media as well as concerned citizens and other political organizations and actors. In Albuquerque, New Mexico the killings of Christopher Torres and James Boyd by Albuquerque Police served as a primary catalyst, for example. Similarly, the killings of Tamir Rice and Michael Brown in Cleveland, Ohio and Ferguson, Missouri initiated DOJ investigations. These investigations generally conclude with a publishing of relevant findings as well as recommendations for reform. In some cases the latter is reinforced by consent decrees. How these investigations, reforms and related events are constructed in the news media is the subject of the following section.

The Social Construction of the News

In spite of passionate claims to objectivity, fairness and balance by almost all involved in its creation, the media product commonly referred to as “news” is not a simple mirror of reality. Instead, news is a social construction involving the conscious selection of specific events and
issues for coverage in a particular fashion or format. The social constructionist viewpoint considers reality to be something created socially by people negotiating and interpreting meaning in events and phenomena as opposed to the idea that an ultimate reality of events and the world exist independent of such processes. According to Surette (1998), media serves as an arena for competing social constructions (Figure 1). This competition is influenced by several factors including time and space constraints, drama, action, cultural narratives, and other issues that might contribute to the construction of a “good story.” The topics of crime and justice, and particularly police violence, often provide journalists with several of the necessary elements for such a story.

Figure 1. The Stages of Social Construction

The way(s) in which news about crime and justice is constructed is important since these issues have been a staple of the media since the 1800s and such news informs how most citizens form opinions and otherwise think about crime and justice, which can then inform policy (Jewkes, 2004; Surette, 1998). Hauge (1965) explained how “the near monopoly of the daily press as a source of crime news therefore presumably makes it an important influence on public
opinion on the subject of crime” (p. 148). Presumably, the press is an important influence on perceptions of those tasked with the control of crime as well, as Mawby (1999) pointed out how “the police-media relationship has increasingly important implications given developments which increase the visibility of policing, if not its transparency” (p. 281). Given the potential for such “good stories” to reflect poorly on police, as in the examples above, they have a vested interest in the construction of such stories.

Official Dominance in the Construction of Crime and Justice News

While the earlier examples of particular historical events related to police might seem to indicate media coverage as a consistent critic of police use-of-force, misconduct or corruption and a catalyst for police reform, research indicates that this is more often the exception than the rule. Instead, those studying the police-media relationship consistently find that the police are generally in a dominant position with regard to the creation of news about crime and criminal justice related issues due to their position as “gatekeepers” (Chibnall, 1977; Chermak and Weiss, 2005; Lawrence, 2000; Lee and McGovern, 2014; Mawby, 1999; 2010; 2014). However, most agree that this relationship is fluid and constantly negotiated.

This official dominance, or institutionally driven, model of news production is not exclusive to the police-media relationship. Essentially, the construction of most news stories relies on information provided by official government sources from government officials, spokespeople and public information or public relations professionals. Critics argue that this in essence creates a media climate similar to those in countries with state control over news (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Others explain how it is simply a result of the bureaucratic organization of society (Fishman, 1990; Lawrence, 2000). Regardless, the official dominance
model of news is important in understanding the way(s) that social problems are constructed. There is some controversy in referring to the creation of news as a social construction. Schudson (1989) stresses the importance of recognizing this as a case of “making” news and not “faking” news and Tuchman (1976) offers the following response:

To say that a news report is a story, no more, but no less, is not to demean the news, not to accuse it of being fictitious. Rather, it alerts us that news, like all public documents, is a constructed reality possessing its own internal validity (p. 97).

This controversy is also considerable when discussing crime and justice news as socially constructed. Fortunately, a considerable body of scholarship exists examining this phenomenon (Kappeler and Potter, 2005; Jewkes, 2004; Potter and Kappeler, 2006; Surette, 1998). Comparing the official dominance of crime and justice news to other types of official news, Mawby (1999) states, “the contexts in which police and political press officers operate are fundamentally different and police press officers cannot control the policing media agenda in the way that government spin doctors control information” (p. 280).

Some research has shown the nature of the official dominance in the police-media relationship to be subtler. Surveying over 200 police agencies located in cities with populations over 100,000 as well as over 300 media sources, Chermak and Weiss (2005) described a mutually beneficial relationship between the police and the press. They state how, “In general, both police and media personnel agreed or strongly agreed that they had a good working relationship” (p. 510). However, they also acknowledged that positive police perceptions of the relationship hinged upon “the ability to put the media to use to accomplish this goal” where the goal was “to generate support for the organization” (p. 510). Likewise, reporters were most
satisfied with the relationship when cooperation and accessibility by police was high. In short, the satisfaction of both parties is related to achievement of institutional goals.

This mutually beneficial arrangement is often recognized in research confirming the existence of the institutionally driven model of crime and justice news in the US. Fishman (1990), for instance, described how the bureaucratic organization of society and the beat structure of reporting interacted to reproduce this official dominance in crime reporting. The crime reporter would have a routine schedule whereby she or he visited the various associated institutions—courts, corrections and police—daily. Officials along this “crime beat” provided the journalist with all the news fit to print regarding crime and justice issues. This arrangement was also examined regarding the police and media relationship in the UK by Chibnall (1977) who found through interviews with both Fleet Street crime reporters and observations and interviews of members of the Scotland Yard press bureau that this special connection between journalists and their sources is of paramount importance in shaping news about crime, or what he refers to as “law-and-order news.”

For Chibnall, the institutionally driven nature of law and order news provides police with an opportunity to position their actions and opinions as legitimate contrasted with the illegitimate positions of those with “alternative definitions of reality.” In other words, those who might question or critique the official police-constructed versions of events can be excluded or delegitimated. This questioning of police construction of events is viewed as “potentially problematic phenomena” and can be neutralized “by either denying their status as beliefs which should be taken seriously by sensible people, or condemning them as manifestations of wickedness or corruption” (Chibnall, 1977:115). This denial or condemnation of differing interpretations is made somewhat more difficult when news includes the exposure of
misconduct, corruption and other such issues but Chibnall argues that the press helps to shield police institutions as a whole from any potential damage related to such issues. This is achieved primarily through a focus on individualized explanations for such activity (“bad apples”).

Police recognize the value of the press in promoting their image and increasing legitimacy and the press likewise realize the importance of maintaining positive professional relations with police sources, especially specialist crime reporters. Chibnall explains how, “in the final analysis the relationships are asymmetrical because the journalist is always in an inferior negotiating position—the reporter who cannot get information is out of a job, whereas the policeman who retains it is not” (Chibnall, 1977:155). Crime reporters are thus, drawn closer into a process of assimilation with the expectations of their sources to create rapport and to maintain respect and trust. Some role conflict emerges then in the event of revelations related to police corruption, misconduct, etc., but these instances are more often than not easily handled through the extension of the tropes of the black sheep or the rotten apple. Scotland Yard’s Sir Robert Mark is quoted as saying “police/public relations are not governed by the truth necessarily. They are governed by the appearance of the truth” (Chibnall, 1977:173). The importance of the press in maintaining such appearances cannot be understated and Chibnall concludes that understanding the relationships and processes inherent in this relationship is “an essential step in grasping how a dominant meaning system is maintained in our society in the face of explicit or implicit challenge” (Chibnall, 1977:226).

Other researchers have also found support for the existence of institutionally driven news production in the police-media relationship. For instance, Mawby (2010) revisited Chibnall’s work. Through interviews with crime reporters and police communications managers as well as a survey of the 51 English, Welsh and Scottish territorial police forces between 2007 and 2008, he
also found evidence that the power dynamic in the contested relationship between the police and media is “increasingly asymmetrical in favour of the police” (Mawby, 2010:1060). The scope of this imbalance he considers to exist “to an extent that threatens the future of specialist crime reporters and their ability to hold the police to account” (p. 1061). Describing the way that the 24/7 news cycle (and the associated scrutiny that comes along with it) had resulted in multiple political attempts at police reform in England and Wales, he points out how

In these demanding operational and complex media circumstances, police forces are committing greater resources to the way they communicate and have become sophisticated in their operational and non-operational communications (Mawby, 2010:1060).

The primary themes found in Mawby’s interviews and survey were an increased role and professionalization regarding the institutionally driven model of police communications. Over 90 percent of the police forces surveyed indicated a practice of recruiting and employing professionals in public relations and journalism as well as marketing, photography and web and graphic design. He also found a 36 percent increase in the use of communications professionals in Basic Command Units (BCU’s) with 26 percent of departments reporting the practice in 2001 and 62 percent in 2007. This quantitative increase in employees corresponded with a qualitative shift in the responsibilities of police communications departments whereby they were found to assist in crafting internal communications as well as training officers in media relations and devising media strategies for major events, cases and incidents.

These strategies also allow journalists to save time by relying on “pre-packaged” stories and Mawby cautions that, “these packages present an unquestioned police-centric version of
crime news” (Mawby, 2010:1068). He also discusses concerns on the part of reporters for the strategic withholding of information and the question as to whether or not the police have the “news sense” to properly identify and release newsworthy stories. After presenting the results of a content analysis of his interviews with crime reporters he explains how “the example of news values encapsulates why tensions arise between reporters and police press offices; they have different roles and different reasons for selecting and constructing crime news” (p. 1070).

Still, the close relationships fostered between crime reporters and police in the constant quest for news also come into question for Mawby, particularly whether or not the reporters might withhold criticism to maintain access to information. One of Mawby’s interviewees summed it up like this:

The paper’s job is supportive, but critical. We criticize if justified, the police know that and respect it. They know they’ll get criticized over serious issues that deserve public scrutiny. If we were critical all the time, we’d lose cooperation. On the other hand, we don’t pander to them, we’re not a police magazine or mouthpiece (Mawby, 2010:1072).

Regardless of such assurances, Mawby concludes that the evolution of the police media relationship does not augur well for the future of specialist crime reporting.

Specifically, he argues that the increase in the control and shaping of policing and crime news by communications professionals is accompanied by a subsequent decrease in the kinds of resources and relationships necessary for specialist crime reporters to do their jobs well. Giving the caveat that the relationship is a complicated one that must be constantly negotiated in various contexts and that the dominance of the police in their relationship with media is by no means a “juggernaut carrying all before it” (p. 1073) Mawby (2010) concludes with the statement that
we are edging further towards a public sphere dominated by the sectional interests of the powerful and in which crime reporters find it increasingly difficult to make their independent, sometimes dissenting, voices heard. If this continues, one dimension of the complex framework of police accountability will be further diminished (p. 1073).

Even more recently, Mawby (2014) found further evidence for the official dominance phenomenon related to police and media relations. In fact, he presents an example of the phenomenon under official investigation in the UK. Through an analysis of the Leveson Inquiry, an independent investigation into the police-press relationship in the wake of a phone-hacking scandal, he examined various impression management tactics by which this dominance was protected and maintained. Utilizing the dramaturgical approach of Goffman (1959) and Manning (1978), he described the inquiry as bringing normally backstage processes of the police-media relationship to the frontstage. This allowed for insight into those processes involved in police impression management (and even impression management about how impressions are managed) as well as the related media role.

After a brief explanation of the scandal that led to the inquiry, Mawby (2014) offers a quote from the Leveson Report:

Public concerns hereabouts may be expressed in just one sentence: the relationship between the police and the media, and News International in particular, was, at best, inappropriately close and if not actually corrupt, very close to it. (p. 241).

Published on November 29th, 2012, 252 pages of the Leveson Inquiry’s total 1,987 pages were dedicated to this relationship drawing on information from 93 witnesses to not only investigate the police-press association, but also to make recommendations about its future. The
93 witnesses included members of both sides from current and former officers, detectives, reporters and editors to organizations dedicated to handling complaints and accountability.

Three types of data were examined: witness statements, transcripts of the proceedings of the inquiry and finally, video recordings of the hearings. While these data were initially collected for the purpose of the Leveson Inquiry, Mawby (2014) notes how “the dataset comprises a comprehensive resource for the analysis of police communications” (p. 242). He describes the inquiry, and police participation in it, as a perfect example of “image work” and concludes that “the police held the show together through effective communication” and that “the signs to date suggest that the balance of police-press power has swung in favor of the police” (p. 253).

Hirschfield and Simon (2010) found support for the institutionally driven model of news related to incidents involving police use of deadly force. This research examined 105 newspaper articles in 23 major daily newspapers related to the use of deadly force by police. They concluded explaining how most articles tended to legitimate this use by casting victims as threats and situating the use of deadly force “within legitimate institutional roles,” yet “articles appearing after police killed Amadou Diallo are less likely to demonize both police officers and victims, partially reflecting efforts to frame deadly force and police racism as systemic issues” (p. 155). The case of Amadou Diallo was one that caused much criticism and protest regarding racially biased and aggressive policing, as he was shot 19 times by four officers when they ostensibly mistook his wallet for a gun. Public perception of the police force in New York City took a turn for the worse, as polls revealed sharp increases in those who believed the NYPD had used excessive force.

Similarly, justification for police use of deadly force was found by Linnemann, Wall and Green (2014) in their case study analysis of the police killing of Rudy Eugene, the notorious
“Miami zombie” or “Causeway cannibal” to build upon Hirschfield and Simon’s theoretical foundation. They explain how the “zombification” of Mr. Eugene allowed for a “fetishistic disavowal” of this instance of “state killing” (p. 4). Indeed, rather than an absurd or laughable proposition, they proclaim that “what zombification schematizes and renders livable then, is a particular sort of enemy, an unrecognizable, killable other, seen as the fodder for police and state violence” (p. 5). In short, this process allows for the dehumanizing of a victim of police violence, shot while naked and unarmed, with little critical analysis in the press. Instead of creating a shift in cultural or ideological currents, familiar tropes were legitimated and recycled including the drug panic as initial police accounts speculated that Eugene was high on bath salts (although no evidence was found to support these claims in a toxicology report). Even supernatural demonological explanations were entertained. As a result, they conclude “there was little discussion of use of force policies or ‘less than lethal’ technologies and virtually no reflection on the fact that police killed a naked, unarmed man” (p. 17). This is similar to the way that Rodney King was initially constructed through official sources as a “raging bull” under the influence of PCP.

Likewise, Lee and McGovern (2014) confirmed the existence of an official dominance in the police-media relationship through an extensive examination of Australian policing. Stating “with image and perception being equally important to police success as arrest rates,” they extend the analysis into new media forms and popular culture such as social media and reality television (p. 28). Describing how the relationship between the police and media has become hyperreal, they explain that representation of policing, or “simulated policing,” is actively becoming policing itself as the lines blur between real and virtual policing.
Lee and McGovern (2014) view this virtual policing as problematic for the police-media relationship, potentially skewing the balance even further in favor of official dominance. Having both reactive and proactive functions, this is seen as a further way of decreasing the influence of crime reporters by way of cutting out the middleman and allowing police agencies to become both newsmakers and media agencies themselves. They identify three core logics underpinning the utility of this relationship for police organizations: risk management and responsibilization, image management, and assuring trust in and the legitimacy of the organization. As mentioned previously, these logics are seen to have existed since at least the formalization of the police and media relationship in the Reform Era. For Lee and McGovern (2014), “The question is not whether they [the police] should engage [in public relations and image work], but rather whether policing organizations can actually live up to the positive images they seek to disseminate” (p. 58). As noted above, this becomes problematic when issues of misconduct, corruption and/or brutality receive increased attention, and particularly when the same technologies of social media can be used to disseminate these more negative images. In fact, this presents a paradox whereby the same tool that can give police increased influence over their own image work may also serve to provide more access to perspectives that challenge such institutionally driven narratives. Some research exists, however, to argue that this access is more dependent upon certain types of events rather than particular types of media production and dissemination. Lawrence (2000) calls this the event-driven model of news construction.

**Event-Driven Model of News Construction**

While most of the scholarly work related to the police-media relationship parallels that of the rest of communications research in confirming official dominance in news construction,
recent work by Lawrence (2000) argues for the existence of an alternative model. Looking at one of the most notorious examples of police brutality in recent US history, the Rodney King beating, Lawrence (2000) recognized an interesting shift occurring in media coverage surrounding this particular incident. She acknowledges the power of the media to both set agendas and/or to marginalize with regard to certain social problems. However, she goes on to challenge the official dominance model of the news (particularly pertaining to police brutality) by recognizing the news instead as a site of struggle. Distinguishing between routine and accidental news, Lawrence describes the latter as dramatic and unplanned events that become defined as newsworthy, and considers incidents of police brutality among them. These contrast with routine news that is managed and planned, such as press releases, which are “executed by officials as they carry out their daily duties and perennial attempts to manage their public images” (Lawrence, 1996:446). She illustrates how accidental news incidents provide problems for officials in defining issues and incidents. At the same time, these kinds of events may present opportunities for critical shifts in public discourse and policy issues. Therefore, instead of the traditional officially dominated or institutionally driven model of news construction (or in addition to) Lawrence makes the case for a model of “event-driven problem construction.” Simply put, whereas institutionally driven news is cued by planned official pronouncements event-driven news is cued by dramatic “accidents” such as incidents of police violence.

Lawrence (2000) identifies several issues related to the struggle to construct police brutality as a social problem. First, there are no universally agreed upon definitions of police brutality or standards for designating instances of use-of-force as excessive. Second, there are differences in public perception by race and class. In a comprehensive review of the empirical literature related to perceptions of police across race/ethnicity, Peck (2015) found that, regardless
of particular measures used to operationalize attitudes on police (confidence, performance, satisfaction, personal experience, etc.), those identifying as a racial minority were more likely to hold negative perceptions or attitudes toward police than those identifying as white. Other research has shown that other social factors such as class and neighborhood composition may predict public perception of police as well. For example, Weitzer (2010) found that these variations can largely be explained by socioeconomic status, age, gender, geography and specific policies and practices. Likewise, Oliveira and Murphy (2014) found that social identification is a greater predictor of attitudes toward police than race/ethnicity. Finally, the vast majority of use-of-force incidents never make the news, even those with the potential to be labeled police brutality or excessive force. Lawrence cites over 27,000 excessive force complaints against the NYPD between 1985-1994 compared to only 198 instances of reporting on such incidents in The New York Times during the same period as support for this claim. How these few are reported is important in whether or not a particular incident becomes an example of routine or accidental news, institutionally or event-driven.

**Voices and views in the event-driven model.**

For Lawrence, an important question is not whether media increases or erodes police legitimacy in the public eye, but “who gets to participate in the mass-mediated conversation about public issues such as police brutality?” (Lawrence, 2000:31). Ultimately, when police officials are the predominant sources for these news stories different narratives are constructed than those offered when other voices are presented. Similar to much of the research discussed above, Lawrence (2000) describes the standard news coverage of police use of force as “brief, episodic, and structured around claims provided by police spokesmen and politicians” (p. 34). Reminiscent of the work of C. Wright Mills in describing the need for a sociological imagination
to connect personal troubles and public issues, she explains how the media commonly define problems through “causal stories” and particularly tend to lean toward individualized narratives versus more systemic or structural ones. This difference in construction not only changes the narrative of a news story, but also changes the potential responses to the event, even if it is seen as problematic. Simply put, if the issue is one of rogue cops or the occasional use of excessive force in defense of officers and/or the public against violent or potentially violent criminals, then this cannot be considered “brutality” or defined as a public issue. However, if seen as systemic and related to problems in training, police culture, politics, race, media and related issues, then excessive force can be publicly problematized and subject to systemic reform as opposed to the more individualized remedies of firing, civil and criminal penalties.

Lawrence agrees with Chibnall, Mawby, Hirschfield and Simon and others on the importance of institutionally driven media constructions of police violence and particularly the way that these often place the ultimate responsibility on suspects, or victims of said violence (Chibnall, 1977; Mawby, 2010; Hirschfield & Simon, 2010). These people are framed as resisting arrest, combative or otherwise threatening or dangerous and seen to have gotten what they deserved. The use of force is thus legitimated, as recognized by Hirschfield and Simon (2010) as defensive and necessary. The benefit of the doubt is extended due to the perceived danger of the profession and the potential for split-second life and death decisions (Fyfe, 1986). Lawrence contrasts these official constructions with news constructed including the perspectives of those she calls “critical non-officials.”

Critical non-officials include activists seeking police reform, residents and leaders of minority and inner city communities and some academic experts. Perspectives from critical non-officials often emphasize the responsibility of police administration for the behavior of police
officers. Also, these perspectives criticize the system of checks and balances that ignore issues of police brutality including both departmental administration and the legal system. Both are seen as lacking will to prosecute or otherwise address such problems. Critical non-officials are frequently concerned with and vocal about persistent problems within the police subculture such as the “blue wall of silence” that facilitate and perpetuate issues of brutality. Finally, critical non-officials often connect these issues to the larger social problem of racism illustrating the connection through discussion of the history of disproportionality in the criminal justice system of the United States. As discussed above, whether a story is ultimately constructed based upon the institutionally driven, or official dominance, model or this event-driven model is dependent upon context. Certain “story cues” are seen as important determining factors in this regard.

**Critical story cues and loss of official control.**

Using the Rodney King incident as an example of event-driven news, Lawrence explains how “increased media attention to police use of force is usually an indicator not that officials have successfully managed the news but rather that officials have lost control of the news” (Lawrence, 2000:64). She identifies three themes for this loss of control indicated by a sharp increase in both news coverage of police brutality and nonofficial sources and systemic claims surrounding the Rodney King incident. These include the power of the video, the official and political reactions to it and citizen reactions. Lawrence argues that the significance of the video is not just that the beating of King was taped and broadcast, as other incidents had occurred without similar impact, but that the particular way it was taped and broadcast presented a very specific context and frame that subsequently undermined the usual narrative of defensive and necessary police violence.
Lawrence describes several critical story cues that separate high-profile events, like the King case, from other lower-profile events that may simply receive more institutionally driven treatment in the news. The first such cue is the presence of other witnesses, family members, etc. who come forward with versions that contradict the claims put forth by official sources. This is especially powerful when combined with video or other physical evidence. Legal proceedings against officers, coroner’s statements that a death was homicide and racial identities of officers and citizens are also seen as critical story cues that may distinguish between institutionally-driven and event-driven news.

Other critical cues include the public, political and official responses to these incidents. The greater the frequency and intensity of these responses the more likely an incident will become an event-driven news story. Regarding the political and official response, Lawrence remarks upon how Los Angeles Mayor Bradley questioned the leadership of Los Angeles Police Department Chief Daryl Gates and called for a broad investigation. This also created obstacles for the usual individualized narrative offered by Gates and invited more systemic claims. When the investigation revealed widespread “racist rhetoric” in the department, Bradley described this as “not aberration” and this was presented as evidence of a fractured elite consensus on the definition of the situation (Lawrence, 2000:74). The Congressional Black Caucus weighed in early on, but overall reporting remained mostly reserved until the Mayor called for the Chief’s resignation a month later, largely in response to the mobilization of the African American community around the issue. This mobilization took the form of several citizen authored op-ed pieces in the newspapers, as well as action and rhetoric on behalf of the ACLU, NAACP and other concerned citizens and community organizations.
Lawrence (2000) showed that the more news coverage increased related to police use of force incidents, the more likely articles were to include the voices of critical non-officials as well as systemic claims, thematic reporting and editorial coverage. In fact, she found a sort of snowball effect exists whereby coverage of high-profile events, such as the Rodney King case, is linked to coverage of other use-of-force incidents 25% more often than mid-profile events and 77 percent more often than low-profile events. Low-profile events were designated as those receiving only 1-2 articles of coverage while mid-profile events received 3-10 and high-profile events were covered more than 10 times. Much like Fishman’s (1977) discussion of the crime wave, these high-profile events are “a ‘thing’ in public consciousness which organizes people’s perception of an aspect of their community” (pp.10-11). Therefore, high-profile events such as the Rodney King beating have the potential to open space for discussion of police violence as a social problem in the media, which may result in differences in perception, prioritization and possibly even policy.

Lawrence also offers a discussion of how this window of opportunity for reform opened by these types of events is often quite limited. Describing the phenomenon as “ritual normalization,” she explains how the ability of officials to regain control of the narrative on police violence relies on the considerable cultural and structural obstacles related to newsmaking. Even after conceding that these problems exist, journalists and news organizations are often quick to “hand the problem off to officials and conclude the ritual once they have responded “appropriately” (Lawrence, 2000:136). One need only recognize the continued relevance of keywords from the Wickersham Committee Report from 1931 to recognize how this ritual repeats itself over time. Unheeded recommendations for improved communications, police training, increased diversity in police hiring and better collection and analysis of data and
statistics echo through nearly every committee report related to policing since (Murakawa, 2014). A public historically uncomfortable confronting systemic issues of violence, particularly those concerning the poor and minorities, is often quick to accept this ritual normalization even if no meaningful reform results. Still, Lawrence concludes that “like solar eclipses, high-profile events that engender critical coverage of policing come along rarely but are no less worth studying simply because they are rare” (Lawrence, 2000:138). This proposed research contends that the killing of Michael Brown by Officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, 2014 was such a high-profile event. As such, it offers the opportunity to extend Lawrence’s proposed theory of event-driven problem construction to a new dataset. Also, this research extends Lawrence’s model geographically through the incorporation of four additional newspapers, theoretically through the addition of articles on deadly force, and analytically by utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). How this will be achieved is the focus of the following chapter.

This chapter has briefly described the nature of the relationship between the police and media as well as how this relationship has evolved over time. The connection between innovations in communications technology and police strategies and policies was also discussed. As with other major social institutions and the majority of communications research, one of the most consistent findings is that this relationship while somewhat symbiotic is still an asymmetrical one. The official dominance, or institutionally driven, model of news was presented with evidence of its existence in the police-media relationship. Finally, the alternative model of event-driven news as developed by Lawrence (2000) was explained.
CHAPTER THREE:
THE CURRENT STUDY

The main question this research attempts to answer is whether there was a change in media coverage of police brutality and deadly force after Ferguson. If the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri was in fact the type of event-driven news story described by Lawrence, then it will share certain characteristics with the media coverage surrounding the Rodney King incident. Specifically, if this officer-involved shooting constituted an event-driven story, there should be both quantitative and qualitative changes in the media coverage and the types of voices and views represented in this coverage. Therefore, this research consists of four research questions with associated expectations and analyses as described in detail below.

Methodology

A mixed methods approach is applied to a sample of articles\(^1\) published in *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Chicago Tribune* and *The Denver Post* between August 9\(^{th}\), 2013 and August 9\(^{th}\), 2015. This timeframe begins one year prior to the killing of Michael Brown and ends on the one-year anniversary of the event. This allows enough data points in the form of weekly units for possible future time-series analysis.

An analysis of the volume of articles on specified topics and content analysis of articles was used to answer the following four research questions.

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1 Articles include news stories, editorials and opinion columns indexed as “police brutality” or “deadly force.”
• Research Question #1: Did reporting on police brutality and deadly force increase after August 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2014 compared to the year before?

• Research Question #2: Did the inclusion of critical nonofficial sources in reporting on police brutality and/or deadly force increase in the year after August 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2014 relative to the year prior?

• Research Question #3: Did systemic claims regarding deadly force and/or police brutality increase relative to individualizing claims after August 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2014 compared to that which occurred the year prior?

• Research Question #4: Was there a qualitative difference in the language and narratives used to report on police brutality and deadly force incidents in the year following August 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2014 compared to reporting the year prior?

This research utilizes newspaper articles as the unit of analysis thus excluding other forms of media coverage (ex. television news, Internet/social media news). This is in part due to convenience as many newspapers employ indexing allowing for ease of searching by topic for relevant information. However, it is also due to public preference. While recent polls indicate historic lows for US trust in mass media, newspapers continue to receive a slightly greater percentage of respondents indicating a “Great deal” or “Quite a lot” of confidence in newspapers than television news or news on the Internet (Gallup, 2015). Finally, Lawrence’s original research on the Rodney King beating was limited to newspaper coverage related to that event.

The database consists of a purposive sample which was selected through a ProQuest search of all articles published in \textit{The New York Times}, \textit{Los Angeles Times}, \textit{USA Today}, \textit{The St. Louis Post-Dispatch}, \textit{Chicago Tribune} and \textit{The Denver Post} between August 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2013 and
August 9th, 2015 indexed with the subjects “police,” “deadly force,” and/or “police brutality.” The more general topic of “police use of force” was not included due to a lack of consistent indexing across newspapers. Five of the six newspapers were selected due to geographic diversity as well as the fact that they are all included in the top 25 for largest weekday circulation in the United States\(^2\). The sixth newspaper, the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, was selected due to its being the closest major paper to Ferguson, Missouri. Each of those selected (including the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*) has a circulation of over 100,000 daily. Finally, each of these newspapers are archived for an online search through ProQuest for the specified dates. Circulation is important because it indicates extensive readership and inclusion in ProQuest is required due to the ability to search newspaper archives for specific dates and subjects.

Relevant articles from each of these publications were identified for the specified timeframe. The search terms “police,” “deadly force” and “police brutality” were employed in order to maximize results and relevance. Each newspaper’s archive was searched for the dates August 9th, 2013 through August 9th, 2015 for each of the keywords in the specific search area of “subject.” The initial search yielded 3,990 articles on the subject of police, 972 articles on deadly force and 895 articles on the subject of police brutality.\(^3\) A breakdown by source and time can be seen in Table 1.

\(^2\) Newspapers from the US South were excluded due to a lack of consistent indexing.

\(^3\) All of the “police brutality” and “deadly force” articles were also included in the “police” articles. Many articles were coded as both “police brutality” and “deadly force,” therefore half of those articles were included in the “police brutality” database and half in the “deadly force.”
Table 1. Article Database, Number of Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>“Police” Pre-Ferguson</th>
<th>“Police” Post-Ferguson</th>
<th>Total Pre-Ferguson</th>
<th>“Police Brutality” Pre-Ferguson</th>
<th>“Police Brutality” Post-Ferguson</th>
<th>Total “Police Brutality”</th>
<th>“Deadly Force” Pre-Ferguson</th>
<th>“Deadly Force” Post-Ferguson</th>
<th>Total “Deadly Force”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>1,304</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>1,063</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St-Louis Post Dispatch</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Tribune</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver Post</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total=</td>
<td>1,397</td>
<td>2,593</td>
<td>3,990</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>752</td>
<td>972</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The volume of articles on the specified topics before and after the Michael Brown incident is used to address the first research question: Did reporting on police brutality and deadly force increase after August 9th, 2014 compared to the year before? If the Michael Brown incident constituted an event-driven story it is expected that the total number of newspaper articles indexed as police brutality and/or deadly force will be greater in the year following the killing of Michael Brown than in the year prior. Similarly, that increase should be evident in multiple newspapers across various geographic regions. Frequencies from each newspaper as well as the overall sample are generated in order to determine whether or not such an increase occurred. The total number of articles published both pre and post event (August 9th, 2014) are used to determine any change in the magnitude of coverage. The total number of these articles published on the front page of newspapers both pre and post event are used to determine whether or not such coverage increased in priority over time.

Content analysis is used to answer Research Questions #2 and #3. A mixed method approach is used to examine the 972 articles with the subject deadly force and the 895 articles with the subject “police brutality.” These analyses determine whether or not any significant
change(s) occurred in the voices (Research Question #2) and views (Research Question #3) presented in media coverage of police brutality after this killing compared to that coverage presented prior.

Research Question #2 asks whether the inclusion of critical nonofficial sources in reporting on police brutality and/or deadly force increased in the year after August 9th, 2014 relative to the year prior. If the Michael Brown incident constitutes an event-driven story, news coverage of police brutality and/or deadly force prior to August 9th, 2014 is expected to adhere to the official dominance or institutionally-driven model of news coverage relying primarily upon official sources and, after that date, there should be an increase in the incorporation of nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices on police brutality and/or deadly force.

Research Question #3 asks whether systemic claims regarding deadly force and/or police brutality increased relative to individualizing claims after August 9th, 2014 compared to that which occurred the year prior. If the Michael Brown coverage is event-driven, the reporting prior to and after August 9th, 2014 is expected vary by the use of individualizing versus systemic claims. Prior to August 9th, 2014 news coverage of police brutality and deadly force should adhere to the institutionally-driven, or official dominance, model of news coverage and therefore include primarily individualizing claims related to police brutality and/or deadly force. In contrast, reporting after August 9th, 2014 should incorporate more systemic claims related to these issues.

Each article was coded and grouped according to an adaptation of Lawrence’s (2000) coding schema (Figure 2 and Figure 3).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable name</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Day/month/year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Placesec      | 1 = section I or A  
               | 0 = other |
| Placepg       | 1 = page 1  
               | 0 = other |
| Newsed        | 1 = news  
               | 0 = editorials, letters, columns |
| Locnat        | 1 = local story  
               | 0 = national story |
| Off           | 1 = official mentioned  
               | 0 = no official mentioned |
| Nonoff        | 1 = non official mentioned (other than victims/suspects)  
               | 0 = no nonofficial mentioned |
| Noncrit       | 1 = activists, community leaders, community residents, academic experts mentioned  
               | 0 = no such sources mentioned |
| Indvuw        | 1 = individualizing claim mentioned  
               | 0 = no individualizing claim mentioned |
| Sysvw         | 1 = systemic claim mentioned  
               | 0 = no systemic claim mentioned |
| Casement      | 1 = particular UFI mentioned  
               | 0 = no particular UFI mentioned |
| Case          | Suspect/victim name (string variable) |
| Polact        | 1 = mention of policy action in a political institution or by institutional actors, or by candidates for political office  
               | 0 = no mention of such action |
| Citizact      | 1 = mention of citizen political action (not including activities associated with filing complaints/charges)  
               | 0 = no mention of citizen political action |
| Jrnlist       | reporter’s name (news only) (string variable) |
| Stolngth      | length of story, by number of words |
| Caselink      | 1 = other incident(s) mentioned  
               | 0 = no other incident(s) mentioned |
| Nonhead       | 1 = mention of nonofficials in headline  
               | 0 = no mention of nonofficial in headline |
| Nonlead       | 1 = mention of nonofficial in lead  
               | 0 = no mention of nonofficial in lead |
| Syshead       | 1 = mention of systemic claim in headline  
               | 0 = no mention of systemic claim in headline |
| Syslead       | 1 = mention of systemic claim in lead paragraphs  
               | 0 = no mention of systemic claim in lead paragraphs |

**Figure 2. Coding Protocol for Newspaper Articles**

Adapted from The Politics of Force: Media and the Construction of Police Brutality, by R. Lawrence, 2000 by University of California Press.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable name</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casename</td>
<td>string variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locnat</td>
<td>1 = local case 0 = other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numstory</td>
<td>number of index entries mentioning the case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontpg</td>
<td>1 = any front-page coverage 0 = no front-page coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontsec</td>
<td>1 = any I or A section coverage 0 = no I or A section coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicerace</td>
<td>1 = victim/suspect described as minority (full text search to verify) 0 = victim/suspect not described as minority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicgend</td>
<td>1 = victim/suspect described as female or female gender 0 = victim/suspect described as male or male gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicage</td>
<td>1 = victim/suspect described as under the age of 16, as an adolescent, as over the age of 60, or as a senior citizen 0 = victim/suspect not described as under the age of 16, as adolescent, as over the age of 60, or as senior citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viccrim</td>
<td>1 = victim/suspect described as having criminal record or engaged in criminal act 0 = victim/suspect not described as having criminal record or engaged in criminal act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typforce</td>
<td>1 = force other than beating or shooting described 0 = no force other than beating or shooting described</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multoff</td>
<td>1 = more than three officers participating 0 = no more than three officers participating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicdead</td>
<td>1 = victim/suspect described as dead 0 = victim/suspect not described as dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>1 = event reportedly videotaped 0 = event not reportedly videotaped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leglproc</td>
<td>1 = DA investigation, grand jury, criminal trial or civil suit reported 0 = no DA investigation, grand jury, criminal trial or civil suit reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polact</td>
<td>1 = at least one item mentioning this incident coded “1” on polact in first round of coding 0 = no stories coded “1” on “polact” in first round of coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizacl</td>
<td>1 = at least one story mentioning this incident coded “1” on “citizacl” in first round of coding 0 = no stories coded “1” on “citizacl” in first round of coding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3. Protocol for Compiling Database on Deadly Force and Brutality Incidents**
Adapted from *The Politics of Force: Media and the Construction of Police Brutality*, by R. Lawrence, 2000 by University of California Press.

For Research Question #2, a comparison of the frequencies and proportions related to the variables *off*, *nonoff*, and *noncrit* both pre and post event (August 9th, 2014) provides evidence of whether there was increased inclusion of critical, nonofficial sources in the reporting.
For Research Question #3, comparisons of the frequencies and proportions of articles coded as *indvw* and *sysvw* prior to and after August 9th, 2014 provide evidence as to whether systemic claims increased in post-Ferguson reporting.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to answer Research Question #4, which asks: Was there a qualitative difference in the language and narratives used to report on police brutality and deadly force incidents in the year following August 9th, 2014 compared to reporting the year prior? If the Michael Brown killing constituted an event-driven story, news published prior to August 9th, 2014 is expected to exhibit characteristics of Van Dijk’s notion of “the ideological square,” or framed in terms of insiders and outsiders whereby official sources are the insiders and alternative explanations the outsiders. After August 9th, 2014 it is expected that there would be qualitative differences in the rhetoric used to discuss issues of police brutality and/or deadly force perhaps illustrated by particular concepts employed in CDA. The population of articles was divided into subgroups based upon initial coding for sources (official, critical nonofficial), claims (individualizing, systematizing), resulting action(s) (political, citizen) and profile (high, medium, low). This initial coding and categorization allowed for theoretical sampling of 10 to 15 articles from each category in order to obtain relevant data to explicate categories. According to Charmaz (2006) “theoretical sampling involves starting with data, constructing tentative ideas about the data, and then examining these ideas through further empirical inquiry” and “helps you to delineate and develop the properties of your category and its range of variation” (p. 102-103). These samples from each relevant category were then analyzed using CDA.

Critical discourse analysis is uniquely suited for this research due to its focus on social problems and political issues as well as “the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate,
reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance in society” (Van Dijk, 2001:353). Richardson (2007) describes newspaper discourse as an activity, or “directed at doing something” (p. 220). CDA recognizes the importance of social context on such activity and takes into consideration the ways this context can enable certain voices to be heard and/or silence others. Likewise that just as social context can influence the news, the news can also influence social context. Incorporating key concepts from CDA including lexical analysis, transitivity, modality and rhetorical tropes helps determine whether any significant changes in reporting post-Ferguson either “reproduce these social conditions (e.g. by naturalizing them) or can challenge them, by showing that social change is not only possible but inevitable” (Richardson, 2007:221).

**Lexical Analysis**

Lexical analysis involves paying particular attention to the specific selection of language to describe a particular phenomenon. A popular example to describe the difference such selection can make is that of war reporting. Allan (2004) examined the linguistic choices of reporters covering the 1991 Iraq War and pointed out the following differences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>They have</th>
<th>We have</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A war machine</td>
<td>Army, Navy and Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship</td>
<td>Reporting restrictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propaganda</td>
<td>Press briefings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They</td>
<td>We</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroy</td>
<td>Suppress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kill</td>
<td>Eliminate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kill</td>
<td>Neutralise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They launch</td>
<td>We launch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sneak attacks</td>
<td>First strikes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W/o provocation</td>
<td>Pre-emptively</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Their men are</th>
<th>Our men are</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Troops</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hordes</td>
<td>Lads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddam Hussein is</td>
<td>George Bush [Snr] is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demented</td>
<td>At peace with himself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other important choices to examine through lexical analysis include naming and predication. Naming and predication relates to the way that individuals are identified or referred to in a particular discourse. Since all individuals generally inhabit many social roles simultaneously (race, gender, class, occupation, etc.) it follows that there are then several different ways to describe a person. The selection of a specific role to refer to an individual can “signal the relationship between the namer and the named” (Richardson, 2007:49). Initial coding for mentions of victim/suspect’s criminal record or engagement in criminal activity allowed for further examination along these lines and more specifically for identifying evidence of what Van Dijk (2001) calls the “ideological square.” The ideological square is a referential strategy whereby discourse is framed in terms of insiders and outsiders with the former having a positive representation and the latter having a more negative one. Presence of the ideological square is important in this regard as official dominance in news coverage of police brutality and/or deadly force would likely exhibit framing that supports the “us vs. them” dichotomy commonly expressed within police culture. On the other hand, event-driven news may be alternatively framed.

Similar and sometimes overlapping with naming in terms of lexical analysis is predication. Predication is a more specific form of reference whereby certain attributes of individuals are directly emphasized. Depending upon the types of adjectives, similes, metaphors and other rhetorical devices employed individuals may be further positively or negatively portrayed. Recently, for example, CNN has come under fire for describing Freddie Gray, who was killed by Baltimore police, as “the son of an illiterate heroin addict” (Richards, 2015). This negative type of naming and predication is expected to be more prevalent prior to Ferguson in stories exhibiting characteristics of official dominance due to the ideological square.
constructions of police as “insiders” and those subjected to brutality or deadly force as “outsiders.” On the other hand, more positive types of naming and predication were expected in regard to those, especially high-profile, news stories of police brutality and deadly force published after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson due to an alternative construction of the ideological square.

Transitivity

Where lexical analysis is primarily concerned with the representation of specific actors, or nouns, transitivity is more interested in the ways in which actions are represented in discourse, or verbs. However, the actors remain important, as certain types of representation can either minimize or maximize particular actors’ agency. Often the example of “John kicked the ball” is used to illustrate the importance of transitivity, and more specifically the potential for syntactic transformation. It is also an option to say, “The ball was kicked.” This, however, changes the construction from active (“John kicked the ball”) to passive (“The ball was kicked”) and in the process deletes John and his agency. While this may be a trivial difference in many narratives or news stories one need only replace the example with “Darren Wilson killed Michael Brown” and “Michael Brown was killed” or “Rodney King beating” compared to “police beating of Rodney King” to recognize the potential impact for purposes of this research. Officially dominated news stories were expected to utilize active constructions of those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force. These articles were also expected to incorporate more passive constructions regarding actions taken by police whereby officers are either somewhat removed from the process or presented as more acted upon than acting. Those more event-driven stories were expected to incorporate more passive constructions of those, such as Michael Brown, reported as
subject to police brutality and/or deadly force after August 9th, 2014. Likewise, given the expected increase in different types of voices and views post-Ferguson, one could expect to see more active voice constructions being used to present police as acting upon those presented as victims of police brutality and/or deadly force.

**Modality**

According to Richardson (2007), “modality forms the counter-part of transitivity, referring to judgments, comment and attitude in text and talk, and specifically the degree to which a speaker or writer is committed to the claim he or she is making” (p. 59). He lists several modal verbs such as may, could, should, will and must as well as their negations (may not, could not, etc.) and describes how these selections are more often found in editorials, letters and opinion pieces. Still, the presence of such language indicates particular values and judgments related to the topic at hand and discourse analysts categorize modality in two forms: truth modality and obligation modality. The former indicates certainty on a continuum from categorical (choice of “will”) to hedgy (“can if”) to less certain (“could if only”). The latter gives a further idea of the speaker or writer’s position by relying upon the use of language like “ought” or “should.” Coding for both official and nonofficial sources as well as political and citizen action was expected to provide examples where modality is likely to come into play in this dataset. Officially dominated news stories were expected to show examples of truth modality and obligation modality from official sources, particularly police officials. Event-driven news stories were expected to show such examples from other sources such as activists, academics, journalists or others.
Rhetorical Tropes

Richardson (2007) presents journalism as an argumentative strategy. Realizing that the news is necessarily socially constructed, the journalist is then pressured to present his/her story in such a way that it persuades the reader to accept its validity. While there are literally hundreds of strategies for doing so, Richardson presents five crucial to the analysis of newspapers: hyperbole, metaphor, metonym, neologism and puns. For the purposes of this research, only the first two were examined. Given the sensational nature of news stories on police brutality and deadly force, hyperbole and metaphor were expected. Hyperbole is defined as excessive exaggeration. Hyperbole is often used for sensational or humorous effect, but can sometimes have sinister effects, specifically relative to minorities, the mentally ill and/or criminals according to Richardson (2007). He cites Van Dijk’s discussion of a police officer who was not simply “stabbed,” but instead “hacked down and mutilated in a fury of blood lust” as an example (Van Dijk, 1991:219). Attention was paid to the use of verbs and adjectives applied to the actors involved in these specific accounts of deadly force and police brutality to determine whether or not such hyperbole was present. Metaphor is the description of one thing in the terms of another, such as discussion of sports events through a war metaphor: visitors attack the home team or one team slaughters another. Both hyperbole and metaphor were expected in the construction of news related to police brutality and each could further indicate the presence of news values and/or the ideological square. In other words, officially-dominated news stories of police brutality and/or deadly force are likely to use hyperbole and metaphor in a way that exaggerates or sensationalizes the actions taken or threat posed by those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force. Likewise, more event-driven news stories were expected to exaggerate or sensationalize the actions of police. Similarly, the utilization of metaphor is expected to adhere more to the
ideological square with police as the insiders in officially-dominated news stories and with police as the outsiders in more event-driven stories.

These questions are important from a theoretical perspective in order to further understand the dynamics of the police-media relationship and particularly how and whether certain events might facilitate narrative shifts in the media. If the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri constitutes an event-driven news story then it is expected that reporting on issues of police brutality and deadly force will have increased afterward. Likewise, that this increase includes more voices of those “critical nonofficials” and systemic claims. Finally, that these quantitative differences will coincide with qualitative differences in the way(s) in which issues of police brutality and/or deadly force and associated actors are reported upon. Thus, extending Lawrence’s model to more recent news could not only be of interest to those in police and media studies but may also benefit practitioners, activists and other concerned citizens interested in issues of police violence, public opinion and policy.
CHAPTER FOUR:

RESULTS

The findings of this research are presented below in order of the four research questions. Research Question #1 regarding the amount of newspaper coverage specific to both police brutality and deadly force is addressed in the first section below. Research Questions #2 and #3 are examined in the following section—characterizing changes in voices and views. Finally, the results of the CDA are presented to answer Research Question #4.

Amount of Coverage Before and After August 2014

To answer Research Question #1, frequencies of articles in each newspaper coded as police brutality or deadly force were documented. Table 2 below shows the increase in articles published post-Ferguson compared to the year before. Figures 4 to 9 below show the frequency distributions of all the newspaper articles in each newspaper indexed as police brutality. Figures 10 to 13 show the corresponding frequency distributions of all the newspaper articles in each paper indexed as deadly force.
Table 2. Increase in Number of Articles Published Post-Ferguson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>“Police Brutality”</th>
<th>“Deadly Force”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-Ferguson</td>
<td>Post-Ferguson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St-Louis Post Dispatch</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Tribune</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver Post</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>733</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is an increase in articles published on both topics after the killing of Michael Brown by Officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9th, 2014. The trend is most pronounced in The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch coverage of both topics. The Denver Post and USA Today searches yielded significantly fewer results, but the trends in frequencies are similar. The peaks in coverage correspond to several events and their associated stories. Specifically, news coverage begins to increase in July 2014 related to the killing of Eric Garner in New York City and tends to peak in August 2014 with the articles surrounding the killing of Michael Brown.

A second wave of news coverage occurs around November and December 2014 perhaps in response to waves of massive protest related to police violence and particularly the grand jury decisions not to indict in both the Garner and Brown cases. In fact, there is more coverage during this period than the year prior in over half of the newspapers analyzed. Toward the end of the period under examination there are increases in reporting from April 2015 through July 2015 related to the cases of Walter Scott in Charleston, South Carolina, Freddie Gray, in Baltimore,
Maryland, Samuel DuBose in Cincinnati, Ohio, Sandra Bland in Prairie View, Texas and also an incident at a pool party in McKinney, Texas.⁴

Figures 4 through 9 provide illustration of the frequency of publication of articles indexed as police brutality over the timeframe beginning one year prior to the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and ending one year after. From August 2013 through July 2014 there were a total of 48 relevant articles indexed in The New York Times under police brutality, an average of four articles per month (see Figure 4). During the period from August 2014 to August 2015, 271 such articles were published, an average of nearly 21 articles per month. Figure 4 below illustrates the frequencies by month. In short, compared to the year before the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, The New York Times increased publication of articles indexed as police brutality by nearly 465 percent the following year (48 articles pre-Ferguson and 271 post-Ferguson or an average of 4 monthly articles pre-Ferguson and 21 post-Ferguson).

As would be expected, the differences from year to year are greatest during those periods of increased coverage surrounding the various high-profile cases mentioned above. From August 2013 to August 2014, there was a 1700 percent increase (two articles in August 2013 and thirty-six in 2014). Most of this increase can be attributed to increased coverage of the killings of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in New York City. Between December 2013 to December 2014 the increase is 1633 percent based largely upon the non-acquittals in the

---

⁴ On April 4, 2015 Officer Michael Slager of the North Charleston Police killed Walter Scott by shooting him multiple times in the back as he attempted to flee. Video recorded by an eyewitness, Feidin Santana, contradicted Slager’s police report. Freddie Gray died April 19th, 2015 after having been taken into custody by Baltimore police one week prior and suffering severe spinal injuries after being transported in the back of a police van without being secured. Samuel DuBose was shot and killed by Ray Tensing, a University of Cincinnati police officer on July 19, 2015 during a traffic stop for a missing license plate. Sandra Bland was found hanged in a jail cell three days after being arrested and charged with assaulting an officer after a traffic stop in Waller County, TX on July 10, 2015. The McKinney pool party incident occurred on June 5, 2015 and received a great deal of public and media attention due to a viral video showing Cpl. Eric Casebolt restraining a fifteen year old black girl wearing a swimsuit and also drawing his gun on two other teens.
Brown and Garner cases (three articles in December 2013 and 52 in December 2014). It is also during this timeframe when the first coverage of the killing of Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio is found. Then, from May 2014 to May 2015 the increase is 533 percent (six in May 2014 and 38 in May 2015). This increase is mostly due to coverage of the killing of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland but it is also linked to several low-profile cases, one being the first mention of the killing of Walter Scott in Charleston, South Carolina (an incident that increased in profile over time). June and July 2015 include coverage on the pool incident in McKinney, Texas as well as continued coverage of Eric Garner, Freddie Gray and Tamir Rice.

![Police Brutality Coverage New York Times (August 2013-August 2015)](chart)

**Figure 4. Police Brutality Coverage The New York Times (August 2013-August 2015)**

In *Los Angeles Times* from August 2013 through July 2014 there were a total of 84 relevant articles indexed under “police brutality,” an average of seven articles per month. During the period from August 2014 to August 2015, 125 such articles were published, an average of 9.6 articles monthly. Figure 5 below illustrates the frequencies by month. Compared to the year before the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri *Los Angeles Times* increased
publication of articles indexed as police brutality by 48.8 percent the following year (84 pre-Ferguson and 125 post-Ferguson).

*Los Angeles Times* experienced a spike in reporting on police brutality in December 2013 and January 2014 related to the case of Kelly Thomas who was killed by police in Fullerton, California. Also here, the differences are greatest, though less pronounced, during those periods of increased coverage surrounding the various high-profile cases mentioned above: the Garner killing in July 2014; the Michael Brown killing in August 2014; non-acquittals in both in December 2014; and the Scott, Gray, Bland, DuBose and McKinney cases in the summer of 2015. From August 2013 to August 2014, there was a 450 percent increase (four in August 2013 and 22 in August 2014). Similar to *The New York Times*, this increase is largely driven by coverage of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, but the *Los Angeles Times* coverage also includes several articles dedicated to the killing of Ezell Ford in Los Angeles and also the video recorded beating of Marlene Pinnock by a California Highway Patrol officer. December 2013 to December 2014 the increase is 150 percent (eight in December 2013 and 20 in December 2014) primarily due to coverage of the grand jury decisions in Garner and Brown and from May 2013 to May 2014 the increase is 25 percent (eight in May 2013 and ten in May 2014) due to continued coverage of Brown, Ford and Gray but also several low-profile local incidents.
Figure 5. Police Brutality Coverage *Los Angeles Times* (August 2013-August 2015)

In the *Chicago Tribune* from August 2013 through July 2014 there were a total of 18 relevant articles indexed under police brutality for an average of 1.5 articles per month. During the period from August 2014 to July 2015, 142 such articles were published for an average of nearly 11 articles per month (10.9). Figure 6 below illustrates the frequencies by month. Compared to the year before the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri *Chicago Tribune* increased publication of articles indexed as police brutality by 688.8 percent the following year (18 pre-Ferguson and 142 post-Ferguson). Again, the differences are greatest during those periods of increased coverage surrounding the various high-profile cases mentioned above. From August 2013 to August 2014, there was a 767 percent increase (three in August 2013 and 26 in August 2014). This increase is driven primarily by coverage of Michael Brown, but also includes several low-profile cases. December 2013 to December 2014 the increase is 933 percent (three in December 2013 and 31 in December 2014) revolving around Brown and Garner but also several low-profile cases and from May 2014 to May 2015 the increase is 100 percent (two in May 2014 and four in May 2015). In Chicago, April also seems to be significant
with a 650 percent increase in reporting from year to year (two in April 2014 and 15 in April 2015). Here, too Walter Scott and Freddie Gray feature prominently.

Figure 6. Police Brutality Coverage *Chicago Tribune* (August 2013-August 2015)

In the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* from August 2013 to July 2014 there were a total of 9 relevant articles indexed under police brutality for an average of 0.75 articles per month. During the period from August 2014 to August 2015 114 such articles were published for an average of 8.7 articles per month. Figure 7 below illustrates the frequencies by month. Here, too compared to the year before the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* increased publication of articles indexed as police brutality by 1166 percent the following year (nine pre-Ferguson and 114 post-Ferguson). From August 2013 to August 2014, there was a 1900 percent increase driven by coverage of both Brown and Garner (zero in August 2013 and 19 in August 2014). December 2013 to December 2014 the increase is 2400 percent (one in
December 2013 and 25 in December 2014) and from May 2014 to May 2015 the increase is 300 percent (zero in May 2014 and three in May 2014).

![Figure 7. Police Brutality Coverage St. Louis Post-Dispatch (August 2013-August 2015)](image)

The *Denver Post* and *USA Today* showed similar trends. The *Denver Post* published only 2 articles indexed as police brutality in the year prior to the killing of Michael Brown compared to 24 the year following. Similarly, *USA Today* published only a single article indexed as police brutality the year before compared to 57 afterward. Spikes in their post-Ferguson coverage resemble those in other areas as well with increased reporting occurring in August and December 2014 and also May 2015. These trends are illustrated in Figures 8 and 9 below.
Figure 8. Police Brutality Coverage *Denver Post* (August 2013-August 2015)

Figure 9. Police Brutality Coverage *USA Today* (August 2013-August 2015)
In the section above, the results were summarized for articles indexed as “police brutality.” Similar trends exist in the examination of articles indexed as deadly force and published in the year prior to the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri compared to the year that followed. Figure 10 illustrates *The New York Times* coverage of deadly force and here as in the coverage of police brutality, the first big spike occurs in August 2014 with coverage of Brown, Ford and Garner. Similar increases follow in January with continued coverage of Garner, Ford and Brown but also Rice, Gurley and several low-profile cases. Several low- and mid-profile cases emerge in March, April and May 2015 alongside coverage of Brown, Scott, Rice and Gray. Overall, *The New York Times* coverage of deadly force increased 335 percent in the year following the killing of Michael Brown compared to that year prior (93 pre-Ferguson and 405 post-Ferguson for a monthly average of 7.75 articles pre-Ferguson and 31.15 post-Ferguson).

**Figure 10.** Deadly Force Coverage *The New York Times* (August 2013-August 2015)
Los Angeles Times coverage of deadly force is also substantially increased in the year following the killing of Michael Brown compared to the year prior, but it seems to decrease somewhat sooner and with less of a spike in May 2015 than that seen in The New York Times coverage as Figure 11 illustrates. The largest increase involves coverage of Ford, Brown and Garner in August 2014. The spike in November 2014 is driven largely by continued coverage of Brown, but also Ford and several low-profile cases. December 2014 includes coverage of Ford, Brown, Garner, Rice and several low-profile incidents. Overall, the year preceding events in Ferguson, Missouri the Los Angeles Times published 94 articles indexed as deadly force and in the year following 190 such articles were published. This represents a 102 percent increase in such coverage with 7.8 average articles per month pre-Ferguson and 14.6 post-Ferguson.

Figure 11. Deadly Force Coverage Los Angeles Times (August 2013-August 2015)
The *Chicago Tribune* increased coverage post-Ferguson by 167 percent. However, this coverage represents significantly fewer total articles than either *The New York Times* or the *Los Angeles Times*. In fact, the *Chicago Tribune* published fewer articles indexed as deadly force over the entire 2-year period than *The New York Times* or the *Los Angeles Times* published just in the year prior to the killing of Michael Brown. The increase in August 2014 is related to Brown and several articles where the deceased was yet unnamed. The spike in November and December 2014 involves coverage of Brown, Garner, Rice and other low- and mid-profile cases.

![Deadly Force Coverage Chicago Tribune (August 2013-August 2015)](image)

**Figure 12. Deadly Force Coverage Chicago Tribune (August 2013-August 2015)**

As could be expected, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* also followed these trends with an 867 percent increase in coverage of deadly force post-Ferguson. The year prior saw only 9 total articles published that were indexed as deadly force (an average of 0.75 monthly) whereas the year after saw 87 (an average of 6.7 monthly). The increase in August 2014 is related to Brown but also to a low- and mid-profile local cases. November and December are dominated by
coverage of Michael Brown, but also Tamir Rice and several articles on low- and mid-profile local cases. Again here the increase seems to disappear after January 2015.

![Deadly Force Coverage St. Louis Post-Dispatch (August 2013-August 2015)](image)

**Figure 13. Deadly Force Coverage St. Louis Post-Dispatch (August 2013-August 2015)**

Coverage of deadly force in both the *Denver Post* and *USA Today* was so sparse as to be almost insignificant. Prior to the killing of Michael Brown *Denver Post* published two articles indexed as deadly force and *USA Today* published one. The next year, *Denver Post* published five and *USA Today* nine.

In addition to the increase in overall coverage of the topics of police brutality and deadly force post-Ferguson, there was also a marked increase in the priority such coverage was given. Front-page newspaper articles are generally seen as more important and therefore given more attention, depth and detail. The amount of articles indexed as either police brutality or deadly force appearing on the front pages of these selected newspapers increased after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9th, 2014 compared to the year before. The year prior to this event there were 18 front-page articles indexed as police brutality compared to 116
the year after, an increase of 544 percent. Likewise, in the year prior to the event there were 26 front-page articles indexed as deadly force compared to 135 the year after, an increase of 419 percent.

In summary, there was a considerable increase in the number of articles published on both topics, police brutality and deadly force, the year after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri compared to the year prior. These increases correspond with particular national high-profile cases such as Brown and Garner as well as with some more regional mid- and high-profile cases such as Ford, Pinnock and others. Likewise, the priority of stories related to police brutality and deadly force increased in the year after Ferguson compared to the year before as seen by the increased publication of such news stories on the front page of multiple newspapers.

**Voices Pre and Post-Ferguson**

As above, reporting on both police brutality and deadly force increased considerably following the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Pursuant to Research Question 2, if this event was significant enough to shift overall news coverage on these topics from the standard model of officially-dominated news production to the event-driven model, then increases were also expected in the types of voices represented within these articles. Specifically, proportionately more nonofficial sources were expected to be included within this increased coverage after the event as compared to the year prior. Figures 14 and 15 below illustrate the inclusion of nonofficial (“nonoff”) and critical nonofficial (“noncrit”) voices over the timeframe under examination here with regard to articles indexed as police brutality and deadly force respectively. These trends mirror those with regard to overall reporting. With event-driven news
stories on police brutality and deadly force we expect to see the inclusion of both nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices to increase. In fact, we see a great deal more of such inclusion in the year after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri compared to the year prior. Also, spikes in such voices occur commensurate with those spikes in overall reporting. This is possibly a function of sheer opportunity, but also likely related to the inclusion of such voices in other high-profile cases such as Eric Garner and Akai Gurley in New York City\(^5\), Walter Scott in Charleston, South Carolina, Freddie Gray, in Baltimore, Maryland, Samuel DuBose in Cincinnati, Ohio and Ezell Ford in Los Angeles\(^6\).

![Figure 14. Overall Voices on Police Brutality](image)

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\(^5\) Akai Gurley was shot and killed by Officer Peter Liang of the NYPD on November 20, 2014.

\(^6\) Ezell Ford was shot and killed by Officers Sharlton Wampler and Antonio Villegas of the LAPD on August 11, 2014.
Figure 15. Overall Voices on Deadly Force

The absolute number of voices included post-Ferguson is expected to increase commensurate with the overall increase in articles published. However, increases in the inclusion of both nonofficial and critical nonofficials as a proportion of the total were observed as well. Table 3 below illustrates the proportions of voices in those articles indexed as police brutality both pre- and post-Ferguson. The representation of official voices remained nearly the same post-Ferguson (66%) compared to the prior year (65%). Nonofficial voices increased six percent post-Ferguson (83%) compared to the prior year (77%). Similarly, the inclusion of critical nonofficials increased eight percent post-Ferguson (73%) compared to the prior year (65%).
Table 3. Proportions of Voices in Articles Indexed as Police Brutality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Ferguson</th>
<th>Post-Ferguson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>off</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonoff</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noncrit</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, increases in the inclusion of nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices were observed in the articles published and indexed as deadly force (Table 4). The inclusion of official voices actually decreased 18 percent post-Ferguson (73%) compared to the prior year (91%). Nonofficial voices increased six percent (76%) compared to the year prior (70%) and critical nonofficial voices increased by nine percent (75%) compared to the prior year (66%).

Table 4. Proportions of Voices in Articles Indexed as Deadly Force

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Ferguson</th>
<th>Post-Ferguson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>off</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonoff</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noncrit</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lawrence (2000) found in her research on the Rodney King incident that the voices of critical nonofficials were found more frequently in high-profile cases than in low- or mid-profile cases. In order to identify the profiles of the various cases in this database articles were sorted according to their casename and grouped as such in order to create an incident database. After creating an incident database for both police brutality and deadly force, 150 specific incidents of
police brutality were identified. One hundred and ninety four specific incidents of deadly force were identified. Using Lawrence’s criteria for the categories, “low-profile cases” were those incidents that resulted in only 1 to 2 articles worth of coverage, “mid-profile” cases resulted in 3 to 10 articles and “high-profile” cases resulted in more than 10 articles worth of coverage.

Figure 16 below illustrates the incident database for the two-year period and shows that the majority of incidents under both police brutality and deadly force were low-profile cases (82.4% and 77.7% respectively). Mid-profile cases were 11.1 percent of the police brutality articles and 18 percent of those indexed as deadly force. Finally, high-profile cases represented a small percentage of the total incidents (6.5% police brutality and 4.3% deadly force). (Three of the ten high-profile cases were represented in both police brutality and deadly force: Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Eric Garner in New York City and Ezell Ford in Los Angeles, California.)

All but two of the high-profile cases appeared after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The Garner case while occurring prior to Brown received the majority of news coverage afterward. In police brutality, the cases of Sam Dubose in Cincinnati, Ohio, Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland and Walter Scott in Charleston, South Carolina all became high-profile incidents after Michael Brown. Only Kelly Thomas from Fullerton, California received high-profile coverage pre-Ferguson. With regard to deadly force, and in addition to Brown, Garner and Ford, the cases of Akai Gurley in New York City and Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio followed the Brown killing as high-profile incidents. Prior to the killing of Michael Brown, only the case of James Boyd in Albuquerque, New Mexico received high-profile coverage.
Table 5 below illustrates the likelihood of critical nonofficial voices according to incident profile for police brutality incidents. With regard to the inclusion of critical nonofficial voices, the difference between low-profile and high-profile cases is predictably much greater than that between high and mid-profile incidents. In fact, there was no difference between the mid- and high-profile police brutality incidents with regard to the inclusion of critical nonofficial voices. All of the high-profile police brutality incidents and all of the mid-profile police brutality incidents included such voices. This compares to only 56 percent of low-profile police brutality incidents (Table 5).

Table 5. Incorporation of Critical Nonofficial Voices by Incident Profile in Police Brutality Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low-profile</th>
<th>Mid-profile</th>
<th>High-profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 16. Incident Profiles
These trends are similar with regard to the incidents of deadly force (Table 6). Again, the difference between low-profile and high-profile cases is predictably much greater than that between mid- and high-profile incidents. However, there was a slight difference between the mid- and high-profile deadly force incidents with regard to the inclusion of critical nonofficial voices. Here 100 percent of high-profile incidents included critical nonofficial voices compared to only 96 percent of mid-profile incidents. Only 66.7 percent of low-profile incidents included such voices.

Table 6. Incorporation of Critical Nonofficial Voices by Incident Profile in Deadly Force Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident Profile</th>
<th>Low-profile</th>
<th>Mid-profile</th>
<th>High-profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The evidence above indicates that the inclusion of critical nonofficial voices increased in post-Ferguson news coverage of both police brutality and deadly force. This increase was driven largely, though not entirely, by the continued publication of articles on high-profile cases such as Brown, Garner and others. These results are consistent with Lawrence’s research on news coverage related to the Rodney King beating where she found that the inclusion of such voices tended to increase as articles published on a particular case increased. The next section examines whether or not this increased inclusion of different types of voices also increased the inclusion of significantly different views with regard to police brutality and deadly force. It was expected that the increased incorporation of nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices would likewise increase systemic claims regarding police brutality and deadly force.
Views on Police Brutality and Deadly Force Pre and Post-Ferguson

Research Question #3 asks whether systemic claims regarding deadly force and/or police brutality increased relative to individualizing claims after August 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2014 compared to that which occurred the year prior. Systemic claims are those explanations for police brutality and deadly force that characterize the problem as related to systemic issues (training, culture, politics). Individualizing claims are those that refer instead to specific situational factors (isolated incident, bad apples, etc.) If the Michael Brown coverage is event-driven, the reporting prior to and after August 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2014 is expected to vary by the use of systemic versus individualizing claims. Specifically, the incorporation of systemic claims is expected to increase in post-Ferguson coverage. Tables 7 and 8 show the proportion of articles containing individual views and systemic views, respectively, both pre and post-Ferguson in both the police brutality and deadly force articles. As a proportion of total articles the incorporation of individualizing views remained similar in the police brutality sample but decreased significantly in the deadly force sample. Pre-Ferguson police brutality articles included individual views 66 percent of the time compared to 64% of those articles published after Ferguson. In the deadly force database 86 percent of the articles published pre-Ferguson included individualizing views compared to 70 percent afterward (Table 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Ferguson Police Brutality</th>
<th>Post-Ferguson Police Brutality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66% (63/95)</td>
<td>64% (313/492)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Ferguson Deadly Force</th>
<th>Post-Ferguson Deadly Force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>86% (119/136)</td>
<td>70% (312/448)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individualizing views of both police brutality and deadly force were more frequently found in both timeframes than systemic claims. However, the inclusion of systemic views increased in both samples post-Ferguson. As seen in Table 8, prior to Ferguson 29 percent of articles indexed as police brutality included such views compared to 54 percent afterward. In the deadly force sample 21 percent of pre-Ferguson articles included systemic claims compared to 32 percent afterward.

Table 8. Proportion of Articles Containing Systemic Views (sysvw)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Ferguson Police Brutality</th>
<th>Post-Ferguson Police Brutality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29% (28/95)</td>
<td>54% (267/492)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Ferguson Deadly Force</td>
<td>Post-Ferguson Deadly Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21% (29/136)</td>
<td>32% (143/448)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the increase in likelihood of critical non-official voices, the increase in systemic claims increased with the profile of the associated case. Every high-profile police brutality incident included systematizing views. Three-fourths (75%) of mid-profile police brutality cases included systematizing views and 31.5 percent of low-profile incidents (Table 9). With regard to systematizing views the difference between high- and mid-profile incidents is considerably greater in deadly force incidents. All of the high-profile incidents included systematizing views compared to 40 percent of mid-profile incidents and only 19.4 percent of low-profile incidents (Table 10).
Table 9. Proportion of Police Brutality Incidents Containing Systemic Views by Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low-profile</th>
<th>Mid-profile</th>
<th>High-profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10. Proportion of Deadly Force Incidents Containing Systemic Views by Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low-profile</th>
<th>Mid-profile</th>
<th>High-profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In regard to these six newspapers, the frequency of reporting on both police brutality and deadly force increased after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri consistent with Lawrence’s event-driven news model. Also, there was an increase in particular types of voices and views included in this reporting, specifically the voices of nonofficial and critical nonofficials and systematizing views consistent with Lawrence’s event-driven news model. Whether or not this increased reporting and increased inclusivity resulted in “more of the same” or significantly different narratives is the focus of the following section.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Research Question #4 asks: Was there a qualitative difference in the language and narratives used to report on police brutality and deadly force incidents in the year following August 9th, 2014 compared to reporting the year prior? If the Michael Brown killing constituted an event-driven story, news published prior to August 9th, 2014 is expected to exhibit characteristics of Van Dijk’s notion of “the ideological square,” or framed in terms of insiders and outsiders whereby official sources are the insiders and alternative explanations the outsiders.
After August 9th, 2014 it is expected that there will be qualitative differences in the rhetoric used to discuss issues of police brutality and/or deadly force perhaps illustrated by particular concepts employed in CDA that reflect the alternating positions of the ideological square. Specifically, event-driven news stories are expected to be less likely to frame those subjected to police brutality and/or deadly force as outsiders.

The articles for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) were selected through a mix of stratified and systematic random sampling from the available coverage of both police brutality and deadly force incidents published in the six newspapers included in the database. Purposive sampling was utilized in order to identify the population of articles in 12 separate categories. These categories were based upon six specific codes from the initial analysis indicating the presence of official voices, critical nonofficial voices, individual views, systemic views, political action and citizen action. Articles identified as having the presence of any of the voices, views and/or actions above in either the deadly force or police brutality databases were grouped according to timeframe (pre-Ferguson or post-Ferguson). Random number generation was then used to systematically select articles for Critical Discourse Analysis from the data base. Overall, two articles were selected from each category for a total of 24 articles.

Each of these selected articles was coded using a color scheme developed according to the elements introduced above: lexical analysis, transitivity, modality and the rhetorical tropes of metaphor and hyperbole. **Lexical analysis** is concerned with the naming and predication of particular actors or acts. Therefore, for purposes of this research specific nouns and adjectives used to describe police officers and also those who were identified as the subject, or alleged

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7 The 12 categories reflect the two categories (police brutality and deadly force); six codes for the voices, views and/or actions; and two time periods (before and after the Ferguson incident).
subject, of the police brutality or deadly force described in each article were the focus. For example, a 2014 Chicago Tribune article published March 24 describes “a team of plainclothes cops” (naming) as “rogue officers” (predication) (Trice, 2014:1.6). Likewise, the language used to describe either the act/actions of police brutality or deadly force was identified. In the same Chicago Tribune article, these actions were described as “casual cruelty” (Trice, 2014: 1.6).

Relevant terms and passages from all articles were highlighted in yellow to identify lexical analysis and each was coded as linked to officer(s) or subject(s) and as positive or negative (where “plainclothes cops” would be positive and “rogue officers” negative). Officially dominated news stories are expected to utilize more positive forms of naming and predication regarding police and more negative types for those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force. On the other hand, event-driven news stories are expected to utilize more positive forms of naming and predication related to those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force.

Where lexical analysis is concerned with nouns, transitivity is related to the portrayal of particular actions and their relation to specific actors (or the lack thereof) so this phase of analysis focused upon verbs and their subjects and objects. Again, from the Chicago Tribune, the aforementioned “rogue officers” were said to have “preyed on some of the community’s most vulnerable members” (Trice, 2014: 1.6). Relevant terms and passages in this regard were identified and highlighted in red to indicate transitivity and coded according to positive or negative (where “preyed upon” is negative but “used force” is positive). In terms of the ideological square, transitivity prior to Ferguson is expected to exhibit more positive verbiage regarding police and more negative verbiage in terms of those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force. If news stories post-Ferguson are more event-driven we will find less negative

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8 Lexical analysis may also involve actions, however this would involve nouns describing them such as “an attack” or “the beating” whereas transitivity concerns the construction of actions using verbs and their subjects and objects: “Officer Wilson shot Michael Brown,” for example.
verbiage related to those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force. Likewise, it is expected that police will be seen as more acted upon prior to Ferguson with those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force as more acted upon afterward.

**Modality**, concerned with judgments made by the author about the topic at hand, is identified by the use of words such as “may,” “could,” “should,” “will,” “must” and their negations “may not,” “could not,” and so on. These words were identified and highlighted in orange and coded according to positive (may, could, should, etc.) or negative (may not, could not). An example of modality is found in an editorial from *The New York Times* published on September 19th, 2013 about the killing of Robert Ethan Saylor. The authors state that, “Mr. Saylor might have been stubborn and argumentative, but he was not mentally ill or a criminal” and go on to say that “those who know him insist that the encounter could have been defused with patience and sensitivity” (emphasis added). Finally, they write how “three deputies who lacked understanding of mental disabilities might have benefited from practical instruction, which the Frederick County sheriff acknowledged no one in his department had ever received” (NYT Editorial Board, 2013: A.30, emphasis added). If news stories are event-driven it is expected that judgments (particularly those from critical nonofficials) would emphasize what could and should have been done by police, prosecutors and others and/or what must and must not be done in response to situations of police brutality and/or deadly force. This would not be expected with regard to officially-dominated news stories.

Finally, the **rhetorical tropes of hyperbole and metaphor** were located and coded using blue and green, respectively. These were coded according to the subject of reference--whether officer or subject--and also whether positive or negative in nature. Nicholas Kristof utilizes hyperbole in an editorial for *The New York Times* published January 11th, 2015. He writes about
how “hate-mongering led by President Obama built a climate of animosity that led to the murder of two of New York’s finest” and quotes ex-New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani as stating that “We’ve had four months of propaganda, starting with the president, that everybody should hate the police” (Kristof, 2015: SR.1). An August 21st, 2013 article from *Los Angeles Times* used metaphor to describe how “For average people in Las Vegas, the whole police review system is a realm of toothless tigers” (Glionna, 2013: A.1). Hyperbole and metaphor are expected to be present in both timeframes but event-driven would be more likely to negatively frame those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force prior to Ferguson compared to afterward.

Overall, the richest data were linked to the first two categories: lexical analysis and transitivity. Very little was found with regard to modality. Similarly, hyperbole and metaphor were sparse throughout these articles with most reserved for descriptions of the police response to protests in the post-Ferguson timeframe rather than particular incidents of police brutality or deadly force. Findings in each category are discussed in turn below.

**Lexical Analysis**

Regarding lexical analysis it is expected that the articles will contain identifying evidence of the strategy Van Dijk (2001) calls the “ideological square” where discourse is framed in terms of insiders and outsiders. In such discourse, insiders are given a positive representation and outsiders a more negative one. On the other hand, event-driven news may be alternatively framed. More specifically, negative naming and predication of those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force is expected to be more prevalent prior to Ferguson in stories exhibiting characteristics of official dominance. On the other hand, less negative types of naming and predication are expected in regard to those news stories of police brutality and deadly force published after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson. In other words, representations of
those subject to police brutality and deadly force are expected to be more negative prior to Ferguson compared to those afterward.

This does not seem to be the case with overall news coverage of police brutality and deadly force when comparing those articles published prior to the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri with those articles published afterward. Ultimately, the way in which events and associated individuals were described differed more by the profile of the event itself (i.e., low-, mid-, or high-profile) than by timeframe. As described above, the vast majority of both police brutality (82.4%) and deadly force incidents (77.7%) were low-profile events (indicated by only 1 or 2 articles of coverage). The descriptors in these articles could also be described as low-profile, or neutral. For example, police were often described simply as “police,” “the officers” or “senior police officials.” Likewise, others involved were given generic labels such as “a man,” or “a man later identified as ________.” Events in low-profile cases were similarly referred to as “the incident” or “an altercation.”

As the profile of the incident increases, so too does the descriptive language utilized in the naming and predication of the subjects of brutality or deadly force. The Pinnock case, which was a mid-profile incident prior to the reporting of the Michael Brown killing in Ferguson, provides an interesting example. This incident took place in Los Angeles on July 1st, 2014. A California Highway Patrol officer was videotaped on top of Marlene Pinnock, 51, punching her in the head at least ten times. Here, the naming of the incident is negative-described as a “police beating” or “the beating of Pinnock.” Pinnock, the target of said beating is subsequently described positively using predication such as “caring and sweet,” and naming her as “a mother of two who once studied bookkeeping and accounting,” and “known as a sweet, friendly presence.” An acquaintance explains how “she won’t do anything to harm anybody” and she is
said to have “graduated from Jefferson High School in South Los Angeles” and her status as a mother and grandmother is documented.

Still, while described positively Pinnock is not named or predicated as an “ideal victim.” Christie (1986) explains how the “ideal victim” is that individual or category of person most readily given the legitimate status of being a victim in news reports and Carrabine et. al (2004) describes those on the margins of society such as criminals, drug users or the homeless as much less likely to secure such status. In the case of Marlene Pinnock it is reported that she “had been arrested at least a dozen times since 2008” and “was suspected of crimes classified as misdemeanors, including thefts, trespassing and one battery.” Also, her homelessness is highlighted as some of the positive comments made about her are qualified as coming from “some who lived in a homeless encampment underneath an overpass where the 10 Freeway crosses La Brea Avenue.”

Two mid-profile incidents provide examples of the naming and predication of an “ideal victim” in reporting on police brutality and deadly force prior to reporting on the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson: the cases of John Wrana in Chicago and Jonathan Ferrell in North Carolina. In describing the attributes of ideal victims, one category identified is the elderly, “perceived as vulnerable, defenceless, innocent and worthy of sympathy and compassion” (Greer, 2017:22). Reporting on the killing of John Wrana by Chicago police in July 2013, Chicago Tribune contributor John Kass initially introduces Wrana as “just shy of his 96th birthday” and “an Army veteran of World War II.” Throughout his article, “the old man” is described as “a weak old guy,” “wobbly on his feet,” and “an old, old man.” While the author admits that Wrana may have been “frustrated or scared” or even “angry and agitated,” he concludes that he “didn’t deserve what came to him” regardless of the police explanation that he
threatened them with a knife. Kass concludes his August 18th, 2013 report on the killing of John Wrana initially quoting a source named Golbert who stated, “I suppose a law professor could dream up some hypothetical where that would be appropriate;” Kass continues, “someone will likely try. John Wrana didn’t deserve what came to him. And I will not let this go” (Kass, 2013:1.2).

A similarly sympathetic portrait is painted of Jonathan Ferrell who was shot and killed by Charlotte-Mecklenberg Police Officer Randall Kerrick on September 14, 2013 responding to a woman’s call for help after Ferrell, 24 knocked on her door, apparently for assistance after a car accident. Ferrell is described as “a former Florida A & M University football player,” “unarmed” and “an all-American young man who survived a horrific accident.” Remembered as “a very happy and outgoing person” who “recently moved to Charlotte from Florida and worked two jobs, at a Best Buy and a department store” it is also confirmed that, “he had no criminal record.” The incident of deadly force that led to Ferrell’s death is portrayed as his having been “crying for help and showered with bullets.”

The two high-profile cases pre-Ferguson show considerable variation in regard to the construction of narrative, particularly regarding the naming and predication of those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force. The case of Kelly Thomas—who was beaten to death by Fullerton, California police officers Manuel Ramos and Jay Cicinelli—was one in which the officers were charged criminally for a death involving actions taken while on duty. Charged with second-degree murder, involuntary manslaughter and excessive use of force, the officers were eventually acquitted, but not before the case played out in the court of public opinion. Descriptions of Thomas ranged from sympathetic characterizations of him as “confused and vulnerable,” “a docile, gentle passive homeless person” and “a passive, confused transient who
helplessly weathered a beating from police until he crumpled to the ground, the blood running from his head” to more negative portrayals. The latter included, like the Pinnock case, descriptions of Kelly Thomas as a “mentally ill homeless man” “who has suffered from schizophrenia,” “a violent and errant street person who gave police the fight of their lives.”

Descriptions of the police in this case are similarly varied ranging from the positive—“a police officer who for 10 years protected his community and did everything he could do to keep the community safe”—to the negative, “freaking ruthless.”

Similarly, in Albuquerque New Mexico, the killing of James Boyd is described as “an incident” involving “a mentally ill and homeless man” or “the fatal shooting of a distraught homeless man.” However, the portrayal of Albuquerque police is often in the context of the Justice Department’s report released in April 2014 where, as Santos (2014) explains, the APD “was castigated…for systemic and unconstitutional use of excessive force” (p. A. 16).

As noted above, post-Ferguson several high-profile cases emerged. Of course, the Michael Brown case in Ferguson, Missouri is included but also continued coverage of the Eric Garner case in New York City; the killing of Samuel DuBose by a University of Cincinnati police officer; Freddie Gray’s death in the back of a Baltimore police van; and the police shootings of Walter Scott in South Carolina, Ezell Ford in Los Angeles, Akai Gurley in New York City and Tamir Rice in Cleveland. Descriptions of each of these cases are comparable to the pre-Ferguson cases in some ways. In both timeframes there is considerable variation in regard to naming and predication of those individuals subject to police brutality and/or deadly force. Much of this variation is related to the source(s) naming or otherwise describing those subjects. Official accounts tend to focus on potentially negative or damaging characteristics of these individuals. Ezell Ford’s mental illness is emphasized, for example. However, articles that
include critical-nonofficials’ sympathetic portrayals of these individuals and cases increase post-Ferguson as well. This is not to say that each of these high-profile cases achieves “ideal victim” status. In fact, the only case post-Ferguson that seems to meet the standard for such status is that of Akai Gurley. No less an authority than Police Commissioner William Bratton refers to Gurley as “a total innocent.” Gurley was killed by Officer Peter Liang in New York City during a “vertical patrol” of a darkened stairwell, a tactic that comes under scrutiny in discussions of the case. Cases seem to exist upon a continuum where one end represents the “ideal victim,” or the “total innocent.” These incidents are reported as unnecessary and/or tragic and regrettable, even by official accounts. On the other end are incidents where the use of force is seen as justified with official (and sometimes nonofficial) accounts often utilizing the language of the “excuses” and “justifications” offered by officers in Hunt’s (1985) “Police Accounts of Normal Force.”

Between these two extremes are those articles with some degree of recognition that the use of force was extreme and/or the consequences dire, but also including a level of understanding or explanation as to why it had to occur. Police officials often refer to these types of situations as “lawful but awful.” More sympathetic portrayals of the subjects of high-profile cases post-Ferguson almost all include some combination of descriptors such as “young black man” and “unarmed,” except in the cases of Tamir Rice, referred to most often as “a boy” or “young black boy” whose age, 12, is often included. Still, many articles on the killing of Tamir Rice include the qualifier that he was playing with a BB gun described as “realistic” providing some level of

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9 Based upon 18 months of participant observation research, Hunt found that officers normalize the use of extra-legal force by three particular types of accounts: excuses, situational justifications and abstract justifications. Excuses recognize inappropriateness but deny full responsibility. Situational justifications refer to the threatening of an officer or their authority (physically or symbolically) and abstract justifications refer to force used against particularly reprehensible groups or individuals (cop haters, sexual deviants, child abusers, etc.)
justification. Similarly, articles on Freddie Gray generally contain mention that he was found in possession of a knife, which is alternately described as a “switchblade” or “pocket knife.”

Similar variations in naming and predication are present in the cases of Eric Garner in New York and Michael Brown in Ferguson. Garner’s size and health are most often emphasized as he is described as having “weighed 350 pounds and had health problems including asthma” but also his behavior since he “had been arguing with officers and objecting to being arrested.” Michael Brown’s age, race and unarmed status are often emphasized with some variation of “unarmed 18 year old black male” or “unarmed black teen” the most often utilized descriptions of his person. His size is emphasized (he “was a big man at 6-foot-4 and 292 pounds”) but this is tempered with the statement “though his family and friends described him as quiet and shy, a homebody who lived with his grandmother.” His future plans are discussed in multiple articles as well as the fact that he was “a 2014 Normandy High School graduate…scheduled to begin classes at Vatterott College.” Witnesses’ accounts of his “hands in the air” are prevalent in early accounts and articles. Initially, the identity of Officer Darren Wilson was withheld from media coverage, but once revealed he is almost always referred to as “a white officer.” This dynamic is present as well in the cases of Eric Garner, Samuel DuBose, Walter Scott and Tamir Rice.

Along with the use of humanizing/sympathetic forms of naming and predication offered by critical non-officials, the emphasis on racial difference in the naming and predication of officers and those killed is the most prominent finding and difference in coverage of both police brutality and deadly force before and after the killing of Michael Brown. In fact, the dynamic is so prevalent that multiple articles in the post-Ferguson sample refer to “the deaths of several unarmed black men at the hands of white police officers.” Prior to Ferguson this difference is rarely noted and/or emphasized.
Transitivity

Transitivity is concerned with “describing the relationships between participants and the roles they play in the processes described in reporting” (Richardson, 2007:54). Simpson (1993) offers three potential categories to look for transitivity. First, noun phrases can identify participants (“rogue officers,” “most vulnerable members of the community”). Second, the process itself can be found by looking at the verb phrase (“attempted to arrest,” “terrorized”). Finally, adverbial and prepositional phrases can elucidate circumstances associated with the process. For purposes of this research, the process under examination is those actions describing the event in each article coded by the newspapers in this sample as either police brutality or deadly force. For example, “the killing of unarmed black teenager Michael Brown by a white police officer,” or “Wilson killed Brown without reason.”

More specifically regarding the transitivity of these articles, there are certain expectations with regard to active and passive voice where these processes (police brutality and/or deadly force) are concerned. The APA 6th Edition recommends that writers use the active voice for clarity (APA, 2009:77). In such sentences, the subject of the sentence is performing the action denoted by the verb. For example, “Officer Darren Wilson shot Michael Brown” is an active construction where Officer Darren Wilson is doing the shooting. A passive construction of the same process might read, “Michael Brown was shot by Officer Darren Wilson.” Here the subject of the sentence, Michael Brown, is being acted upon whereas in the active voice construction, Michael Brown was the direct object of the action taken by the subject of the sentence, Officer Darren Wilson.

Active voice constructions are preferable due to their direct nature and clarity. On the other hand, passive construction has the potential to increase the difficulty of a reader
understanding precisely what is being done, by whom and/or to whom. In fact, many word processing programs, such as Microsoft Word, will recommend that users reconstruct sentences written in the passive voice, suggesting more active constructions. While passive voice constructions are often utilized for simple variety in sentences, in certain contexts, a passive voice construction can seem to remove agency or a particular actor from a process. In terms of this research and the presence of the ideological square one might expect to see much of this type of transitivity. For instance, those verb phrases representing the processes of police brutality or deadly force would likely correspond with passive constructions whereby the police actors in such accounts are either somewhat removed from the process or presented as more acted upon than acting. Conversely, the other actors in such processes would be subject to more active constructions where they are seen as more active and acting than passive and/or acted upon. In regard to the official dominance model of news production, one might expect to see more passive voice prior to the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Likewise, if news stories post-Ferguson are event-driven, one could expect to find more active voice constructions being used to present police as acting upon those presented as victims of police brutality and/or deadly force.

In this research, however, police are seen as predominantly active in both the pre-Ferguson and post-Ferguson samples for articles indexed as deadly force as well as those indexed under police brutality. This could simply be a function of the natural preference for active voice construction in writing. On the other hand, those subject to police brutality or deadly force are seen as passive far more frequently post-Ferguson compared to active pre-Ferguson. There are also several other slightly different types of transitivity construction. In a few instances, the process of deadly force (or police brutality) is presented in an almost “actorless”
fashion. For example, “the fatal shots were fired.” This presentation leaves the reader to fill in the blank as to who fired the shots. These kinds of constructions often coincide with active presentations of those subject to police brutality or deadly force. In other words, these individuals are reported as resisting arrest, assaulting officers or otherwise behaving in an aggressive or disorderly fashion.

The difference between active and passive actors is most pronounced when comparing articles published pre-Ferguson to those published post-Ferguson, whether indexed as deadly force or police brutality. Prior to the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, the majority of articles presented descriptions of the events whereby police were seen as active (68% police brutality; 60% deadly force) though often in response to the actions of those they were acting upon. For example, “police used a Taser on a suspect who resisted arrest.” These active constructions were repeated post-Ferguson but with the notable difference that targets/victims of police brutality and/or deadly force were more frequently presented as being acted upon through passive voice constructions (“Michael Brown was shot and killed by Officer Darren Wilson”). Once these differences in transitivity constructions emerged, another round of coding was completed in order to further elucidate these different categories.

Sentences where actions occurred without actors were categorized as “actorless.” Active constructions with targets/victims of deadly force or police brutality as the active subjects were categorized as “active victim.” Those passages where police were the subjects and acting upon others were considered “active police.” Passages where police were the subject of action, or acted upon, were considered “passive police.” Finally, those statements passively constructed presenting the targets/victims of deadly force or police brutality as being the acted upon subjects of a sentence were categorized as “passive victim.” As a result of this level of coding, the pre-
Ferguson sample presents mostly active police and active victim articles while post-Ferguson active police and passive victim are more prevalent (Table 11). After presenting and briefly describing examples of each type of construction, the significance of the difference between time frames will be discussed below.

Table 11. Proportion of Transitivity Categories by Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Pre-Ferguson</th>
<th>Post-Ferguson</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PB</td>
<td>DF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actorless</td>
<td>6% (3/50)</td>
<td>6% (3/50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Police</td>
<td>68% (34/50)</td>
<td>60% (30/50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active victim</td>
<td>34% (17/50)</td>
<td>56% (28/50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive victim</td>
<td>14% (7/50)</td>
<td>24% (12/50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive police</td>
<td>0% (0/50)</td>
<td>0% (0/50)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pre-Ferguson. Each of these categories other than “passive police” is present to some extent in those articles published and indexed as either police brutality or deadly force prior to the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Beginning with those categorized as “actorless” each of the other four categories will be discussed in turn with examples.

Actorless constructions pre-Ferguson. Six pre-Ferguson articles (three police brutality; three deadly force) reporting on the cases of Jonathan Ferrell and Rekia Boyd employ actorless constructions, where actions appear to occur without actors. This represents six percent of both the police brutality and deadly force samples. In the former case these constructions include statements such as “Ferrell was shot 10 times and killed.” In the latter, “A bullet hit Boyd in the
back of the head as she fled for cover.” All of these passages/statements decontextualized might seem to indicate the erasure of a particular actor. However, as Richardson (2007) cautions, “it is important not to fixate on an individual passive structure and the meaning that it (arguably) realizes” (p. 57). In each of these cases, the passive structure seems to be merely an author’s choice for variety, as agency is clearly illustrated in other surrounding sentences, passages, etc. This agency is the focus of the next two categories.

**Active police pre-Ferguson.** A majority of articles sampled pre-Ferguson employ active constructions with police as the subject, or acting party (68% police brutality; 60% deadly force). Pre-Ferguson articles indexed as police brutality often contain passages from lawsuits or other court cases. These constructions generally depict police acting upon others and are therefore categorized as active police. For example, Queally (2014) reports in the *Los Angeles Times* how “A group of Philadelphia narcotics officers repeatedly robbed and assaulted the drug suspects they were supposed to be investigating, engaging in a campaign of brutality that lasted nearly six years” (p. AA.2). Similarly, *The New York Times* journalist Frances Robles (2013) writes of accusations against Detective Louis Scarcella where a murder defendant asserts how “The detective had knocked him around,” “The detective had abused him,” and “Mr. Scarcella slammed his head into a locker” (p. A.1). However, active constructions with the police as subject are not all so accusatory or condemning. For example, this statement from Cindy Carcamo’s April 23rd, 2014 report in *Los Angeles Times*: “An officer fatally shot a 19-year old woman suspected of stealing a vehicle before pointing a gun at police, authorities said” (Carcamo, 2014:A10). Likewise, active constructions are not simply relegated to police actors, as seen next.
Active victim pre-Ferguson. Also, in the pre-Ferguson police brutality sample are descriptions from the police perspective that illustrate the actions of those citizens alleged to have experienced police brutality, therefore coded as active victim. In the police brutality articles pre-Ferguson 34 percent contain passages categorized as active victim. For example, reporting on the case of Timothy Peterka in the St-Louis Post-Dispatch, journalist Joel Currier writes how “Cavanaugh forced Peterka to the pavement when Peterka protested Cavanaugh’s intent to frisk him, the suit and police say” and also “Dunne said, ‘the fellow resisted Sergeant Cavanaugh’s efforts to pat him down for his own safety’” (p. A.1). Other active victim constructions in the pre-Ferguson police brutality sample include coverage of the case of Jonathan Ferrell. “’He began banging on the door viciously,’ Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Chief Rodney Monroe told reporters before the officer was charged” (Zucchino, 2013: A.5).

Another such active victim construction is seen in the Kelly Thomas case: “The homeless man died not because of the altercation with police, but because his past drug abuse had damaged his heart, the attorneys said” (Esquivel, 2014:A.1). Officer Nichols of the LAPD testified that Brian Mulligan, a Hollywood and banking executive alleging brutality, “turned to face him, curling his fingers like claws, gnashing his teeth and growling. Then, Nichols testified, Mulligan got into a tackle stance and charged him” (Winton, 2014:AA.3).

Early reports on the Eric Garner case also include these active-victim constructions. Erik Eckholm’s June 18th, 2014 article in The New York Times includes the passage “The recording shows Mr. Garner, who had health problems including severe asthma, arguing with officers who had accused him of illegally selling cigarettes on a sidewalk in Staten Island” (p. A.19). Similarly, James Queally of the Los Angeles Times reports how “Garner became involved in an
escalating argument with the officers, repeatedly asking them to ‘leave me alone’ before the officers pounced on him, videos of the incident show’ (p. A.12).

The active constructions of the targets/victims are even more prevalent in the pre-Ferguson sample of articles indexed as “deadly force.” Here, 56 percent of the articles sampled contain such constructions. The Ferrell case is represented here, as David Zucchino of the Los Angeles Times reports on January 29, 2014 how “According to police, Ferrell approached the officers, ignoring their orders to stop” and “Ferrell moved toward Kerrick, according to the police account, and the officer fired the fatal shots” (p. A.8). Similarly, Cindy Carcamo of the Los Angeles Times describes how “Police said Armand Martin, 50, came out of his home Sunday afternoon ‘with a handgun in each hand, firing shots’” (p. A.11). David Goodman (2013) of The New York Times describes how “The police later said the man, Guillermo Melendez, 37, a former boyfriend of the woman’s, had also attempted to attack the officers with a black-handled kitchen knife” (p. A.18). Not all of those actors reported as subject to either police brutality or deadly force are depicted through active constructions, however.

Passive victim pre-Ferguson. In the pre-Ferguson sample of police brutality articles there are passages in a few articles (14%) where targets/victims of police brutality are presented in passive constructions. This includes the Ferrell case where David Zucchino (2014) of the Los Angeles Times writes how “He’s crying for help and is showered with bullets” (p. A.5). Kim Severson of The New York Times also uses a passive construction for the Ferrell case on September 17th, 2013 explaining how “A former college football player shot to death while searching for help after a car accident was killed by 10 bullets fired by a Charlotte, N.C., police officer, officials said Monday” (p.A.12). Likewise, the case of Darrin Hanna in Chicago where Robert McCoppin of the Chicago Tribune reports, “Hanna, 45, was beaten and shocked with an
electric stun gun multiple times during his arrest on a domestic violence call in North Chicago in November 2011. He died in a hospital one week later” (p. 1.4).

In the pre-Ferguson sample of deadly force articles, the case of John Wrana presents several passive constructions where journalist John Kass (2013) of the Chicago Tribune writes how “An old man who couldn’t stand without help was first tased, then shot multiple times, as many as four times” and how “Wrana died in a hospital of internal bleeding hours later” and that “…a preliminary report ruled that Wrana died as a result of a tremendous blow to the abdomen caused by the bean-bag round” (p. 1.2). On March 22, 2014 Maura Dolan of the Los Angeles Times presents similar constructions in the case of Scott Olsen. She describes “…a Marine veteran who suffered brain damage when a police officer shot him with a beanbag round during an Occupy Oakland protest” and “Scott Olsen, 26, who served two tours in Iraq, suffered a fractured skull and traumatic brain injury on Oct. 25, 2011, when Oakland police tried to disperse a crowd near City Hall” (p. AA.3). Dolan also reported on the case of Andy Lopez on November 5, 2013 stating that “Andy Lopez was walking to a friend’s home on the outskirts of Santa Rosa when a sheriff’s deputy shot and killed him, mistaking the eighth-graders plastic BB gun for an assault weapon.” She goes on to describe a similar case and how “The 13-year-old Los Angeles boy, who was shot while playing with friends in Glassell Park, was left a paraplegic” (p. AA.1). Overall, 24 percent of the articles in the pre-Ferguson deadly force sample include constructions categorized as passive victim.

Post-Ferguson. We can similarly look at these various constructions within the police brutality and deadly force articles post-Ferguson. After the shooting of Michael Brown there was a single article in the sample containing a passage with a passive construction of police actors, thereby coded as “passive police.” This was an article in The New York Times on August 22nd,
2014 reporting that “…two officers were confronted by Kajieme Powell, 25, who was behaving erratically and brandishing a knife…” (Bosman, Apuzzo and Santora, 2014:A1). Actorless constructions were nearly as rare post-Ferguson as pre-Ferguson with 2 percent and 8 percent in the police brutality and deadly force samples respectively. Active police constructions in police brutality articles remained similar with 68 percent pre-Ferguson and 70 percent post-Ferguson and decreased 4 percent in deadly force articles from 60 percent pre-Ferguson to 56 percent post-Ferguson. Perhaps the most interesting differences occur regarding the constructions employed (active or passive) for the subjects of police brutality or deadly force. Active victim constructions decreased considerably in police brutality articles from 34 percent pre-Ferguson to 16 percent post-Ferguson and also in deadly force articles from 56 percent pre-Ferguson to 18 percent post-Ferguson. On the other hand, passive victim constructions increased in police brutality articles from 14 percent pre-Ferguson to 48 percent post-Ferguson and in deadly force articles from 24 percent pre-Ferguson to 64 percent post-Ferguson (Table 21). These will be discussed in turn below.

Actorless post-Ferguson. There were a few instances whereby deadly force or police brutality was presented as “actorless,” such as the Michael Brown case where a statement from St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar describes how “The officer and Brown then got out of the car, and at that point the fatal shooting occurred.” Likewise, in the case of Akai Gurley, “In the darkness, a shot rang out from the officer’s gun.” A total of five articles (one police brutality and four deadly force) include the actorless construction. However, much like the pre-Ferguson examples, these statements seem to reflect an author’s choice for variety rather than any attempt at removing agency since the context in each article also provides active constructions with police as the actors.
Active police post-Ferguson. Active constructions of police are prevalent in both post-Ferguson samples (70% police brutality; 56% deadly force). Nicholas Kristof reporting on the case of Tamir Rice in The New York Times on January 1, 2015 describes how “A white police officer, who had previously been judged unprepared for the stresses of the job, shot Tamir” (p. SR.1). On June 10, 2015 Ashley Southall of The New York Times reports how “A police officer in McKinney, Tex., who was seen on video pulling his gun on teenagers in swimsuits and shoving a young black girl’s face in the ground at a pool party has resigned, the police said Tuesday” (p. A.17). In the Chicago Tribune on November 26, 2014 James Queally and Michael Muskal explain how “Wilson, who remains on administrative leave, killed Brown on Aug. 9” (p. 1.1). An editorial from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch September 12, 2014 describes how “The police in and around Ferguson have shot and killed twice as many people in the past two weeks as the police in Japan, a nation of 127 million, have shot and killed in the past six years, ‘The Economist reported’” (p. A.12). Similar to the pre-Ferguson sample not all active constructions are condemnatory. For example, Hansen and Serna’s August 23rd, 2014 report from Los Angeles Times describes how “The trainee officer returned fire and killed Alvarado after what police called a ‘protracted gun battle’” (Hansen and Serna, 2014:AA.1). Likewise, articles post-Ferguson contain constructions of active victims.

Active victim post-Ferguson. Passages presenting active constructions of targets/victims of police brutality and/or deadly force are present post-Ferguson (at 16% and 18% respectively), though in decreased proportion compared to the pre-Ferguson sample (34% police brutality; 56% deadly force). For example, another statement from Chief Belmar indicates how “Brown pushed the officer back into the car, then entered the vehicle as the two men struggled over the officer’s gun” (Pearce, Srikrishnan & Zucchino, 2014, A.6). The Garner case as reported by David
Goodman of *The New York Times* and others also includes such construction. Goodman (2014) writes, “…Mr. Garner, a Staten Island man who resisted arrest while selling untaxed cigarettes and died after a police officer used a chokehold to subdue him” (p. A.23). These active victim constructions are less prevalent however post-Ferguson than passive victim constructions.

*Passive victim post-Ferguson.* The most interesting category in the post-Ferguson samples however, is that of the passive voice constructions of targets/victims of police brutality and deadly force (48% police brutality; 64% deadly force). These types of passages are frequently found throughout articles in both samples and sometimes alongside constructions categorized otherwise, such as active victim, active police and so on. (Coding only considered whether or not such constructions were included in an article; many articles contained numerous such constructions.) Compared to the pre-Ferguson sample, these types of constructions increased 34 percent in the police brutality articles and 40 percent in deadly force (Table 10). This increase is particularly prevalent in high-profile cases such as Brown, Garner Rice, Ford and others.

For example, in *The New York Times’* Kristof’s January 1, 2015 column on the Tamir Rice case presents “…the boy’s 14-year-old sister rushing to her fallen brother—and then tackled by police, handcuffed, and placed in a police car a few feet from her dying brother” (p. SR.1). Charles Johnson of the *Chicago Tribune* uses such a construction to present the Tamir Rice case on November 30, 2014 as well. He writes how “Rice was killed, by police estimation, two seconds or less after officers arrived in their squad car, responding to what a 911 caller reported as a kid with a gun, ‘probably fake, but scaring people’” (p. 1.21).

Multiple articles present the passive construction of the Michael Brown killing with some variation of “Michael Brown was shot and killed by Darren Wilson,” with even a Presidential
proclamation in the context of Michael Wines and Sarah Cohen’s May 1st, 2015 *The New York Times* article:

Since Mr. Brown was fatally shot in an encounter with a Ferguson, Mo., police officer in August, so many unarmed black males have died in police confrontations that even President Obama noted this week that ‘it comes up, it seems like, once a week now, or every couple of weeks.’ Calling such encounters ‘a slow-rolling crisis,’ he added, ‘This is not new and we should not pretend it is’” (p. A.1).

Several articles accentuate the passive voice with naming and predication by also stating that Brown was unarmed such as an account by Frances Robles and Julie Bosman in the August 18th, 2014 *The New York Times*: “Within minutes, Mr. Brown, who was unarmed, was dead of gunshot wounds” (p. A.1). (This is also an example of an actorless construction, but again one where context provides evidence of agency through other more active police constructions.) An editorial in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* uses the passive voice to state the significance of Brown’s killing to the area, stating “From the moment 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed by Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson on Canfield Drive that Saturday afternoon, life in our region has changed dramatically” (p. A.16).

*The New York Times* article by Nikita Stewart on August 24, 2014 about the Garner case also mentions the killings of Sean Bell and Ramarley Graham using passive victim constructions. She writes “Mr. Graham, 18, was shot and killed by the police in his Bronx home in 2012” and “Mr. Bell, 23, was shot and killed by the police in 2006 hours before he was to get married” (p. A.17). On April 29, 2015 another *The New York Times* piece describes the case of Freddie Gray with repetition of the passive victim construction by stating:
They subdued him; his spine was nearly severed, his voice box was smashed and he was hauled off in a police van, even after he requested medical attention multiple times. He died a week later as a result (Watkins, 2015:A.23).

On June 19, 2015 the Chicago Tribune reported on the case of Officer Marco Proano who fired into a stolen vehicle injuring two teenagers inside. Multiple passages include the passive victim construction. One passage states how “One of the teens was shot in the shoulder and grazed in his forehead and cheek, according to the lawsuit.” Another describes how “Another teen was shot in his left hip and right heel” and a third reports that “A third teen was forcibly taken to the ground by one of the officers, causing an injury to his right eye, the suit alleged” (p.11). Tina Susman and Maria La Ganga utilize the passive voice reporting on the case of Samantha Ramsey in the Los Angeles Times on November 16, 2014. They write of how “…Samantha Ramsey died a violent death” and explain that “In April, Ramsey was killed when a sheriff’s deputy fired four bullets through her car windshield as she left a party on the banks of the Ohio River.” This article also reminds the reader of the case of Kelly Thomas, describing him as “a homeless man with schizophrenia” who “was beaten in 2011 by Fullerton police when he wouldn’t follow their commands” (p. A.1). On December 7th, 2014, after outlining several killings by police (mostly in passive voice constructions) including Amadou Diallo, Gidone Bosch, Richard Watson and Patrick Dorismond, Ginia Bellafante of The New York Times provide this passive voice clause for context: “Last month, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that 461 felony suspects had been killed by police officers across the country last year, the highest figure in two decades” (p. MB.1). It was expected that alongside these different types of representations and constructions that journalists, other authors and/or voices represented would likewise contain
considerable judgment as to what could or should be done regarding these incidents and issues. This is not the case with these samples, however, as addressed in the next section.

**Modality**

The presence of modality in these samples is extremely limited. Even in those op-ed and editorial articles that appear, authors utilize hardly any language judging whether or not specific actors in the event described “may,” “could,” “will” or “must” do anything. Pre-Ferguson there is only one such passage identified in the sample where The New York Times’ Editorial Board reports that “If the Maryland commission comes up with policies and practices that change the way agencies see and treat those with disabilities and prevent future tragedies, it will have delivered a measure of recompense for Mr. Saylor’s senseless death” (NYT Editorial Board, 2013:A.30). No such passages are identified in the sample post-Ferguson. Likewise, there are no articles in either timeframe where authors or others describe what “ought” or “should” occur in regard to those cases or events represented. This is likely due to the minor representation of op-eds and editorial pieces in these samples.

**Rhetorical Tropes (Hyperbole and Metaphor)**

Similar to modality, very little hyperbole or metaphor is found in the writing contained in these samples of articles. The use of hyperbole was nearly non-existent with no passages identified in the pre-Ferguson sample. Post-Ferguson the only passage coded as hyperbole was in Nicholas Kristof’s January 11th, 2015 commentary where he stated that “Hate-mongering led by President Obama built a climate of animosity that led to the murder of two of New York’s finest” and he quoted former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani as saying “We’ve had four months
of propaganda, starting with the President, that everybody should hate the police” (Kristof, 2015:SR1). While hyperbolic, this passage does not refer to a particular event of reported police brutality or deadly force and was therefore excluded.

Pre-Ferguson there was a single passage utilizing metaphor with regard to reported police brutality or deadly force. This was in *The New York Times* account of the killing of Miriam Carey by Secret Service and Capitol police officers after she hit a police officer and a police car during a high-speed pursuit down Pennsylvania Avenue. A tourist who witnessed the event stated that, “it was like poking a hornet’s nest” (Schmidt, 2013:A.12). Post-Ferguson what was found regarding metaphor had more to do with descriptions of the police response to protest in Ferguson (“like a warzone”), the St. Louis County prosecutor (“like a deer in the headlights”) or police review processes in Las Vegas (“a realm of toothless tigers”) than any specific incidents of police brutality or deadly force. The only example post-Ferguson where metaphor was directly applied to an incident or actors in a specific case of police brutality or deadly force would be Officer Darren Wilson’s descriptions of Michael Brown as looking like “a demon” or “Hulk Hogan” (Kass, 2014:1.2). Given the scarcity of relevant passages illustrating either modality or the rhetorical tropes of hyperbole or metaphor no comparison before and after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri is possible using CDA for these concepts.
CHAPTER FIVE:
DISCUSSION

Much of the previous research investigating the relationship between the police and media has found evidence of the official dominance model of newsmaking (Chibnall, 1977; Chermak and Weiss, 2005; Lawrence, 2000; Lee and McGovern, 2014; Mawby, 1999; 2010; 2014). In examining the news coverage surrounding the high-profile and controversial case of the LAPD beating of Rodney King in 1991, Lawrence (2000) formulated an alternative model of news production. Comparing routine news to accidental news and recognizing police brutality and/or deadly force incidents as the latter, Lawrence explained how these kinds of events can significantly alter the way news is constructed. Specifically, she proposed an event-driven model of news production, where news is constructed through the incorporation of different voices and views.

Lawrence’s model identifies both quantitative and qualitative differences in news that is constructed according to an officially dominated model of production and that which is more event-driven. Specifically, increased coverage is associated with event-driven news stories. Along with an increase in the frequency and amount of coverage dedicated to such events (where frequency signifies the number of articles related to a particular incident and amount of coverage the number of words, pages, etc.), the inclusion of particular types of voices and views increases as well. Whereas officially dominated news stories generally rely upon official sources event-driven news stories incorporate more nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices.
news adhering to the official dominance model tends to include individualizing views ("bad apples," “isolated incidents”) the event-driven model includes systemic views (police culture, training, recruitment, etc.)

The current research sought to explore whether news constructed after Officer Darren Wilson’s killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9th, 2014 reflects event-driven news, and, if so, whether and how this event-driven news might have affected the construction and tone of the discourse in newspapers regarding police brutality and/or deadly force.

This chapter provides a discussion of the results of this study in the context of the research questions. Relevant findings and their implications for theory and research are presented along with limitations of this research and directions for future research. First, a discussion of each of the four research questions for this study is presented with an emphasis on the relationship of these findings to current theory and research. Second, the potential policy and practical implications of this study are discussed. Specific attention is paid to how this research could contribute to discussions of policy related to practitioners of criminal justice as well as the journalists who cover them. Third, the strengths and limitations of the study are discussed and, finally, this chapter proposes future research and provides concluding thoughts.

Review of Research Questions

Based upon Lawrence’s (2000) research on the event-driven news model pertaining to the police beating of Rodney King, four research questions were formulated. The first research question is, “did reporting on police brutality and deadly force increase after August 9th, 2014 compared to the year before?” If post-Ferguson news coverage reflected the event-driven news
model, there should be an increase in the number of deadly force and police brutality articles published post-Ferguson. The second research question is, “did the inclusion of critical nonofficial sources in reporting on police brutality and/or deadly force increase in the year after August 9th, 2014 relative to the prior year?” Consistent with the event-driven news model it was expected that an increase in the frequencies and proportions of critical nonofficial sources would be observed. The third research question is, “did systemic claims regarding police brutality and/or deadly force increase relative to individualizing claims after August 9th, 2014 compared to that which occurred the year prior?” If news stories post-Ferguson adhered to the event-driven news model, there should be an increase in the frequencies and proportions of systemic claims. The fourth, and final, research question is, “was there a qualitative difference in the language and narratives used to report on police brutality and deadly force incidents in the year following August 9th, 2014 compared to reporting the year prior?” If the event-driven news model is present post-Ferguson, articles published before and after the shooting of Michael Brown should be different in terms of the elements of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It was expected that the language and associated constructions utilized to describe particular events and actors related to those cases indexed as police brutality and deadly force would differ considerably in the two timeframes. Specifically, institutionally-driven news stories published pre-Ferguson were expected to include more positive forms of naming and predication regarding police and more negative forms for those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force. On the other hand, event-driven news stories were expected to include more positive naming and predication for those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force. Similar results were expected regarding transitivity, or the verb selection, to describe police brutality and/or deadly force with more positive or defensive verbiage expected pre-Ferguson compared to more negative or offensive
verb selection afterward. Modality was expected to differ with more judgments exhibited emphasizing what police could and should have done differently. Finally, hyperbole and metaphor post-Ferguson was expected to be less likely to negatively frame those subject to police brutality and deadly force compared to that exhibited pre-Ferguson.

**Discussion of Results Related to Research Questions**

Research questions were answered according to a mixed method approach to content analysis. Frequencies of published articles indexed as either police brutality or deadly force were compared over time as well as frequencies and proportions of variables representing types of voices (off, nonoff and noncrit) and views (indvw and sysvw). CDA was utilized with a random sample of articles to examine any qualitative differences in the language and narratives used to report on police brutality and/or deadly force in both the timeframe prior to August 9th, 2014 and afterward. Findings related to each research question will be discussed below, as well as how these findings relate to expectations. Also, descriptions of further implications these findings have in the context of current theory and research will be provided.

**Research Question 1: Did reporting on police brutality and deadly force increase after August 9th, 2014 compared to the year before?**

**Results.** There was an increase in the publication of articles indexed as both police brutality and deadly force in the year after August 9th, 2014 compared to the reporting that occurred in the year prior. This was the case overall as well as by individual newspaper. Overall, the number of articles published that were indexed as police brutality increased by 352 percent (162/733). The increase in police brutality articles was greatest in *USA Today*. Pre-Ferguson *USA Today* published only a single article indexed as police brutality compared to 57 articles
published post-Ferguson for a 5600 percent increase. *The New York Times* had a 465 percent increase post-Ferguson, *Los Angeles Times* 48.8 percent, *Chicago Tribune* 688.8 percent, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* 1,166 percent and *Denver Post* 1,100 percent.

Overall, the number of articles published that were indexed as deadly force increased by 242 percent (220/752). Similarly, each newspaper saw an increase in articles indexed as deadly force. Predictably, the greatest increase in this regard was in *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* where there was a 867 percent increase. *The New York Times* increased publication of articles indexed as deadly force by 335 percent, *Los Angeles Times* by 102 percent, *Chicago Tribune* by 167 percent, *Denver Post* by 150 percent and *USA Today* by 800 percent. The priority of news coverage increased considerably in the year post-Ferguson as well. Police brutality articles given front page coverage increased by 544 percent compared to the year prior while front page deadly force articles increased by 419 percent.

**Results in the context of theory and research.** Lawrence’s (2000) event-driven model of news production purports that controversial and high-profile incidents of police brutality and/or deadly force lead to an increase in overall reporting/coverage. Indeed, an increase in articles indexed as police brutality and deadly force occurs the year after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri (352% and 242% increases respectively). This increase in articles is driven largely by such controversial and high-profile incidents, including but not limited to the Brown case itself. This can be seen as the peaks in coverage correspond with the killings of Eric Garner in New York City in July 2014 and Michael Brown in Ferguson in August 2014. Peaks in coverage are seen again in November and December 2014 likely due to increased coverage related to grand jury decisions not to indict Officers Pantaleo and Wilson for the Garner and Brown killings.
The sheer volume of articles dedicated to these, and other, high-profile incidents of police brutality and deadly force post-Ferguson compared to that of the year prior is consistent with the event-driven model of news production. Likewise, the increased prioritization of such stories evidenced by the increase in front page coverage indicates that these incidents and associated public and political action have increased the degree to which issues of police brutality and deadly force are considered public or political problems.

It is possible that the increases in both samples could be attributed to an increase in the actual number of deadly force and/or police brutality incidents in the year post-Ferguson, rather than just increased media attention. This alternative explanation for the results can be explored in two ways. First, the total number of deadly force and/or police brutality incidents covered by the six newspapers can be compared before and after the killing of Michael Brown. That is, were there more incidents covered after the Ferguson events than before? Second, the increase in newspaper coverage of deadly force and/or police brutality can be compared to available data on the number of such incidents (irrespective of newspaper coverage).

Regarding the first, a comparison of the number of incidents pre- and post-Ferguson shows the year prior to Ferguson there were 42 specific cases of police brutality reported upon in these six newspapers. The year after Ferguson 108 specific cases of police brutality were reported upon. This reflects an increase of 157 percent. Therefore, if amount of coverage was expected to be commensurate with this increase we could expect a similar rise in the amount of published articles. Comparing the number of articles indexed as police brutality, pre-Ferguson there were 162 such articles published compared to 733 published post-Ferguson, an increase of 352 percent. In other words, the increase in articles indexed as police brutality post-Ferguson is over two times greater than what might be expected due to an increase in cases covered.
Regarding deadly force articles the increase in cases post-Ferguson compared to pre-Ferguson was 42.5 percent (80/114). This corresponded with a 242 percent increase in the number of articles published (220/752). Here the increase in articles is more than five times what would be expected due to the increase in cases. Therefore it appears that the increased coverage with regard to both police brutality and deadly force can not simply be explained as a result of an increase in incidents/cases.

It is more difficult to compare the increase in news coverage to the actual number of deadly force and/or police brutality incidents (irrespective of newspaper coverage), because national data on police brutality and deadly force are imperfect at best. There are ultimately no valid or reliable national measures of police brutality. There are, however, some sources attempting to catalog the number of citizen deaths that occur as a result of interaction with police. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) data on “deaths by legal intervention” indicated an increase in such deaths 2.7% the year after Ferguson compared to the year before (Centers for Disease Control, 2018). The website Fatal Encounters, which “intends to help create a database of all deaths through police interaction in the United States since Jan. 1, 2000” reported a 6.8% decrease in such deaths post-Ferguson (Burghart, 2018). These sources indicate that the 225% increase in deadly force articles published post-Ferguson cannot be explained by an increase in the number of actual deadly force incidents. Testing whether or not particular news stories adhere to Lawrence’s (2000) event-driven model requires more than just numbers of articles, however, as was addressed with the remaining research questions.

**Research Question 2: Did the inclusion of critical nonofficial sources in reporting on police brutality and/or deadly force increase in the year after August 9th, 2014 relative to the year prior?**
Results. As seen in Table 12 below, the inclusion of nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices increased after August 9th, 2014 compared to the year prior, while the inclusion of official voices decreased or stayed the same. This increase in the proportion of alternative (to official) voices in the overall database of articles, however was slight (6 to 9 percent) and varied across police brutality and deadly force coverage.

Table 12. Voices Included Post-Ferguson and Change Over Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Police Brutality Articles</th>
<th>Deadly Force Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Official</td>
<td>66% (-1)</td>
<td>73% (-18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonofficial</td>
<td>83% (+6)</td>
<td>76% (+6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical nonofficial</td>
<td>73% (+8)</td>
<td>75% (+9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to police brutality articles, official voices remained nearly the same as a proportion of total police brutality articles pre and post-Ferguson with 65 percent and 66 percent respectively. Nonofficial voices increased 6 percent from 77 percent to 83 percent and critical nonofficial voices increased 8 percent from 65 percent to 73 percent. In deadly force articles inclusion of official voices decreased considerably from 91 percent prior to Ferguson to 73 percent afterward. Nonofficial voices increased in the deadly force articles 6 percent—from 70 percent pre-Ferguson to 76 percent afterward. Critical nonofficial voices increased 9 percent—from 66 percent pre-Ferguson to 75 percent afterward.

While these overall increases were slight, consistent with Lawrence’s event-driven model of news production the current research found that inclusion of nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices was more likely with higher-profile incidents (Table 13). In police brutality articles only 56 percent of low-profile incidents included a critical nonofficial compared to 100 percent of
mid- and high-profile incidents. Deadly force articles showed similar results with 66.7 percent of low-profile incidents including critical nonofficial compared to 96 percent of mid-profile incidents and 100 percent of high-profile incidents. This is significant since there were only two high-profile incidents the year pre-Ferguson. Post-Ferguson there were eight high-profile cases. As noted above, this minority of incidents was responsible for much of the increase in total articles and also in the increase of nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices. For example, articles on the killing of Michael Brown (182) constitute 32 percent of the increase in articles indexed as police brutality and 39 percent of the increase in those indexed as deadly force (207). This is consistent with the event-driven model of news production.

**Table 13. Critical Nonofficials by Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>Police Brutality Articles</th>
<th>Deadly Force Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-profile</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-profile</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-profile</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results in the context of theory and research.** Overall, this research found results over time with police brutality and deadly force articles commensurate with Lawrence’s event-driven news model. Specifically, a slight increase in the inclusion of nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices was observed. This inclusion was found to be more likely with the increased profile of specific incidents. One notable difference was seen in the decrease in official voices post-Ferguson with regard to deadly force articles. While the inclusion of official voices in the police
brutality database remained almost the same over time, with regard to deadly force official voices decreased by 18 percent. This decrease in official voices potentially magnifies the effect of the 9 percent increase in critical nonofficial voices. Also, this could lend further support to Lawrence’s notion that “increased media attention to police use of force is usually an indicator not that officials have successfully managed the news but rather that officials have lost control of the news” (p. 64). It could also be the case, however, that this decrease indicated police representatives exercising the “no comment” option regarding these incidents of deadly force. While who gets to participate in these kinds of news stories is important, this is in part due to the tendency of nonofficials and particularly critical nonofficials to offer different types of views, or explanations, regarding police brutality and deadly force. Research Question 3 assesses this aspect of event-driven news.

**Research Question 3: Did systemic claims regarding police brutality and/or deadly force increase relative to individualizing claims after August 9th, 2014 compared to that which occurred the year prior?**

**Results.** Individualizing claims of police brutality and deadly force are those that offer individual explanations for particular incidents (“bad apples,” “isolated incident”). Individualizing claims were more prevalent than systemic claims in both the police brutality and deadly force databases across both timeframes, pre and post-Ferguson. In terms of changes from pre-Ferguson to post-Ferguson, the results vary by police brutality and deadly force categories. For police brutality, individualizing claims remained nearly the same post-Ferguson as compared to the year before. Pre-Ferguson these claims were present in 66 percent of the articles compared to 64 percent the year post-Ferguson. For the deadly force articles, individualizing claims decreased by 16 percent post-Ferguson (70%) compared to the year prior (86%).
Systemic views, those that instead offer systemic explanations (police culture, training, recruitment) increased in both the police brutality and deadly force databases over time. Systemic views increased by 25 percent in police brutality articles from the year prior to Ferguson (29%) to the year after (54%). In the articles indexed as deadly force there was also an increase, but it was smaller, systemic views increased 11 percent from the year prior to Ferguson (21%) to the year after (32%).

Similar to the inclusion of critical nonofficial voices, the inclusion of systemic views increased as an incident received more coverage both pre and post-Ferguson. In the police brutality database only 31.5 percent of low-profile incidents included systemic views. Mid-profile incidents included systemic views 75 percent of the time and high-profile incidents included them 100 percent of the time. The differences were even more considerable in the deadly force database. Within this category of articles 19.4 percent of low-profile incidents included systemic views, mid-profile incidents included them 40 percent of the time and again, 100 percent of high-profile incidents included systemic views.

**Results in the context of theory and research.** These results are consistent with Lawrence’s (2000) event-driven model of news production as she predicts an increase in systemic views alongside increased incorporation of nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices. While these increases did occur across the board, again we find significant differences between the police brutality and deadly force databases. Specifically, the increase in the proportion of articles including systemic views relative to individualizing views is greater in the database of police brutality articles. While there are 37 percent more individualizing views than systemic views pre-Ferguson, post-Ferguson there are only ten percent more individualizing views as systemic views. This illustrates a significant shift in the conversation regarding police brutality.
While the increase in systemic views is considerably less with the deadly force database (11%) and the differences greater relative to individualizing views (65% less pre-Ferguson; 38% less post-Ferguson), there is also a 16 percent decrease in individualizing views from the year prior to August 9th, 2014 to the year after.

In the deadly force database, this decrease in individualizing views may be directly related to the 18 percent decrease in official voices. Also, this decrease in individualizing views may magnify the effect of those systematizing views included post-Ferguson. In other words, while the resulting increase in systematic views is smaller in the deadly force database, this may still represent a considerable change in the discourse due to the corresponding decrease in individualizing views. This difference across the police brutality and deadly force databases may indicate something significant about the official response (or lack thereof) in the aftermath of deadly force. Whether this is a result of official silence on incidents or an increase in journalists’ seeking out other sources is beyond the scope of this research but theoretically interesting nonetheless. Finally, as observed with nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices above, the likelihood of inclusion of systemic views increased as coverage of incidents increased from low-profile to mid-profile and high-profile. This is also consistent with Lawrence’s (2000) event-driven model of news production.

**Research Question 4: Was there a qualitative difference in the language and narratives used to report on police brutality and deadly force incidents in the year following August 9th, 2014 compared to reporting the year prior?**

**Results.** Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was utilized in order to analyze certain qualitative aspects of the reporting in each database pre and post-Ferguson. Specifically, lexical analysis, transitivity, modality and the rhetorical tropes of hyperbole and metaphor were
examined. Overall, the strongest results/differences were found with regard to lexical analysis and transitivity. So few passages were identified in the sample with evidence of modality, hyperbole or metaphor that no comparison pre and post-Ferguson was possible. This may have been due to an underrepresentation of op-ed pieces and editorials in this sample.

Lexical analysis is concerned with the language used to describe specific actors. As such, naming and predication looks at the particular nouns and adjectives used to both name and identify certain traits, roles or identities of those being reported on. Since people often have multiple such ways they can be identified (age, sex, race, class, occupation) the choice of descriptors is important and can tell the reader about the relationship between the named and the namer. It was expected that evidence for Van Dijk’s ideological square would be found whereby pre-Ferguson reporting assumed to be more officially dominated would identify police as insiders and those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force as outsiders. This is consistent with the “us and them” dichotomy often observed in police culture. Also, it was expected to see challenges to this ideological square post-Ferguson whereby the naming and predication of those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force would be subject to less negative naming and predication or othering, perhaps even given more positive and/or humanizing description.

These differences were observed, however similar challenges to the ideological square existed in the pre-Ferguson samples as well. Specifically, a couple of subjects of mid-profile cases--Wrana and Ferrell--were presented very sympathetically perhaps even achieving “ideal victim” status. While there were more mid- and high-profile incidents post-Ferguson still perhaps only one was given “ideal victim” treatment (Akai Gurley). Perhaps the most consistent, and important, use of naming and predication involved the increased use of racial signifiers post-Ferguson. Nearly all of the high-profile cases involved incidents with white police officers and
black citizens subject to police brutality and/or deadly force. This form of identification was utilized frequently enough in the year after August 9th, 2014 that multiple articles included the phrase “the deaths of several unarmed black men at the hands of white police officers.” Even the President of the United States made a statement on the issue.

Where lexical analysis is concerned with nouns and descriptions of actors, transitivity looks at actions, or verbs. Specifically, there was an expectation related to the voice constructions of statements related to the processes of police brutality and/or deadly force, whether active or passive. These types of constructions allow the reader to determine who is acting and/or who is being acted upon. It was expected that police might be seen as more acted upon prior to Ferguson and therefore presented in passive voice constructions. This was not the case, however as active voice constructions were predominant regardless of timeframe (pre- or post-Ferguson) or actor (police or victim). Several categories were identified with regard to active and passive constructions: passive police, actorless, active victim, active police and passive victim. Constructions of passive police were not found in any of the samples except for the post-Ferguson deadly force articles where 2 percent included such constructions. A few actorless constructions were identified but were all somewhat neutralized by context. Active police remained a constant across both time periods with 68 percent in the pre-Ferguson police brutality sample, 60 percent pre-Ferguson deadly force, 70 percent post-Ferguson police brutality and 56 percent post-Ferguson deadly force.

The most interesting finding with regard to transitivity over time was related to the presentation of those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force. Prior to Ferguson the active victim constructions were predominant. These were included in 34 percent of police brutality articles and 56 percent of deadly force articles prior to Ferguson compared to only 14 percent
police brutality articles and 24 percent of deadly force articles that included passive voice constructions. However, post-Ferguson the inclusion of active victim constructions decreased substantially and passive victim constructions increased greatly. Active victim constructions in police brutality were found in 16 percent of the articles post-Ferguson and 18 percent of deadly force. By comparison, 48 percent of police brutality articles after Ferguson included passive victim constructions and 64 percent of deadly force.

**Results in the context of theory and research.** These results are consistent with the news coverage of the killing of Michael Brown being an example of Lawrence’s (2000) event-driven model of news production. In lexical analysis, that naming and predication are seen to change according to the amount of coverage a particular incident receives and particularly that increased profile cases include more positive/humanizing descriptors of those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force supports the assumption of post-Ferguson news as event-driven. Likewise, the change in transitivity over time illustrates considerably different constructions of police brutality and/or deadly force consistent with the event-driven model of news. Similarly, the totality of these findings suggest something akin to that observed by Hirschfield and Simon (2010) when they noted how “articles appearing after police killed Amadou Diallo are less likely to demonize” (p. 155).

The use of CDA in this research extends the notion of the “ideological square” more specifically to controversial and high-profile incidents of police brutality and deadly force. In particular it indicates that the dichotomy between “insiders” and “outsiders” may be too simplistic. While the categories of “actorless” and “passive police” yielded little the construction of “active police—especially related to the transition from “active victim” to “passive victim”—seemed significant. While the “active police” category was seldom presented as an “outsider” it
does seem to be the case that the “passive victim” was considerably less “outsider” if only achieving relative “insider” representation in the case of near “ideal victims.”

The application of CDA to these articles also allows for greater analysis of the qualitative differences in event-driven news stories. Lawrence indicates how it is the presence of particular characteristics and conditions that drive news production in the event-driven model and she identifies certain important elements that distinguish events like the beating of Rodney King or the killing of Michael Brown from other low-profile incidents that are more likely to receive institutionally driven, or officially dominated, treatment. Lawrence describes these elements as “story cues.” The first such cue is the presence of other witnesses, family members, and so forth who come forward with versions that contradict the claims put forth by official sources. It was Michael Brown’s friend, Dorian Johnson whose eyewitness account formed the foundation for the mantra “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot.” Brown’s mother and stepfather were outspoken in the aftermath of his killing as well. This is especially powerful when combined with video or other physical evidence. Legal proceedings against officers, coroner’s statements that a death was homicide and racial identities of officers and citizens (particularly White police and Black citizens) are also seen as critical story cues that may distinguish between institutionally-driven and event-driven news. While there was no video of Brown’s killing the image of his body lying on the street for hours was quickly seared into the collective consciousness of a nation. So, too were the ongoing legal proceedings and the emphasis on issues of racial bias in policing. Both of the high-profile cases prior to Ferguson (James Boyd and Kelly Thomas) included video as did half of those afterward (Garner, DuBose, Scott and Rice).

Other critical story cues include the public, political and official responses to these incidents. The greater the frequency and intensity of these responses the more likely an incident
will become an event-driven news story. Regarding the political and official response, the Federal government initiated DOJ investigations in Ferguson, Baltimore, Chicago, Cleveland, San Francisco and Philadelphia related to issues of police use of force, racial bias and other patterns and practices. The public response involved national and international protest, petitioning and activism including Black Lives Matter and Campaign Zero. All of these reactions, along with increased media coverage, combined to elevate concern about issues of police brutality and deadly force to high priority in the national discussion. This research indicates that this increased media coverage is due to high-profile news stories indexed as police brutality and deadly force covering controversial and contested incidents (Michael Brown, Eric Garner, etc.) adhering to Lawrence’s event-driven model of news production.

**Overall Assessment of the Results**

The results across all four research questions indicate that news coverage post-Ferguson is consistent with Lawrence’s event-driven model of news production as compared with that published pre-Ferguson. Quantitatively (Research Question #1), the increase in total articles published and indexed as police brutality (352%) and deadly force (242%) as well as the increased front-page treatment (544% and 419% respectively) indicates that high-profile events are driving much of the production of such news stories. That these events are driving production of police brutality and deadly force news stories is evidenced by the fact that while high-profile cases constituted only 6.5 percent of the total incidents in police brutality and 4.3 percent of deadly force incidents, they are responsible for much more of the increase in total articles. For example, articles on the killing of Michael Brown alone (182) constitute 32 percent of the increase in articles indexed as police brutality and 39 percent of the increase in those indexed as deadly force (207).
The results regarding the inclusion of nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices (Research Question #2) were not as strong, but the increased inclusion of these voices in both the police brutality and deadly force databases was consistent with the event-driven model. Perhaps most significant was the decrease in official voices post-Ferguson (for the articles indexed as deadly force). The results for the inclusion of nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices varied by the amount of coverage (profile level). Consistent with the event-driven model, the likelihood of the inclusion of critical nonofficial and nonofficial voices increased with the level of coverage for both police brutality and deadly force incidents.

Consistent with the event-driven model, the inclusion of systematizing views (Research Question #3) increased in both databases. The decrease in the inclusion of individualizing views post-Ferguson for articles indexed as deadly force may be related to the decrease in official voices post-Ferguson.

Finally, the application of the CDA concepts of lexical analysis and transitivity (Research Question #4) identified significantly different constructions in the discourse of articles published pre-Ferguson and post-Ferguson for both the police brutality and deadly force articles. Consistent with the predictions of the event-driven model, there was an increase post-Ferguson in sympathetic portrayals of those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force; this was particularly strong for high-profile incidents. Likewise, and consistent with the event-driven model, the results show an increase in constructions portraying victims as passive alongside a decrease in constructions portraying victims as active. Once again, these trends are noticeably greater for articles indexed as deadly force compared to those indexed as police brutality; this and other differences between these two categories are discussed below.
Differences between police brutality and deadly force. This study expands upon Lawrence’s by examining not only those articles indexed as police brutality but also those indexed as deadly force as well. This is important, as not all incidents of deadly force are cases of police brutality and vice-versa. Also, because high-profile events such as those that lead to the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Akai Gurley and others ostensibly led to much of the recent public, political and professional concern with use of deadly force. This research found three significant differences between the news stories indexed as police brutality and deadly force. Theoretically, these differences in deadly force articles compared to police brutality may simply indicate an increased sensitivity/sympathy with those killed compared to others subject to less-than-lethal force. These differences between deadly force and police brutality articles may also illustrate a difference in official strategies of response as indicated by decreases in official voices and individualizing views as well.

First, as discussed above, there was a considerable decrease (18%) in official voices post-Ferguson with regard to deadly force news stories whereas inclusion of such voices remained nearly the same (-2%) with police brutality stories. It is possible that this decrease is related to police being more likely to “exercise the right to remain silent” or abstain from comment during an active investigation of these more serious (and higher liability) events. It may also be the case that individual journalists also see these incidents as more serious and, as a result, choose to include more nonofficial or critical nonofficial sources; or the journalists include more of these voices to fill space made available by the lack of police voices. Regardless, this decrease in official voices corresponds to a decrease in individualizing claims related to news stories on deadly force.
Second, *deadly force* articles include fewer official explanations that tend to explain events as isolated or the result of “bad apples” after Ferguson than before. In contrast, individualizing voices remain almost the same in news stories indexed as *police brutality* both pre- and post-Ferguson. This is likely associated with the relative consistency of official voices over time in *police brutality* news stories. News stories on *deadly force*, on the other hand, have a 16% decrease in individualizing claims. As might be expected, this decrease in individualizing claims exists alongside an 11% increase in systematizing views (police culture, training, supervision). As above, this decrease in individualizing claims in *deadly force* articles could be a function of law enforcement officials’ decisions to abstain from commenting on these events or to journalists’ decisions to include more nonofficial and/or critical nonofficial voices.

Finally, while both police brutality and deadly force articles had decreases in the construction of victims as “active” post-Ferguson compared to before, the deadly force data saw significantly greater decrease (38%) compared to police brutality (18%). The difference was less pronounced regarding an increase in construction of victims as passive post-Ferguson. There police brutality news stories saw a 34% increase compared to a 40% increase in news stories on deadly force.

The results of this research have implications for actors at various levels from policing, and particularly public information officers (PIOs), to journalists and editors. Each of these will be discussed in turn below.

**Implications of Research**

One implication of this research from both a policy and a practical perspective pertains to the expectations of, and media response by, police agencies (particularly public information officers) in the aftermath of controversial incidents of police use of force and especially deadly
force. Second, these findings might inform the practice of journalists covering incidents of police brutality and deadly force, particularly with regard to those events seen as lower profile. Finally, this research offers insight for academics interested in issues related to police brutality and deadly force in moments of event-driven news production. Each of these implications will be discussed in turn below.

**Implications for Police**

This research shows that certain *high-profile* events of police brutality and deadly force drove the considerable increase in the amount of media attention paid to these police actions. Along with this increase in attention came increased claims of police brutality and deadly force as systematic issues. These results can be utilized by police public information officers (PIOs) to anticipate and respond to the media portrayal of controversial and high-profile incidents involving police brutality and/or deadly force. PIOs can expect to see an increase in overall media coverage after high-profile events and this coverage will likely reflect some of the findings from the current research. For example, it is likely that, following high-profile incidents, journalists will include significantly more nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices and that these additional sources may be more likely to bring into question official explanations (or the lack thereof). Additionally, PIOs can expect that media representations will reflect more sympathetic portrayals of those subject to police use of force.

To be effective in such a media environment, the PIOs should be particularly proactive and transparent; this strategy would seem to be a better counterpoint to the media portrayal than remaining silent until investigations are complete. While official voices are present in the majority of news stories on both police brutality and deadly force, a notable decrease was recognized in the deadly force sample post-Ferguson. This may be a result of decisions not to
comment pending investigation or it may be an increased reliance on nonofficial sources by journalists. Either way, the opportunity for more proactive interaction with media by PIOs is presented particularly in the aftermath of high-profile cases of deadly force.

PIOs might also counter the media narrative by countering the potential perception on the part of the public that the increased coverage of deadly force and/or police brutality reflects an increase in the actual incidences of them. This can be challenging since, to date, the most valid, publicly available data documenting the frequency of such incidents nationally is that created by news media in the first place. These data consistently indicate an under-reporting of police brutality and deadly force when compared to official counts.

The implication for the local PIO is to share department data that may indicate that the increased reporting does not reflect an increase in such events. For the police as a profession, this study highlights the need for the participation on the part of law enforcement in creating a valid and reliable national database of use of force incidents. If Lawrence’s event-driven model of news production indicates a loss of control of the narrative on the part of law enforcement officials, one potential way that police could regain control in such situations is to collect and provide more reliable information on these types of events. If official data existed to either confirm or deny the trends constructed by media reports of police brutality and/or deadly force, police (and public information officers more specifically) could be more proactive and less reactive in response to high-profile events such as the killing of Michael Brown.

On October 7th, 2015 then FBI Director James Comey publicly expressed his frustration with the lack of data regarding violent encounters between police and citizens. He called the situation “embarrassing and ridiculous” stating how “it is unacceptable that the Washington Post and the Guardian newspaper from the UK are becoming the lead source of information about
violent encounters between [US] police and civilians. That is not good for anybody.” He went on
to explain how “you can get online and figure out how many tickets were sold to The
Martian…the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] can do the same with the flu”
(the implication being that it is absurd that one cannot similarly easily find the number of police
killing of citizens) (Tran, 2015). Professionals in criminology and criminal justice as well as
public health have echoed Director Comey’s sentiments.

On June 1, 2015 The British newspaper The Guardian launched a website called “The
Counted” which sought to report, in real-time, the number of people killed by US police by
“monitoring regional news outlets, research groups, and open-sourced reporting projects” (The
Counted, 2015). They identified 1,146 killings by police in the US during 2015. Comparing this
data to the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) maintained by the Federal government and
based on death certificate data, Feldman, Gruskin, Coull and Krieger (2017) concluded that
government statistics underreport the number of killings by police by 50 percent. In other words,
The Guardian was twice as likely to identify these incidents as the NVSS due to misclassification
of such incidents as “assault” rather than “legal intervention.” The rates of such misclassification
were found to be greater regarding decedents of color versus white, those in lower versus higher
income counties and those killed with non-firearm versus firearm mechanisms (Feldman et. al,
2017).

The research by Feldman et. al indicates that, if properly utilized, news media can
provide more accurate estimates of the number of citizens killed annually by police in the United
States than any currently available public data. This leaves practitioners, academics and others
interested in issues of police brutality and/or deadly force completely dependent upon journalists
for data. While these data are certainly better than no data at all, it should be as much a point of
embarrassment and frustration for police executives as for former FBI Director Comey.

Consistent and transparent official records regarding police use of force—at both the local and national levels—could increase community trust in the institution and counter media narratives. Such records could provide evidence as to whether official individualizing claims (“isolated event,” “bad apple”) or critical nonofficial systematizing claims (“bad barrel,” “bad training,” “culture,” etc.) have more merit.

**Implications for Journalists**

There are implications of this research for journalists and editors as well. This research found an increase in nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices as well as systematizing claims in stories indexed as police brutality and deadly force post-Ferguson. This may be explained by Surette’s (1998) model of the social construction of crime and justice news, which illustrates how opportunities exist for “media adept constructionists” to step into the “arena” and influence criminal justice policy. It is entirely possible, however, that these opportunities are created not by the sympathy of individual journalists or editors, but instead are due to the more mundane and bureaucratic practices and decisions of the field of journalism and newspapers in particular.

The context in which such decisions are made could be instructive. For example, events with a low-level of coverage (low-profile events) could be the result of a particularly heavy news cycle where other news stories are given more attention. An article published by John Jay College’s Center on Media, Crime and Justice recently stated that “the Trump administration is now the drama at center stage,” for example (Crime and Justice News, 2018). Similarly, extensive coverage of incidents (high-profile events) could be due to particular contexts whereby police brutality and/or deadly force can take center stage. Regardless, in any context, journalists are often bound by the space allotted them by editors. Therefore, an increase in the number of
nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices (and by extension of systematizing claims) may be a result of this increased page space offered in the aftermath of certain controversial incidents of police brutality and/or deadly force. In short, low-profile events may be relegated to this status due to the editorial decision that “there is no story here.”

In contrast to low-profile and more institutionally-driven news stories, controversial events such as the killings of Michael Brown, Eric Garner and so on may meet more of the criteria for a “good story.” This could be due in part to their having many or all of the “story cues” described by Lawrence (2000). As a result, these incidents will be given priority in terms of increased word count and prioritized page placement. Given that decreases seem to occur regarding official voices in the aftermath of high-profile deadly force events, this means that journalists are given more space to fill with less of “the story” than they generally expect. Therefore, in order to meet the expectations and demand of the article, they may turn to nonofficial and/or critical nonofficial sources in order to fill the gap. This could indicate that the inclusion of nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices and systematic views is less a function of “media adept constructionists” stepping into the “arena” than how Fishman (1990) noted that bureaucratic decisions and routines may have more to do with “manufacturing news” than the discretion and decisions of individual actors. Therefore, while there is space created in the aftermath of particularly controversial and high-profile events such as police brutality and/or deadly force, it may be created as much by process and procedure than particular people.

This brief examination of process and procedure offers insight into the way(s) in which journalists, editors and other newsmakers may be shifting the narrative unconsciously through simple editorial decisions in the process of newsmaking. An awareness of the potential impact that these seemingly mundane practices may have on public opinion and perception could be
useful for those journalists working “the crime beat.” Perhaps they could negotiate for more of
the story from police, and particularly from PIOs, by indicating that they are required to write a
certain amount of words on this story and insinuating that “if you don’t talk to me, someone else
will.” In short, while it may not create a second honeymoon for the “forced marriage” between
police and media, recognizing the effects of event-driven news stories on the practices of both
could be mutually beneficial.

**Study Strengths and Limitations**

The strengths of this research include the creation of an extensive dataset on media
coverage on police brutality and deadly force from 2013-2015. The dataset consists of 1,867
news articles specifically indexed as either police brutality or deadly force published in *The New
York Times, Los Angeles Times, USA Today, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Chicago Tribune* or
*Denver Post* (Table 1). Each of these articles has been coded according to 21 different variables
related to Lawrence’s event-driven model of news production. A subset of the data was created
by grouping articles by casename (incident) and then determining the profile of each according
to how many publications were associated.

This research expands upon Lawrence’s (2000) study on the news coverage following the
beating of Rodney King in several ways, including an expanded list of newspapers for analysis,
the addition of articles indexed as deadly force and the incorporation of Critical Discourse
Analysis (CDA). First, while Lawrence’s (2000) research focused entirely on *The New York
Times* and *Los Angeles Times* articles, this study incorporated four other major newspapers (*USA
Today, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Chicago Tribune* and *Denver Post*) in an attempt to broaden the
scope and thus generalizability of the research. Importantly, this research incorporated the *St.
Louis Post-Dispatch*, which likely served as a central hub for news related to the killing of
Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. This was likely similar to the function of the *Los Angeles Times* with regard to coverage related to the police beating of Rodney King.

Second, in addition to the increased geographical scope, this research also incorporated news articles indexed as deadly force in addition to those indexed as police brutality. This additional dataset elucidated multiple theoretical points of interest as discussed above. Significant differences in the reporting on articles indexed as deadly force emerged compared to those indexed as police brutality. As stated before, while all deadly force is not police brutality and vice-versa, the implications and potential for future research are considerable with this comparison.

Third, a major strength of this research—and an advance over Lawrence’s study—is the incorporation of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The use of this analytical strategy offered valuable insight into the differential framing in the media of those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force. CDA provided particular insight with regard to the differential construction of sentences by journalists across the country in reporting on police brutality and deadly force. Without its implementation the shifting construction of victims of police brutality and deadly force as more passive actors post-Ferguson compared to those that came before may have been ignored or missed entirely. While some public opinion seemed to indicate that media might have taken such a turn, this research allowed for an examination of the nuance and subtlety in these differing constructions.

The CDA concepts of lexical analysis and transitivity were the most fruitful. The application of these approaches to data analysis identified additional explanatory factors at work in news stories on police brutality and deadly force. Specifically, constructions of those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force as either active or passive discussed above. The decrease
in constructions of victims as active and increase in passive victims corresponded with a shift in rhetoric that includes more sympathetic and humanizing language for those subject to police brutality and deadly force. Much more complicated than the false dichotomy of pro-police or anti-police news stories or even official dominance or event-driven models of news construction, this analysis seems to indicate that the devil truly is in the details. Also, the mixed method approach to this research allows for multiple levels of analysis as well as significant insight at each level.

Fourth, another strength of this study was the examination of the media phenomenon from both the macro and micro views. The original descriptive statistics on the entire dataset allowed for a macro examination of the overall trends in news stories on the topics of police brutality and deadly force. (This showed that an increase did occur regarding media focus on these issues after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.) Examining this trend from the level of specific newspapers, however, showed that this growth was most pronounced on the east and west coast, (with The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times). The micro examination and analysis of individual articles allowed for the recognition of the different types of voices and views presented relative to specific incidents.

While the current study successfully builds on previous research examining the police media relationship more generally and that related to Lawrence’s event-driven model of news production more specifically, there are a number of limitations. First of all, one major limitation of this research is the level of quantitative analysis. Much insight could yet be garnered by examining whether or not correlations exist between the multiple variables coded. Likewise, in measuring the strength of any relationships that might exist.
Second, another major limitation of this research includes the lack of other forms of news media such as television news and also Internet based news sites and social media. These sources reach millions of people and while they often rely on news initially reported in newspapers, they also likely include significantly different voices, views and rhetoric. Internet news, and particularly that disseminated through social media also includes evidence of audience engagement in the form of approval/disapproval, comments, likes, shares, “retweets,” and so on. All of this adds additional layers of complexity in analysis but also potentially greater depth and breadth of understanding and insight.

Also, this study suffers from a lack of official records. In her study on the event-driven model of news production after the beating of Rodney King, Lawrence (2000) compared official records related to police brutality to news stories indexed as police brutality. She was able to show the rarity of media attention to potential incidents of police brutality by showing how there were over 27,000 excessive force complaints against the NYPD between 1985 and 1994 but only 198 instances of reporting. This trend might have been similar in relation to some, or many, of the police departments represented in this data but without official records of excessive force complaints it is impossible to know for certain.

In terms of generalizability, the number of deadly force and police brutality cases/incidents is necessarily conservative. This can be seen by comparison to more comprehensive databases that have been created recently such as The Counted database formulated by The Guardian and also the data compiled by the website Fatal Encounters. Also, the inclusion of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) concepts of modality and the rhetorical tropes of hyperbole and metaphor turned up no results. This is likely related to the underrepresentation of editorial, opinion and other forms of op-ed articles in these data.
Finally, this research did not include any interviews with journalists associated with the articles included in the database or any of the witnesses, family members, public information officers (PIOs), activists, academics or others that might have offered insight as to the process of making specific news accounts. Interviews with included journalists and/or their editors as well as PIOs might add insight as to whether Surette’s (1998) “arena” model or Fishman’s (1990) “manufacturing” model of news production is more relevant to (and/or responsible for) these examples of event-driven news stories. Similarly, interviews and/or surveys with citizens both within and outside of communities where these events occurred could increase our understanding as to the possible public opinion effect(s) of event-driven news stories.

**Directions for Future Research**

The limitations above provide some of the guidance for future research. First, future research should include more exhaustive quantitative analysis of the existing dataset. Some additional questions that could be asked and answered with this dataset include: Is there a relationship between story length and the incorporation of nonofficial or critical nonofficial sources? Does placement (front page, section, etc.) relate to differing voices and views? Are particular journalists responsible for a considerable amount of increased attention? Are there associations with specific journalists and the incorporation of different voices and views? Are there substantive differences in news coverage across newspapers? (For instance, do certain publications place event-driven news stories on the front page or in the front section more frequently than others?)

Given the more comprehensive nature of the databases created and curated by *The Guardian* and/or the website Fatal Encounters, future research should incorporate these data for a
more comprehensive and population-based analysis. Cases identified there could be used as a starting point for both old and new media analysis. A sample coded from *The Guardian* database according to the variables utilized here could lend further validity to the methods and results of both the current study and Lawrence’s (2000) model. Likewise, it could provide an additional layer of insight and understanding to the reporting associated with the cases identified by *The Guardian*.

Future research should include, and compare, additional news sources such as television and Internet news. A comparison across different types of television news would be informative given the different audiences across networks. For example, trends may look different related to official versus nonofficial sources depending upon the specific channel or type of programming examined. FOX News and CNN may have considerably different rates of reference to one category or another. Likewise, different channels or types of programming may differ according to the views expressed. Similarly, a comparison of the discourse reported on old media (newspapers and television) and that presented on new media (websites and social media) might prove fruitful. More specifically, content analyses of traditional op-ed and editorial articles and news segments as well as social media pages (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter) specifically created to address issues of police, policing and police brutality and/or deadly force (Black Lives Matter, Blue Lives Matter) could offer considerable insight on changes over time to the process of newsmaking. Are certain voices and views more prevalent in old media when compared to new? How might the construction of narratives differ between media (CDA)? Finally, interviews with those involved with writing, editing and otherwise making news in these various venues from journalists to public information officers (and all sources in between) could also be beneficial.
Finally, future survey research could attempt to identify and examine the potential impact of event-driven news stories relative to, or independent of, institutionally-driven news stories. Is there a correlation between public opinion polling on trust and opinions of police and the prevalence of high-profile incidents of police brutality and deadly force? If so, does this vary according to type of news media, amount of exposure, geographic or other demographic factors? In short, can we measure what effect the incorporation of these different voices, views and types of discourse might have on public opinion?

**Conclusion**

The police-media relationship is as old as the institutions themselves. While it is not the happiest marriage of all time, the two inevitably work together to produce crime and justice news. The relationship is at its most strained, however, when controversial events of police brutality and/or deadly force occur. Such incidents have the potential to lead to a loss of official control over associated news stories inviting alternative explanations and perspectives from nonofficial and sometimes critical sources. Recognizing the news as a site of struggle for competing narratives, Surette (1998), Lawrence (2000), Barak (1994) and others have theorized that these rare moments have the potential to change the discourse and bring increased public and political attention to issues such as police brutality and deadly force in such a way as to construct them as social problems. More specifically, with such events driving news production it becomes possible for more systemic explanations and solutions.

The current study created a database from articles indexed as police brutality and deadly force over a two-year period from August 9th, 2013 to August 9th, 2015 in an attempt to identify any differences in reporting on these two topics after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson,
Missouri. A mixed method approach to content analysis was used to determine whether the controversial killing of Brown (and other similar cases) constituted the kind of event described by Lawrence (2000) in her event-driven model of news production. The findings show that after this event increased attention and priority was given to reporting on both police brutality and deadly force. The increased frequency and priority given to such news stories also increased the inclusion of nonofficial and critical nonofficial voices as well as systematizing views. Reporting post-Ferguson also showed a qualitative difference in the ways in which those subject to police brutality and/or deadly force were portrayed and described.

This study offers insight into the types of incidents that can facilitate an event-driven model of news production and provides support for many of Lawrence’s (2000) key findings. This has important implications for police public information officers associated with police agencies, journalists and researchers concerned with issues of police brutality, deadly force, and newsmaking.
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