

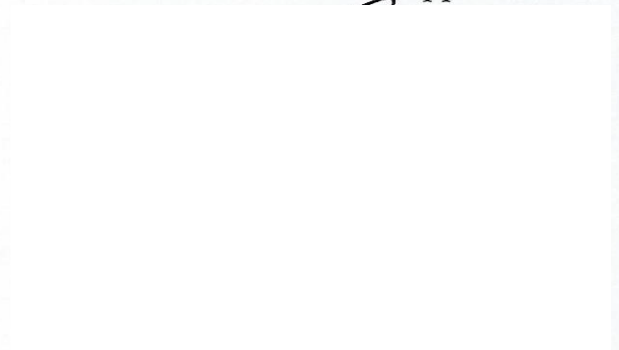
How Media Covered Police Shootings During and After Ferguson:
Framing Analysis of Officer-Involved Shootings
In 2014 and 2016

By Grace Ketron

Senior Honors Thesis
School of Media and Journalism
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Spring 2019

Approved:



Abstract

This framing analysis determined how three national media platforms portrayed two high profile police-involved shootings of unarmed individuals from 2014 to 2016. The pivotal Ferguson shooting occurred in 2014, so cases during and after Ferguson were evaluated. Specifically, this study asked, how did three leading national news sources (*The New York Times*, *Fox News*, and the *Associated Press*) frame the issue of police-involved shootings from 2014 to 2016? The significance of how media explain issues and events cannot be overstated; how reporters present stories influences how audiences view public issues, including police-involved shootings, and how they respond to them. This study hopes to contribute to the current national dialogue surrounding the role of race in officer-involved shootings because framing theory suggests that news frames affect how people understand race's role in American police departments and society.

Acknowledgements

Thank you, Professor McElroy, Dr. Boynton and Dr. Friedman for your unending patience and much-needed guidance. I have greatly appreciated your willingness to help mold my thesis into what it is today. Our meetings, conversations and email exchanges have been invaluable for expanding my academic horizons as a researcher. Without you, this thesis would be unwritten.

I also want to thank my parents and sister for always believing in me and pushing me to be my best. Thank you for your unwavering support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the summer of 2014, a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, shot and killed an unarmed black teenager on a residential street. The officer, Darren Wilson, said the teenager, Michael Brown, was a threat, a claim contested by some witnesses. The shooting prompted protests and “explosive violence” that revived “another bout of national soul-searching about race,” McCoy (2014) wrote in the *Washington Post* (para. 1). Police violence had long concerned communities nationwide, but the Ferguson shooting heightened the dialogue about the issue and highlighted growing charges of systemic racial biases in police departments across the United States (U.S.) (Perez, 2015). Sullivan, Tate & Jenkins (2014) of the *Washington Post* succinctly explained, “The 2014 death of Brown, an unarmed black man, sparked nationwide protests and scrutiny of the use of deadly force by police” (para. 7). After the shooting, the news media began crafting a narrative that aligned with the growing accusations from communities at odds with police, especially as news of similar shootings emerged. A March 2015 Department of Justice study prompted by the shooting in Ferguson provided some statistical support to the accusations and the media narrative. The analysis found that, from 2012 to 2014, out of the Ferguson Police Department’s total arrests, 93% were arrests of black individuals (“Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department,” 2015, p. 62). Only 67% of the Ferguson population, however, was black (“Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department,” 2015, p. 62). Was this the result of systemic racial bias in American law enforcement or caused by another factor, such as police presence predominantly in black neighborhoods (Mac Donald, 2016b)? Because of the enormity of these questions and their implications for American society, this thesis examined how the media portrayed high-profile police shootings during and after Ferguson.

The Black Lives Matter movement predates Ferguson, but the riots and public criticism of officers following the police shooting death of Brown and other unarmed black individuals shifted the movement from social media-based activism to street demonstrations (Touré, 2017). Members of Black Lives Matter argue that the Ferguson shooting highlighted national racial tensions and biases that are rooted in the historical acceptance of American slavery (Lebron, 2018). As the media cover new police-involved shootings, they use with similar framing¹ as Ferguson, pointing to recurring themes of police brutality and racism throughout multiple shootings. For instance, when Philando Castile, a black male, was shot and killed in 2016 by Officer Jeronimo Yanez, LaFraniere and Smith (2016) of *The New York Times* wrote that Castile had been “pulled over 49 times in 39 days often for minor infractions.” His death, they wrote, “to many, is a heartbreaking illustration of the disproportionate risks black motorists face with the police” (para. 8). LaFraniere and Smith (2016) elaborated that within two years “at least two other African-Americans – in Cincinnati and North Charleston, S.C. – were fatally shot by officers after being pulled over for minor traffic infractions.” LaFraniere and Smith (2016) then concluded, “The killings have helped fuel a growing national debate over racial bias in law enforcement,” suggesting that race may influence the judgment of police officers who make life or death decisions in split seconds (para. 8).

This heightened discussion bled into other arenas, providing a deep backdrop to the national narrative crafted by media publications during the time frame of the shootings. Even when writing about NFL reactions to shootings, for instance, journalists directed national conversations back toward the issues of systemic racism and police brutality. For example, NFL

¹ This thesis uses Robert M. Entman’s (1993) definition of framing: “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52).

players publicly condemned police brutality against black people and minority racial groups. In 2016, Colin Kaepernick, then the San Francisco 49ers quarterback, kneeled during the National Anthem before a game in protest of these issues, prompting a separate debate about respecting the American flag. Kaepernick explained, “I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color” (Wyche, 2016, para. 3).

However, Blue Lives Matter, a national group advocating for police rights that arose in response to Black Lives Matter, sees the protests as attacks against officers. In 2015, James Comey, then the FBI Director, relayed the frustration of police officers scrutinized for using deadly force: “They told me, ‘We feel like we’re under siege’” (*Associated Press*, 2015, para. 11).² Blue Lives Matter emphasizes that though police officers “are human” and sometimes make mistakes, they protect American citizens, and they do it well (Mac Donald, 2016a, para. 17). Rather than focusing on the stimulus for police-involved shootings, this group addresses how officers respond and confront challenges in the aftermath, such as anxiety, depression, lack of sleep or post-traumatic stress disorder (Klinger). In essence, protests on behalf of both the Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter movements became inseparable from discussions about police-involved shootings. Coverage of the growing protests (in addition to coverage of actual shootings) focused on whether on-duty police allow racism to influence their judgement and how such officers are affected by shootings.

News media use many techniques to cover police shootings, including citing a range of sources to present multiple sides and publishing pictures of the officers and victims involved. Some news coverage of officer-involved shootings, however, uses statistics to frame the issue. A

² Multiple national news outlets, such as *CBS News*, *The Times* and *National Review*, included Comey’s quote. Their articles incorporated Comey’s observation to discuss whether the “Ferguson Effect” and accusations about systemic racism and police brutality in American police departments were valid (Associated Press, 2015; French, 2016; Schmidt & Apuzzo, 2015).

main argument by Black Lives Matter is that white officers are more likely to shoot black individuals. After analyzing this argument, media outlets often suggest that white officers are more likely to kill black suspects than officers of other races are. In *Pacific Standard Magazine*, Jacobs (2018) challenges this assumption by explaining that white officers are more likely than officers of other races to use deadly force against black individuals because American law enforcement is predominantly white. Citing a Rutgers University study, Jacobs (2018) notes that “*nonwhite* officers kill both black and Latino suspects at significantly higher rates than white officers,” which suggests that officers may be affected by other things than bias when deciding to use force (para. 9). Additionally, Mac Donald (2016b), a journalist who focuses on police activity, noted that most black homicide victims are murdered by other black individuals, which explains why police often work in predominantly black neighborhoods. An increased police presence in black neighborhoods could explain why officers may use deadly force against black individuals more often than individuals of other races.

A closer look at statistics regarding *unarmed* individuals shot by police indicates a lack of significant racial biases of police officers. As of March 31, 2019, police officers in the U.S. reportedly killed 998 people in 2018 (Tate, Jenkins, & Rich, 2018). Of those killed, 47, or 5 percent, were unarmed (Tate, Jenkins, & Rich, 2018). Out of the 47, 23 (49 percent) were white, and 18 (38 percent) were black (Tate, Jenkins, & Rich, 2018). This means that police killed more unarmed white individuals than unarmed black individuals. A 2018 *Washington Post* article discussing data on unarmed police shooting victims elaborated that “the number of deadly police shootings of unarmed people has generally declined since 2015” (Sullivan, Tate & Jenkins, 2018, para. 1). Sullivan, Tate & Jenkins (2018) further explained that “criminologists said the downturn in the number of cases and their analysis of the data indicate that evidence of racial

bias by police who shoot and kill unarmed blacks has also declined but not disappeared” (para. 2). The statistics therefore clash with the narrative that *most* police-involved shootings result from white officers’ bias toward black individuals.

On the other hand, some statistics indicate that police “kill black people at disproportionate rates,” says Lopez (2018) of *Vox* (para. 1). Although 2012 data from the F.B.I showed that police officers kill more white people annually, 39 percent of *unarmed* people killed were black, even though black people made up only 13 percent of the population that year (Lopez, 2018). Sullivan, Tate and Jenkins (2018) noted a similar trend in more recent years: “Blacks make up about 13 percent of the population but 23 percent of those fatally shot by police since 2015” (para. 11). These statistics bolster the narrative that police brutality and systemic racism may be plaguing the United States, so journalists must carefully analyze the origin and reliability of data when seeking to help Americans understand the importance of these larger narratives.

While the previously explained statistics help situate police shootings into a national analysis of systemic racism and police brutality, this thesis evaluated whether journalists cherry-picked statistics to bolster their arguments without contextualizing them for readers. Data are sometimes contradictory, suggesting that race may or may not contribute significantly to police-involved shootings. As Lopez (2018) acknowledges, databases with police shooting statistics are largely incomplete since data includes “voluntary reports from police agencies around the country” (para. 2). In essence, while race may contribute significantly to police-involved shootings, it can be easy to cherry-pick data or raw numbers from pre-existing research without evaluating the veracity of the statistical studies. In order to determine how the media discussed police-involved shootings, this thesis evaluated whether the media cited the organization or

individual offering the figures and statistics. Did the media provide links to the original research, so readers could contextualize the given data? Also, to what end were the statistics included in the news report?

This thesis also determined how media platforms portrayed two high-profile police-involved shootings of unarmed individuals from 2014 to 2016. The pivotal Ferguson shooting occurred in 2014, so this thesis evaluated events during and after Ferguson. Specifically, the thesis asked, how did three leading national news sources (*The Times*, *Fox News* and *Associated Press*) frame the issue of police-involved shootings? What were the differences in coverage among the three chosen news outlets? Specifically, what did the coverage say about the causes or origins of police-involved shootings when an unarmed victim was shot, and did the coverage include remedies for such shootings? What sources were consulted in the coverage, and to what end? This study hopes to contribute to the current national dialogue surrounding the role of race in officer-involved shootings because framing theory suggests that news frames affect how people understand race's role in American police departments and society.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

News Reportage of Officer-Involved Shootings and the “Ferguson Effect”

The Black Lives Matter movement started when George Zimmerman, a self-proclaimed neighborhood watchman, was acquitted for shooting Trayvon Martin, but the 2014 killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, led to street demonstrations and more vocal activism once protesters learned that Brown’s body was left unattended in the street for four hours (Touré, 2017). Meanwhile, the Blue Lives Matter movement gained momentum, as supporters of law enforcement focused on the challenges and effects felt by police involved in shootings (Sharpton & Phang, 2018). News coverage of Brown’s death drew viewers who were eager to know what happened, but led to a parallel debate over the consequences of the coverage, including what some call the Ferguson Effect, or an officer’s reluctance to engage suspects because of increased scrutiny, thereby increasing crime rates.

Mac Donald (2016a) helped popularize the term Ferguson Effect in reference to police officers’ reluctance to engage in use of force for fear of prosecution and public scrutiny through media and social media. Mac Donald’s (2016a) analysis of metropolitan crime rates after the Ferguson shooting stemmed from then-FBI Director James Comey’s acknowledgement that violent crime in some U.S. cities increased after Brown’s death. The Ferguson Effect holds significance because it could represent “a growing lack of cooperation between the community and the police,” Thomas Hargrove, a former journalist and founder of the non-profit Murder Accountability Project, told the *Peoria Journal Star* (Kravetz, 2018, para. 29). Those who subscribe to the Ferguson Effect argue that the shooting and subsequent protests left police officers “vilified and facing a hostile public,” which prohibited them from protecting Americans, explained a *Times* journalist (Dewan, 2017, para. 1). Thus, the term can be used both to blame

police for failing to protect citizens or to indicate that protests affect police conduct; the term even became an offshoot of subsequent shootings' coverage that wanted to determine whether racism influences police.

The possibility of the Ferguson Effect highlights how important framing can be because it highlights that officers may act differently due to media coverage of police shootings and fear of repercussions (whether legal, digital or departmental) when using deadly force. Some media outlets noted that after the fatal shooting of Brown, arrests declined in St. Louis, Chicago and Baltimore, three large metropolises with high violent crime rates (Dewan, 2017; "Sessions Left"). That fewer arrests were made, despite an 18 percent violent crime increase in St. Louis from 2013 to 2016, contributed to criticisms of local law enforcement (Dewan, 2017; "Sessions Left"). On the other hand, some journalists suggest that the Ferguson Effect may not be scientifically or statistically valid (Davey & Smith, 2015; Dewan, 2017; French, 2016). Dewan (2017), for example, evaluated many explanations for changes in policing and crime rates to determine whether the debated Ferguson Effect reaches a legitimate conclusion concerning officers' decision-making. For instance, based on an analysis of crime in 81 U.S. cities, sociologist Pyrooz found that in St. Louis, "homicides had begun to increase before Mr. Brown was killed" (Dewan, 2017, para. 7). The debate over the Ferguson Effect shows how quickly a national conversation can spring from the message that the media is crafting. By including coverage over a variety of events stemming from single police shootings (i.e., protests, outcry, effects on crime and police use of force), the media uses these events to frames larger narratives about racism and police brutality.

Atlantic writer Lantigua-Williams (2016), like Dewan (2017), observed similar weaknesses with Mac Donald's (2016a) view that backlash from Ferguson caused police officers

to hesitate to fulfill their duties. Citing research conducted by sociologists and the Pew Research Center, Lantigua-Williams (2016) suggests that the “lack of confidence” in police officers, especially by members of the black community, is not connected to increases in violent crime; it instead indicates that high-profile police shootings “are reinforcing historic distrusts” that existed before the 2014 shooting of Brown (para. 12-13). As Lantigua-Williams (2016) explains, racial divides in American society have always existed, and while the events in Ferguson incited more societal discussions about racism, the shooting of Brown did not exhibit *newly developed* racism in the U.S. News coverage concerning the debated validity of the Ferguson Effect highlights the divide between Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter proponents, who, along with the rest of the media audience, may come to understand how race influences the decision-making of American law enforcement based on news frames in coverage of police shootings.

Scholarly Discussions of Race in News Media

How the media portray race relations impacts Americans’ beliefs about how racial biases influence the decision-making of law enforcement officers (Mills, 2017). According to Hall (2003), “the media are not only a powerful source of ideas about race. They are also one place where these ideas are articulated, worked on, transformed and elaborated” (p. 90-91). Pollack and Allern (2014) state that “the news media is the *primary* information source for discussions about crime trends, criminal justice policy, law enforcement and police work” (p. 33). Americans develop their perceptions of law enforcement based largely on how officers are presented in the media. News coverage of how racial bias may influence police-involved shootings therefore affects whether Americans trust police to effectively do their jobs (Pollack and Allern, 2014).

While discussing the media's focus on race, Hall (2003) distinguishes between overt and inferential racism, which are shown by quoted sources in news stories. Overt racism includes "arguments, positions and spokespersons who are in the business of elaborating an openly racist argument or advancing a racist policy or view;" in the context of news stories, sources who are quoted can exhibit this blatant racism (Hall, 2003, p. 91). Meanwhile, inferential racism refers to "unquestioned assumptions" that "enable racist statements to be formulated without ever bringing into awareness the racist predicates on which the statements are grounded" (Hall, 2003, p. 91).³ Sometimes, quoted sources allow subconscious racism to influence their statements. In their study of how agenda-setting and framing theory shape peace journalism, McMahon and Chow-White (2011) observed that "new racism" incorporates "the avoidance of racial terminology; the invisibility of structural mechanisms that reproduce inequalities; and the re-articulation of old practices in new forms" (p. 992). McMahon and Chow-White (2011) emphasize that inferential (and overt) racism exhibited by sources in news coverage can conceal or neglect the structural causes of racism and other forms of inequality; this societally pervasive racism then influences when police use deadly force against individuals of minority ethnicities.

Studies by multiple scholars suggest that if racism influences the decision-making of police officers, then it is more likely to be inferential, rather than overt (Hattery, 2018; McDonald Hutchins, 2017; Price & Payton, 2017; Russell-Brown, 2017). According to McDonald Hutchins (2017), narratives about how black individuals perceive their experiences with law enforcement highlight that police officers may subconsciously view black people as more likely to commit crime. As one "target of racial profiling succinctly explained, 'When

³ Other scholars, such as Russell-Brown (2017) and McDonald Hutchins (2017), refer to the phenomenon that Hall (2003) deems "inferential racism" as "implicit bias." McDonald Hutchins (2017) elaborates, "Far more than overt racial animus, implicit bias better explains a greater percentage of the racial differences in policing outcomes" (p. 108).

you're young and you're black, no matter how you look, you fit the description” (McDonald Hutchins, 2017, p. 105). The Department of Justice defined racial profiling as the following:

The practice of a law enforcement agent relying, to any degree, on race, ethnicity, or national origin in selecting which individuals to subject to routine investigatory activities, or in deciding the scope and substance of law enforcement activity following the initial routine investigatory activity. (Teasley et al., 2018, p. 38)

If inherent racist ideologies affect officers' decision-making in routine matters, they are more likely to influence how they use deadly force (Fridkin, Wintersieck, Courey & Thompson, 2017). As Hattery (2018) points out, Officer Wilson, who killed Brown, “described Brown as huge, like a monster,” although “Wilson and Brown are about the same size and weight” (p. 161). Wilson may therefore have allowed underlying, inferential racism to influence his decision to shoot Brown. This thesis project utilized framing analysis to find how the news media cover the role of overt and inferential racism in police-involved shootings.

Framing Studies of Officer-Involved Shootings

Framing analysis studies what news media include in or exclude from their news reports (Entman, 1993). Entman (2010) defines framing as “selecting a few aspects of a perceived reality and connecting them together in a narrative that promotes a particular interpretation” (p. 5). According to Entman (1993), framing highlights four components in a news article: “a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52).

Fridkin et al. (2017) applied framing theory to news coverage when university police “slammed” Ersula Ore, a black professor, “to the ground” for a jaywalking violation (p. 3394).

Video was released of the confrontation, and in their content analysis of subsequent coverage, Fridkin et al. (2017) found that three frames dominated the coverage: “police brutality, law and order, and race” (Fridkin et al., 2017, p. 3394). “Police brutality,” which focuses on an officer’s excessive violence toward suspects, had long dominated news discussions of police violence, but Fridkin et al.’s (2017) research suggested that the media began including the ideas of “law and order” and “race” to their coverage. The law and order frame showed “that the police officer was trying to ensure public safety,” while the race frame focused on the different races of actors in situations of police violence (Fridkin et al., 2017, p. 3401). Mills (2017), however, argues that this approach to framing often focuses on individual instances of officer racism or insinuates that victims are to blame for police force, rather than acknowledging the potential for racism within a police precinct or across American law enforcement departments. In essence, Mills (2017) notes the opportunity for improvement of media frames.

Framing therefore emerges from day-to-day practices of news organizations. As Fridkin et al. (2017) noted, the selection of specific news media frames “can influence the public’s policy priorities and drive policy actions by political actors” (p. 3410). How news media portray police-involved shootings may determine how individuals view the role of law enforcement officers and their ability to protect civilians without allowing biases to sway their decision-making (Fridkin et al., 2017). This opportunity for journalists to expose societal problems is useful, but also precarious, as media might slant issues. It is the responsibility of media to report on social problems, including crime and violence, and how journalists cover these public interest areas affects how Americans view those involved (i.e., law enforcement officers and shooting victims).

By utilizing a framing analysis to evaluate how *The Times*, *Fox News* and *Associated Press* portrayed two cases of officer-involved shootings, this thesis hopes to shed light on how journalists choose what to emphasize when covering police shootings. For example, how did these three news sources frame race in the coverage of such shootings in the U.S. between 2014 and 2016? How did the coverage present the consequences of the shootings for victims' families and officers? The media's presentation of news stories can influence whether Americans attribute systemic racism to police decision-making, so conducting a framing analysis on news coverage of police-involved shootings highlights what kinds of frames influence American perceptions of law enforcement.

Journalistic Critiques

Because the media can influence how Americans view law enforcement and the impact of race on society, it is important to recognize instances when news media struggled to effectively address the divide between the Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter movements. Some journalists and editors have reflected on flaws in their coverage of police-involved shootings. For example, Eligon, a black journalist for *The Times*, described Michael Brown as "no angel" and noted his involvement with illicit "drugs, alcohol and rap music" (Mirkinson, 2014, para. 1-2). Readers responded with intense criticism. In a conversation with *Times'* Public Editor Sullivan (2014), Eligon admitted that his use of the phrase was inappropriate. Sullivan (2014) reported:

He agreed that "no angel" was not a good choice of words and explained that they were meant to play off the opening anecdote of the article in which Mr. Brown saw an angelic vision. That anecdote "is about as positive as you can get," Mr. Eligon

said, and noted that a better way to segue into the rest of the article might have been to use a phrase like “wasn’t perfect.” ... “Hindsight is 20/20. I wish I would have changed that,” he said. (para. 9-10)

Other journalists admit to making errors when covering police shootings. For instance, French (2018), a journalist for *National Review*, noted that he focused on the wrong components of police-involved shootings. French (2018) explains, “To put it bluntly, when I look back at my older writings, I see them as contributing more to a particular partisan narrative than to a tough, clear-eyed search for truth” (para. 16). French (2018) wrote that his coverage worsened racial divides in American society by making race a predominant factor in the discussion of *all* law enforcement shootings. Media portrayals of race when discussing law enforcement suggest that police officers consistently act differently toward individuals of specific races, claims which journalists, like French (2018) should bolster with statistics, documentation or objective research.

This thesis analyzed news frames to evaluate how the media covered police shootings from 2014 to 2016. As Americans examine the racial implications of events like those in Ferguson, it is important to note that Americans still trust traditional print and broadcast media as reliable sources of news, even though the Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election through Facebook and the transmission of fake news, particularly online, led some Americans to doubt the trustworthiness of news reports (Ingram, 2018). A *Columbia Journalism Review* analysis of a Knight Foundation and Gallup poll determined that most of the survey participants “lost trust in the media in recent years,” and over 30 percent “expect that change to be permanent” (Ingram, 2018, para. 2). The media, however, still effectively communicate news to the public; *Poynter* notes that three out of four Americans “trust their local TV news and local newspapers” (Dyakon & Grau, 2018, para. 1). The significance of these findings should not go

unnoticed: *Most* Americans trust news coverage. News media therefore hold relevance because journalists frame issues, “define public problems” and impact how Americans think about social issues (Lawrence, 2000, p. 7). This influence makes media especially important in a country filled with uncertainty and some distrust of law enforcement’s ability to act without racial bias.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This thesis implemented a framing analysis to examine how news media cover police-involved shootings. According to Entman (1993), framing, or what journalists choose to share in or exclude from their articles, impacts what information viewers of news reports have access to and how they internalize that information (Entman, 1993). Entman (1993) elaborates that “the frame determines whether most people notice and how they understand and remember a problem, as well as how they evaluate and choose to act upon it” (p. 54). The significance of how media explain issues and events cannot be overstated; how journalists present stories influences how audiences view public issues, including police-involved shootings, and how they respond to them.

Framing, or what journalists share with their audience, impacts four segments of the “communication process: the communicator, the text, the reader, and the culture” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Frames have four functions: “define problems, specify causes, convey moral assessments, and endorse remedies” (Entman, 2010, p. 391). These functions are translated in the text, where frames demonstrate “the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). By choosing how to present information to mass audiences – how to package an article– communicators influence what information the reader receives and how the reader interprets the news story (Entman, 1993). Finally, the frames can resonate throughout society, as readers internalize frames and act upon them (Entman, 1993).

This thesis therefore conducted a framing analysis on two⁴ cases of police-involved shootings that occurred from 2014 to 2016 in order to gauge how media chose to report on these instances. When reviewing digital coverage of the shootings, this thesis examined how the incidents were framed in *The Times*, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press*. I chose these national media outlets because they cover a range of political biases. Typically, news readers believe *The Times* offers more liberal opinions, while *Fox News* is known for its conservative standpoint. The *Associated Press*, however, represents an objective news outlet that is recognized for its unbiased stance. The *Associated Press*' articles are even used by both liberal and conservative news websites, which further demonstrates its reputation as objective. *Fox News*, however, relied on the *Associated Press* more heavily than *The Times* did, so I grouped *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* together during my analysis. Additionally, I intentionally studied digital print articles, rather than broadcast, because each of these national news outlets is typically less overtly politicized when reporting hard news than when discussing news (and sharing opinions about the news) on television.

Adhering to Entman's (2010) four functions, this thesis assessed how news reporters conveyed the following information: the public issue of police-involved shootings, the root causes of the issue, who should fix the noted challenges with police-involved shootings and how these changes should be made. This thesis therefore evaluated the following components:

- *Victim portrayal*: How are victims portrayed in news stories? How do journalists compare or link their deaths to other unarmed victims? Johnson (2018), an analyst for

⁴ This thesis studied news coverage of two police shootings of unarmed black individuals that occurred in 2014 and 2016 in order to cover incidents that include and follow Ferguson: Michael Brown and Terence Crutcher. I specifically chose these cases because their victims were the same race but had differing ages, much like the involved officers were both white but were different genders. By studying these two cases, I was able to determine how journalists portray differing components of shootings.

Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), noted that victims are often made to seem aggressive and at fault when the press releases their past criminal convictions (if any exist). When victims are portrayed as aggressors somehow responsible for the shooting, journalists indicate that victims' actions may be the stimulus for police-involved shootings, so victim portrayal indicates who the media believe are to blame.

- *Officer portrayal*: Similarly, are the officers portrayed in a menacing way, or are they shown in peaceful settings? Are the officers' actions seen as understandable given the circumstances? Much like victim portrayal, this component of framing contributes to how the problem of police-involved shootings is defined and who is deemed responsible for the shooting.
- *Imprecise or misleading language*: Are words, such as "altercation" or "officer-involved shooting," used by journalists to avoid describing the details of what happened between the officer and victim (Johnson, 2018, para. 2, 5)? Johnson (2018) noticed that "altercation" and "officer-involved shooting" were used in coverage describing how Officer Richard Scarborough killed Joseph Haynes (para. 2, 5). Johnson (2018) explained that these words were used by media to avoid directly implicating the officer's decision to use force against an unarmed teenager. This thesis considered Johnson's (2018) claims by evaluating how such words were used in news reports of two police shootings from 2014 to 2016 to determine whether journalists use them to avoid an in-depth analysis of what happened in the shootings. This component of framing highlights how the media discuss the problem of police-involved shootings, who (i.e., victims or potentially racist officers) the media

- implicates as responsible for the shootings and how the media suggest police-involved shootings and their associated challenges be resolved.
- *Sources*: Were members of the victim's family, police department officials, lawyers or the police officer involved quoted? If a union representative for police officers was quoted, was there also a quote from someone, such as an ACLU representative, who spoke on behalf of the victim? By evaluating whose quotes are shared, this framing analysis determined whether one side disproportionately received more coverage, which highlights who the media see as responsible for addressing potential racial discrimination by law enforcement officers. It is important to note that Standpoint Theory contributes to framing analysis because it highlights "that people's experiences, knowledge and opinions are shaped by the social groups to which they belong" ("Standpoint Theory," para. 3). These external influences then impact how individuals, such as news sources, understand, interpret and communicate about social issues. By incorporating Standpoint Theory, this framing analysis can observe how sources perceive police-involved shootings and how media frame their responses to the issue by including or excluding various sources. Standpoint Theory therefore serves as a reminder that news stories should incorporate a range of perspectives from sources.
 - *Context*: Are both sides (i.e., the victim and officer) presented, and do both sides receive the same amount of space in the article? The news report's layout and the amount of time spent on each side insinuate how one side was presented differently by the story's framing. This, along with the sources quoted, highlights who journalists portray as the issue's problem solvers. For example, are police officers given three-

fourths of the story's space? If this occurs, media may imply that officers hold more relevance when causing, addressing and resolving the issue of police-involved shootings.

- *Statistics and documentation*: How are statistics and documentation used to contextualize shootings into larger narratives of police brutality and racism? How often are journalists even incorporating statistics and documentation into their articles about police shootings? Are data and documentation only given by proponents of one side of the debate? If so, Americans consuming news reports may not fully understand how the problems surrounding police-involved shootings should be solved. It is important to note that while initial coverage of police shootings naturally focuses on the basics of what happened, later coverage should implement statistics and documentation in order to demonstrate whether single police shootings are linked to larger narratives about police brutality and racism.
 - Throughout this thesis, the term “statistics” refers to raw numbers that have been analyzed and presented in order to objectively prove more qualitative findings. “Documentation,” on the other hand,” includes police reports and non-numerical records used to verify journalistic claims.

In order to qualitatively analyze digital articles about each police shooting, I performed the same Google search for *The Times* and *Fox News* articles. I searched the victim's name (Michael Brown or Terence Crutcher) in connection with the place the shooting occurred (i.e., Ferguson or Tulsa). I then entered a custom date range that spanned one month from the day each police shooting happened. For example, Michael Brown was shot on August 9, 2014, so my

Google search for digital articles spanned from August 9, 2014 to September 9, 2014. In total, I evaluated 56 articles about Brown's death and 25 about Crutcher's death.⁵

Number of Articles by National News Outlet

<i>Police Shooting</i>	<i>The Times</i>	<i>Fox News</i>	<i>Associated Press</i>
Ferguson	44	9	3
Tulsa	14	4	7

While future research could study a larger number of police shootings or could expand the timeline of studied articles, my thesis focused on two well-known shootings in order to analyze how the media covered the pivotal Ferguson shooting and a subsequent shooting. In turn, my study showed whether media coverage of police shootings changed over time as people became more aware about comparable shootings across the U.S. I also chose cases with varying victims' ages and officers' genders to see if those components altered coverage of police shootings. After locating a representative sample of articles, I completed qualitative research by reading through each article and by evaluating how the article's content addressed my six criteria. I took extensive notes to determine how each article performed according to the different criteria before looking for similar journalistic practices and tendencies in news coverage of both police shootings.

⁵ Please refer to the chart for specific article breakdown by national news outlet.

Chapter 4: Findings

I examined 81 digital articles about the police shootings of Michael Brown (2014) and Terence Crutcher (2016) in *The Times*, *Fox News* and *Associated Press*⁶ and evaluated the coverage using six framing analysis criteria: victim portrayal, officer portrayal, imprecise or misleading language, sources, context, and statistics and documentation. For example, did *The Times* provide the full context for any racial and police violence statistics that it cited in the articles? Did *Fox News* include a variety of sources that showed multiple perspectives? How did the *Associated Press* portray officers and victims?⁷ The analysis shows that overall, *The Times*, *Fox News* and *Associated Press* framed their articles fairly and unbiasedly. These national news sources, however, had some seemingly biased articles that omitted necessary context, focused on only one side's version of events or did not fortify claims with objective statistics and documentation.

***The Times* – Michael Brown**

Victim portrayal

Overall, *The Times* portrayed Michael Brown precisely as he was: an 18-year-old, unarmed black male killed by a police officer. By giving objective⁸ facts about Brown's interactions with Wilson, *Times* journalists avoided offering their opinions. *The Times* also provided clear and authoritative sourcing to back up the facts. In the lead of an article about

⁶ *Fox News*' website relied heavily on articles written by the *Associated Press*, so I analyzed these news outlets in tandem. *The Times*, however, relied more on its own wire service, so I studied *The Times* as an independent entity.

⁷ For detailed explanations of each criterion used during the framing analysis, please refer to **Chapter 3: Methodology**.

⁸ The term "objective" indicates that *The Times*, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* used clear evidence or cited other sources when providing information that could implicate Brown's or Wilson's guilt. On the other hand, expressing an opinion occurs when journalists point to their own views about Brown's or Wilson's innocence or guilt.

Brown's autopsy written a week after Brown's death, *The Times* described the circumstances of the shooting in clear, declarative, straight-forward diction, letting the facts speak for themselves rather than inflating the language with emotional, sensational terms.

Michael Brown, the unarmed black teenager who was killed by a police officer, sparking protests around the nation, was shot at least six times, including twice in the head, a preliminary private autopsy performed on Sunday found. (Robles & Bosman, 2014, para. 1)

The straight-forward tone continued through the rest of the article.

"This one here looks like his head was bent downward," he said, indicating the wound at the very top of Mr. Brown's head. "It can be because he's giving up, or because he's charging forward at the officer." He stressed that his information does not assign blame or justify the shooting. (Robles & Bosman, 2014, para. 11)

Additionally, *The Times* often presented both sides back to back in a given section, rather than loading up the top of an article (the most important part) with one side or the other.

The police have said that what happened next was a physical struggle between Mr. Brown and Officer Wilson that left the officer with a swollen face. Mr. Johnson and others have said that it was a case of racial profiling and police aggression from a white officer toward a black man. Within minutes, Mr. Brown, who was unarmed, was dead of gunshot wounds. (Robles & Bosman, 2014, para. 31)

As my selection of quotes shows, *The Times* portrayed Brown as objectively as possible. Robles and Bosman (2014) cited a variety of sources: Dorian Johnson, Brown's friend who witnessed the shooting; official autopsy reports; Dr. Baden, the medical examiner; Professor

Shawn L. Parcells, Dr. Baden's assistant; Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr.; Benjamin Crump, Brown's family's lawyer; and Tim Zoll, a police spokesman for the Ferguson Police Department. *The Times* quoted these sources directly in most cases, presenting their words without commentary or spin, and included arguments from both sides of the increasingly heated divide (Robles & Bosman, 2014). Many articles, for example, quoted both Brown's family and sources within the Ferguson Police Department supporting Officer Wilson. By doing so, *The Times* avoided risks often associated with paraphrasing, such as presenting information out of context or misinterpreting a speaker's intent. Overall, *The Times* presented a complete and unbiased account of the shooting.

When covering the events in Ferguson, it is important to note that *The Times* repeatedly connected Brown's death to those of other unarmed, black individuals. *The Times* specifically mentioned the cases of Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner, men whose deaths were associated with racism. Multiple *Times* articles also pointed the discussion of the shooting and its aftermath toward national narratives about police brutality toward minorities and racial bias.

- “The protesters questioned the role that race — and simmering tensions between residents and the Police Department — may have played in the killing of Michael Brown, 18, who was to start college this week” (Bosman & Goode, 2014, para. 3).
- “Mr. Brown's parents said at a news conference that he was nonviolent and good-natured, and would have objected to the looting. Their lawyer, Benjamin Crump, compared the case to another one in which he represented a family, that of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black 17-year-old shot to death in Florida two years ago by a neighborhood watch coordinator” (Bosman & Goode, 2014, para. 17).

- “Thousands converged on an overcast Saturday at the site of the encounter, the start of a protest march linking Mr. Garner’s death to lethal police actions past and present, from New York City to Ferguson, Mo., where a white officer fatally shot an unarmed black teenager on Aug. 9” (Goodman, 2014, para. 2).
- “And polls show that blacks are three times as likely to say the shooting of Mr. Brown, an unarmed black 18-year-old, by a white Ferguson police officer was not justified. With this in mind, leading black officials are moving to seize the aftermath of the shooting and subsequent protests to increase African-American political participation” (Martin, 2014, para. 11-12).
- “Though the shooting of Mr. Brown turned a few blocks of suburban St. Louis into disputed territory, many local protesters emphasized that their frustrations go far beyond the city of Ferguson and the police shooting. Instead, they said grievances with the police are common throughout the area” (Robertson & Goldstein, 2014, para. 6).
- “That there is racial disparity in police stops is borne out by official numbers” (Robertson & Goldstein, 2014, para. 12).
- “The Rev Charles Ewing, Michael Brown’s uncle, said, ‘There is a cry being made from the ground, not just for Michael Brown, but for the Trayvon Martins, for those children in Sandy Hook Elementary School, for the Columbine massacre, for black on black crime’” (“Speeches and Reflections, 2014, para. 3).
- “The speed with which the shooting of Mr. Brown has resonated on social media has helped propel and transform a local shooting into a national cause, as African-American commenters draw attention to continued episodes of violence directed at

African-Americans and the media portrayals of young black men. ‘This affects me deeply because the stories of Mike Brown, Renisha McBride, Trayvon Martin, Sean Bell, Amadou Diallo and many more could have been me,’ Mr. Atkins wrote, referring to the shooting deaths of blacks, some at the hands of police officers” (Vega, 2014, para. 5).

- “The issue at the heart of the unrest in Ferguson — the suspicion among some that a white policeman was trigger-happy when faced with a young black man — is also at the heart of what divides black and white Americans. An overwhelming majority of blacks say they think that, generally, the police are more likely to use deadly force against a black person; a majority of whites say race is not a factor in a police officer’s decision to use force. Forty-five percent of blacks say they have experienced racial discrimination by the police at some point in their lives; virtually no whites say they have” (Vega & Thee-Brenan, 2014, para. 8).

By comparing Brown’s death to similar episodes and using comparable diction in many articles, *The Times* framed Ferguson within a national narrative linking police-involved deaths to charges of systemic and societal racism.

Eligon (2014) and other *Times* journalists portrayed Brown objectively. For example, Eligon (2014) represented both the positive and negative components of Brown’s character when profiling Brown two weeks after the shooting. Eligon (2014) discussed Brown’s childhood, recent high school graduation, plans to attend college, and how he viewed the world. “In the weeks afterward, until his shooting death by Darren Wilson, a white police officer, on Aug. 9, they⁹ detected a change in him as he spoke seriously about religion and the Bible. He was

⁹ As a point of reference, “they” refers to Brown’s friends and family.

grappling with life's mysteries," Eligon (2014) wrote (para. 3). Eligon (2014), however, also explained Brown's personal challenges, even claiming that Brown "was no angel" (para. 4). Readers heavily criticized Eligon (2014) for this word choice. According to Sullivan (2014), Eligon's editor, Eligon immediately saw backlash for his diction through Twitter, email and digital comments. The article's inclusion of Brown's positive *and* negative life choices, however, highlighted Eligon's (2014) intent to explain who Brown was.

While age is relevant and crucial in many articles, such as Eligon's (2014) profile of Brown, age should not be *overemphasized*¹⁰ in general coverage about what occurred between the officer and victim. In the totality of coverage, 25 *Times* articles (out of 44 written about Ferguson) mentioned Brown's youth multiple times (Blinder & Vega, 2014; Bosman & Apuzzo, 2014; Bosman & Blinder, 2014; Bosman & Eckholm, 2014; Bosman & Fitzsimmons, 2014; Bosman & Goldstein, 2014; Bosman & Goode, 2014; Davey, Eligon & Blinder, 2014a; Davey, Eligon & Blinder, 2014b; Fernandez, 2014; Goodman, 2014; Kennedy & Schuessler, 2014; "Michael Brown's Shooting," 2014; Robles, 2014; Robles & Bosman, 2014; Stewart & Horowitz, 2014; Southall, 2014; Stewart & Horowitz, 2014; Storey, 2014a; Storey, 2014b; Vega, 2014; Vega & Eligon, 2014; Vega & Thee-Brennan, 2014; Vega, Williams & Eckholm, 2014; Wines & Robles, 2014). For example, *The Times* referred to Brown as 18 years old four times in an article designed to explain the facts of Brown's death and its implications for Ferguson ("Michael Brown's Shooting," 2014, para. 1, 2, 11, 12). The same article also classified Brown as a "teenager" three times ("Michael Brown's Shooting," 2014, para. 1, 2, 9). Instead of merely contextualizing who Brown was for readers, the overemphasis on Brown's youth had a reverse

¹⁰ "Overemphasis" refers to instances where Brown was called 18, young, or a teenager more than once in a single article. The fact that Brown's age was mentioned is not the issue. Rather, continually mentioning Brown's youth prevents readers from having empathy for Wilson.

effect; because Brown's young age presented such an emotional angle, the public and press alike struggled to have empathy for Wilson.

In breaking news, it is customary to give ages for all major players as part of standard biographical information. In comparison, however, out of 44 articles, 40 never included Wilson's age. Moreover, Crutcher's age was not mentioned at all in some *Times* articles (Berkman, 2016; Blinder, 2016; Engel Bromwich, 2016; Goldstein, 2016; Hoffman, 2016; Pérez-Peña, 2016a; Williams & Dickerson, 2016). Even when *The Times* cited Crutcher's age, it typically did so only once, whereas Brown's age was often mentioned multiple times in a single article. Because *The Times* overemphasized Brown's youth by not simultaneously providing the age of other police shooting victims or officers, *Times*' coverage of Ferguson cast doubt on Wilson's claims that Brown threatened him.

Officer portrayal

When discussing the implications of Brown's death, *The Times* quoted multiple sources. Many argue that Brown's death exposed longstanding police brutality and racism by white officers against minority individuals, so *The Times* situated Wilson's decision to shoot Brown into this larger narrative (Barry, 2014; Blinder & Vega, 2014; Bosman & Blinder, 2014; Bosman & Fitzsimmons, 2014; Bosman & Goode, 2014; Davey, Eligon & Blinder, 2014a; Davey, Eligon & Blinder, 2014b; Davey & Robles, 2014; Dewan, 2014b; Eligon, 2014; Goodman, 2014; Kennedy & Schuessler, 2014; "Reactions to the Shooting," 2014; Rich & Secret, 2014; Robertson, 2014; Robertson & Goldstein, 2014; Sisario, 2014a; Storey, 2014; Vega, 2014; Vega & Eligon, 2014; Vega & Thee-Brenan, 2014). Davey and Robles (2014) stated, "Officer Wilson's formative experiences in policing came in a department that wrestled historically with

issues of racial tension” (para. 15). Similarly, Bosman and Blinder (2014) quoted Ferguson Democratic Committeewoman Patricia Bynes to show that when Wilson shot Brown, he typified police department racism toward black individuals: “People are fed up with police brutality and police harassment. There is still so much racism and discrimination in this region, ingrained in the business world and the communities. This is what happens when institutional racism continues” (para. 20).

Although evidence of brutality and racism in police departments is strong, *The Times*’ framing of Ferguson within this context seemed to ignore contradictory information about whether Wilson’s case fit that narrative, such as Wilson’s clean behavioral record, the likelihood that Brown caused Wilson to fear for his life, or that Wilson was not overtly racist. In many *Fox News* and *Associated Press* articles about Brown’s death, however, journalists quoted the Ferguson Police Department to emphasize Wilson’s lack of disciplinary issues within his department; Meanwhile, *The Times* largely failed to give such quotes prominent article placement. For example, *Associated Press* (2014a) stated, “Belmar said the officer has been with the Ferguson Police Department for six years and that he wasn't aware of other issues involving the man” (para. 8). *Associated Press* (2014c) quoted Wilson’s friend, Jake Shepard, early during its profile of Wilson to highlight that racism might not have influenced his decision to shoot Brown:

“But I can tell you for sure it was not racially motivated. He’s not the type of person to harbor any hate for anybody. He was always nice, respectable and well-mannered, a gentleman. He doesn’t have anything bad to say about anybody, ever. He’s very genuine.” (para. 7)

Likewise, *Fox News* (2014a) used Ferguson Police Chief Jackson as a source: “Jackson said Wilson is a six-year veteran with no disciplinary action on his record” (para. 2). These quotes showed that shooting unarmed, black victims or exhibiting racism was unprecedented for the officer. In essence, both *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* suggested that racism may not have influenced Wilson’s decision to shoot Brown, even though police brutality sometimes caused shootings of other unarmed, black individuals (Associated Press, 2014c; Fox News 2014a).

A similar *Times* article about Wilson also used Jackson as a source, but it situated information about Wilson’s mother’s criminal record more prominently in the article, as if this made Wilson a less-effective officer (Davey & Robles, 2014). When explaining that Wilson’s mother was sentenced for her crimes, Davey and Robles (2014) quoted Mrs. Finney (Wilson’s childhood neighbor), who “said she was stunned when she saw her former neighbor [i.e., Wilson] appear outside the old house in a police uniform. ‘My husband and I thought, ‘How did he get to be a police officer?’” Moreover, Davey and Robles (2014) used six paragraphs on Wilson’s mother’s criminality, while *Associated Press* (2014c) only spent one paragraph at the end of the article doing so. Furthermore, Davey and Robles (2014) used Jackson’s quote about Wilson’s previously clean record in the very last paragraph while *Fox News* (2014a) incorporated it in the second paragraph. Because *The Times* spent less prominent article space discussing Wilson’s lack of discipline and more time on his criminally influenced childhood, *The Times* portrayed him as more prone to use force than *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* did. Readers who did not finish *The Times* article could have been less convinced of Wilson’s professionalism and the possibility that he had no racist intentions toward Brown (Davey & Robles, 2014). Although most *Times* articles did not make Wilson seem inherently aggressive,

sometimes the placement (or lack) of quotes failed to show that Wilson's case may not fit into the narrative of racism and police brutality.

Imprecise or misleading language

I looked for imprecise or misleading language based on Johnson's (2018) claim that journalists avoid blaming officers for shooting unarmed victims. Journalists, Johnson (2018) suggested, want officers to seem reasonable for killing unarmed minority individuals. When looking for instances where *The Times* avoided claiming that Wilson killed Brown, I found none. Rather, most *Times* articles explicitly stated that an officer "shot," "shot and killed" or "killed" Brown, so word choice about Brown's death did not remove Wilson from the scene of the shooting (Alvarez, 2014, para. 2; Blinder & Vega, 2014, para. 2; Bosman & Apuzzo, 2014, para. 3; Bosman & Blinder, para. 9; Bosman & Eckholm, 2014, para. 1; Bosman & Fitzsimmons, 2014, para. 4, 12; Bosman & Goldstein, 2014, para. 1; Bosman & Goode, 2014, para. 8; Bosman, Schwartz & Kovalski, 2014, para. 19; Davey, Eligon & Blinder, 2014a, para. 2; Davey, Eligon & Blinder, 2014b, para. 2; Davey & Robles, 2014, para. 3; Dewan, 2014, para. 2; Eligon, 2014, para. 7-8; Fernandez, 2014, para. 3; Goodman, 2014, para. 2; Martin, 2014, para. 1; "Michael Brown's Shooting," 2014, para. 1; *New York Times*, 2014, para. 2; Perloth, 2014, para. 1; Robertson, 2014, para. 2; Robles & Bosman, 2014, para. 31; Sisario, 2014a, para. 2; Sisario, 2014b, para. 14; Southall, 2014, para. 1; Stewart & Horowitz, 2014, para. 1; Storey, 2014a, para. 1; Storey, 2014b, para. 1; Vega, 2014, para. 1; Vega & Eligon, 2014, para. 4; Vega & Thee-Brenan, 2014, para. 1; Vega, Williams & Eckholm, 2014, para. 14; Wines & Robles, 2014, para. 2, 13).

Sources

The Times provided a variety of sources, and most articles included quotes or explanations from different parties represented in the shooting, such as police figure heads, lawyers, family members, witnesses of the shooting, or friends of Wilson and Brown. By incorporating various sources in single articles about Brown's death and its impact, journalists gave readers enough information to judge the facts of the shooting on their own. If journalists had included more subjective opinions, such as whether Wilson should be charged with murdering Brown before the trial occurred, without using outside sources to express these ideas, readers would have misunderstood sources' opinions of Brown's *perceived* innocence or guilt as objective journalistic fact.

Context

Times coverage presented both sides of the shooting (i.e., the officer and victim), but spent more time on the implications for Brown's family than on those for Wilson's. Mostly, *The Times* quoted diverse individuals within articles, so both the officer and victim were represented in the totality of coverage. Multiple articles (that did not profile individuals), however, *began* by focusing on Brown, such as his lack of a criminal record or by quoting Brown's family members (Bosman & Blinder, 2014; Bosman & Fitzsimmons, 2014; Bosman & Goldstein, 2014; Fernandez, 2014; Sisario, 2014a; Storey, 2014; Vega, 2014). Because multiple *Times* articles began with the shooting's implications for Brown and his family, *The Times* repeatedly spent a

highly important part¹¹ of its articles representing Brown. For example, Bosman and Goldstein (2014) explained:

Just after noon on Saturday, Aug. 9, Michael Brown was shot dead by a police officer on Canfield Drive. For about four hours, in the unrelenting summer sun, his body remained where he fell. Neighbors were horrified by the gruesome scene: Mr. Brown, 18, face down in the middle of the street, blood streaming from his head. They ushered their children into rooms that faced away from Canfield Drive. (para. 1-3)

This vivid account of Brown's death explained what happened, but its emphasis on emotions (such as "horrified" and "gruesome") created biased reporting in favor of Brown as a victim who did not threaten Wilson (Bosman & Goldstein, 2014). While describing witnesses' reactions to the shooting contextualizes the event for readers, *The Times* did not equally emphasize how Wilson was affected or explain his point of view during/after the shooting. In essence, emotional language was placed at the beginning of the article, and later paragraphs failed to equally explain the shooting's implications for Wilson and his family (Bosman & Goldstein, 2014). *The Times* therefore emphasized the shooting's implications for Brown's family and supporters over its implications for Wilson and his family. By using a vastly larger section of its article to discuss Brown's side, *The Times* created the appearance of bias; this could easily have been eradicated with more focus on Wilson and his family. Furthermore, Bosman and Goldstein (2014) wrote their article two weeks after Brown's death. While early news

¹¹ The beginning of news articles is crucial because readers rarely read the entire article. Rather, they often start at the beginning and stop reading before reaching an article's end; only 40% of Americans admit to reading past an article's headline (American Press Institute, 2014). By representing Brown and his family's interests at the beginning of many *Times* articles and by not discussing how Wilson was affected by the shooting until later, *The Times* failed to give equally important article space to both Brown and Wilson.

articles typically focus on victims and community reactions to shootings, later articles should share more information about the officer's reaction to the shooting in order to fairly balance coverage. Because multiple *Times* articles contextually focused on the shooting's implications for Brown's supporters and employed emotional diction (weeks after the Ferguson shooting), *The Times* should have given Wilson's side more space in its articles.

Statistics and documentation

Using statistics or documentation is often a good, if not the only way, to show support for a larger claim ("Statistics"). While *The Times* often quoted someone or blatantly stated that racism and police brutality caused Brown's death, it failed to consistently back up these claims with objective data or evidence. For example, when discussing the significance of protests a week after Brown's death, Blinder and Vega (2014) stated,

Time and again he [i.e., Captain Johnson of the Ferguson Police Department] won applause. But in a vivid display of the challenges faced by the authorities in this tumultuous city of 21,000 that has become the center of a national debate about race and policing, a large crowd outside continued to protest Mr. Brown's death.

This quote situated the Ferguson shooting and its aftermath into discussions about police brutality and racism, but Blinder and Vega (2014) failed to support their claims via data or documentation. What was the disparity in use of force over similar encounters between white and black individuals in Ferguson? How many allegations were made pre-2014 against the Ferguson Police Department concerning overt racism? Answering such questions would have more objectively bolstered *The Times*' suggestion that Wilson's case exhibited bias toward black individuals.

The Times did not consistently use statistics when explaining whether Brown's death represented systemic police racism. In total, 24 articles (out of 44) quoted sources or actually stated that Brown's death resulted from racism or police brutality. Only 11¹² of those articles, however, included objective documentation or data to support what journalists presented as hard news: that Wilson acted on racist bias (Bosman & Goldstein, 2014; Davey, Eligon & Blinder, 2014a; Davey, Eligon & Blinder, 2014b; Davey & Robles, 2014; Dewan, 2014; "Reactions to the Shooting," 2014; Robertson & Goldstein, 2014; Robles & Bosman, 2014; Southall, 2014; Vega & Eligon, 2014; Vega & Thee-Brennan, 2014). The 11 articles that included objective evidence, however, pulled from a variety of sources: the Pew Research Center, *Times/CBS News* national poll results, 2007 police department survey, court case analysis, voter polls, police reports and autopsies, and 2012 Census Bureau data. It is important to note that journalists could also have utilized other third-party data collection as early as 2014, such as Brian Burghart's "Fatal Encounters" police shooting database and Jim Fisher's (a previous FBI Special Agent) police shooting data (Lowery, 2014). Although data collection on police shootings greatly increased and was refined post-Ferguson, *The Times* could have included more statistics or documentation to better fortify its claims, even as early as 2014 (Lowery, 2014).

More positively, when *The Times* used statistics, it often incorporated multiple statistics within single articles to show whether police use force regularly against minority individuals. For example, Davey, Eligon and Blinder (2014a) included a Pew Research Center survey that "showed that 80 percent of blacks thought the case [i.e., Ferguson] raised 'important issues about

¹² Each of the 11 articles was written at least one week after Brown's death, showing a journalistic trend to include data and documentation later in coverage. This thesis argues that *The Times* dropped the ball because it did not include enough statistics and documentation *in later coverage* of the Ferguson shooting, rather than arguing that *The Times* need more statistical proof within the first few days of coverage. By utilizing more research to bolster arguments about the shooting's aftermath, *The Times* could have better helped readers situate Ferguson into national narratives.

race that need to be discussed,’ while only 37 percent of whites thought it did” (para. 31). Davey, Eligon and Blinder (2014a) then elaborated that “blacks surveyed were also less confident in the investigations into the shooting, with 76 percent reporting little to no confidence, compared with 33 percent of whites” (para. 32). While the lack of statistics in many articles was balanced by the use of multiple statistics in a few articles, *The Times* could have contextualized the Ferguson shooting with more regular usage of statistics.

Fox News and Associated Press – Michael Brown¹³

Victim portrayal

Fox News and the *Associated Press*, like *The Times*, included sources that linked Brown’s death to other unarmed, black victims, such as Martin, and to similar instances of police racism (*Associated Press*, 2014a; *Fox News*, 2014d; *Fox News*, 2014f). For example, *Associated Press* (2014a) quoted John Gaskin, St. Louis County NAACP member:

With the recent events of a young man killed by the police in New York City and with Trayvon Martin and with all the other African-American young men that have been killed by police officers...this is a dire concern to the NAACP. (para. 12)

This parallel of information between the three news sources highlights how journalists used framing to connect single police shootings to larger issues, such as police bias. News readers then understand whether police shootings highlight increased use of force nationally.

Unlike *The Times*, however, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* explained what happened in each police shooting without continually emphasizing Brown’s youth. Out of 11

¹³ *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* are analyzed together because *Fox News*’ website relied heavily on articles from the *Associated Press*.

articles, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* repeated Brown's youth five times within the same article (*Associated Press*, 2014a; *Fox News*, 2014a; *Fox News*, 2014b; *Fox News*, 2014d; *Fox News*, 2014e). This means that *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* repetitively included Brown's youth only 45% of the time, while *The Times* did so in 55% of its articles. Additionally, when *The Times* mentioned Brown's age more than once, it often did so more than twice within single articles, while *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* rarely did.

It is important to note that while *The Times* was unbiased *overall*, it made Brown seem more like an innocent victim than the other two national platforms. For example, I compared quotes from three articles (one from each news outlet) published within a week of each other (ranging from August 15 to August 23). Two of the quotes were included in the article's first two paragraphs, highlighting how journalists immediately framed discussions about Brown's death. While *Associated Press* (2014b) included the quoted information later in the article, it was formatted like a traditional timeline,¹⁴ so it makes sense that information explaining Brown's death came after the events leading to the shooting. The three chosen quotes are therefore equally comparable.

Fox News (2014a) described the shooting matter-of-factly with few adjectives and adverbs:

A suburban St. Louis police chief on Friday identified the officer whose fatal shooting of an unarmed black teenager ignited days of heated protests, and released documents alleging the teen was killed after a robbery in which he was suspected of stealing a \$48.99 box of cigars. Ferguson, Mo., Police Chief Thomas Jackson said the robbery took place just before noon on Saturday at a convenience store roughly 10 minutes before a police officer identified as Darren Wilson fired

¹⁴ A "traditional timeline" article is when the events are listed by the time they occurred.

the bullet that killed Michael Brown. Police say that the shot was fired after a struggle touched off by Wilson's confronting Brown. Jackson said Wilson is a six-year veteran with no disciplinary action on his record. (para. 1-2).

Similarly, *Associated Press* (2014b) stated:

Officer Wilson encounters Michael Brown walking on a street and the shooting follows. Ferguson Police Chief Tom Jackson said Friday that Wilson did not know about the robbery at the convenience store when he encountered Brown. Another officer arrives on the scene after the shooting, and an ambulance is contacted to treat Brown's wounds. (para. 7-8)

Now compare *Fox News*' and *Associated Press*' succinct, unbiased diction with *The Times*' seemingly sensational wording:

Just after noon on Saturday, Aug. 9, Michael Brown was shot dead by a police officer on Canfield Drive. For about four hours, in the unrelenting summer sun, his body remained where he fell. Neighbors were horrified by the gruesome scene. (Bosman & Goldstein, 2014, para. 1-2)

The Times' language initially appeared more biased by including emotional appeal (i.e., "gruesome" and "horrified"). *The Times*' overuse of adjectives and adverbs in comparison with the other news outlets highlights that even the *appearance of bias* is problematic in news writing. While explaining witnesses' reaction to Brown's death described what took place, Wilson's trial had not yet occurred when Bosman and Goldstein (2014) wrote their article. Their emphasis on what witnesses felt therefore caused readers to feel disgust toward Wilson because he was responsible for creating a "gruesome scene;" *The Times* also failed to include how Wilson and his family reacted to the shooting later on in the article (Bosman & Goldstein, 2014, para. 2).

Instead, *The Times* should have allowed readers to determine on their own whether Wilson feared for his life when interacting with Brown by using fewer emotionally charged adjectives and adverbs. For example, rather than saying “gruesome,” *The Times* might have simply said that “neighbors were horrified by the scene.” This change in word choice would have explained neighbors’ reaction to Brown’s death while also reducing the *appearance of bias* in favor of Brown. In comparison, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* removed subjective, emotional adjectives and adverbs in order to avoid influencing readers’ opinion of Brown’s and Wilson’s innocence or guilt. *Fox News* (2014a) even explained Wilson’s untarnished disciplinary record at the top of the article, so readers could visualize Wilson’s perspective during the shooting. Additionally, *Fox News* (2014a) and *Associated Press* (2014b) did not use seemingly emotional diction when portraying Brown. By focusing less on how people felt about Brown’s death, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* wrote less biasedly in favor of Brown.

Officer portrayal

Fox News and the *Associated Press* used a variety of sources when discussing whether Wilson’s split-second decision to shoot Brown was justified. When sources suggested that racism influenced Wilson, journalists also cited police who noted Wilson’s clean record; *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* included such references more often than *The Times* (*Associated Press*, 2014c; *Fox News*, 2014a; *Fox News*, 2014b; *Fox News*, 2014d; *Fox News*, 2014f). For example, *Fox News* (2014d) quoted Ferguson Police Chief Thomas Jackson to stress Wilson’s previously unbiased professional decision-making: “Wilson is a six-year police veteran – two in neighboring Jennings and four in Ferguson – and had no previous complaints filed against him, Jackson said, describing him as a ‘gentle, quiet man’ who had been ‘an excellent officer’” (para.

16). *Fox News* (2014d) then cited Brown's family attorney Benjamin Crump, who worked for Martin's family: "Police 'are choosing to disseminate information that is very strategic to help them justify the execution-style' killing" (para. 20). In essence, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* included sources with differing opinions to show how the Ferguson community responded to the shooting and to avoid indicating whether journalists believed Wilson acted on racist motives. This emphasis on including a variety of perspectives led to unbiased articles.

Additionally, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* explained how the shooting affected Wilson more than *The Times* did. While *The Times*, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* provided information about the shooting's aftermath, including the fact that Wilson had administrative leave post-shooting, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* incorporated more specifics about Wilson's struggles post-shooting. McKay (2014) stated:

Wilson was left dazed by the initial confrontation, the source said. He is now "traumatized, scared for his life and his family, injured and terrified" that a grand jury, which began hearing evidence on Wednesday, will "make some kind of example out of him," the source said. (para. 8)

By quoting a source to portray Wilson's personal feelings, readers see that police officers, in addition to victims' families, experience long-lasting aftereffects of police shootings. Because McKay (2014) refrained from overusing sensational adjectives and adverbs to paraphrase and instead quoted someone else's perception of Wilson's subjective emotions, McKay (2014) unbiasedly represented the involved officer.¹⁵ While *The Times*, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* included many sources who discussed why Wilson shot Brown, *Fox News*' and the

¹⁵ The previous example of overly emotional diction explained on pages 36-37 was different because journalists were selectively using emotional language, rather than quoting a source who included emotionally charged language. By quoting sources, journalists are less subjective.

Associated Press’ more in-depth explanation of Wilson’s struggles clearly showed how shootings affect officers.

Imprecise or misleading language

Instead of shifting blame, as FAIR Analyst Johnson (2018) said would happen in police shooting coverage, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* clearly stated that Wilson “shot” and “killed” Brown (*Associated Press*, 2014a, para. 1-2; *Associated Press*, 2014b, para. 1; *Fox News*, 2014a, para. 3, 9; *Fox News*, 2014b, para. 8; *Fox News*, 2014d, para. 8, 14, 16; *Fox News*, 2014e, para. 1-2, 8; *Fox News*, 2014, para. 7; McKay, 2014, para. 7). *Fox News*’ and the *Associated Press*’ use of clear diction to explain what occurred before, during and after Brown’s death eliminated potential confusion about how Wilson and Brown interacted.

Sources

Fox News and the *Associated Press* included numerous and varied sources. If Brown’s family provided a quote, those representing Wilson, such as the Ferguson Police Chief, also shared their thoughts. For instance, *Fox News* (2014b) quoted Brown’s family attorney Benjamin Crump: “Crump says ‘it’s bad enough they assassinated him, and now they’re trying to assassinate his character’” (para. 11). The word “assassinated” suggests that Wilson acted unfairly when he killed Brown, so *Fox News* (2014b) then quoted police to show Wilson’s spotless record: “The police chief described Wilson as ‘a gentle, quiet man’ who had been an excellent officer” (para. 12). By juxtaposing quotes that represent Wilson and Brown in consecutive paragraphs, *Fox News* gave both sides equal representation without suggesting that one side had more validity than the other. This in turn created unbiased articles.

Similarly, the *Associated Press* included various sources. *Associated Press* (2014a), for instance, represented multiple perspectives: St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar; John Gaskin, a St. Louis County NAACP member; Missouri Senator Jamilah Nasheed; Desiree Harris, Brown's grandmother; and Lesley McSpadden, Brown's mother. Although *Associated Press* (2014a) could have included quotes from Wilson's family to give more article space to both sides, its inclusion of a variety of sources created a fair article overall. By incorporating multiple informants, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* made the victim's and officer's sides seem important when determining who holds responsibility for shootings and who should deal with shooting repercussions.

Context

Both *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* refrained from putting only one side's views in the first two or three paragraphs (or the top) of every article; headlines also referred to a variety of opinions regarding Brown's death. For example, *Associated Press* (2014a) began by explaining how Brown's death inspired protestors to rally against police brutality, while *Fox News* (2014g) depicted Brown's funeral arrangements. Other articles on *Fox News*' website, however, began with the shooting's implications for Wilson. McKay (2014), for instance, immediately explained a witness's claim that Brown attacked Wilson, which could justify the officer's use of deadly force. Moreover, *Fox News* (2014b) introduced information from Ferguson Police Chief Jackson in the second paragraph. By starting with differing perspectives, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* unbiasedly contextualized their articles, so that one side did not seem more newsworthy or valid than another.

Fox News and the *Associated Press* also gave equal space within single articles to different sides. For instance, *Fox News* (2014a) spent the article's first half discussing police reports that Brown committed a robbery before encountering Wilson. The article then spent its later half on how Brown's family and lawyer responded to the police's claims (*Fox News*, 2014a). Similarly, *Fox News* (2014d) gave relatively equal article space to diverse representatives of community opinions in Ferguson: protestors; store owners; police who spoke on behalf of Wilson; and Brown's family's lawyer. By giving article space to diverse perspectives, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* made both the officer's and victim's supporters seem responsible for addressing the shooting's after effects.

Statistics and documentation

Fox News and the *Associated Press* used less statistics and documentation than *The Times*, which can present challenges for readers seeking to contextualize shootings into national narratives. Out of seven *Fox News* and *Associated Press* articles that situated the Ferguson shooting into discussions about police brutality and racism, two¹⁶ included some form of objective statistics *or* documentation to verify its claims (*Associated Press*, 2014c; *Fox News*, 2014a). Both *Associated Press* (2014c) and *Fox News* (2014a), however, failed to explain the statistics' origins since neither article linked to the statistics' original study or explained how the numerical values were ascertained. Without outside support for information, readers may struggle to understand how Ferguson exemplified national issues, such as police racism.

¹⁶ Like *The Times*, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* only used statistics and documentation in articles written about a week after Brown's death. This means that national news outlets should have incorporated more data and research into *later* coverage of the Ferguson shooting to better reflect the validity of arguments about police brutality and racism. The fact that news outlets did not include statistics early on, however, is not problematic, since at that time they were more focused on the basic facts of the case.

Statistics contextualize seemingly isolated police shootings into larger narratives, so *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* should have more regularly used data and research (and provided these studies' context) to validate claims that the Ferguson shooting was an example of linked national narratives. After researching how three national news outlets portrayed the Ferguson shooting, I began my analysis of how they each covered the Tulsa shooting.

***The Times* - Terence Crutcher**

Victim portrayal

The Times clearly explained how Terence Crutcher's death fit into a national narrative about system police racism. As Williams and Dickerson (2016) stated, "In many ways, the shooting, which took place in Tulsa, Okla., was a familiar one: A white police officer. An unarmed black man shot dead. A disturbing confrontation captured on video that prompted outrage across the country" (para. 3). This concise wording linked Crutcher to other victims likely affected by discrimination, much like coverage of Brown's death connected him to Martin and Garner. Many articles related the circumstances of Crutcher's death to similar occurrences where police brutality and racism were suspected to be a root cause (Goldstein, 2016; Pérez-Peña, 2016a; Stack, 2016; Williams & Dickerson, 2016; Williams & Fernandez, 2016). "This is an issue that is not unique to Tulsa, Oklahoma," Crutcher's family's lawyer Benjamin Crump said when explaining that Crutcher's death exemplified white police shooting black individuals. "This is an issue that seems to be an epidemic happening all around America" (Stack, 2016, para. 15). Williams and Fernandez (2016) noted a similar connection between police shooting victims: "The case is the latest in a series of deaths across the country at the hands of the police that have raised questions about officers' use of force particularly against African-American men" (para.

5). Williams and Fernandez (2016) even related Crutcher's 2016 case to Brown's death in 2014. By comparing Crutcher to similar victims, *The Times* showed how systemic police brutality can affect society.

While *The Times* presented both sides (i.e., the officer's and victim's) when covering the Tulsa shooting and its aftermath, its coverage appeared more sympathetic toward Crutcher than empathetic for Officer Betty Shelby. For example, Fernandez and Wines (2016b) focused more than three-fourths of their article on the shooting's repercussions for Crutcher's family, while spending minimal time discussing repercussions for Shelby post-shooting (Fernandez & Wines, 2016a, 2016b). In fact, Fernandez and Wines (2016a) spent only two (out of 24) paragraphs explaining the shooting's after effects for Shelby, while the rest of the article included views from Crutcher's family and situated his death into a narrative of police brutality. Unlike an individual profile about Crutcher, however, the article was supposed to explain *the entire Tulsa community's* response to the shooting (Fernandez & Wines, 2016a). Fernandez and Wines (2016) therefore portrayed Crutcher as a sympathetic victim and failed to give equal voice to those more understanding of Shelby's decision to shoot.

Similarly, Williams and Fernandez (2016) started their article by quoting Crutcher's family, who suggested that "Crutcher had posed no threat and that his hands were in the air when he was shot" (para. 1). Only in the sixth paragraph did *The Times* first acknowledge Shelby's opinion that "Crutcher had behaved erratically and refused to comply with police commands;" *The Times* then spent the majority of the article's second half continuing its discourse on Crutcher's perceived innocence, only explaining the shooting's impact on Shelby in two paragraphs (Williams & Fernandez, 2016, para. 6). Other general coverage of the Tulsa shooting also used disproportionate article space for Crutcher's side of the debate and failed to give

Shelby (or her supporters) an equal amount of space to explain her perspective (Blinder, 2016; Engel Bromwich, 2016; Fausset & Blinder, 2016; Fernandez, 2016; Hoffman, 2016). *The Times* did not fully examine how Crutcher could cause Shelby to fear for her life, which may have led readers to empathize more with Crutcher than Shelby.

Officer portrayal

Although *Times* coverage favored Crutcher, Shelby was portrayed fairly: a white, female officer who shot and killed Crutcher. Because *The Times* often quoted sources, such as lawyers, police and family members, when discussing whether Shelby's use of force should be legitimized, it did not emphasize what individual journalists thought about her decision to shoot. For instance, when explaining how NFL players used Crutcher's death as rallying cry for anti-police brutality and anti-racism protests, Hoffman (2016) quoted DeSean Jackson, a Redskins player: Jackson "published a photo of Terrence Crutcher, a black man shot by the police in Tulsa, Okla., on his Instagram feed with a caption that read in part, 'Us as black People are a threat, so jus take our lives smh the system been set up for us not to live and make it thru all this'" (para. 44). Because this content blames Shelby for acting on racist bias, *Times* journalists quoted someone, rather than openly agreeing or disagreeing with such strongly opinionated language.

A significant portion of article space, however, focused on Crutcher's life and his family, while only a minimal section evaluated the shooting's impact on Shelby. For example, Williams and Dickerson (2014) explained that female officers, such as Shelby, are usually not involved in police shootings. At no place in the article (and rarely in other articles) did they explain how the shooting individually affected Shelby, such as whether she experienced PTSD, anxiety or

depression. In fact, in only one of its 14 articles related to the Tulsa shooting did *The Times* mention how the shooting personally impacted Shelby and her family (Williams & Fernandez, 2016). Williams and Fernandez (2016) quoted Shelby's attorney after explaining how protestors of Crutcher's death questioned Shelby's decision to shoot: "'She is extremely distraught over what has happened,' Mr. Wood said. 'She has never used deadly force in her nine-year career. She is a pretty seasoned officer and has worked in a lot of different areas'" (para. 7). While Williams and Fernandez (2016) showed some of the shooting's repercussions for Shelby, *The Times* could have used more equal article space when presenting the shooting's implications for Crutcher's family *and* Shelby; this, in turn, would demonstrate that shootings simultaneously affect *both the officer and the victim*. Meanwhile, Fernandez and Wines (2016b) spent an entire article highlighting the pain felt by Crutcher's family over his passing, without a similar *Times* article about Shelby and her family post-shooting. *The Times* should have better represented Shelby's challenges post-shooting in order to show that both officers and victims' families are influenced by police shootings.

Imprecise or misleading language

The Times clearly stated that Shelby killed Crutcher. Like coverage of Brown's death, *Times* articles about Crutcher used "shot" or "killed" in practically every article (Blinder, 2016, para. 1; Fausset & Blinder, 2016, para. 13; Fernandez, 2016b, para. 1; Fernandez & Wines, 2016a, para. 2; Fernandez & Wines, 2016b, para. 5; Goldstein, 2016, para. 10; Hoffman, 2016, para. 44; Pérez-Peña, 2016a, para. 2; Pérez-Peña, 2016b, para. 1, 3, 5; Stack, 2014, para. 1, 3, 4, 6, 8; Williams & Dickerson, 2014, para. 2-4; Williams & Fernandez, 2016, para. 1, 6, 17). By

using clear diction, *The Times* unbiasedly explained that Shelby killed Crutcher and linked his death to other instances where officers shot unarmed victims.

Sources

The Times' coverage was fair, so it included a variety of sources. If it had represented only one perspective, such as Crutcher's family, then *The Times* would have suggested that one side offered more useful perspectives than the other. *The Times*, however, represented both sides (i.e., the officer and victim). When articles quoted police, they also quoted Crutcher's family or its lawyers to show different standpoints on the events in Tulsa. For example, in its first online article about Crutcher's death, *The Times* cited Tulsa County District Attorney Steve Kunzweiler; police video of Shelby's interaction with Crutcher; Tulsa Police Chief Chuck Jordan; Shelby's lawyer Scott Wood; Shelby's husband Dave Shelby; Crutcher's family; Benjamin Crump, Crutcher's family's lawyer; and Dewey F. Tulsa Mayor Bartlett Jr. (Stack, 2016). Similarly, Fernandez (2016b) mentioned court documents; Tulsa county district attorney investigator; Tulsa County District Attorney Stephen Kunzweiler; Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin; lawyers for Crutcher's family; the Reverend Al Sharpton; and Mia Hogsett, a Tulsa cosmetology student and Black Lives Matter supporter. Both Stack (2016) and Fernandez (2016b) exemplify *The Times'* dedication to providing multiple sides of the debate surrounding Shelby's use of force in order to create unbiased coverage.

Context

While *The Times* represented multiple perspectives in most of its articles, it should have spent more time explaining how shootings affect officers. For example, Williams and Fernandez

(2016) spent most of their article explaining how Crutcher's family responded to the police shooting. Although a small portion of the article quoted Shelby's husband, *The Times* should have more fully explained how the shooting impacted Shelby in order to fairly represent both the officer and the victim (Williams & Fernandez, 2016). If *The Times* did not want to allocate more article space for Shelby when focusing on Crutcher, it could have simply written a separate article about the shooting's repercussions for Shelby's family, so that both sides received equal coverage. Additionally, *The Times* created a profile to highlight who Crutcher was before his death, without creating a similar article to profile Shelby (Fernandez & Wines, 2016). For instance, the only article that predominantly discussed Shelby focused on how unusual it is for female officers to be involved in shootings, rather than explaining how the shooting personally affected Shelby and her family (Williams & Dickerson, 2016). In order to address its contextual shortcomings, *The Times* should have included more information on the shooting's repercussions for officers by adding articles specifically about Shelby and her family post-shooting or by including more context for Shelby's point of view throughout pre-existing articles.

Statistics and documentation

Out of 12 *Times* articles where Crutcher's death was cited as an instance of police brutality or racism, six included data or documentation to show how Tulsa related to police shootings of other police shooting victims (Fernandez, 2016a; Fernandez & Wines, 2016; Goldstein, 2016; Pérez-Peña, 2016a; Pérez-Peña, 2016b; Williams & Dickerson, 2016). For example, Williams and Dickerson (2016) cited a research study by Philip Stinson, a criminal justice professor, to explain that on-duty "police officers kill about 1,000 people each year" (para. 6). "Mr. Stinson's analysis shows that since 2005, there have been 77 police officers

charged with manslaughter or murder for an on-duty shooting,” *The Times* explained (para. 7). “Only three of those, including Officer Shelby, were women. The other two were not convicted” (para. 7). Stinson’s research greatly bolstered Williams and Dickerson’s (2016) article about the scarcity of female officers involved in shootings because it provided objective proof for claims that journalists made.

Each of the six articles also provided links to show the statistics’ or data’s origins. Statistics and outside research (such as Stinson’s findings) were more widely used to discuss Crutcher’s death than they were when situating the Ferguson shooting into a national narrative about police treatment of minority groups. When writing about Brown’s death, 46% of *Times* articles that linked Ferguson to other police shootings included data or evidence; in comparison, 50% of *Times* articles about Crutcher’s death did so. In the future, journalists should continue incorporating statistics and research, so readers can contextualize police shootings into societal narratives about police use of force. By 2016, even more sources housed police shooting data than in 2014, such as *The Washington Post* and the National Bureau of Economic Research, which is reflected by *The Times*’ increase of research and data usage (Fryer, 2016; “Nine Hundred,” 2015). This greater availability of objective data and documentation post-Ferguson shows the continued need for journalists to provide objective evidence as proof for how racism may influence American law enforcement.

Fox News and Associated Press – Terence Crutcher

Victim portrayal

Fox News and the *Associated Press* compared Crutcher’s death to other likely instances of police brutality, much like Brown was regularly connected to Martin and Garner (*Associated*

Press, 2016d; *Associated Press*, 2016g; *Fox News*, 2016a; *Fox News*, 2016c). For instance, *Associated Press* (2016g) stated, “In the recent shootings of unarmed black men in a San Diego suburb and in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the police officers who fired the fatal shots were accompanied by officers who simultaneously drew and fired their stun guns” (para. 1). This quote compared Crutcher to a police shooting victim in San Diego, drawing correlations between use of force against minorities across the U.S. *Fox News* (2016c) also compared Crutcher to Keith Scott, an armed victim who was shot by police in Charlotte, NC, in 2016, because both deaths raised questions about racism toward black victims. Protesters of the Charlotte shooting even used Crutcher’s death to reiterate their claims of police brutality. Although Scott was armed and Crutcher wasn’t, *Fox News* (2016c) showed why individuals as far away as North Carolina protested Crutcher’s death and how shootings repetitively influence minority individuals. These correlations help news readers determine that police shootings are not isolated instances; instead they create societal discussions about police treatment of minorities.

Officer portrayal

Fox News and the *Associated Press* created unbiased articles by using outside sources to discuss how prosecutors and community members responded to Shelby’s use of force. For example, *Associated Press* (2016f) explained Shelby’s belief that shooting Crutcher was valid given the circumstances: “A not guilty plea has been entered on behalf of an Oklahoma police officer charged with first-degree manslaughter in the fatal shooting of an unarmed black man” (para. 1). *Associated Press* (2016f) then stated, “Prosecutors allege Shelby acted unreasonably when she shot the 40-year-old Crutcher after she encountered his vehicle abandoned on the street” (para. 3). Instead of saying what individual journalists thought about Shelby’s rationale

for shooting Crutcher, *Associated Press* (2016f) used prosecutors' wording to show that some saw Shelby's decision to shoot as unjustified.

Similarly, *Associated Press* (2016c) used sources to explore whether Shelby acted reasonably. Shelby's attorney explained, "Shelby has completed drug-recognition expert training and thought Crutcher was acting like he might be under the influence of PCP" (para. 17). If this was the case, then Shelby may have indeed felt threatened by Crutcher and been authorized to use deadly force. On the other hand, Crutcher's family and lawyers argue that "Crutcher wasn't threatening the officers. The attorneys also provided an enlarged photo from police footage that appears to show the SUV's window rolled up, which would contradict Shelby's claim that Crutcher was reaching inside his vehicle" (para. 23). These examples demonstrate that *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* shared diverse perspectives when discussing Shelby's choice to use force against Crutcher, so that readers could create their own opinions about the justification for Shelby's actions.

Imprecise or misleading language

Fox News and the *Associated Press* also avoided shifting blame away from Shelby. Journalists' word choice was very direct, so readers knew Shelby shot Crutcher. Both news platforms avoided calling the police shooting a less-confrontational "altercation," instead stating that Shelby "shot" and "killed" Crutcher in practically every article (*Associated Press*, 2016a, para. 1, 3; *Associated Press*, 2016b, para. 2; *Associated Press*, 2016c, para. 12; *Associated Press*, 2016e, para. 3; *Associated Press*, 2016g, para. 1; *Fox News*, 2016a, para. 22; *Fox News*, 2016b, para. 14; *Fox News*, 2016c, para. 2). *Fox News'* and the *Associated Press'* wording clearly did not deny that Shelby shot Crutcher, as FAIR Analyst Johnson (2018) suggested they would.

Sources

Fox News and the *Associated Press* included a variety of sources, so many people connected to the events in Tulsa could voice their opinions and were seen as newsworthy when addressing the social issue of police shootings. For example, *Associated Press* (2016a) cited police video; Tulsa Police Chief Chuck Jordan; Tiffany Crutcher, Crutcher's sister; police spokespeople and officers; U.S. Attorney Danny C. Williams; and Benjamin Crump, Crutcher's family's attorney. When comparing Crutcher's death to Scott's in Charlotte, *Fox News* (2016a) also included diverse sources: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Chief Kerr Putney; Scott's daughter; B.J. Murphy, a Nation of Islam leader; TV footage; Charlotte Mayor Jennifer Roberts; Shelby's attorney; and Crutcher's family's attorney. Because *Fox News'* and the *Associated Press'* journalists used such a variety of sources in many articles when explaining whether or not Crutcher's death exhibited potential police brutality, they wrote unbiasedly.

Additionally, the *Associated Press* repetitively used official police footage to analyze discrepancies between accounts from Crutcher's family and police (*Associated Press*, 2016a; *Associated Press*, 2016b; *Associated Press*, 2016c). Using first-hand dashcam and aerial police footage as a primary source of information is an effective way to convey what happened during the shooting. While witnesses' memories may change or fade, video does not, so the *Associated Press'* use of such a reliable primary source bolstered its ability to share objective, verifiable facts with readers.¹⁷

¹⁷ Loftust (1974) notes the troubling inaccuracy of eyewitness accounts: "Between the time you first witness an event and the time you recount it to someone else, your memory of the event may change drastically. Many factors can affect the accuracy of your report. I have found that the questions asked about an event influence the way a witness 'remembers' what he saw. Changing even one word in a single question can systematically alter an eyewitness account" (p. 188). *Fox News'* and the *Associated Press'* use of video footage eliminated this unreliability of individual memories.

Context

When explaining the Tulsa police shooting, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* gave equal article space to multiple perspectives. For example, *Associated Press* (2016c) identified whose perspective each section represented via italicized headings. The headings included “what the videos show,” “what the videos don’t show,” “what police have said,” “what the officer’s attorney has said,” and “what the family and their attorney have said.” Each heading received anywhere from three to seven paragraphs, so each side received (on average) about the same amount of contextual space, and one side did not have a disproportionate amount of article space to explain its side of the debate. By giving article space to Crutcher’s family and Shelby’s lawyer, the *Associated Press* insinuated that both officers and victims must address shooting repercussions. If, for instance, Shelby’s lawyer was quoted but Crutcher’s family was not, the *Associated Press* would suggest that the officer was more responsible for causing, addressing and resolving the police-involved shooting. By providing relatively equal article space for each side within single articles, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* fairly represented both the officer and the victim.

Likewise, when explaining how Shelby exhibited racism, *Associated Press* (2016a) quoted Crutcher’s family’s lawyer, Benjamin Crump:

“When unarmed people of color break down on the side of the road, we’re not treated as citizens needing help,” said Crump, who has also represented the family of Florida teenager Trayvon Martin. “We’re treated as I guess criminals, suspects that they fear. Big bad dudes, and I don’t know what they mean because they didn’t know who Terence Crutcher was.” (para. 21)

Associated Press (2016a), however, also cited Jeanne MacKenzie, a Tulsa police representative, in order to show the flip side: Crutcher may have threatened Shelby; “Police spokeswoman Jeanne MacKenzie had said earlier that police briefings indicated Crutcher was not obeying the officers’ commands” (para. 10). This article allowed both the officer’s and victim’s representatives to combat opinions given by the other (*Associated Press*, 2016a).

These national news platforms, however, failed to focus enough on Shelby’s perspective in many articles. Out of 11 articles that evaluated the Tulsa shooting in connection with other police shootings or that explained what happened between Shelby and Crutcher, five explained Shelby’s side of the debate; Crutcher was represented in all 11. However, three of the articles only devoted one sentence to Crutcher, using the rest of the article to discuss other shootings and protests, such as those in Charlotte. *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* could have created a fairer balance of coverage by giving equal references to both the officer and victim, and both national news platforms should have provided more general coverage about the Tulsa shooting and its aftermath.

Statistics and documentation

Fox News and *Associated Press* did not include sufficient statistics to prove claims about connections between Crutcher and other unarmed shooting victims. *Fox News* had 11 digital articles related to Crutcher’s death (nine of which claimed Crutcher’s death was likely caused by racism and police brutality) and *only two* used statistics to situate the Tulsa police shooting into a narrative about police racism (*Associated Press*, 2016b; Finn, 2016). Increased usage of data and documentation may be useful in future police shooting coverage, as Americans try to understand what police shootings indicate about societal racism. For example, *Fox News* (2016a) stated,

“Shelby’s attorney has said Crutcher was not following the officers’ commands and that Shelby was concerned because he kept reaching for his pocket as if he were carrying a weapon. An attorney representing Crutcher’s family says Crutcher committed no crime and gave officers no reason to shoot him” (para. 23). Do officers, however, who claim the victim was armed typically win cases? Are unarmed, black individuals (such as Crutcher) more likely to be victims of police shootings than unarmed, white individuals? Do white police disproportionately kill minority individuals? Answering these questions with objective research or documentation would have contextualized Crutcher’s death into a larger narrative of police brutality, so *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* should have incorporated more outside data and documentation.

Analysis of *The Times*, *Fox News* and *Associated Press* coverage in totality

Based on Entman’s (2010) four functions of framing analyses, I evaluated how news reporters conveyed the public issue of police-involved shootings, the root causes of the issue, who should fix the noted challenges with police-involved shootings and how these changes should be made. In order to examine how three national news platforms (*The Times*, *Fox News* and *Associated Press*) covered police shootings, I looked at six criteria: victim portrayal, officer portrayal, imprecise or misleading language, sources, context, and statistics and documentation.

The Times, *Fox News* and *Associated Press* created fair articles overall. Most of the time, the national news platforms unbiasedly portrayed victims and officers, used clear diction to show that the officer shot the victim, and quoted diverse sources when exploring opinions about the shooting. Each news source, however, lacked data and documentation when trying to prove claims, which would have objectively contextualized police shootings into national narratives about police racism. Additionally, journalists sometimes needed to include more context and

focus on more than one side's version of events in order to avoid the appearance of bias, often in favor of the victim. Although *The Times*, *Fox News* and *Associated Press* created fair articles about police shootings overall, they could have more unbiasedly written some articles.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Police shooting victims are linked

As journalists covered police-involved shootings, they made connections between victims. Rather than being isolated instances, journalists (and their sources) acknowledged potential links between victims of police force and racism. These ties largely rested on race, although the age of victims like Brown and Trayvon Martin¹⁸ was sometimes compared. The deaths of unarmed black individuals, such as Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown and Terence Crutcher, are often cited within news articles as cases of police brutality or societal racism against minority ethnicity individuals. When relaying the public reaction to Brown's death, Julie Bosman and Emma G. Fitzsimmons (2014) of *The Times*, for instance, quoted St. Louis County NAACP President Esther Haywood: "We are hurt to hear that yet another teenage boy has been slaughtered by law enforcement, especially in light of the recent death of Eric Garner of New York, who was killed for selling cigarettes" (para 10). By comparing the police shootings of multiple black, unarmed men, journalists highlight the view that department-level police brutality impacts minority individuals living across the United States. National discussions then ensue about whether police shootings occur because of institutionalized racism.

Discussing Racism

As drawing connections between police shooting victims highlights, racism and police brutality are crucial components of police shooting coverage. Democratic committeewoman Patricia Bynes put this observation quite bluntly when speaking to *The Times* about Brown's death: "People are fed up with police brutality and police harassment. There is still so much

¹⁸ It is important to note that Martin was not killed by police, but because he was killed by a neighborhood watchman, he was compared to victims of police force.

racism and discrimination in this region, ingrained in the business world and the communities. This is what happens when institutional racism continues” (Bosman & Blinder, 2014, para. 20). Her remark emphasizes the view that police departments across America target minority individuals differently than white individuals. While *The Times*, *Fox News* and *Associated Press* did not consistently use data or documentation to objectively show that police brutality occurs, multiple sources suggested that racial bias permeates American police departments. Racism is a clear component of police shooting discussions due to the news’ focus on it, so American citizens must conscientiously consider whether and/or how racism influences officers’ decisions to shoot.

Not shifting blame

Journalists employed clear-cut diction when discussing what happened between officers and shooting victims. I included “imprecise or misleading language” as a criterion after reading an article by Johnson (2018), who suggested that journalists use the word “altercation” (rather than shooting) to shift blame away from officers involved in police shootings (para. 5). Johnson (2018) also claimed that journalists would not state that officers “shot” and “killed” victims (para. 8). Analyzing *The Times*, *Fox News* and *Associated Press* digital articles, however, indicated that this did not occur like Johnson (2018) suggested. For example, in articles relating to Michael Brown’s death, journalists from each national platform succinctly stated that Officer Wilson “shot” or “shot and killed” Brown (Alvarez, 2014, para. 1; *Associated Press*, 2014a, para. 1-2; *Associated Press*, 2014b, para. 1; *Fox News*, 2014a, para. 3, 9; *Fox News*, 2014b, para. 8; Robles & Bosman, 2014, para. 31; Vega, Williams & Eckholm, 2014, para. 14). Similar wording described the confrontation between Officer Shelby and Terence Crutcher: “Mr. Crutcher was

shot and killed by a Tulsa police officer,” “a white Tulsa police officer fatally shot an unarmed black man,” “she shot the 40-year-old Crutcher” or Crutcher was “shot” and “killed” (*Associated Press*, 2016a, para. 1, 3; *Associated Press*, 2014e, para. 2; *Associated Press*, 2014i, para. 3; Fernandez & Wines, 2016, para. 2; *Fox News*, 2016a, para. 22; *Fox News*, 2016b, para. 14; Goldstein, 2016, para. 10;). The articles did not shift blame away from the police officer responsible for the shooting. Rather, the journalists explained that an officer shot and killed an unarmed victim before providing sources who discussed whether the officer should be found guilty of excessive force. While Johnson’s (2018) claim that reporters avoid blaming police for killing unarmed victims may hold merit in other national news platforms, this was not the case in coverage of Brown’s and Crutcher’s deaths in *The Times*, *Fox News* or *Associated Press*.

Statistics and documentation not consistently cited

The three news outlets did not regularly cite documentation or statistics to back up charges, either in their own voice or in the voice of a source, that shootings could be linked directly to systemic racism or other causes. Because Ferguson was a turning point for comprehending how racial biases influence police departments, I assumed that *The Times*, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* would include more objective research after Brown’s death to prove whether bias causes police shootings. Neither the Ferguson or Tulsa shooting, however, were consistently framed with data and documentation overall. On the other hand, in the few instances where the *The Times* did objectively prove its claims, it usefully provided links to show the statistics’ origins and explained how organizations conducted their research. While giving the research’s background helped readers understand the data’s validity, statistics and documentation were used sparingly *overall* in each news source’s coverage of police shootings. Journalists

should use more statistics in the future, so readers can understand how single police shootings correspond to national instances of police department racism and can better contextualize isolated shootings into larger societal narratives.

Conclusion

As reporters of the news and sharers of the truth, journalists have an immense responsibility to the American people. Every word in an article matters, as it dictates news framing and how Americans view those involved in situations, such as police shootings. Journalistic framing therefore indicates who journalists believe cause police shootings and who should be responsible to solve these problems.

By conducting a framing analysis of coverage in *The Times*, *Fox News*, and the *Associated Press*, this thesis determined that, journalists conscientiously told readers what happened in the police shootings of Michael Brown and Terence Crutcher. Careful diction overall enabled readers to understand how individual police shootings can relate to national trends of police brutality and racism. *The Times*, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press* should continue providing a variety of sources and unbiasedly portraying officers and victims involved in police shootings; American news readers will then understand whether and/or how racism influences American law enforcement.

The Times, *Fox News* and the *Associated Press*, however, did not have perfect coverage. In other words, these national news outlets sometimes struggled to provide enough necessary context, validate claims about racism and police brutality with data and documentation, and focus on more than one side's version of events. These shortcomings call for newsrooms to complete their own analyses in order to determine their shortcomings when reporting on police

shootings. By doing so, journalists can understand where their coverage of police shootings needs improvement. Then, they can more fairly and unbiasedly cover events that shape national discussions on racism and law enforcement.

Future research can study a larger number of police shootings that cover a wider timespan in order to evaluate whether the observations in this thesis occurred on a widespread scale. For instance, do other national news sources depict police shootings in the same way? What about local news outlets? How has coverage of police shootings changed since 2016? By expanding the boundaries of this thesis, future researchers can more fully analyze how the media have portrayed those involved in police shootings before and after Ferguson and can continue contributing to discussions about potential police brutality and racism.

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