Digitally Witnessing Police Brutality: Examining the Relationship Between Police Violence, Race, and Affect in the Age of Social Media

by

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Abstract

Police brutality has recently become a popular topic following the summer of 2020. However, long before this time, police brutality and black trauma specifically had been explored by many others. With the emergence of social media, the exhibition of black bodies in trauma has been a sight for public gathering and debates. Previous research has shown us the inconsistencies that exist between the treatment of black and white bodies who experience violence in general. With that being said, this study aims to explore the intersections of race, police violence, and affect in the digital space. By comparatively analyzing online commentary left under two racially different cases (Philando Castile and Daniel Shaver), one will begin to understand how a victim’s race influences how others affectively respond to them and their deaths. In doing this, discussions around narrative reconstruction, racial stereotypes, and the power of sound and imagery will all become relevant.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Author’s Note

It is a quiet evening on September 24th, 2020, only a few days post-grand jury decision on the Breonna Taylor incident. As I sit here and try to process the words that US Attorney General Daniel Cameron stated in his press conference trying to justify the validity of shooting Breonna Taylor, it is difficult for me to dismiss the current state of policing and racial tensions within America. When I initially conceptualized this research study, I was inspired by my own emotional reaction while witnessing the death of Eric Garner in a graduate seminar. This initial experience developed into a newfound fascination with the impact of filmed visual evidence, particularly its emotional value. This led me to briefly examine the historical case study of Rodney King, an African American man filmed being beaten by Los Angeles police officers in 1991. As you will see in the following section, Rodney King’s case helped me formulate some of the major research questions that I aim to examine within this thesis. If I am being truthful, I was hoping to write this thesis in a way that would address these questions in a simple and easy manner. By utilizing two case studies – Philando Castile and Daniel Shaver – I was hoping to unpack an already complex social issue. As a new researcher, I thought I could easily detach myself from the harsh realities of what I would be studying. However, if these past few months of writing and experiencing life and the news have taught me anything, it is that this relationship between police violence, film, race, and affect are constantly changing and becoming more complex, and at no point could I ever detach myself from it.

The experience of writing this thesis at a time where police violence has become at the forefront of every social, political, and cultural discussion has been interesting, and to say this thesis was the most emotionally challenging piece I have ever written would be an understatement. From
witnessing a video clip of Ahmaud Arbery running for his life to hearing the sounds of George Floyd begging for his life all while four officers lay on top of him, the emotional and intellectual toll of unpacking my own research findings while simultaneously unpacking the everyday reality of more and more African Americans being beaten and/or dying at the hands of police officers greatly impacted my own understanding of this research topic. With every news update and Instagram post, it became more and more difficult to escape my research topic. Nevertheless, the latest set of cases this summer and the various protests following were not forgotten when writing this piece. Individuals such as George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, Jacob Blake, amongst others have all shaped my analysis to some degree.

With this in mind, I would like to present this thesis in the most transparent way that I can. By no means are these findings finalized and conclusive; if anything, these findings aim to provide an insightful time stamp in the overall evolution of policing in America, and people's emotional reactions to police violence. Although we are witnessing an unprecedented time for the Black Lives Matter movement to finally thrive and be noticed in a positive way in mainstream America, the landscape around policing, race, and affect has not always been this way. The issue of police violence is nothing new to those who are victims of it, however, our perceptions around it continue to transform and develop over time. People of all races, ethnicities, and backgrounds were not always chanting “Hands Up Don’t Shoot” at protests around the world nor were we supportive of athletes engaging in performative protesting, such as kneeling. The climate in which the following two case studies took place is relatively different than the reality we are currently seeing in front of us. With that being said, there are still elements in these findings that still hold up today. By presenting these findings within the temporal context in which they occurred, while also briefly comparing them to current incidents, I hope to provide a more nuanced understanding around this
topic at hand, while also shedding light on the ever-transforming complexities around police violence, race, and affect.

1.2 Statement of Project

This project is inspired by a combination of the racially contextualized case of Rodney King and the increase in active public engagement within social media. With that being said, this research study will focus on the reactionary responses from viewers rather than the digital culture and space these comments are situated within. As a researcher, I am interested in looking at the ways in which individuals respond to filmed incidents of police violence; this includes unpacking the visual and auditory aspects of these videos that resonate with people (i.e., what types of things do people take away from this type of visual content? How does this experience influence their perspective on police violence as a larger issue?). In conducting this research, I examine this relationship through a racial lens. By centering my analysis and research question around this concept of race and racial difference specifically, my objective is to understand how the racial identity of a victim influences the types of responses that are experienced and acknowledged by viewers. Given the current climate around policing and race in America as well as all over the world, the objective of this piece fits in with the larger political, cultural, and societal conversations that are occurring in 2020/2021.

In order to accomplish this task, I will compare two racially different cases of police violence. The two cases I will be looking at are of Philando Castile, an African American man fatally shot during a traffic stop in Falcon Heights, Minnesota, and Daniel Shaver, a white European-descendent who was fatally shot in a hotel hallway in Mesa, Arizona. Additionally, I will be utilizing Facebook and Twitter as my central platforms to gather my data. As touched on previously, the discussions that emerge from comments sections within social media platforms
have the ability to provide rich and diverse perspectives. With this in mind, this thesis will explore the deeply complex relationship between police violence, race, and affect. Through four different, yet interrelated discussions, I will show how race, specifically the racial identity of a victim has been used to create different standards in how death is shown and responded to by others. The four central relationships that are formed between the viewer and varying elements of these videos (i.e., the visual techniques, the “characters”/victims, the social issue, and sound) will be explored in greater detail within this thesis. In doing this in-depth analysis, I will demonstrate how racial narratives associated with the preservation of black and white identities have been upheld (and in some cases, challenged) through our own reactionary responses to this form of visual evidence.

This paper will be organized into six chapters. In Chapter 1, I will be setting the background for the reader. Chapter one will further outline the fundamental literature and concepts that will be relevant to this thesis. Topics within my literature will cover themes of policing, visual evidence and representation, as well as discussions around audio, affect, and race. This chapter will also include a brief explanation of how I define “affect” within the constructs of this research study. Following this, my second chapter will further unpack my methodological approach. Here, I will provide a greater insight into the various criteria that were used to define the parameters of my research as well discussing the coding process in more detail. Chapter 3 will look at the relationship between the viewer and the visual as produced through visual techniques and editing. This section will touch on how accessibility around visual evidence has simultaneously reproduced traditional narratives around race, bodily trauma, and protection, all while triggering complex and nuanced responses from spectators.

This will then lead into Chapter 4, which looks at the more intimate relationships that are formed between both the viewer and the viewed (the victim), as well as the viewer and the social
issue/context (police violence). By comparing the two case studies within each context, one will begin to see how individuals differently associate black and white bodies to ideas of innocence, relatability, and threat. This section will also utilize LeCount’s tactics of minimization to better understand how individuals engage with these videos as examples of a much larger issue – police violence. Moving forward, Chapter 5 will slightly diverge from this visually centered analysis to focus more on the aspect of audio and the auditory experience. In this section, I will be shifting my focus ever so slightly by assessing how race and racial narratives influence our perceptions of individuals based on elements of audio such as speech, tone, and dialogue. Here, we will come to understand how sound has been crafted to inherently be racialized, both in how we utilize it, but also in terms of how we categorize what is appropriate and inappropriate (i.e., what we define as respectable based on sound). To conclude this thesis, I will use the final chapter to provide a thorough and final analysis of my findings and discuss the importance of continuing this type of comparative research.

1.3 The Inspiration: Witnessing Police Violence in Past and Present Times

It was March 3rd, 1991, in the city of Los Angeles, California when a young African American man, Rodney Glen King, was violently beaten by four Los Angeles Police Department officers (Sastry and Bates, 2017). Following a high-speed chase through Los Angeles involving approximately twenty-one Los Angeles police officers, King was finally pulled over (ibid; Network, 2012; Feuerherd, 2018). It was at this very moment when King became the “catalyst for [a] second major urban uprising in the city [of Los Angeles]” (Christensen, 2008). Once ordered out of his car, King was physically assaulted (Sastry and Bates, 2017). Unbeknownst to Rodney King, the four officers conducting the physical beatings, and the remaining seventeen officers who served as bystanders, the assault was captured on a camcorder by a local bystander named George
Holliday (Ortiz, 2015). The clip was sold to local Los Angeles television stations where it was continuously being shown (Network, 2012). What had been a private incident had now transformed into a publicly consumable experience for people to witness on their television screens.

King’s interaction with the Los Angeles Police Department now served as a sensationalized piece of visual evidence that both surprised certain people and validated the experiences of others (Sigelman, Welch, Bledsoe, and Combs, 1997). The footage created an uproar of criticism and debates around policing and police brutality (Lawrence, 2000; Network, 2012). To provide greater context, the footage of Rodney King’s incident was released at a time when racial divisions within the neighbourhood were strict and the tension between African Americans and the criminal justice system was reaching a boiling point (Terry, 1992). With a lack of justice provided for previous racially charged cases, the Rodney King video became a tipping point and sparked larger expressions of frustration, predominantly within African American communities in the Los Angeles county (ibid). These frustrations were further exacerbated following the acquittal of all four police officers involved in the King case by a jury that mainly consisted of Caucasian individuals (Sastry and Bates, 2017).

People’s responses to witnessing King’s assault through a television screen with no immediate legal consequences for the officers involved became another example of how black bodies have been in consistent pain, only to now be consumed by others (Alexander, 1994). The Rodney King video and the following Los Angeles riot that occurred post-acquittal reflect an interesting relationship that exists between racialized violence and how individuals as consumers express and understand these depictions. In the case of Rodney King, the video produced by Holliday and reproduced by media outlets created a variety of emotional and cognitive responses. With each
individual actively engaging with Rodney King’s assault, they had some sort of take away or interpretation of what they were viewing. Although the Rodney King incident was traumatic in nature, the video still did not represent the same thing to everyone (Crenshaw and Peller, 1992; Sigelman, Welch, Bledsoe, and Combs, 1997). However, each perspective on this video influenced much larger discussions around policing, policy, and violence (Bowen, 2015).

In terms of accessibility and reproduction, the Rodney King video was one of the first videos to be circulated at a frighteningly fast pace by traditional news outlets (Zelizer, 2017). Having been widely viewed by many, the impact of this video not only influenced the conversations around race and race relations, but it also shaped how one engaged with acts of violence. The role of the videotape “[created an imprint of] constructed bodily histories…and, in a national arena [amplified or denied] the story an African American appears to be telling” (Alexander, 1994). In this sense, the role of visual and auditory evidence allows us to fully witness violence in a new and interactive format (ibid). In essence, it could be argued that this type of imagery has allowed individuals to transform from passive spectators to now active consumers of violence.

This act of engaging with filmed depictions of police violence has continued to expand into present day. Current cases such as Eric Garner in Staten Island (Baker, Goodman, and Mueller, 2015), Laquan McDonald in Chicago (Husain, 2019), Philando Castile in Minnesota (Berman, 2017), and most recently George Floyd in Minnesota (Hill et al., 2020) have all gained a new set of consumers to experience their deaths through social media1. These platforms now serve as a central space for one to engage in “participatory culture”, with many utilizing their technological

1 The term “consumers” is used here to reiterate the position that individuals embody within this space. As individuals, they are consuming pieces of news stories, images, etc. This will be further acknowledged with the following point around “news snacking”. This term will be used interchangeably with others, such as “viewers”, “commenters”, and “witnesses”.
devices to curate, share, and access news and current events throughout the day (Bergström and Belfrage, 2018, p. 585; Jenkins, 2009, p. 8). This quick accessibility paired with the influx of information being dispersed by anyone has led to what is called “news snacking”. “News snacking” refers to the consumption of shortened, brief news pieces, where consumers are able to gather the basic overview of a news story (Bergström and Belfrage, p. 594). When relating this back to the issue of police violence, it becomes easier for consumers to not only access but be entertained by shortened clips depicting a portion of these far longer fatal interactions.

Furthermore, the trend of incidental news consumption has also been prominent within social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, with many being exposed to such news stories while on the medium for other reasons. However, not all participants of social media sites accidentally come across these news events. In fact, in a study conducted in August 2017, it was found that 67% of Americans intentionally received a portion of their news from social media sites (Shearer and Gottfried, 2017, p. 2). Platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and Snapchat have all seen an increase in their share of users who willingly access news stories from their sites (ibid, p. 4). Given the current climate in which I am writing this piece, the COVID-19 pandemic has only furthered social media usage and the participatory action taken up by users (Koeze and Popper, 2020; Ramsden, 2020; Samet, 2020).

This influx of deliberate news intake stems from the actions of social media participants, news organizations, and social media corporations. As an individual on social media, one has the ability to increase the quantity and flow of news amongst their own feeds by following news organizations and journalists (Bergström and Belfrage, 2018, p. 592). Journalists and news organizations on the other hand have utilized social media platforms to further distribute and market news stories to their consumers (Broersma and Graham, 2013, p. 446). This online forum serves as a useful tool
and has now surpassed other news formats, such as newspapers and radio to become the new dominant space for news readers (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosentiel, and Olmstead, 2010). Finally, the platforms themselves have also invested in this trend by developing their news usability by launching different news streaming partnerships and features that will allow users to access news content directly on their sites (Shearer and Gottfried, 2017, p. 4). With this increased initiative from all three parties to curate news stories through social media, there is a clear reflection in the amount of engagement one has with news stories.

Social media has also now allowed individuals to actively curate and interact with content through comment sections and sharing options (Bergström and Belfrage, 2018, p. 584; Ince, Rojas, and Davis, 2017). These features are a fundamental aspect of digital news consumption and are well-used by consumers of such platforms. In fact, in a study conducted by the GFK Group, formerly known as Knowledge Networks, researchers found that 55% of Americans had left an online comment, while 77.9% of Americans have read comments at some point (Stroud, Duyn, and Peacock, 2016, p. 1). For this particular context of witnessing violence, the ability to comment on these types of videos is an extremely significant aspect of the social experience itself. Similarly, to Rodney King’s time where newspaper articles and physical riots were the methods to express individual and collective responses, the comments section has now become that unfiltered outlet for those who engage with these clips to respond and display their own interpretations of what they are viewing.

To extend this point, I would argue that these responses are fundamental to a larger discussion at hand. For the Rodney King video, the physical riots themselves were a monumental point in time that shifted the national gaze towards the racial treatment of African Americans and spotlighted the ineffective nature of long-standing institutions (Banks, n.d.; Crenshaw and Peller,
As stated previously, the reaction itself was based off an underlying message of frustration and a desire for change (Terry, 1992). In present times, we do see relatively similar displays of physical reactions such as the Ferguson unrest following the death of Michael Brown (Buchanan et al., 2015) and most recently the numerous protests around the world following the death of George Floyd (Taylor, 2020). These current forms of protests and movements such as Black Lives Matter are able to be curated and transformed through social media and social media comments (Giesbrecht, 2020; Zilles, 2020).

The participatory action taken up by those on social media such as comments and likes are essential to the tangible actions we see today. With that being said, there has always been important discussions and commentary that exist within the digital space of social media. These comments and online interactions amongst individuals from all parts of the world have the ability to provide great insight as to how individuals in this current era respond to such forms of violence. What types of things do people take away from witnessing this type of violence through their computer and/or phone screens? This question in particular is the starting point to what my larger research project at hand will be.

1.4 Key Concepts: Defining ‘Affect’ and How it Will Be Referenced

A large segment of this research study is focused on this idea of ‘affect’ and/or having an ‘affective response’ (i.e., examining an individual’s affective response to something). The term ‘affect’ has been used and studied in varying ways by many writers and scholars, all of whom provide an insightful understanding of this concept. With that being said, given its significance within the realms of this project, it is of particular importance that I briefly unpack this term and clarify how I will be utilizing this idea when it comes to my own examination.
As McHugh initially states, the most literal and simplest way of understanding the term is to know that it is essentially the ability to “touch the feelings of” or “move emotionally” (2012). Wyer Jr., Clore, and Isbell refer to ‘affect’ as subjective reactions that an individual can experience at a point in time (1998). Affect can be a by-product of one’s perceptions of their stimulus environment or past and future events; by no means are they simply pleasant or unpleasant, but rather it could be both (ibid). In the field of medicine and psychiatry, affect can be looked at as the communication of one’s emotional state to another – often examining one’s tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions in order to understand one’s affect (McHugh, 2012). In psychology, affect possesses its own definition and understanding. Affect is often a broader concept that encompasses elements such as mood and emotions (Forgas, 2000; McHugh, 2012). In this case, psychologists are often interested in how affect interplays with cognition (ibid). Finally, with philosophy, there is a far more complex and nuanced understanding of the term ‘affect’ and its separation from concepts like “emotions” and “feelings”. The term itself was used by Baruch Spinoza and later elaborated on by individuals such as Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari (Robinson and Kutner, 2018).

This distinction between emotions and affect are re-emphasized in Seigworth and Gregg’s interpretation of the term. In their introduction to The Affect Theory Reader, they note that affect often grows within this state of “in-betweeness” when one is to act and be acted upon (2010). Affect seems to be contextualized as more complex than what is known as emotions. It is the intensities that pass from body to body, a visceral force that goes beyond just feeling “happy” or “sad” and “drives us toward movement, thought, and extension” (ibid). Eric Shouse also points this thought out when he discusses how affect is often the unconscious experience of intensity (pre-personal) while emotions are a projection of feelings – either genuine or intentionally
stimulated (2005; Massumi, 1987; McHugh, 2012). Nevertheless, affect does not generally reject emotional entirely (Reeser and Gottzén, 2018). Emotions put into language what is already the affective response by retroactively coding a difficult to define intensity (ibid). In Reetzer and Gottzén’s piece, they utilize masculinity and emotions to make this argument. For example, once a man expresses a culturally coded emotion, he is simply putting into language the already-visceral intensity that he has experienced (ibid).

With this mind, the application of the term “affect” within the realms of this paper takes on more of a simplified approach, closer to what Wyer Jr., Clore, and Isbell outline in their piece. By this I mean, I utilize “affect” more so in conjunction with this idea of “emotions” and “subjective reactions” as opposed to creating a complex conceptual difference between the two. Similar to the field of psychiatry and medicine where individuals examine the physical elements of expression, I will be analyzing language to unpack the emotional codes presented in these comments (i.e., analyzing language to understand the types of forces they are feeling and using commonly understood labels to express my analysis). In this sense, emotions are intertwined with this idea of affect, and both will be used interchangeably within this piece. My purpose for creating this close distinction between emotions and affect here is to help the reader understand the larger impact that stems from this type of visual evidence in a way that does not read as convoluted or disorganized. By highlighting the points and stimuli that trigger instinctive affective responses and applying an analysis that incorporates emotionality as the central focus, my aim is to provide an insightful and multi-dimensional analysis that is raw and speaks to the resonance of this particular type of visual evidence.

As a researcher, I am deliberate about how I define this idea of affect and emotions for the purpose of this study. Although I provide a merged understanding of affect and emotions, I am
still specifically interested in understanding the macro and micro levels of reactions. I would like to focus on the points of resonance that individuals pick up on – what triggers this unconscious affective response (i.e., what are individuals noticing? What are elements that are acting on individuals and forcing individuals to act?). I am also curious about the deliberate vocalization and labelling – the more “emotional” aspect. Questions around how viewers express themselves will be key here (i.e., how they are structuring their responses, the labels that they are using, etc.). Although unconventional and contrary to traditional conceptions of the term ‘affect’, this plan of action and method of questioning will help this research study in its efforts to understand how race influences individuals on unconscious and conscious levels.²

1.5 Background of Cases

Case I: Philando Castile

The case of thirty-two-year-old Philando Castile took place in a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota known as Falcon Heights (Shapiro and Jacobo, 2017). Castile, an African American man, was stopped by Jeronimo Yanez on June 6, 2016 (Park, 2017). Prior to the physical encounter, Officer Yanez radioed his colleague to indicate that Castile, who he was following at the time, matched the description of a robbery suspect from an incident that occurred several days earlier (Bosman and Smith, 2017). During the initially calm interaction, Officer Yanez was heard informing Castile about his broken tail light (Shapiro and Jacobo, 2017). At the time, Castile was with his partner, Diamond Reynolds, and her four-year-old daughter (Croft, 2017). With a second officer next to the passenger’s side of the vehicle, Castile provided Officer Yanez with his insurance card (Bosman and Smith, 2017). It is at this time when Castile also disclosed to Officer Yanez that he

² I would like to veer away from the more philosophical approach to affect and emotions and apply a more psychological approach (i.e., affect as a macro structure that encompasses feelings and moods).
was carrying a firearm (Garcia and Lopez, 2017). Officer Yanez then responded by loudly indicating to not reach for the firearm, to which Castile tried to reassure him that he was not reaching for it (Bosman and Smith, 2017).

In a matter of a few seconds, Yanez proceeded to shoot Castile seven times (Bosman and Smith, 2017). A year following the incident, Officer Yanez was found not guilty of second-degree manslaughter in Castile’s death (Garcia and Lopez, 2017; Bosman and Smith, 2017). The video footage of Castile’s death came in two formats, a Facebook Live video taken by Reynolds following the shooting and a dashboard camera positioned in Yanez’s vehicle. The dashboard camera footage was made public by the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office in Minnesota a few days after the verdict (Shapiro and Jacobo, 2017). For the purpose of my thesis, I will be analyzing the commentary posted under the dashboard camera footage rather than the Facebook Live post. My reason for this has to do with accessibility. As a researcher, I wanted to ensure that all sources were available and found through reliable sources. Although both forms of footage would have been useful for the purpose of this study, the limited quantity of Reynold’s footage online at this point in time served as the central reason for its absence in this study. Furthermore, the nature of this comparative study requires that both case studies were as equal as possible in terms of the nature of the footage itself. Given the perspective of Shaver’s footage (from the police perspective), I wanted to ensure that Castile’s study was as similar as possible in this regard.

**Case II: Daniel Shaver**

On January 18, 2016, Daniel Shaver, a twenty-six-year-old man, was fatally shot in Mesa, Arizona (Wang, 2017). It occurred when six officers were called to the La Quinta Inn and Suites after a guest had reported seeing a man pointing a gun outside of a window (ibid). Shaver, who was a pest control worker in between shifts, and a female peer ended up walking into the hallway
when they encountered the officers, including Officer Philip Brailsford. (Friedersdorf, 2017; Wang, 2017). Their interaction was caught on a body camera positioned on Officer Brailsford. Brailsford and a fellow officer were heard yelling various commands at Shaver and his female acquaintance (Wang, 2017). The woman in the incident was eventually asked to crawl down the hallway, where she was eventually taken into custody (Lowery, 2017).

Following this, Shaver was left alone to follow the commands mostly yelled out by Officer Brailsford. Some of the commands that could be heard include being told to crawl without placing his hands on the ground for any reason (Wang, 2017). After approximately five minutes of providing instructions, Shaver was seen twisting slightly to his right with his elbow point upwards (Lowery 2017; Wang, 2017). It is at this point when another officer could be heard yelling at Shaver to stop, which was immediately followed by Officer Brailford shooting at Shaver. Two months following the fatal incident, Officer Brailsford was fired from his position and was later acquitted of the second-degree murder charges (Wang, 2017; Lowery, 2017). Similar to the Castile case, following the acquittal of the officer, the body camera footage was released to the public (Wang, 2017).

1.6 Literature Review

The underlying concepts and theories that fundamentally structure this thesis are vast and intertwined. Many of the central themes that will be discussed within this literature review stem from the nature of my data collection and the commentary provided by viewers. With this in mind, the following literature review aims to provide a condensed and insightful view about the topics which follow. I will first provide a brief review of published literature surrounding the topic of policing, both in terms of racial perceptions around policing as well as the literature surrounding the digital monitoring of police officers. This will then lead up to a discussion about visual
evidence and its effectiveness. Finally, I will conclude this literature review by highlighting some of contextual work that has been done within the field of audio and sound studies. By outlining the central arguments, statistics, and data presented by these various scholars, my objective is to provide the reader with a framework around the many ideas that will be expanded on within this thesis. This literature will be useful as a comparative reference point to touch back on when assessing the data from this research study.

1.6.1 Policing

*Perceptions Around Policing and Racial Discrimination*

A central topic that emerges within this research is the perception of racism and/or racial discrimination within these two incidents, and specifically issues of racism and racial discrimination perpetuated by police. Although I am not directly assessing comments based on the racial background of commenters, it is important to acknowledge that many of the ideas and thoughts that come from my data will coincide with the arguments presented by these authors.\(^3\) By understanding some of the reasonings behind these different perceptions, it will help me to better situate and analyze the various types of comments that are presented in this research study.

It is important to note that the information presented by writers and scholars in this section reflect past attitudes held by viewers and may not perfectly encompass what individuals believe in now following the events that have occurred in 2020. In fact, it has been found that current attitudes around racial injustices, racial discrimination, as well as racial movements have shifted tremendously over the past few years, with many now acknowledging the existence of systemic

\(^3\) During the data analysis portion of this project, I did take notes on the demographic information of commenters (i.e., information that was publicly accessible through their respective social media profile pages). The information is provided in Appendix A. However, for the purpose of my analysis, I do not explicitly include this information in my discussion.
racism (Cohn and Quealy, 2020; Maqbool, 2020). With that being said, this area of literature may help further contextualize some of the reactions that were found in 2016 (i.e., prior to racial justice becoming a mainstream discussion). The following points discuss what other researchers have discovered when looking at how black and white individuals perceive this issue of police violence and systemic racism. Again, although I am not specifically examining the racial background of commenters, this information will allow me to better situate the different viewpoints they present around this topic of policing.

In Ronald Weitzer and Steven A. Tuch’s piece, the authors use recent national survey data to assess how race along with social class influence one’s perception of criminal justice agencies in America (1999). Based on five central research questions ranging from whether people think racial disparities exist amongst the criminal justice system to whether individuals have had personal experiences of mistreatment from police officers, the findings in this work show that race has become a strong predictor of attitudes around policing. The general trend found in this study was that those who have had discriminatory experiences within the criminal justice system (racialized individuals) were more likely to view discrimination as an existent issue within the criminal justice system (ibid). Similar findings have been found in more recent literature about this subject matter. For example, in Wortley and Tanner’s piece on discrimination and policing, they found that black people were more likely to be subjected to random street interrogations, with more than 50% of black students reporting that they had had at least two involuntary interactions within the past two years (2003, p. 199).

Furthermore, when comparing the experiences of black and white individuals, there was a clear distinction between their experiences and perceptions around policing. A large implication for this may stem from the amount of surveillance that is placed on black communities (ibid, p. 200; Kahn
Similar to Weitzer and Tuch’s findings, the increase in surveillance and exposure to police shapes one’s perceptions around the levels of discrimination within the criminal justice system (Wortley and Tanner, 2003). Although, this piece of literature is situated within a Canadian context, what Wortley and Tanner present, along with the information provided by Weitzer and Tuch, is that there is an inherent role that race, and racial experience plays in one’s perceptions around policing and systemic racism. This becomes crucial when examining a viewer’s relationship with the social context/issue (Chapter 4). By understanding that there is a history between these two variables, it will help contextualize the differences in reactions which are presented in subsections 4.2.2 (Relatability to the Social Issue: White Experiences and/or Perspective) and 4.2.3 (Relatability to the Social Issue: Black Experiences and/or Perspective). The findings that have been presented by these writers will be expanded on when doing my own comparative analysis between how black bodied individuals and white bodied individuals engage with these videos as depictions of a larger social issue.

This relationship between race, lived experiences, and perceptions around policing is a fairly common trend amongst literature. In Graziano, Schuck, and Martin’s piece, they found the relationship between these three factors to be existent when examining perceptions around racial profiling (2010, p. 52). In their discussion, they state that although both white and racialized individuals disapprove of racial profiling as a practice, minorities are more likely to view this practice as a widespread issue (ibid, p. 55-56). These differing opinions may stem from the juxtaposition between the lived experiences faced by racialized populations and the commonly held beliefs and racial narratives adopted by white communities. In fact, research shows that one’s exposure to incidents involving excessive use of police force negatively impacts one’s attitudes towards police institutions (ibid, p. 56). In the case of racialized individuals, they are in fact more
susceptible to experience “racial disparity” policing (Kahn and Martin, 2016, p. 84). This is evident when looking at the quantifiable differences that exist within every stage of the criminal justice experience. To add on to previous statistics, black individuals are three times more likely to experience a stop and search, although they are often less likely to possess contraband when compared to whites (ibid; Langton and Durose, 2013). They are also more likely to experience worse outcomes at every procedural step within the criminal justice system; this includes being more likely to receive citations, as well as being more likely to be killed by police officers themselves (Graziano, Schuck, and Martin, 2010, p. 56; LeCount 2017, p. 1052). These statistics are not only important in creating a context around this issue, but these points will again be reiterated and expanded on by commenters in this research study.

These experiences and the subsequent perceptions formulated by racialized individuals are then contrasted by the perceptions of white individuals. In previously written literature, researchers have found that some individuals, often times white individuals, are far more reluctant to acknowledge racism in America and within American institutions like policing (Kahn and Martin, 2016, p. 83; Weitzer and Tuch, 1999, p. 503). Even when differential treatment is acknowledged, it is still not seen as a by-product of racism and racist ideology, but rather it is understood as a neutral approach to resolve issues such as street crime (Graziano, Schuck, and Martin, 2010, p. 55-56). Although, it is important to understand that not all white individuals adopt this perspective, this form of minimization and denial of racism is still existent and becomes incredibly relevant in understanding the approach that some individuals took in their assessment of Castile and Shaver’s videos (i.e., we will see these tactics and arguments take place in these observations).

These tactics of minimization and denial outlined by Graziano, Schuck, and Martin follow a set of methods that are discussed by Ryan Jerome LeCount. In his paper, LeCount touches on a set
of four prominent themes that emerge when people actively participate in symbolic racism via their responses to heavily racialized issues. The four central ideas LeCount discusses include racial resentment (when the dominant group assumes that the target group is unfairly advantaged), denial of racial discrimination, minimization of racism, and white claims of racial disadvantage (2017, p. 1055). These four tropes are fundamentally rooted in the assumption that the target or sub-dominant group of individuals (racialized individuals) are in fact the issue, and that the dominant group (non-racialized individuals) are the victims. LeCount’s discussion around these tactics serve as an essential reference point when examining anti-race-based commentary and will be commonly referenced throughout this piece. By comprehending these central patterns that exist, it will help further breakdown a specific type of perspective held by a group of commenters – that being one that is centered around denial and distance. LeCount’s categories and specifically the terminology he provides readers with will be essential and often referenced in this work. In this case, it will be used to categorize and label these types of responses (i.e., minimization, denial, white claims of racial disadvantage) found within the various findings (i.e., throughout the different relationships/chapters).

Elizabeth Alexander’s work will also assist in this objective. In her piece, Alexander discusses the impact of white victimization within larger discussions around collective cultural trauma (1994, p. 80). Again, these patterns that are brought up in LeCount’s piece are re-emphasized here by Alexander, stating how white individuals aim to distance themselves from the position of ‘white oppressor’ thanks in part to their inability to witness the beatings of black individuals (ibid, p. 80-81). The repositioning of roles and this essence of victim-blaming and denial are particularly impactful when looking at the interaction between Caucasian Americans and racialized Americans such as African Americans, especially within this larger context of racial inequality and police
violence. The application of this literature and theoretical toolset will become most visible when assessing the relationship that viewers have formed with both the victims and the social issue of police violence (e.g., role reversal of who the real victim is – citizen or officer, victim-blaming based on characteristics of the victim, co-opting the incident as a means to shift the focus, etc.).

**Monitoring Police: Background on Dashboard Cameras and Body-Worn Cameras**

Visual relationality is an important aspect that emerges from this research study, and a large aspect within this area is the element of visual perspective. Although I will be expanding on visual evidence at a later point, I want to briefly take a moment to highlight the existing literature around the use of dashboard cameras and body-worn cameras within the field of policing. The two cases within the research study both display two different perspectives, one being from a dashboard camera and the other being from a body-worn camera. The following literature will help provide some further insight into the historical context behind both forms of recording, while also highlighting some of the criticisms behind these types of digital recordings. This literature and arguments that are presented by these scholars will be essential when examining the relationship between the viewer and the visual (Chapter 3). As a reader, one will see how these arguments are reproduced through the commentary that is provided around the production and narration of these two sets of videos.

The historical context of surveillance cameras began with the first static surveillance camera that was set up in Trafalgar Square in London in 1960 (Taylor and Lee, 2019, p. 474). This type of recording was known as the closed-circuit television (Taylor, 2016, p. 128). The closed-circuit televisions garnered mainstream popularity in the 1970s, with many being set up in larger public spaces, such as football stadiums, motorways, and tube stations in Britain (Young, 2018). In the United States, the use of dashboard cameras was first tried out in the 1980s, with them becoming
more popular in the early 2000s (Taylor, 2016, p. 128). Now, the emergence of this type of recording is synonymous with the field of policing, and in particular, with the issue of race-based traffic stops (ibid; Hahn and Stalcup, 2016, p. 486). This especially becomes the case when examining the context in which Castile’s incident takes place (i.e., the interaction takes place during a traffic stop).

The use of body-worn cameras was prevalent for some time; however, it had a major resurgence in the United States again after a series of racialized police shootings (Taylor and Lee, 2019, p. 474). The 2014 case of Michael Brown served as one of those inspirational cases (Hahn and Stalcup, 2016, p. 486). For activists and policymakers alike, this was the pivotal moment when body-worn cameras emerged as the proper technological solution (ibid). Later that year, President Barack Obama provided 263 million dollars for police and training and body cameras, with 25 million dollars being allocated to the cameras themselves (ibid; Taylor, 2016, p. 129; Taylor and Lee, 2019, p. 474). The popularity of body-worn cameras also stemmed from the counter argument around officer safety (Beutin, 2017, p. 13). Those who were a proponent of this reasoning found that the footage from this closer perspective would help alleviate or reduce some of the possible dangers that an officer may encounter (ibid). Furthermore, advocates also argued that these devices would help “civilize” police actions and help increase police legitimacy (Walby, Louis, and Saulnier, 2019).

When it comes to the implications around monitoring police through these two forms of surveillance, there have been many discussions around the advantages and disadvantages. With early research, there was a clear emphasis on the positive findings (Pagliarella, 2016, p. 535). These positive attributes included lessened use of force by police officers, reduced numbers of complaints against officers, and a reduction in the amount of violence committed by the public.
Taylor and Lee, 2016, p. 475). From this perspective, technological devices such as body-worn cameras and dashboard cameras were framed as a legitimate solution (Ariel, Farrar, and Sutherland, 2015; Jameel and Bunn, 2015; Walby, Louis, and Saulnier, 2019). However, these findings were later challenged by newer research studies that showed the opposite (Taylor and Lee, 2016, p. 475). Although police officers welcomed the introduction of body-worn cameras for various reasons such as enhancing the quality of evidence and bettering the accuracy of accounts, the issue around biases and power created further issues around this type of surveillance (Beutin, 2017; Taylor, 2016; Taylor and Lee; 2019, Walby, Louis, and Saulnier, 2019).

The question of fairness has been raised by many researchers, activists, and scholars (Taylor and Lee, 2016, p. 477-478). The use of discretion has been brought up in previous literature, with various jurisdictions having variations on when and what to record (Taylor, 2016, p. 130). In a study conducted in Phoenix, only 13.2% to 42.2% of incidents were recorded, while in Denver, incidents of officers either punching or using stun guns on individuals were not recorded (Taylor and Lee, 2016, p. 476). The issue of when to turn on the camera along with other technological issues surrounding these cameras create significant issues when it comes to ensuring accountability on the part of police officers (Balko, 2018; Beutin, 2017, p. 15; Taylor, 2016, 130; Taylor and Lee, 2019, p. 478). In addition, there is the issue of misrepresentation and accessibility. The perspective of cop cameras, whether body-worn cameras and/or dashboard cameras, is solely focused on the individual who is engaging with the officer (Beutin, 2017, p. 15). With a sole focus on one person’s actions, these videos fail to capture the full interaction between an officer and the individual in the video. This can lead a viewer to adopt camera view bias or a first-person viewership bias. Camera view bias or first-person viewership bias is when one’s interpretation of an event is solely based off of the visual perspective from which the footage is shot (Richardson, 2020; Taylor and Lee,
2019, p. 480). In terms of its importance, concepts such as camera view bias, as well as the other critiques around discretion become imperative to this research study because it does become both implicitly and explicitly imitated in individuals’ affective response (i.e., the commentary that alludes to an interpretation that reflects camera view bias, commentary that explicitly challenges how the filming is being done, etc.). The literature again aims to provide a historical and contextual background around some of the critiques that surround this type of surveillance. This research will utilize this knowledge and demonstrate how these arguments have been reproduced with the comments provided by viewers.

In terms of accessibility, there is also a clear display of a power imbalance on the part of the police. In literature discussing cop cameras, many researchers have discussed the issues surrounding the challenges around public accessibility to these videos (Beutin, 2017, p. 15; Taylor and Lee, 2019, p. 478). Although different departments take their own approaches to public disclosure, it is found that in written federal and state laws, law enforcement agencies have the right to protect footage by keeping videos private (Pagliarella, 2016, p. 535). With the varying degrees of disclosure that departments can take, this notion of open public accessibility is never guaranteed. This serves as a concerning issue when looking at the topic of accountability and monitoring police officers, and it is an aspect that is relevant to both cases in this research study. Specifically, we see this being applicable to both Castile and Shaver’s cases, as both videos were not made public to the community until the verdicts were made a year later. The becomes of contention for many commenters and is referenced numerous times throughout each video’s set of comments. In turn, considering the past literature around the formation of police monitoring through visual technologies such as dashboard cameras and body-worn cameras, there have been many relevant advantages and limitations to the application of it within the context of police
violence. As later shown in this piece, one will see these very same discussions and criticisms being echoed and further expanded on by those in this research study, specifically within Chapter 3.

1.6.2 Visual Evidence

To branch off from the visual monitoring of police officers, it is important to assess the significance of visual evidence in broader terms. Many scholars have studied the role of visual evidence in a variety of contexts ranging from war photography (e.g., Woolf, 1938) to images of domestic violence victims (e.g., Moore and Singh, 2018). This section of the literature review will unpack some of the relevant literature surrounding visual evidence in regard to its importance in the creation of affect and “truth”. This again will become significant when examining how viewers interact with and unpack these two different deaths, both visually and auditorily.

The Significance of Visual Evidence

Visual evidence has become increasingly prevalent within recent years thanks in part to digital technologies (Feigenson and Spiesel, 2009, p. 149). However, the affective and cognitive impact of visuals, such as photos, films, videos, etc., has been long present prior to the creation of newer technologies. The role of visual depictions, particularly, visual depictions of various forms of violence has been a point of interest for many scholars, all of whom have examined the positive and negative impact of producing this form of representation. A prominent scholar who has written about this particular topic has been Susan Sontag. In her piece, Regarding the Pain of Others, Sontag provides a pointed critique of Virginia Woolf’s piece Three Guineas, which explores the origins of war through its photographic depictions of the Spanish Civil War (Moore and Singh, 2018; Woolf, 1938). For Woolf, the circulation of war images provides an opportunity for individuals to unite for the purpose of becoming better (Moore and Singh, 2018; Sontag, 2003, p.
This unification of viewers around this imagery stems from their reactionary responses, specifically that of compassion and shock (Moore and Singh, 2018; Sontag, 2003, p. 12). The aspect of shock is particularly important here because it is the triggering factor that dictates what individuals consume and how much value they place on it (Moore and Singh, 2018; Sontag, 2003, p. 15). This argument becomes a point of interest in the third chapter of this thesis, where there is a specific focus on the relationship between the presentation of death and one’s reaction. This interconnectivity between shock, compassion, and unity that is being argued within this previously written piece will become questioned when examining how individuals now respond to this type of digitally accessible evidence (i.e., will the shock produce unity and compassion?). Furthermore, this section will also reference Feigenson and Spiesel, who in their own work, reaffirm this point made by Sontag and Woolf by discussing how visual media affect viewers’ perceptions and judgements (2009, p. 14).

It is with this in mind that visual evidence has resonated within various social, legal, and political arenas (ibid, p. 2). The “realness” of images and visuals as a whole has shifted the way people have engaged with social dilemmas. In the case of war photos, the photographs themselves are a formulated, materializable way of presenting alternative realities and experiences to those who would otherwise not know or understand the magnitude of such events (Sontag, 2003, p. 4). Again, the emotional attachment that is formed between the observer and the observed becomes a point of importance here, with the observer formulating an emotional response to not only the event but the individuals in the images or videos. Emotions including anger and sadness that are felt by the observer allows them to have a relationship with the observed; in this sense, the pain that is experienced by others are now adopted by the observer (Ahmed, 2015, p. 21). This will become evident in this research study when examining how viewers related to victims through this
viewing experience. However, as pointed out by scholars like Sara Ahmed in her chapter, *The Contingency of Pain*, feeling one’s pain is not the same as being equivalent to the “other” (ibid, p. 22). This is further explored in other literature about visual evidence.

In “Seeing Crime, Feeling Crime: Visual Evidence, and Emotions and the Prosecution of Domestic Violence”, Dawn Moore and Rashmee Singh analyze the role of visual evidence within the context of domestic violence. At the heart of this piece and particularly relevant to my own thesis is their discussion around the emotional impact of such evidence and the subsequent issues that stem from the underlying power dynamics that are existent within this type of gaze. In their examination, they point out how visual forms of evidence, specifically, video statements, allow viewers to visualize incidents of assault and further provide an opportunity for them to engage with it on an emotional level (2018, p. 120). With this integration of affect and imagery, there is this existent idea that these images allow spectators to access or at least become closer to the truth (ibid, p. 121). Again, this point brought up by Moore and Singh is similar to Woolf’s perspective around the importance of an emotional connection in relation to visual imagery, “truth”, awareness, and change. The interconnectivity between these ideas become relevant in various sections of this thesis, specifically when observing how viewers try to conceive truth claims through sound and visual elements. By understanding the literature around this phenomenon, one will come to understand that this pursuit to create truth claims within this particular experience (i.e., viewing videos that depict police violence) is not unique to this context, and in fact, is often a normalized by-product or consequence of visual evidence.

Moore and Singh’s piece also highlights a fundamental argument that needs to be considered when examining the importance and validity of visual evidence within various social, legal, and political contexts. This argument is centred around power and perspective. Explicitly, they propose
that the experience that we as observers are engaging with is not one that is completely truthful (2018). Rather, this perspective that is enlightening others is not framed from the perspective of the victim themselves, but rather from that of another person, in this case it would be from the masculinized gaze of another person (e.g., police officers) (ibid, p. 122-123). This notion of framing an image is quite complex as put forth by Judith Butler. However, framing works in a way where it seen as an “editorial embellishment [to] the image” itself (2009, p. 8). This ‘embellishment’ can be seen as subjective in nature and in many ways depict a form of power within visual representations.

Susan Sontag explains this argument further in her discussion. In fact, she states that although one could argue that photographs are objective, they typically have a particular point of view (2003, p. 17). This point of view is inherently shaped by subjectivity thanks in part to several factors. Aspects such as who takes the photo, how the photo is taken, and how it has progressively been filtered through its reproduction all play a role in its subjectivity (Sontag, 2003, p. 32-33). Butler also takes on this point within her piece Frames of War: When is Life Grievable? In her section on torture and ethics of photography, Butler wants individuals to consider the ways suffering has been presented to us and how this presentation affects our responses. She mirrors what Sontag points out by using the example of the Abu Ghraib photos to demonstrate how aspects like camera angle, framing, and the position of the subjects themselves all demonstrate a form of subjectivity that connects the producer of the image to the image itself (2009, p. 65). Furthermore, Butler goes on to introduce a relevant concept known as “embedded reporting”. Embedded reporting refers to the curation of stories based on specific conditions and regulations (ibid, p. 64). Essentially, there is a specific gaze that must be used by the producer in order to curate an ideal
response and/or interpretation from the viewer; in that way, visual evidence is not objectively presenting the full truth.

When applying this argument to the context of police violence, Neil Feigenson and Christina Spiesel’s piece provides a thorough analysis of how subjectivity and framing influence perceptions around police violence. In their chapter on the use of videotapes as evidence, they agree that there is a need to understand the context and frames in which pictures are presented (Feigenson and Spiesel, 2009, p. 35). By using the case study of *Scott v. Harris* to point out the subjectivities that exist within dash cameras, they again, like others, acknowledge that there is an assumption of truth that is present within these videos (ibid, p. 43). However, they argue that the objective and “god-like view” that might resonate from these trusted dashboard mounted cameras are inherently flawed (ibid, p. 40, 49).

In their analysis of the *Scott v. Harris* case, they discuss how the initial video of the incident became stylized prior to being made public online (e.g., the video becoming black and white, omitting the last two minutes of the footage) (ibid, p. 46). These alterations to the visual evidence parallel some of the concerns that were expressed earlier in this literature review as well as what was found in this thesis (i.e., commentary within Chapter 3 regarding the desire to see more content). This also follows this phenomenon of embedded reporting presented by Butler, as there is a particular narrative that is having to be expressed through this visual material. Although, a dashboard camera may not necessarily seem subjective, Feigenson and Spiesel note that the perspective and the placement of the camera in itself adds to its subjectivity. By positioning it

4 The case involved Deputy Timothy Scott, who ended a high-speed pursuit by forcing his push bumper to the rear end of Harris’ car. This caused Harris’ car to crash, leaving him to become quadriplegic. Harris filed a lawsuit claiming that Scott used excessive force resulting in an unreasonable seizure. The Supreme Court found that the videotape capturing the incident contradicted Scott’s version of the events (Scott v. Harris – 550 U.S. 372, 127 S. Ct. 1769, 2007).
within the cop’s camera, the viewer is transported into the scene by placing themselves within the role of the cop (ibid, p. 40). Again, as mentioned previously, the viewer is inherently adopting a camera view bias. This in turn influences what we are able to see, how we see it, and how we react to it (ibid, p. 49; Butler, 2009, p 66). The arguments put forth by these scholars become important when examining the relationship between the viewer and the visual. These critiques not only present an alternative perspective to how one views visual evidence, but it serves as an interesting lens for analysis in the third chapter of this thesis (i.e., understanding how censored and/or uncensored versions of these videos curate particular narratives, and how that is perceived by individuals).

**Visual Evidence and Racialized Bodies**

An important component to consider when examining literature on visual evidence is the role that racialized bodies have on the creation and consumption of visual evidence, specifically visual evidence depicting bodily trauma and death. As discussed earlier in this section, there is a power dynamic that is present when looking at the framing and gaze of visual evidence. However, there is also a power dynamic that is existent when looking at who the actors are in these visual depictions of death. The treatment and ritualization around death and specifically the dead human body is inherently unique and brings about a certain level of fascination (Posel and Gupta, 2009, p. 301-302). However, when we examine this integration of bodily trauma and its presentation through the form of visual evidence, there is a sense of voyeurism that becomes present (Sontag, 2003; Moore and Singh, 2018). This sense of voyeurism is further exacerbated when there is a particular type of body, specifically, a racialized body, that is being continuously consumed by the public. Many scholars have looked at this trend including Elizabeth Alexander.
In “Can you be BLACK and Look at This?: Reading Rodney King Video(s)”, Alexander contextualizes the consumption of black bodies in pain within the larger, historical context of racism and racial violence inflicted on black bodies (1994). In the piece, she points out how suffering black bodies have been consumed by the public for a long period of time and how these bodies have been used as a source of entertainment and drama (ibid, p. 78-79). This entertainment that Alexander is referring to is not restricted to physical violence, but rather includes the social status stripping and emotional deterioration of black bodies (ibid). Furthermore, Alexander argues that in this production of entertainment, white bodies have become the stagers and consumers of this pain, while others have looked at this “entertainment” through a lens based on trauma and collective history (ibid).

This paradox between the white gaze and how racialized individuals view themselves has also been a point of discussion in W.E.B. DuBois’ work. His term “double consciousness” perfectly encompasses this duality that is experienced by racialized folks in regard to their representation. Simply put, double consciousness is referred to as “the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (DuBois 1903; Smith, 2000, p. 581). From DuBois’ writing, we see that the African American individual must take on a dual identity, which he refers to as the “second-sight in this American world” or “twoness” (Blau and Brown, 2001; Du Bois, 1903; Smith, 2000). The first identity is that of their own, based on their own perceptions of themselves and the authentic origins of their culture; while the second identity is a mere representation and/or mask that is created and placed on them by non-racial community members (Du Bois, 1903; Smith, 2000). The latter identity is the primary source of interest here in regard to the creation of racialized trauma as entertainment.
This Euro-centric curation of blackness and the black experience curated by non-African Americans and inadvertently adopted by those in the racial community is fundamentally dangerous for the reasons that we see talked about in Alexander’s piece. Again, the black body is used as a tool for entertainment and the narratives that are created are situated within a context that has limited connections to the original cultural framework (Blau and Brown, 2001, p. 45). The consequences that formulate from this Euro-centric production are tremendous. Not only are these representations forcing African Americans to continue possessing this dual identity or double consciousness, but it is also continuing a falsified and sensationalized idea around the black body and wound culture. The narrative that is adopted in these images around the black body and second identity stem from this larger idea of trauma and violence. This is briefly explored in Sara Ahmed’s piece when she talks about wound culture. She states that by assessing the wounds on one’s body without proper historical context, individuals are essentially fetishizing that injury (2015, p. 58). When these stories are further heightened, it turns these forms of pain into an entertaining spectacle, instead of moments that are supposed to spark sadness and anger (ibid).

This relationship between visual evidence, pain, and racialized bodies is also examined in Derek Hook’s piece. Hook uses the example of Greg Marinovich and Joao’s The Bang Bang Club, which tells the story of photographers who captured brutal scenes of violence during the dying days of the apartheid, to discuss this recurring racist motif that exists within visual evidence (2013, p. 2). He uses this idea of pleasure to formulate his argument, by stating that the creation and reproduction of such visuals stem from a deeper fantasy curated around the black body in pieces (ibid, p. 15). This fantasy is further emphasized in the streaming of these images, with Hook stating that these images of black bodies in states of horrific death seem to garner the most airway and press (ibid, p. 2). This again is similar to what Butler proposed in her piece, where she integrates
discussions around conceptualizing what a grievable life is with its representation through visuals (Butler, 2009). In this case, visual evidence here is used as a tool for power, constructed and consumed by white bodies while also serving as a reminder to racialized bodies of their complicated position as a strong physical body in a vulnerable and inferior position (Hook, 2013, p. 5, 15).

This brings us to a question posed by Lyndsey P. Beutin that I believe perfectly encompasses this complex relationship between the effectiveness of visual evidence and racialized bodies. She asks, “What happens if the depicted victim is read as ‘not deserving’? What happens if the victim is understood as inherently criminal?” (2017, p. 12). As stated by her and others mentioned here, blackness seems to inherently be linked to negative stereotypes and perceptions (ibid; Agenda, 2011; Dukes and Gaither, 2017; Peffley, Hurwitz, and Sniderman, 1997; Smiley and Funkle, 2017); whether that is seeing them as inherently inferior or criminal, the effectiveness of visual evidence as presented by writers like Virginia Woolf can be challenged when individuals are viewing these images through a lens of racism (Beutin, 2017, p. 9). With that being said, as a researcher writing this piece, I am curious about this complex relationship between racialized bodies, stereotypes, trauma, and affective response.

What scholars have shown us through this wide range of literature is that the context of these images have been historically and racially set, and with that comes a multitude of different reactions based on one’s racial identity and connection to the content. In terms of its relevance, the arguments that are presented here will be utilized in my own analysis of these findings. By serving as a reference point to draw on, this literature will be acknowledged throughout this piece as I go on to assess the differences between how viewers have witnessed and responded to the deaths of Shaver and Castile. Given the historical connection between blackness, conceptions of guilt, state
violence, and entertainment, my own research will further reiterate some of these arguments while also highlighting the more nuanced ways that we have come to witness racialized deaths in present times (thanks in part to the role of social media and viral videos). In essence, this thesis will explore and expand on these established findings and discussions around the visual representation and perceptions of suffering black and white bodies.

1.6.3 Audio

The visual component of video imagery is essential; however, the aspect of audio is also extremely important in the creation of affect and response. Most recently, we see this point exemplified with the case of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Although, the visual image of Floyd’s final moments resonated greatly with the public, the audio, specifically the sounds of Floyd begging for his already deceased mother was both disheartening and equally powerful. Its impact was shown through the numerous riots and protests that followed (Barajas, 2020; O’Neal, 2020). As Alexander puts it in her piece, the aural component is quintessentially linked to the experience of witnessing an event (1994, p. 81). The sounds that we take in have an impact on how we respond to violence, it can haunt one’s mind just as much as visually seeing a horrific event (ibid, p. 83). The exploration of audio and its significance within various spaces, fields, and contexts have been explored within sound studies.

Although the field of sound studies is vast and covers many relationships and subcategories, for the purpose of my research, I was particularly interested in looking at sound studies in relation to affect and race. The following discussions will briefly explore some of the relevant literature in relation to sound, dialect, affective response and relativity, as well as race and racial identification. The points presented in this section will help develop a core framework for the fifth chapter of this thesis, which explores sound and dialect in relation to racial hierarchies, expectations, and affect.
The findings that stem from this research study will rearticulate the following arguments presented by scholars while also furthering them within this specific context (i.e., the sound that comes from these videos).

**Audio, Affect, and Connection**

The first relationship I wanted to explore is the one between sound and affective responses. As referenced in the beginning of this section, scholars like Alexander have made a point in regard to the importance of audio especially within filmed depictions of police violence. Audio in this case is referring to all sounds such as talking, music, and various types of environmental sounds (Gershon, 2013, p. 258; Xu, Chia, and Jin, 2005, p. 3). Although visual depictions influence people’s emotional responses to a particular subject matter, the incorporation of sound has been found to result in higher levels of emotional impact compared to just a video with text (Crigler, Just, and Neuman, 1994, p. 134; Tsuneki, 1998). With that being said, emotional impact is further heightened when individuals are presented with both aural and ocular components (Crigler, Just, and Neuman, 1994, p. 146). Audio has an additional ability to convey deeper meanings in a way that is complex and resonates with individuals. As Siobhan McHugh puts in her piece, audio has the ability to convey emotions thanks in part to its affective quality (2014, p. 145). Sounds with strong emotional content are able to trigger some sort of affective resonance and these emotions can be interpreted by the human mind through the absorption of sound (ibid). This absorption of sound not only resonates in an individual’s ears but through their entire body, making it an experiential event (Gershon, 2013, p. 258).

As discussed in such literature, audio has the ability to transcend past being just a “sound” and create emotional experiences and interpretations for the listener. In the case of George Floyd, viewers were able to emotionally experience his death in such a vivid manner. The pleas and the
begging struck an emotional chord for many, and those more affected by police violence felt a reliving of past incidents through Floyd’s voice (Longman, 2020; O’Neal, 2020). With respect to the case studies chosen for this thesis, the victims’ voices played a huge role in how individuals emotionally engaged with both the men and their situations. This emotional engagement can stem from audio’s ability to remove and/or reduce distance between the sound-maker and the listener. As pointed out in various literature, sounds and the act of listening transforms the process of listening into a personal experience (McHugh, 2014, p. 143). In this sense, the listener is no longer a detached subject from what they are listening to. This sense of connection can also transcend past one’s own relationship to sound. In the case of macro-connections, audio also has the ability to connect people with each other. As McHugh later points out in her work, audio can transcend past this initial intimate connection, and create larger relationships between other listeners (ibid, p. 142).

Additionally, audio and the act of listening serve as an important point of analysis within this thesis and has been a topic that has been referenced within sound studies literature. The prioritization of what one hears and does not hear has been explored by researchers such as Walter Gershon and Les Back. As Les Back points out and is referenced in Walter Gershon’s piece, what a person hears and does not hear is personalized and socio-culturally contextualized (Back, 2009; Gershon, 2013, p. 258). That is all to say, that not all individuals hear the same sounds; what one hears, another person may not pick up on, and what one person may prioritize sonically, another individual might not (Gershon, 2013, p. 258). All of these interpretations and values imposed on different sounds further contextualizes the importance of audio, especially within the context of this project. The process of listening to audio is a qualitatively different experience (ibid, p. 259),
and again, this will be further explored through this thesis, specifically when examining the varying interpretations that stemmed from the victims’ audio.

In essence, this research study and the findings around people’s emotional reactions toward the sounds they hear in these videos exemplifies what these scholars have articulated around the importance of sound in its creation of an all-encompassing emotional experience. The arguments that these scholars put forth are all interesting and provide a particular standpoint around the importance of sound. This literature becomes integral to not only why the topic of sound is included within this thesis, but it also serves a centre point for the discussion that follows in Chapter 5. By understanding the importance of sound in curating an affective and/or emotional response, it clarifies the importance of this section and also helps rationalize the nature of the commentary that is provided within this section (i.e., we can understand the frequency and magnitude of these types of comments).

**Audio, Dialect and Racial Identification**

Dialogue is also an important component of this research study and will be specifically explored in the third chapter of this piece. By dialogue, I am specifically referencing the verbal exchanges between the individuals in the two respective cases. This brings me to the second relationship that I want to explore within this sub-section, that being audio and racial narratives. The inclusion of race into the field of sound studies has been particularly interesting, especially in relation to how that translates into the area of auditory evidence. As I will discuss later on in this paper, there are distinguishing differences between different racially situated speeches, and this in part largely influences how individuals view, acknowledge, and empathize with victims of police violence.
Many scholars within the field of sound studies and other related areas have looked at this particular trend of racial identification through speech. Having looked at various literature, there is a clear distinction that is made between the normative “white speech” and the other (Fought, 2006; Harris, 2010; Newman and Wu, 2011; Trechter and Bucholtz, 2001; Chun, 2001). This linguistic binary expands into discussions around racial binaries, identification, and hierarchy (Trechter and Buchotz, 2001, p. 4). As Michael Newman and Angela Wu state in their piece “Do You Sound Asian When You Speak? Racial Identification and Voice in Chinese and Korean Americans’ English”, there is an intrinsic connection between linguistics and racial identity that is somehow based on a stereotypical association of a certain racial profile (2011, p. 153). In this case, the authors utilize the question “do you sound Asian when you speak English?” to explore this relationship between what one defines as an as “Asian profile” and linguistics. Although Newman and Wu are looking at particular racial groups in their research, this exact point is also applicable to black speakers.

The term “sounding African-American” has become a popularized expression and there have been numerous studies on this particular type of dialect (Fought, 2006, p. 45; Newman and Wu, 2011, p. 152). Ebonics, also known as African American Vernacular English or “black English”, is a particular type of dialect that is spoken by many African Americans in the United States (Fought, 2006, p. 45-46; Harris, 2010). The dialect itself shares a set of grammatical and other linguistic features that allows it to distinguish itself from other dialects (Fought, 2006, p. 46). With that being said, this level of individuality and uniqueness that stems from African American Vernacular English has become a target point for negative prejudices and racial discrimination (ibid, p. 53; Harris, 2010). The racial stereotypes that derive from listening to Ebonics or AAVE include assuming that one is bad, lazy, uneducated, overtly masculine, and/or inferior (Fought,
The inclusion of “blackness” into speech is often looked down upon, with many black speakers being criticized for their speech patterns, tone, cadences, and/or pronunciations of basic words (Harris, 2010). Again, as stated earlier, all of these negative perceptions around this dialect may transcend into how one is perceived as an individual by their peers (ibid), and we see this being the case with the findings presented in this thesis.

In the case of this situation, most often racialized individuals will become bidialectal. Bidialectal refers to one speaking both AAVE or Ebonics and a more “standard” dialect (Fought, 2006, p. 56). Adopting Du Bois’ principle of the double consciousness and the duality that is experienced by racialized individuals regarding their representation within white, mainstream society, this approach tackles the basic assumption that one will be held back thanks in part to their use of AAVE or Ebonics (Blau and Brown, 2001; Du Bois, 1903; Fought, 2006, p. 56; Harris, 2010; Jones, 1998; Smith, 2000). By switching between “racialized” and “appropriate” dialects, it has become a survival tactic utilized by upwardly mobile black individuals in order to slip from one culture to another when needed (Harris, 2010). The ability to transition between dialects has helped racialized individuals navigate between their linguistic background and the “mainstream” linguistic norm. This pressure to assimilate into mainstream language norms stem from the immense integration of whiteness into the linguistic dimension (Fought, 2006, p. 62-63; Trechter and Bucholtz, 2001, p. 4).

Whiteness within the realm of language and sound studies has been explored by various scholars, all of whom have noted its standardized status. In Language and Ethnicity, author Carmen Fought uses a chapter to explore whiteness and its dominance within language studies. In her piece, she points out that although whiteness may not be widely acknowledged as an ethnicity or at least it is invisible in its status as an ethnic category, its presence in the field of language is
immense (2006). Likewise, this is also explored by Sara Trechter and Mary Bucholtz, who too claim that although whiteness may not explicitly present itself as a colour or culture, it’s visibility as an audible racial category is evident (2001, p. 5).

This visibility of whiteness within language is positioned thanks in part to its relationship with racialized language such as Ebonics. As Elaine W. Chun puts it in her piece “The Construction of White, Black, and Korean American Identities through African American Vernacular English”, in order to examine talk by European Americans and understand white space and identity, it is crucial to address talk by “non-whites” (2001, p. 52). This comparative examination again leads to the formation of language and racial binaries (Trechter and Bucholtz, 2001, p. 4). As previously stated in this section, dialects such as AAVE and other racialized forms of speech have been positioned as inferior and unpleasant, while traditionally white or European speech has been seen as ideal (Harris, 2010). Common associations with white speech include being middle-class, educated, intellectual, and “regular” (Fought, 2006, p. 115; Harris, 2010).

This position of regularity that is encompassed by white and/or European speech has been widely acknowledged by different racial populations. As examined by Carmen Fought, both voluntary and involuntary minorities considered English as the standard and symbol of white identity, while many found that white speakers had an elevated form of language (2006, p. 117; Ogbu, 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 1998). This superior/inferior relationship between racial groups within the field of language is an incredibly important point of analysis here, especially in regard to how one understands and empathizes with others. This nuanced relationship between these elements create real and dynamic consequences in relation to how we view an individual. This point becomes incredibly relevant within this project, specifically when looking at the relationality between the viewer and the viewed. As you will see in Chapter 5, many of the
discussion points found within the literature will reappear in the overall analysis of both how Castile speaks and how he is heard. My research will also extend on many of the points here by highlighting the contradictory nature around sound and race when it comes to this idea of what we define as acceptable and unacceptable speech (e.g., “blaccent” spoken by non-black bodied individuals vs. Ebonics spoken by black-bodied individuals).
Chapter 2: Methodology

The methodological approach to my research project involved conducting a textual and comparative analysis of comments provided by unknown individuals on social media. My desire to compare comments was inspired by how popular comment sections have become in recent times. With approximately 55% of Americans having left an online comment on a post and 77.9% of individuals having read comments at some point during their experiences with social media, the ability to discover and assess nuanced discussions and findings from comments sections is extremely relevant (Stroud, Van Duyn, and Peacock, 2016, p. 1). The following sections will outline the methodological decisions and criteria that were created and utilized during the development of this research study; this includes defining how I chose my two case studies, what social media platforms I would set my research in, as well as narrowing down which specific videos/sources I would be acquiring commentary from. From here, I will further outline my coding process, which took place over the span of 3 months. To conclude my methodology section, I will briefly discuss any relevant limitations to this study.

2.1 Cases

Having identified my main research question and the central objective for this project (i.e., *how does race, specifically the racial identity of a victim, influence one’s affective towards both videos of police violence and police violence in general*?), it was important to begin my methodological process by gathering my variables for this study. Given the comparative nature of my research question and the objectives for this research, it was important to choose multiple racially different cases for this project. In terms of defining the parameters here, I wanted to ensure that I was able to provide thorough analysis of multiple case studies, without the risk of overcomplicating the process. With this in mind, I chose to analyze two case studies that had
multiple videos available online\(^\text{5}\). When it came to narrowing down which cases to use, I wanted to ensure that I had some sort of criteria in place; this would help guarantee that the case studies that I chose would best fit the requirements for this study.\(^\text{6}\) The following criteria were used to assist in the case selection process:

- **Different Racial Identities**: In order to properly assess the impact of race on people’s responses to filmed incidents of police violence, it was important to choose two cases that involved victims of different racial backgrounds. Based on previous literature, there was a clear juxtaposition between the purity and privacy of the white body and the spectacle and threat of the black body. With this in mind, I wanted my two videos to show a black body (an African American individual) and a white body (a person of European descent).

- **Timing of the Incident**: The element of timing was essential because I wanted to ensure that the temporal context of these incidents was similar. I wanted to ensure that the cases were set within the same year (if not, a maximum of a year apart from each other). Because there was a lack of options for victims who were of European descent, the time period for my African American case study was based on the timing of Daniel Shaver’s case.

- **Police-Victim Interaction**: Because my research involves the larger topic of police violence, the cases themselves needed to be centred around the relationship and interaction between a police officer and a citizen (rather than between two racially different citizens)

- **Accessibility of the Incidents Online**: Being set within the realm of the digital space and social media to be specific, it was necessary that the incidents be filmed and easily available on social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter.

\(^5\) I chose to use multiple videos for each case study because it would provide me with the appropriate amount of commentary to use (i.e., I would have a sufficient amount of commentary to evaluate)

\(^6\) I began this process in 2019 (prior to the occurrence of more recent cases).
- **Viewer Engagement**: In order for my research to have a diverse range of data, it was important for the cases to be fairly-well known. Again, although filmed cases with European-descent victims are rare, there still needed to be some sort of viewer engagement with the content.

Having followed this criterion, the two cases that I ended up selecting for this research study were that of Philando Castile from Falcon Heights, Minnesota and Daniel Shaver from Meza, Arizona. In terms of the selection process, I first chose Shaver’s case study for this project because there was a limited number of useable cases to pick from in terms of white-bodied individuals experiencing police violence on film. From there, I based my selection of the second case off of both the criterion as well as the characteristics from Shaver’s case study (i.e., a case that happened in the same year as Shaver’s incident, etc.). Given the wider range of content for black-bodied individuals experiencing police violence on film, I was able to find a case (Philando Castile) that shared these similarities and would be effective for this comparison. Both cases occurred in 2016, with corresponding video footage being released post-acquittal of the officers responsible. The incidents themselves are both fairly well-known online and have garnered a substantial amount of viewer engagement.

### 2.2 Social Media Platforms: Facebook and Twitter

A key factor in my research was the choice in space that I would use to conduct my project. As the larger society shifts from gathering their information from traditional outlets like television and newspapers to now more digital and conversational networks, it was important for me as a researcher to situate my project within these newer digital spaces (Bergström and Belfrage, 2018 p. 583). Of course, social media is a broad term that encompasses a plethora of various digital outlets that include but are not limited to Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook, Vimeo, etc.
With that being said, in order to create a feasible sample size, I decided to choose two specific outlets for this project: Facebook and Twitter. My decision to use Facebook and Twitter as my social media platforms was based on number of reasons.

As two massive social media outlets, both Facebook and Twitter are popular social media sites that have increasingly played a large role in informing people around the world about various issues and incidents like police violence. In fact, in a study conducted by the Pew Research Centre, both sites were found to be comparable when it came to presenting coverage about crime and community issues (Shearer, Barthel, Gottfried, and Mitchell, 2015). While Twitter is known to dispense news in real time, Facebook was still seen as the most common platform amongst individuals (ibid; Bergström and Belfrage, 2018, p. 590). The ability of these two platforms to dispense news at a rapid pace to a large population of individuals was beneficial. In terms of demographics, it was important to ensure that I used two social media networks that had a diverse set of users. As an outlet, Facebook has a typically older clientele, with 38% of users being male and 62% of users being female (Shearer and Gottfried, 2018). This is compared to Twitter, which has a large share of college graduate students as users, 53% of them being male and 47% being female (ibid). In regard to educational background, both platforms have users ranging from those who are high school educated to those who have a college degree or higher (ibid).

2.3 News Sources/Social Media Profiles: Sources of the Videos

Following the cases, it was important to then figure out which news sources/social media profiles I would be using for this study. For the purpose of my research project, I will be looking at three separate Facebook video posts and two separate Twitter video posts per case, all of which display either the dashboard camera footage or the body camera footage from the two incidents. In the case of Philando Castile, the events following the incident were caught on both Facebook
Live and through dashboard cameras. Although I initially wanted to incorporate the Facebook Live footage into my analysis, it did not display the interaction between the officer and Castile prior to the shooting. Additionally, it was not logistically possible to find that footage based on the criteria I had set out for myself. My criteria for the Facebook videos are as follows:

- **Instant Accessibility:** The footage would be immediately accessible on the social media platform (i.e., user would not have to click on an additional link to access the video).
- **Authenticity:** The footage that is displayed on the screen will be as authentic as possible and will not include any additional information within the video itself (e.g., additional text narratives – not including subtitles).
- **Sufficient Commentary:** There would be a sufficient amount of relevant and useable comments posted by viewers (users on the social media site).
- **Credibility:** The footage should also be posted by well-known American pages and/or news sources. In order to meet this criterion, the page must be verified and have the verified badge. The verified badge ensures that Facebook has verified this source as an authentic page or profile for the figure, brand, and/or organization (Facebook Help Centre, n.d.).
- **Diverse Sources:** The sources should be as ideologically and politically diverse as possible (i.e., the set of sources should represent various backgrounds and perspectives).

After assessing all the possible video posts on Facebook, I decided to analyze the videos from the following sources: Fox 10 Phoenix (Philando Castile), USA Today (Philando Castile), NBC News (Philando Castile), Fox 10 Phoenix (Daniel Shaver), AZ Central (Daniel Shaver), and ABC 15 (Daniel Shaver).

When looking at Twitter posts, the criteria for the videos shifted slightly based on the availability of the posts themselves. The majority of the criteria stayed the same, however, the
national scope of the sources broadened up, with the focus no longer staying central to America. The criteria for Twitter posts are as follows:

- **Instant Accessibility**: The footage would be immediately accessible on the social media site (i.e., user would not have to click on an additional link to access the video)
- **Authenticity**: The footage displayed on the screen should be as authentic as possible and would not include any additional information within the video itself (e.g., additional text narratives – not including subtitles).
- **Sufficient Commentary**: There should be a sufficient amount of relevant and useable comments posted by viewers (users on the social media site). Although, it is important to note that the expected quantity of comments for Twitter were less than Facebook
- **Credibility**: The footage should also be posted by a well-known American or international organization, news source, and/or journalist. This criterion was expanded to meet the lower quantity of accessible videos on Twitter. With that being said, in order to meet this criterion, the Twitter page must be verified and have the verified badge. The verified badge ensures that Twitter has verified this source as an authentic profile for the figure, brand, and/or organization (Twitter Help Centre, n.d.)
- **Diverse Sources**: Finally, the sources should be as ideologically and politically diverse as possible (i.e., the set of sources should represent various backgrounds perspectives).

The available Twitter Sites that will be assessed in this thesis are the following: CBS (Philando Castile), Sky News (Philando Castile), Shaun King (Daniel Shaver), and Tim Black (Daniel Shaver).

2.4 Data Collection and Coding Process
In terms of the data collection process, I began collecting commentary from each source in October 2019. Given the large quantity of comments that needed to be transferred from Facebook and Twitter to Excel, I used an online website which specialized in exporting social media commentary to Microsoft Excel files. I created 10 different Excel files (one for each source) that encompassed each set of comments in chronological order based on time (i.e., the timing of each posted comment). These files also had the information of each commenter as well hyperlinks to their profiles and the original comments. This became incredibly useful in the later stages of this research study (i.e., the analysis stage and the writing stage) when I needed to go back and reference the comment numbers (when including the comments within the written piece), the comments themselves, and the commenters (during the analysis stage and while creating the appendix).

Collectively, the total number of comments that were initially collected in this initial stage was 7849. In terms of the breakdown, 943 comments came from Fox News (Castile), 2461 comments from NBC News (Castile), 99 from CBS’ Twitter page (Castile), 1816 from USA Today (Castile), and 51 from Sky News’ Twitter page (Castile). The remaining 2479 comments derived from Daniel Shaver’s videos. ABC 15 (Shaver) provided 1194 comments, 449 comments from AZ Central (Shaver), 138 from Fox 10 Phoenix (Shaver), 646 comments from Shaun King’s Twitter page (Shaver), and finally 52 comments from Tim Black’s Twitter page (Shaver). The number of comments here depict the initial data set that I was working with at the beginning stages of my research. Of course, not all of this data was useable and/or relevant for the purpose of this study. With this in mind, I began to sift through the data and narrow down the commentary by coding all 7849 comments.
Using the software system NVivo, I conducted multiple stages of coding. The first stage of coding was for the sole purpose of narrowing down the commentary based on relevance. Comments that were not focused on the video content (i.e., “bots”, irrelevant “trolling” comments) were removed during this first step. From there, I conducted a thematic analysis based on what was being presented by the commenters. With this, I was able to categorize the remaining set of comments based on broader themes. The initial themes that emerged included: race, visual cues and techniques, social media and media at large, language, and audio. Again, it is important to note that these themes and/or nodes were not preconceived (i.e., I did not come up with them prior to this process), but rather were a by-product of the commentary itself (i.e. what were people referencing in their posts? What seemed to stand out for individuals?). In terms of properly assigning comments into their relevant themes, I provided myself with definitions for each larger theme. The race code was generally defined as any comment referencing the aspect of race, racial identities, and/or racism within the context of the incident. The visual cues theme dealt with any comments provided by individuals that referenced aspects of the filming itself, such as the length of the footage, the angle at which the footage was shot, and any other background visual effects.

The next theme that emerged was the accessibility through social media and media at large, and this was in particular for comments that talked about the role of social media in the sharing and framing of the respective incident. Following the accessibility theme was language; for the purpose of my project specifically, I was interested in how people described the victims within their comments. An example of this would be if someone emphasized a victim as a “loving father”. Finally, the audio code dealt with comments that pointed out the auditory aspects of the respective videos. An example of this would include if individuals resonated with the tone or accent of a victim. With these larger codes established, I was able to further deduce these comments into
related sub-codes or subthemes. These subthemes were more specific and narrowed in on relevant tones, arguments, and comparisons that could be found. Subthemes such as “positive” comments around accessibility, “negative” comments around accessibility, “use of racial stereotypes”, “references to victimhood”, “references to respectable voice”, etc. all emerged from this deeper analysis and coding. By taking on a macro to micro approach to my coding and analysis, I was able to establish relevant patterns, commonalities, and differences amongst the two cases.

2.5 Limitations to this Research Study

Prior to moving forward, it is important to address a few limitations within this research study. The first limitation to consider is the lack of background information about the commenters in this research study. The commentary provided by the following individuals are simply a snapshot of who they are and what their perspective is. With that being said, as a researcher, I am not aware of their backgrounds unless they decide to share additional personal information about themselves within their comments (e.g., mentioning their racial background, etc.) or have made their profiles publicly accessible. This additional information could also influence how they respond to the following videos. Throughout this process, I noted down some of the additional background information on commenters as found on their profiles (e.g., their social media biographies, profile pictures, publicly shared content, etc.); this includes but is not limited to describing their racial background (based on profile pictures), the sex and/or gender they identify with (based on what they have stated in the profile biographies and/or profile pictures), their possible political stances (based on shared content, if available), and whatever other information is made public. Although I am aware that this is not a perfect approach and it has its own set of limitations, I am hoping that this provides a brief window of opportunity to see the parallels between one’s (assumed) identity and their perspectives. Additionally, I am confident that this will help the reader contextualize the
commentary that has been referenced within this thesis. This information is made accessible to the reader and is available within Appendix A.

Furthermore, the specificity of my sample population in this study may serve as a point of limitation. For example, in this study, I am only observing and analyzing the opinions of those who have posted a comment on the posts themselves; this would leave out a certain percentage of the population who do not choose to actively present their opinions on social media. The sources themselves are also susceptible to certain biases and limitations when it comes to their viewership and base. For example, these news outlets may market themselves and influence certain types of people based on racial, political and/or ideological positions. This in turn may affect who the commenters are and what types of interpretations they have. Additionally, the environment of social media is susceptible to various limitations, such as the various algorithms that may alter what individuals have access to on their timelines. The existence of false or fake accounts is also an issue on social media. In order to alleviate some of these limitations as a researcher, I aimed to ensure that there was a wide variety of political and ideological perspectives amongst the sources themselves (i.e., sources that are both liberal and conservative). Additionally, I narrowed down the initial set of comments based on their useability and relevance to the topic at hand. Through careful deliberation and scrutiny, I aimed to ensure that all comments were as real and useful to this study as possible. Even with these limitations, it is important to note that the central themes and discussions that emerge from this research study are still beneficial and can contribute to greater discussions around race, police violence, and the social experience of responding to visually accessible forms of violence.
Chapter 3: Relationality to Visual Evidence: Analyzing Visual Evidence and its Accessibility in Relation to Affect and Race

“They watched these violations up closes and on their cell phones, so many times over. They watched them in near-real time. They watched them crisscrossed and concentrated. They watched them on the school bus. They watched them under the covers at night” (Alexander, 2020)

The exhibition of black bodies, particularly black bodies experiencing trauma is not a new phenomenon and by no means does it seem to be fading away. As Alexander eloquently hints at in the quote above, these violations thrusted upon black bodies are becoming easily viewable thanks in part to the increased level of accessibility. Again, however, this synoptical space in which the many observe the few is not a recent phenomenon. Sarah Baartman, most commonly known as the “Hottentot Venus” is a prime example of this (McKittrick, 2010). Brought to Europe under false pretenses, this Khoi woman was physically “paraded around ‘freak shows’” and exhibited as a caged attraction (Elkins, 2007; Mwansa, 2018; Parkinson, 2016). Her bodily proportions fascinated viewers and were heavily fetishized through stage performances and limited clothing (Elkins, 2007). Until 1974 – long past her death in 1815 – parts of her physical body were kept in a Paris museum for viewers to gaze over (Parkinson, 2016). In fact, her physical remains were not brought back to her place of origin until 2002 (ibid). The continuous dehumanization and spectatorship around Baartman’s blackness is only one example as to how blackness and black trauma has served as entertainment for the white gaze.

In more recent times, social media has been utilized to better help individuals with their consumption of this type of visual. This is true now more so than ever, given that we are experiencing a global pandemic. The ways in which people consume visual evidence through
social media over the past year is significantly different (Ramsden, 2020). The deaths of individuals such as George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery were able to be witnessed by everyone without any sort of external distractions that are otherwise a part of people’s day-to-day lives (e.g., social gatherings, employment-related matter, etc.) (Giesbrecht, 2020). The affective consequences of viewing these videos at this time were transformative, with numerous online and physical mobilizations taking place shortly after (ibid; Anderson, Barthel, Perrin, and Vogels, 2020; Beckman, 2020; Emont and Wen, 2020; Zilles, 2020). Although this part may feel irrelevant, this discussion at large is deeply connected to the themes and discussions that emerge within this chapter. Given both perspectives around the synoptical space (e.g., Sarah Baartman’s example and the summer of BLM example), there becomes a question around the importance of visual evidence and the accessibility of it.\textsuperscript{78}

With these examples in mind, this chapter explores the positioning and relationality between the viewer and the viewed. Specifically, the point of analysis here will be centered around this idea of accessibility and how one’s viewership is imperative to the development of this type of voyeuristic relationship. In conducting a thorough analysis of this relationship between the viewer and the visual/technical elements of these videos (i.e., the perspective from which the footage is taken, the length of time, the quantity of videos to view) as well as the corresponding commentary that is left under these posts, I will demonstrate how race has influenced visual presentations of black and white bodies in a way that upholds traditional conceptions around the preservation of white bodies/identities, while implicitly degrading that of black-bodied individuals. What is

\textsuperscript{7} Synopticon and thee synoptical space will be further defined in the following section
\textsuperscript{8} There is a contrast between the inherently dehumanizing experience of Sarah Baartman and the more complicated ways in which we view videos showing police brutality (i.e., arguments around raising awareness and inspiring movements and action from those who would otherwise be silent)
interesting and should be noted as significant to this chapter is the resulting feedback that is presented by commenters under these videos. While traditional producers have upheld these narratives around preservation, commenters seem to contradict this motion by encouraging the perpetuation of a synoptical space, as put forth by scholars such as David Lyon. As a reader, these contradictory and complex findings may be challenging to grasp, however, what it inherently shows us is that this integration of race in the production and mediation of this content is far more complex given the nature of present-day society and its connection to social media.

In coming to this conclusion, this chapter will touch on two contrasting sections: the perspective of the viewer and the actions taken up by the producers of this content. The first section delves into the reactions presented by the viewers. Here we will see how individuals have challenged conceptions around race and racial preservation. By unpacking two predominant observations (positive and/or neutral feedback, and negative feedback), the two subsections will present varying reactions that stemmed from viewing both Shaver and Castile’s death within the space of social media. Points of discussion here will include looking at the synoptical space and how that has produced a heightened sense of interest, as well as more racialized concepts such as LeCount’s claims of white racial disadvantage and how that has produced a complex affective understanding of race and death. The second section will take on a more analytical approach towards the visual content itself. This section will focus in on the ways producers have utilized technical skills to uphold the dichotomous and contrasting narratives between black and white bodies. By evaluating each video and their presentation of death through timing and camera angles, it will become evident that race largely influences how this content is shared to the public. This in turn will have a great (and contrary) effect on how viewers formulate a relationship with the footage.
3.1 Availability on Social Media & People’s Perspectives

A person’s direct relationship to a filmed incident of police violence begins with their ability to access such material. For some, this could be done through reading articles or opinion pieces about the incident or listening to news stories on the radio. For others, the emotional connection stems from actually witnessing the event. For the purpose of this study, I am focusing on the latter. In this case, in order for one to have what Virginia Woolf would describe as an emotional connection and be impacted by the visual piece, one must have access to experience it (Moore and Singh, 2018; Woolf, 1938). Discussions around accessibility and witnessing events can often be linked to a larger concept that is known as the synopticon. The synopticon refers to a contextual space in which the many view a few (Lyon, 2006; Mathiesen, 1997). For the purpose of this topic and other forms of experiential violence, there is a harmonious relationship that exists between acts of violence and mass media viewing (Lyon, 2006, p. 37). This was and continues to be evident in cases of police violence that are made accessible to the public; starting with the Rodney King case, where television was utilized to enhance the synoptical experience of watching King’s beating (Beutin, 2017; Crenshaw and Peller, 1992; Mathiesen, 1997). Fast forward several years and we are now utilizing social media as our access point to viewing other people’s experiences. The existence of a viewer society in which anyone and everyone can witness what would otherwise be a private event is developed from this key point of accessibility (Lyon, 2006; Mathiesen, 1997). One must have access to the spectacle in order to curate this sort of system.

With that being said, creating this system in which the many witness a few becomes far more complex within the context of police violence. Although, we have seen an influx of bystander

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9 This is an alternative concept to Bentham’s panopticon (a few watching the many), which is discussed most famously in Foucault’s work. Although, they contrast each other, both concepts often work cohesively and strengthen each other (Lyon, 2006; Mathiesen, 1997).
videos made accessible to the public (most recently with George Floyd amongst others), it becomes more challenging when we consider police operated footage and the politics around public accessibility. This has been a critique by many writers and scholars. Police operated footage taken through BWCs and/or dashboard mounted cameras are often exclusively reserved for the purpose of serving as evidence and are rarely publicly circulated (Beutin, 2017; Taylor and Lee, 2019). In the cases of Daniel Shaver and Philando Castile, the videos were eventually circulated to the public a year after the incidents and post-verdicts (Shapiro and Jacobo, 2017; Wang, 2017). This delay in releasing such content from these institutions fundamentally undermines the role of these videos in terms of fostering emotional responses from the public, but also creating public action to hold institutions and individuals accountable (Beutin, 2017, p. 15).

Aside from the lack of videos shared at the immediate time of the incident, there were also different levels of accessibility based on the racial identity of the victim. When examining the two types of case studies, there was a real juxtaposition right from the beginning of my research. The most obvious example of this came when trying to find cases for this research study. Racially, there seemed to be more publicized examples of police violence involving African American individuals to choose from than ones that involved individuals who are of European descent. This observation aligns with Richardson’s argument that police body cameras often function in service of whiteness by ignoring white bodies in these moments (2020). She uses the example of white-collar crimes and the lack of videos out there displaying European descendants committing crimes, being arrested, etc. (ibid, p. 183). If one were to extrapolate Richardson’s point and apply it here, we could see that this privilege again is existent in this particular finding. It is much harder to find white bodies in this state of vulnerability and in turn that makes it challenging for white bodies to be seen as possibly questionable (Morrison, 2017; Richardson, 2020). The fascination and
spectacle around black bodies in pain also seems to resurface here with this finding (Alexander, 1994; Butler, 2009; Hook, 2013; Scott, 2018). This is contrasted with Shaver’s case, where filmed and publicly accessible footage was sparse, with approximately 10 useable videos at the time of my data gathering.\textsuperscript{10}

Many of the videos that were available for Daniel Shaver’s case did not actually show the incident but were rather news pieces discussing Shaver as an individual prior to his death (e.g., interviews with his family and friends about the type of person Shaver was, etc.). For Philando Castile, although there were several videos that talked about his background (e.g., who he was prior to his death, etc.) there were still a large portion of videos that were either the dashboard camera footage or news pieces focusing on his fatal interaction with Officer Yanez\textsuperscript{11}. This here speaks to the inequities that exist between these two individuals’ identities pre- and post-deaths (Moore and Singh, 2020). These inconsistencies between black and white bodies have been discussed in various literature and there have been numerous examples that have highlighted this point, including that of Sarah Baartman or the “Hottentot Venus”.

In a more graphic sense, we see this lack of dignity afforded to black bodies through visual depictions of physical trauma. As Hook points out in his discussion on Marinovich’s \textit{Bang Bang Club}, the photos of black bodies being hacked to death and carelessly loaded into trucks served as a piece of entertainment for viewers (2013). The sharing of these images may have initially been used to threaten the existence of apartheid, but the sheer idea of openly displaying these tortured black bodies as if they are only that becomes dehumanizing at its core (i.e., there is no connection to an identity outside of that visual). When we connect this back to the initial point here, we see

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} This number encompasses the videos that met my criteria for this research study
\item \textsuperscript{11} At least 50\% of the videos that were available at the time were focused on his death.
\end{itemize}
that the influx of videos showing Castile’s death is a reiteration of this example. Comparatively, the white body does not experience such a pattern (Butler, 2009; Hook 2013). As Ndebele puts it, “the white body is inviolable” (2009, p. 17; Hook, 2013). In this case, the lack of visual accessibility to Shaver’s death reasserts this level of respect and privacy that is afforded to him and other white bodies, both living and dead (ibid).

The limited quantity of videos displaying Shaver’s death is an important point of interest. Unlike the endless amount of visual content that exists for black bodies in states of trauma, the white body is rarely ever seen in such a manner. This again holds true in this research study, both through the limited number of videos and the techniques utilized by sources to hide and/or soften the graphic nature of his death. That being said, the inequities between white and black bodies are also evident when it comes to seeing how Shaver is remembered online. Unlike Castile, there were a large quantity of videos discussing Shaver as a person, external to his incident. There is a vivification of Shaver even after his death; viewers have the opportunity to create positive associations of Shaver (white body), even if his physical body is no longer existent (Dukes and Gaither, 2017; Moore and Singh, 2020). Social media users have a chance to get a glimpse of who he was as a husband, a father, and a man, all thanks in part to various interviews that were done with his loved ones. These clips humanize Shaver while allowing viewers to connect his body to an identity. Again, this is not necessarily afforded to Castile. The ritual of his identity post-death and the associations that follow are always linked to the incident itself (Posel and Gupta, 2009). Although viewers get a slight glimpse into his life pre-incident, it instinctively cannot be separated from the glorification of his death and the contextual history of black trauma at the hands of police officers. This difference here exemplifies how power has been regulated within these two distinct fatal narratives.
When shifting over to my analysis of the data set, there were certain aspects of my initial experience that were mirrored in people’s commentary; however, the data was far more complex than my initial observation. As a general trend, there were two central observational standpoints around the access of these videos. The first general feeling that was held by a number of commenters was that of a more positive outlook. Here I saw individuals generally unbothered, satisfied and/or content with having access to these filmed depictions of police violence (e.g., “this video is ‘paid for by the public’ record…therefore it should be PUBLIC”\(^{12}\)). This was contrasted by others who seemed to have a negative outlook towards having access to such visuals. Comments here ranged from those expressing feelings of disgust to those who were either irritated and/or confused (“Why do they have to release this?? I don’t need to see this cop murder someone”\(^{13}\)). With that being said, the following discussion further analyzes these two larger patterns in greater detail.

### 3.1.1. Observation #1: Positive (and/or Neutral) Feedback Around Having Access to Visuals

In his piece, “9/11, Synopticon, Scopophilia: Watching and Being Watched”, Lyon poses the question, “what is it about watching others that is so compelling and enjoyable?” (2006, p. 47). He goes on to discuss the term scopophilia, a concept originating in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis meaning to “love looking” (ibid, p. 48; Metz, 1982; Simsek, 2018). In many ways this concept is echoed in this thesis and more so in this section of my findings. Here, we saw a variety of comments expressing a range of affirmative expressions towards the visual evidence presented. For the purpose of my research study, I define positive comments as those expressing some form of interest in the visual depictions that they were seeing. The range of emotions

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12 Commenter 141 of ABC 15 (Shaver)  
13 Commenter 343 of USA Today (Castile)
displayed by commenters was fairly open based on the types of responses that were being given. Some comments exuded a clear expression of excitement and enthusiasm around their desire to view and share the videos, while others were far more subtle in their interest.

In terms of quantity, it was fairly clear that there was a difference in the number of positive comments based on the racial identity of the victims in the videos. By this, I mean there were a lot more individuals who positively reacted to Shaver’s footage being shared online. Commenter 514 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver) stated “This needs to have mass distribution. Please re-tweet”; while Commenter 66 of the same source (Shaun King Twitter) expressed the following: “[I] normally would say this stuff should not be shown out of respect, but this needs to be seen to help change police mentality, this bloke was not a threat at all and could of easily been handcuffed”. Commenter 10 of ABC 15 (Shaver) stated that “the public deserves to see it. THE TRUTH. No matter the verdict today, this video shoes an unarmed man begging for his life...Why NOT release it?”. All three commenters displayed a genuine interest in the output of this footage, with Commenter 515 emphasizing the importance of continuing to share this footage with the greater public. Commenter 66’s comment on the other hand expresses the same idea, but explicitly includes this point around attempting to alter traditionally set standards and/or actions, in this case within the field of policing. Commenter 10’s post encompasses this desire for change by highlighting the element of truth within the video itself. As a whole, their comments display an unconventional form of pleasure and embody this concept of scopophilia in many ways. Although they do not necessarily state that they enjoyed watching Shaver die, the act of watching paired with the positive affirmation around accessing such content and further encouraging a larger synoptical space for many to watch this man’s death speaks to what individuals like Lyon and Mathiesen talk about in their respective works around spectatorship and surveillance (Lyon, 2006;
Mathiesen; 1997). In this context, these three individuals used advocacy and consciousness raising as central reasons for their perspectives.

This idea of using Daniel Shaver’s footage as a tool for change was also prominent in people’s subconscious discussion around police violence, race, and media distribution. For many, Shaver’s footage brought attention to an alternative narrative around police violence that is not always publicized; this narrative being police violence experienced by individuals who are of European descent (Friedersdorf, 2017). Some individuals were explicit in their commentary about this subject matter, such as Commenter 928 of ABC 15 (Shaver) commenting “Wait, the victim is white? Why does any of this matter then...Why is this even in the media? This man is clearly white and that does not fit a narrative that the media will like”. Commenter 928’s comment demonstrates an interesting point here. For one, they hint at what has already been established by individuals such as Allissa V. Richardson, which is the discrepancy between white and black bodies on film, although, this commenter moves away from the crux of Richardson’s main argument and stance here (2020). Nevertheless, when further analyzing the comment, there seems to be an underlying tone of frustration paired with an explicit call out towards the discrepancy between this case and the media’s reporting of police violence. Here we see race being overtly used as the central reasoning for such an argument. Commenter 928’s comment was echoed alternatively by others commenting on Daniel Shaver’s case. The following comments made on Shaun King’s Twitter post reflect this matter:

Commenter 294 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver): “I’ve seen a lot of national tv news coverage over the past several days and have yet to see this covered. It may have been covered and I missed it, but certainly that coverage was not substantial”

Commenter 437 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver): “…notice…no likes…no retweets”
Commenter 591 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver): “How this isn’t covered everyday by mainstream media is baffling”

All of these commenters noticed the lack of coverage that media outlets were placing on Shaver’s case. In Commenters 294 and 591’s posts there is an emphasis on the lack of attention and care demonstrated by news outlets. Although Commenter 294 states that there may have been some coverage, it was still lacking – it was possibly not as substantial as the coverage of other police violence cases. Commenter 437’s statement is interesting in the sense that it speaks to the non-viral nature of the case, particularly within the social media space. With “no likes and no retweets”, it seems as if Commenter 437 is trying to demonstrate the lack of care that we as individuals have with this case. Active looking and participation by individuals are essential in a synoptic space such as social media (Mathiesen, 1997). By not digitally engaging with the clip online nor heightening its scope on traditional news outlets, there fails to be a thriving and active synoptical space in which the public finds interest in this individual experience. There is some sense that people do not care and/or are not resonating with this case. This in turn can lead to a lack of mass affective response (e.g., anger, fear, etc.) (Lyon, 2006). The key word here is “mass”. One can display their emotional response through comments such as those presented here; however, the strength and quantity of people’s affective responses are key when attempting to create impactful change, which is what individuals here are attempting to vocalize.14 By increasing the viewership with this video, they are attempting to increase the cultural currency of this content and narrative (Morrison, 2017).

14 Relevant examples of mass affective responses that have translated into tangible actions by civilians include the LA Riots following Rodney King’s beating, the Ferguson riots following Michael Brown’s death, and most recently the global protests that continue to transpire following the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. It is important to note that all of these examples are inspired by incidents inflicted on black and brown bodies.
The lack of digital engagement with this case may be a result of the case’s uniqueness and divergence from the traditional understanding of police violence. As mentioned previously, the narrative that these commenters are advocating for does not necessarily align with the normal police interactions experienced by white bodies (Graziano, Schuck, and Martin, 2010; Kahn and Martin, 2016; LeCount, 2017; Weitzer and Tuch, 1999; Wortley and Tanner, 2003). The messaging around what these videos demonstrate in terms of depicting violent repercussions for certain behaviour does not naturally align with the white experience, especially the public white experience (Richardson, 2020; Sigelman, Welch, Bledsoe, and Combs, 1997; Smith, 2002). With that being said, as indicated by this group of commenters, there is some hope that is being expressed in regard to this video serving as a trigger point for more awareness around this alternative perspective.

Now whether this differentiation stems from reasonings related to race cannot definitively be confirmed within this research study; and although some commenters have brought it up within their posts (e.g., Commenter 928), it is important to note that there may be other reasons for the lack of coverage and social media engagement. Nevertheless, this finding displays a complex parallel to some of the literature that was outlined in the previous chapter of this thesis. I use the words complex parallel because previous works have looked at the differentiation between the white and black body (Alexander, 1994; Beutin, 2017; Butler, 2009; Du Bois 1903; hooks, 2013; Smith, 2000;). The white body in these works have represented vulnerability in the purest form (Butler, 2009; Hook, 2013; Ndebele, 2009). In this case, viewers are never in a position to see the white body in pain nor is that what we as consumers want. As Alexander puts it, white bodies are the stagers and the consumers of this entertainment – not the actors (1994, p. 79). When applying these previously formulated arguments to my findings, there is some overlap. The similarities stem
from the actions of producers, creators, and sharers of such content. The purity of the white body is maintained by having limited accessibility and reporting around the matter. By limiting how we see the video (e.g., not on news shows, few blurry videos on social media), the vulnerability of the white body is still relatively intact. With that being said, viewers’ desire to watch this video and share it amongst the public opposes previous notions around the white body and its distance from physical trauma.

While many of the commenters argue that the need to publicly witness this video derives from a need to protect the white body, the mere fascination around witnessing a white body being shot presents a different understanding around violence and white bodies than what previous individuals, such as Butler (2009), have pointed out in their work. A fairly common sub-pattern that emerged in this research study was people’s desire to see the full experience. In Daniel Shaver’s case, this sub-pattern was exponentially heightened thanks in part to the lack of footage being presented by these outlets. Many viewers took the time to display their feelings around the lack of footage (“Agree they didn’t show the whole video”15), while others took the time to direct other commenters to other sites (“the full video, including shots fired on the news page”16, “Actually you can see the whole video you just haven’t looked for it”17, “This is not even the full real shooting, watch Daily Mail”18). The appeal around violence and trauma inflicted on Daniel was still relevant, even if it “typically” should not be. In some cases, it is possible that this appeal

15 Commenter 708 of ABC 15 (Shaver)
16 Commenter 38 of ABC 15 (Shaver)
17 Commenter 460 of ABC 15 (Shaver)
18 Commenter 644 of ABC 15 (Shaver)
is driven by the desire to grasp some sort of “truth”\textsuperscript{19}. Either way, this speaks to nature of our society at the moment, that being the viewer society (Mathiesen, 1997).

Individuals are inundated with viewing the private in the public space (Lyon, 2006, p. 50; Meyrowitz, 1985). Scopophilia, or at its basic core voyeurism is what is being exhibited through these comments. The audience is reproducing their infant-like curiosity through visual pleasure and this gaze is clearly visible and put out in the open, as witnessed through the nature of these comments (Denzin, 1995; Lyon, 2006; Mulvey, 1975). Shaver’s position as a European descendent or a “white body” did not deter individuals from consuming or wanting to consume more of his death. This juxtaposition here between the minimal and inconsistent dispensing of his video and the mixed consumption of it by viewers present an interesting point of analysis that is not necessarily monolithic in nature. By this I mean, the element of race in this particular area is not necessarily indicative of people’s positive responses towards having access to such imagery. The reasoning around people’s interest and the levels of interest that people displayed are diverse.

Comparatively speaking, when looking at the application of this general trend to Philando Castile’s case study, the findings were quite different. Based on the quantity of comments, there seemed to be far less enthusiasm around the dispensing of his video. As mentioned previously in my own personal findings, there were far more videos depicting Castile’s death made available to the public via social media – more than double Shaver’s. However, that seemed to have the opposite effect on people’s reactions towards accessing the video. The number of negative comments will be further explored in the following subsection, but for now it is important to note that the quantity of positive comments to negative comments were generally uneven. In fact, to

\textsuperscript{19} It is important to note that there is no definitive truth in this type of space. By grasping for some sort of truth, I am referring to a created interpretation of something that one self-labels as the “truth”
say that there were positive comments would be insufficient. The general feelings around accessing Castile’s videos were relatively neutral to negative. Unlike Shaver’s set of comments that highly encouraged the release of the video in order to alleviate the general underexposure of the case, Castile’s set of comments did not mirror that same argument. Commenter 727 of Fox News (Castile) stated “This needs to go viral, so people know to do what they are told!! It was a legal shooting. Don’t be reaching around your stupid car”. Although their message encourages the dissemination of this video, their visceral reaction is not an empathetic one, rather it depicts a feeling of disgust and aggressiveness towards Castile. In this case, Commenter 727 does not view Castile as a victim, but rather an instigator of his own death and the object of hate (Ahmed, 2015; Lorde, 1984).

However, there were still various comments presented that displayed an implicit level of interest around accessing videos around Castile’s case. The following comments provide a sample of this:

Commenter 1429 of NBC (Castile): “Does anyone have a link to the original video the girlfriend/wife was taking?”

Commenter 902 of USA Today (Castile): “Where is the video from the girlfriend inside the car?”

Commenter 1757 of USA Today (Castile): “…I have seen four videos now of this…”

The tone of these comments displays a different form of positive interest around Castile’s video. Although none of them seem to explicitly state an emotional excitement or passion around witnessing the videos (i.e., no one alludes to any sort of emotional reaction in their response, there is a lack of exaggerated language). The general interest that underlines the commentary can still be read as positive. Commenters 1429 and 902 present the most obvious forms of interest here by
asking to see more clips of the incident. In fact, they are specifically asking to see a more close-up version of the incident – that being the video taken by Castile’s partner. Commenter 1757 has already engaged in multiple viewings of Castile’s death. Their desire to see more of this violent incident again speaks to the nature of a viewer society and individuals partaking in voyeuristic tendencies and scopophilia (Lyon, 2006; Mathiesen, 1997; Metz, 1982; Simsek, 2018). The sheer intrigue around seeing a closer perspective of a black man in pain correlates with previously written literature. Whether commenters acknowledge this or not, the curiosity and active desire to seek out more footage feeds into the “entertainment” value of this incident; thus, furthering what is known as the “market for suffering” through spectatorship (ibid, p. 32; Moore and Singh, 2018; Sontag, 2003). Furthermore, given the setting and structure of social media, viewers are able to feed this curiosity through the multiple synopticons that exist online (e.g., searching other online news outlets and social media sites for clips) (Mathiesen, 1997, p. 221).

When comparing the overall positive feedback towards the respective videos, there are several comparative points between the two incidents. If we use race as a central factor, it could be argued that Shaver’s position as a European-descendent allowed for more positive feedback towards the release and accessibility of his videos. The underexposure of not only his case but the general narrative of white victimization– or what LeCount would call white claims of racial disadvantage – served as a point of interest and passion for many commenters (Khazan, 2017; LeCount, 2017). The lack of this particular type of visual storytelling in mass media – one where the victim is played by a non-typical individual (white body) – inspired individuals to utilize this case as something far more symbolic. By wanting to see and share Shaver’s video, there seemed to be a greater purpose for this positive feedback – that being, highlighting the disadvantages that a white
bodied individual must experience when they go through this type of trauma. This does not seem to be the case with Castile given the media attention that his case (and other cases like his) received.

The inability to easily access a clear and unobstructed view of the incidents was also a strong reasoning amongst both cases here. Again, as we saw with Castile’s case study, many commenters had either wanted or had seen a closer perspective of the incident – one that shows Castile up close and personal post-shooting. The numerous questions around this alternative video speak to this larger desire for accessibility, even if it is not necessarily framed in an explicit manner. Commenters wanted to see more of the incident than what was given to them at the time. This is similar to Shaver’s case where commenters acknowledged the lack of visual accessibility that was being given out by producers of the video. Regardless of race, both set of commenters engaged in voyeuristic tendencies and displayed a level of curiosity around the incidents, with both voicing their desire to see and/or share more content. The difference here lies in reasoning. Again, with Shaver, commenters seemed to provide a sort of justification (e.g., bring an alternative narrative around police violence to the forefront); whereas Castile’s set of comments rarely if ever provided some sort of reasoning as to why they needed to see and disperse such content. In essence, when assessing positive commentary around accessibility, the element of race and specifically racial identities of the victims seemed to function in a way that was far more complex than expected.

3.1.2 Observation #2: Negative Feedback Around Having Access to Visuals

This takes us to the negative feedback presented by viewers around the accessibility of these videos. As stated previously, for the purpose of this study, I define “negative” feedback as a range of expressed emotions that include but are not limited to confusion, disgust, anger, and/or an overall feeling of disassociation towards the visual piece. In short, it refers to comments that either oppose or show no interest to the visual content being presented. In terms of assessing quantity,
Philando Castile’s commenters were more vocal when compared to those commenting under Daniel Shaver’s videos. Factors such as a difference in the overall quantity of comments may play a role in this comparison; however, as a researcher, I found that there was generally a greater emphasis on the negative repercussions of these videos within Philando Castile’s case. For the purpose of this analysis, I noted down three key themes that were presented in people’s negative responses. These themes include upholding one’s privacy, avoiding and/or reducing racial tension, and furthering desensitization. All three of these served as a foundational reasoning for people’s perspectives and seemed to be repetitive amongst the various videos used in this research study.

**Privacy and Discomfort**

The commentary around privacy and respecting one’s privacy was predominantly vocalized in Castile’s case, which is interesting considering the past literature around black bodies and trauma. As we see here, there is an obvious juxtaposition between what we have established around trauma, black bodies, and emotion and these particular comments. Previous academic literature emphasized the voyeuristic nature of witnessing black death and violence through the eyes of a white body. There have been many historical moments that have highlighted this such as in the 1890s, where acts of lynching were well-documented in pamphlets such as *The Red Record* (Gregory, 2019). During the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, photographs of African American protesters getting assaulted by police officers were dispersed to the public for consumption (ibid). Based on the influx of visual content paired with what has been pointed out by scholars, it would be fair to assume that our continual streaming of these videos would translate into an acknowledgement of our interest; however, this is not the case in this research study. The following two comments briefly demonstrate this point.
Commenter 1923 of NBC (Castile): “I wish these videos could be kept off the internet. Guilty or not, everyone involved deserves privacy”

Commenter 450 of Fox News (Castile): “Plz stop showing this...Let the man RIP [rest in peace]”

Commenters 1923 and 450’s messages are two of the more explicit comments highlighting this desire for privacy. The nature of both comments depicts an inherent level of emotional discomfort around this video, although neither necessarily state their stance around this case or the issue of police brutality as a whole. Both also fail to provide a particular reasoning behind their disdain for the material; the closest reasoning that we do get is from Commenter 450, who implicitly uses the dignity of the victim to justify their stance. This is an interesting point here that Commenter 450 hints at when it comes to this relationship between privacy and one’s dignity. Richardson makes a great point in her piece around the irony that exists between police-operated surveillance and the humanization of black bodies, which I think is also perfectly reflective here. She states, “bearing witness while black is...an act that is borne of a desire to be seen as human. Body cams can dehumanize, in that they rob everyday people of privacy” (2020, p. 180). Although she is specifically referencing the initial act of filming, I think this point here encompasses the nature of Commenters 1923 and 450’s arguments. There is an irony here between dispersing such visual content to create affect and action (e.g., protests, etc.) and respecting the dignity of Castile in his final vulnerable moment (Moore and Singh, 2020; Morrison, 2017).

When further assessing the two messages, there is also a distinction that should be made when it comes to the terms used in both of these comments. While Commenter 450 singles out the privacy of Castile (“the man”), Commenter 1923 uses the wording “everyone involved”. By stating “everyone involved”, Commenter 1923 is not necessarily singling out one person or one
side in this incident (unlike Commenter 450). In terms of intention, I as a researcher cannot confidently determine if Commenter 1923 is actively including officer Yanez’s privacy in their comment, however, it could be argued that they are also aware of his privacy as well and attempting to not single out one side. This is relevant because it shows that there are consumers here who are demonstrating a level of empathy towards both parties involved in the incident. Consequently, this brings up many additional questions around how individuals view and understand both characters.  

Other reasons provided by some viewers highlight aspects such as the timing of the video release as well as the repetition of it. To provide some clarification, the dashboard camera footage was released a year after the incident had occurred and post-verdict. At the time of the incident in 2016, police did not release the footage, claiming that it was due to the ongoing investigation that was taking place.

Commenter 751 of NBC (Castile): “There is nothing in this video that proves anything and to plaster this video all over social media after he was found not guilty is an insult to the family affected by his actions”

Commenter 565 of Fox News (Castile): “This is just unnecessary to be posting this especially after all of the negativity outcome the family of this is still alive and I’m sure they’re hurting due to things like this it’s awful this happened I can’t imagine having this happen to anyone”

Commenter 1941 of NBC (Castile): “This should be used as evidence but taken of [off] the web. How terrible for the family to have to keep reliving this horror”

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20 This will be explored in the following chapter, which looks at the affective relationships formed between viewers, the viewed, and the social context

21 Other reasons for releasing footage at a later time also includes political motivations, as exemplified in the Laquan McDonald case in 2014 (Guarino, 2015; Richardson, 2014)
Commenter 525 of Fox News (Castile): “I wish the media would just stop rehashing this and let it go it’s over it’s done a man lost his life for no reason and a cop got away with murder. Let It Go another case of injustice”

Commenter 1840 of NBC (Castile): “Why would anybody want to relieve this atrocity! No thanks! Nothing entertaining about this!”

These comments display a level of distress around this video and reflect the further trauma and consequences that can emerge from the dispersal of this type of visual content. Here we see several different yet related things being brought to light. The central idea here is the level of discomfort that is produced through reliving the experience a year after the incident. All five of the sampled commenters indicated in some manner the influence of timing and repetition when denouncing the productivity and effect of this footage. Unlike in the cases of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, where the footage was used to commence the process of legal justice following protests, Commenters 751, 565, and 1941 touched on the detrimental impact that these public videos would have on Castile’s family knowing that legal justice was not reached against Officer Yanez (Eligon, Oppel Jr., Mervosh, 2020; Morrison, 2020). Commenter 751’s comment specifically links their plea for privacy with the heavy emotional nature of this content. This is exemplified by how they choose to describe the event (“reliving this horror”). The term horror exudes a deeper sense of distress and disgust as compared to using a more neutral term such as “incident” or “event”.

Additionally, Commenters 751, 565, and 1941 acknowledged the pain that Castile’s family will experience from having to visually relive the incident that killed their loved one. Commenter 525’s sombre comment targeted the media for “rehashing” the incident at this time. Their reference to “another man” losing his life and “another case of injustice” displays a level of frustration and possibly exhaustion towards the normalized experience of police brutality. Finally,
Commenter 1840’s comment also implicitly targets the media while denouncing the footage on social media ("nothing entertaining about this"). Their use of the term *entertaining* is also an interesting point of analysis. From the position of Commenter 1840, there seems to be no difference between entertainment and simply witnessing an incident of police brutality. By utilizing this word as opposed to other terms, there is a dual effect here. On one hand, it is assuming that as viewers, we are witnessing this video not as passive bystanders but rather as active spectators with an objective to find entertainment. On the other hand, it is also assuming that the production and release of such content is simply for the purpose of entertainment (Hook, 2013; Posel and Gupta, 2009).

In terms of privacy and discomfort, Commenters 751, 565, and 1941 focused on the pain experienced by family members and possibly community members, while Commenters 525 and 1840 were a little more general in terms of who’s privacy should be respected and who this discomfort affects. Commenter 1840’s use of the word “anybody” was a particular point of interest for me as a researcher. The term *anybody* assumes that all those who are watching the video will experience a level of discomfort or trauma from the nature of what is happening. It also takes up this assumption that there is a moral imperative to express a certain type of emotional reaction. In this case, if one is not horrified or disgusted, there is a presumption that they are then a racist and/or a horrible human being (DiAngelo, 2018).

With that being said, there is an additional level of violence that is perpetuated here for those who can relate to this experience. Although these visual pieces allow for non-community and/or non-family members to understand and affectively respond to the realities of being a black body in America (e.g., the George Floyd case), it can also create further trauma for family and community members. Gregory (2019) states that there is an added level of violence that stems
from these pervasive videos and “they inflict a unique harm on viewers, particularly African Americans…This recognition becomes a form of violence…and even more so when justice is denied”. When one is able to see themselves or their loved ones as the victim, who later receives no justice within the court of law, the level of pain is further amplified. In the case of Philando Castile and these specific comments, we see that connection being made through the acknowledgement of pain that is and will be experienced by family and community members.

To briefly summarize this section, it is evident that there was a general theme associated with this notion of respecting one’s privacy. In almost all of the comments, there was either an explicit reference to discomfort or at least an implicit underlying tone of it. In terms of the discomfort, many commenters touched on the counterproductivity that stems from sharing the dashcam footage. As we saw, there could be a plethora of reasons as to why individuals oppose the dispersal of these videos. Elements including timing and repetition/over-access to such material created a negative response for commenters. At this point in time when the video was released, there was an inability for individuals to create legal accountability and by simply replaying these videos, there seemed to be no sense of importance or reasoning aside from creating discomfort or perpetuating additional violence towards family and community members (Gregory, 2019). There was also an established level of respect that wanted to be given to the victim and his dignity. As witnessed in present day society, often times black bodies particularly black bodies experiencing police violence are remembered for their last moments of life and that is exacerbated by the reproduction and viral nature of these videos. By denouncing the spread of such content, individuals could be advocating for a understanding of these individuals aside from just that moment.

Creating (Racial) Tension within the Nation
Another sub-theme that emerged within the overall number of negative comments was the argument around creating further tension and distress within the United States. This section was one of the most expressive set of comments. Comments here were far more explicit in tone and linked to this aspect of race. Given the context of time and geographical space, a reason for this may be linked to the larger argument transpiring around the United States. Historically, the division of white and black bodies in the United States has been rigid both in its definition and enforcement (Ahmed, 2015; p. 53; Bloch, Taylor and Martinez, 2020; Omi and Winant, 2014, p. 60). With this division in place, there have been many discussions around the existence of racism within American society and its larger institutions such as the police force (Figueroa, 2020; Gramlich, 2019; Graziano, Shuck, and Martin, 2010; LeCount, 2017; Sigelman, Welch, Bledsoe, and Combs, 1997; Weitzer and Tuch, 1999). For temporal context, there had already been a number of cases of police violence against African American individuals, as well as numerous protests and demonstrations, such as the Ferguson unrest, and the NFL National Anthem protest conducted by Colin Kaepernick and Eric Reid (Hsu, 2018; Yeboah, 2016). The release of this footage was positioned within an environment that was already at odds with this social and racial reality.

All of the comments here connect to race and the racial divide within the United States in one capacity or another. The following comments are a small sample of the comments that relate to this topic.

Commenter 315 of USA Today (Castile): “Little late on posting this video usa today trying to race bait & trigger people much?”

22 Note: The racial climate in 2016 was different than what is being experienced now in 2020/2021.
Commenter 2143 of NBC (Castile): “How about you stop sharing this stuff to keep dividing us...you guys want people rioting in the street...you are disgusting”

Commenter 955 of USA Today (Castile): “Way to go USA Today!!! As usual you show what you want to cause outrage amongst us...”

As I analyze all three comments here, again, there is a clear tone of anger that resonates from these comments. The use of multiple exclamation marks (Commenter 955) and words such as “you are disgusting” and “trigger” all display a level of irritation amongst commenters. All three of these comments are also linked to race and the racial tensions that exist within the United States.

Commenter 315’s post accuses the news outlet USA Today of “race baiting”. Race baiting refers to “the act of intentionally encouraging racism or anger about issues relating to race, often to get a political advantage” (Cambridge University Press, 2020). The nature of this comment is difficult to assess due to its conflicting nature. On one hand, the accusation of race baiting parallels with what LeCount would call denial or minimization of racism and racial discrimination (2017). While on the other hand, the insertion of “triggering people” may assume that there is further damage coming from this late release (as proposed by other commenters from the previous sub-theme). Either way the undertones of Commenter 315’s post indicates a clear objective of avoiding racial tensions amongst Americans.

While Commenter 315’s comment was more complex, Commenters 2143 and 955’s responses were a bit easier to divulge. The nature of both comments was undeniably minimizing the larger issue at hand (racism) in order to obtain calmness amongst civilians. Commenter 2143’s references to division and riots clearly indicate a relationship between this particular post and the larger racial tensions that are existent within America. From the perspective of Commenter 2143, it seems as if the dispersal of this footage and the following possible riots are what creates division rather than
the issue of police brutality itself; at no point do they mention racial issues within the United States. Commenter 955’s comment embodies the same idea as Commenter 2143’s in the sense that again they are pointing out their disdain for the outrage that may stem from this footage. Unlike Commenter 2143, however, Commenter 955 does not explicitly refer to elements such as riots and division, but rather keeps it at just outrage.

All three commenters while presenting their thoughts, inadvertently depict an assumption around being in a post-racial era and/or society. The term “post-racial” refers to a stage in which racial prejudice is no longer a socially existent issue (Hollinger, 2011). In the context of American society, the term post-racial era and/or post-racial society became a prominent buzzword following the election of America’s first African American President, Barack Obama (Bhopal, 2018, p. 8; Dawson and Bobo, 2009; DiAngelo, 2018). The social impact of Barack Obama’s presidency served as beacon of hope for many racialized individuals, while also serving as an argumentative tool used to establish the non-existence of racism within America (Dawson and Bobo, 2009; Hollinger, 2011). Of course, this notion of living within a post-racial society in America is notably a myth, however, it has not stopped individuals from centering their arguments around this idea (Dawson and Bobo, 2009; Hannah-Jones, 2016). This subtheme of creating racial tension and the comments presented under it all correspond to this illusion around living within a post-racial era. For example, in Commenter 2143’s post, they argue that this content would create “division”. This argument of creating division can only be situated within a larger context in which every citizen is the same (i.e., a post-racial state). However, that is not the case – there are still divisions and inequities that exist based on race. By fostering visual evidence that counters this idea of unity and non-existent racism, it triggers a response that can only be characterized as sheer denial.
This idea of denial was also evident in one’s argument around racially manipulating visual footage. Similar to Commenter 315’s accusation of race baiting, others, such as Commenter 723 of NBC (Castile) have claimed that the media is simply moulding these cases to establish an overtly racial and anti-policing rhetoric. Commenter 723’s post under Castile’s case study is as follows: “Just as every instance like this that the liberal media spins into a racist act by the police, all the guy had to do is keep his hands still and not reach for the firearm like the officer asked 3 times”. Not only does Commenter 723 blame the media for engaging in race baiting (similar to Commenter 315’s comment), but they are also denying the existence of racism within this and other incidences of police violence (again, tying back to this conception of a post-racial society). By focusing on the wrongful actions of the victim, Commenter 723’s comment exhibits their adoption of living in a post-racial society via their denial of systematic and institutionalized racism (LeCount, 2017; Weitzer and Tuch, 1999).

This argument was not just limited to Castile’s case study. In fact, another commenter within Shaver’s case study acknowledged the same argument by stating “The media wants you to believe this is a common occurrence, however it makes up an EXTREMELY small amount of police interactions”23. Although, there was no mention of race and racial tension within this comment, the intent behind this quote suggests at least a partial display of denial while suggesting that this footage is an abnormal experience. The positioning of this commenter based on the tone and words of this statement suggests that the individual is situated within a position of privilege in terms of their particular experiences24. We see that this viewer is trying to advocate for an alternative pro-policing narrative that would involve less visibility on this type of content (i.e., the body-worn

23 Commenter 312 of AZ Central (Shaver)
24 Refer to Appendix A for more information about commenters’ characteristics based on their public social media profiles.
camera footage of the incident). As a researcher, this was particularly interesting because it was not on par with some of the earlier comments that I saw from individuals examining Shaver’s video. Here, we saw a clear disassociation between the element of race and the creation of tension. Shaver, being a descendent of European ancestors, does not necessarily differ from any other racially privileged person. With that being said, there still seemed to be a distance created by the viewer between themselves and Shaver; and rather than utilizing Shaver’s skin colour to create that sentiment, it was through the argument of supporting police officers (i.e., Shaver’s skin colour was not the basis for the commenter’s lack of empathy towards him). We will see this point being made again when examining people’s relationship to the social issue of police violence.

In essence, these comments within this subsection provide a glimpse into a generally common sub-theme found in this study. When observing Castile’s comments, race seemed to be a predominant variable in people’s reasonings behind their dismay for these videos. Evidently, some commenters were more explicit in expressing their sentiments around race and causing tensions within the nation (e.g., race baiting, riots, etc.), while others were implicit in terms of how they referenced race. In many cases, race does play a role here and we see that through some of the tactics used by commenters (e.g., defensiveness, denial of racism, etc.). However, this subsection is also far more complex than just blaming it on race. The juxtaposition we saw with Shaver’s comment should be noted. In this case, Shaver’s position as a European-descendent or white body was not a factor in this particular trend. Rather, Shaver’s position as an “opposition” to the police seemed to be at play. To expand on this, these findings demonstrate the larger connection that needs to be made between race, public tension and hostility, and one’s loyalty towards policing institutions.

*Desensitization*
The final subsection that will be examined in relation to negative feedback relates to the argument around desensitization. As I am writing this at a time where the public has mourned the latest set of African Americans to be killed via police brutality – Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, the question around the effects of viral videos in relation to desensitization has been making the waves amongst various writers, journalists, and racial equality advocates. In a Vox article conducted by Sara Morrison, visual editor Kainaz Amaria discusses this idea of oversaturation and how it causes “psychic numbing” (2020). Psychic numbing is the process in which there is an overflow of videos that consequently affects people’s level of interest and commitment; the basic principle here is that “as numbers increase, ‘[one’s] empathy… willingness to help, reliably decreases’” (ibid). With this in mind, there were several individuals in this study that expressed this idea through their comments.

Commenter 344 of NBC (Castile) perfectly encompassed Amaria’s point by stating, “Repeated viewings of things like this desensitize the public to the murders of innocent people, until they become background noise and common place. In this case, I think part of the problem is how many websites like Facebook have Auto-play videos, so it begins without giving you time to decide for yourself if you are prepared to view it...”. This comment divulges on several points in relation to desensitization. Not only does Commenter 344 talk about how repeated viewings of police brutality curate desensitized viewers, but they also make a connection to third parties and corporations. In the quote, there is a specific call out towards Facebook and the structuring of social media as a whole in regard to allowing for and perpetuating oversaturation. The use of auto-play is a significant factor here in terms of fostering more views and creating a space where individuals can normalize a traumatic event such as this one. Similar to the oversaturation of Rodney King’s video on television news stations, the deaths of African American men in present
day have been formatted in a way that is digestible and repetitive for current day consumers; as Commenter 344 points out, this overexposure creates desensitization and turns traumatic experiences into “background noise”.

In the case of Daniel Shaver, where we typically do not see visual footage of white bodies in physical pain or experiencing death, it could be argued that this notion of desensitization is not a thing. How can it be? With a lack of public cases to be accessed, it almost seems impossible to be overly saturated with such content. That being said, there were a few comments provided by viewers that provided a different perspective. Commenter 7 of AZ Central (Shaver) talked about how they wanted to move on from the overly repetitive news coverage of Shaver’s death (“AZ Central and 12 News going to run this story over and over again and again. It happened, now let’s move on”). Additionally, Commenter 110 of Fox 10 Phoenix followed that same sentiment in terms having no interest in witnessing the footage.

Commenter 10 of Fox 10 Phoenix (Shaver): “I’m sorry, but I have no wish to see this. All we need is to become even more desensitized to violence. Our officers are out here, day and night, serving and protecting. I didn’t sign up for it, therefore I don’t want to see it. The horrible things officers see and have to do, is something we’ll never understand...”

Commenter 10’s post has similar elements of what was seen in Commenter 7 (Shaver) and Commenter 344 (Castile)’s respective posts. In many ways Commenter 10’s comment embodies the distant desensitization approach that was conveyed by Commenter 7; this is made clear in the very first phrase of the comment (“I’m sorry, but I have no wish to see this”). Commenter 10 is clearly trying to place a sense of distance between themselves and the visual. They then go on to discuss the effect of this video – similarly to Commenter 344. However, the subject matter at hand is not the death of Shaver, but rather the violence that police officers must experience. As Morrison
puts it, these videos have cultural currency and the more people watch, the greater power it has on people’s perceptions (2017, p. 793; Meares, Tyler, and Gardener, 2015). In this case, Commenter 10 implicitly acknowledges this point by hinting at the “false” perceptions around policing that may stem from viewing the video (e.g., insinuating that there is an alternative pro-policing narrative).

There is a different sentiment being expressed here by these two viewers when compared to comments under Castile’s case. With Castile’s case there was a general sense of numbness when it came to this idea of desensitization, whereas with Shaver’s case, the feeling of desensitization translated more into frustration and feeling “over it”. The reduction in empathy and interest were framed very differently between these two cases. Furthermore, given the long history between police violence and black bodies, there was far more emphasis around the racial element in Castile’s case study. This is contrasted with Daniel Shaver’s case where race was not necessarily at the forefront of the incident. In this case, there was still an element of desensitization that was argued by viewers. However, it was more centred around elements external to the victim and the particular incident.

When examining the negative responses towards the accessibility of such footage as a whole, there was a large scope in terms of how people reacted and the reasons for them. These were just a few of the main subthemes presented in the findings. Although Philando Castile’s case presented more “negative” commentary in terms of quantity, there was quite a bit of diversity when it came to the quality of the comments from both case studies. There could be many reasons for the differentiations, including that of race which was discussed here. In order to gauge a deeper analysis of this, it is important to examine the production and dispersal of the footage based on the two racially different cases.
3.2 The Production (and Censoring) of Visual Content: What are Viewers Seeing?

The production of these filmed incidents is an essential aspect in the overall discussion around its impact within society. Digital technologies, such as photos and videos have shifted the way individuals affectively respond and relate to content (Coleman, 2013; Feigenson and Spiesel, 2009). With the expansion of these technologies, it has become easier to produce, modify, and censor visual content (ibid). For the context of this research study, it was evident that there were stark differences between the videos depicting Shaver’s and Castile’s interactions with police (e.g., length of footage, angle, etc.). These technical elements play a role in how individuals interact with not only what is happening in the footage, but also how they engage with the people in them (i.e., the officers, the victims, etc.) (Sentilles, 2018; Sontag, 2003). Regardless of the social media platform (e.g., Twitter and/or Facebook), each video used in this research study was manipulated to some degree, and viewers on both platforms were equally vocal regarding this matter.25 With this in mind, this section will take the time to expand on some of these visual differences in greater detail, while also highlighting people’s perspectives.

3.2.1 The Length of the Footage

The length of the footage is something that has been a primary point of discussion. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, many individuals in Daniel Shaver’s case study were quick to point out the lack of content being displayed in the video posts made available. The comments mentioned earlier demonstrate an important idea here around the specific curation of timing and how that may foster censorship based on racial identity (Beutin, 2017; Butler, 2009; Richardson, 2017).

25 By “equal”, I am referring to the proportion of comments that highlighted and/or referenced the technical manipulations of the videos. Both platforms had an equal proportion of comments that touched on this subject matter.
2020). The following breakdown of the videos used in this case study will highlight these points in greater detail.

**Daniel Shaver’s Videos:**

**Table 1: Daniel Shaver’s Footage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Source</th>
<th>Length of Footage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twitter: Shaun King</td>
<td>5 minutes, 52 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter: Tim Black</td>
<td>59 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox 10 Phoenix</td>
<td>53 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AZ Central</td>
<td>1 minute, 46 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News 15</td>
<td>2 minutes, 52 seconds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When examining Shaver’s videos in terms of length, it is relatively clear that the length of the footage is substantially short as compared to the set of videos showing Philando Castile. Besides Shaun King’s clip posted on his Twitter page, the other videos are fairly condensed regarding time. King’s clip depicts the entirety or what we know as the entire depiction of the January 18th, 2016 interaction. The clip begins with Shaver and a female peer exiting a room in the hotel, it is at this point where Shaver begins his interaction with Mesa police officers. The clip ends with the officers attempting to enter the suite that was occupied by Shaver and his peer. Interestingly enough, Shaun King’s clip is one of two videos that actually display Shaver getting physically shot (this is out of all five available videos). The second video that depicted the fatal shot was from Tim Black’s Twitter page. Although it was much shorter than Shaun King’s post, Black’s video depicts Shaver getting shot relatively early in the video (by 0:21 seconds). The remainder of the 0:59 seconds
video depicts the follow up actions by the police officers – none of which included checking on Shaver’s body.

The three Facebook videos (ABC 15, Fox 10 Phoenix, and AZ Central) all had explicitly edited versions of the video. With Fox 10 Phoenix, the video footage only depicted the moments prior to Shaver’s interaction with the police officers. For the viewer, at no point do they ever witness Shaver coming out of the suite nor do they see what Shaver even looks like. As a researcher, this was particularly interesting to assess in terms of how censored this footage was. Here we see a news story entitled “Mesa Police Dept. Body Camera Video Released”, and yet we do not see anybody or anything in the clip, including the victim himself within this short 0:53 second clip. Again, we see the preservation of whiteness being applied to the curation of this video (i.e., we do not see the white body in questionable and/or vulnerable states) (Richardson, 2020).

This finding may also connect to the overall tone and branding of Fox News. Known for its conservative stance and counter-mainstream approach to journalism, Fox News has amassed a large following of like-minded viewers (Ackerman, 2001; Alterman, 2003; Collins, 2004; Morris, 2005). With a specific right-wing demographic, the dispersal of news content from Fox News will inevitably be tailored to fit the ideologies of their viewers – Daniel Shaver’s video post is no different. The shorter time lapse of this video paired with the lack of actual content displaying Shaver’s death (i.e., shows other moments external to the actual shooting) in the post aligns with the perceptions that Republicans and/or right-wing partisans hold around policing in the United States (Brown, 2017). Thus, by not actually seeing Officer Brailsford kill Daniel Shaver, viewers are able to interpret this BWC footage in a different context that still aligns with a heroic, pro-policing stance (Morrison, 2017).
In contrast, ABC News 15 and AZ Central’s respective footages both displayed different ways of editing and censoring as compared to Fox News 10 Phoenix. ABC News 15 and AZ Central’s respective footages displayed a level of censoring via editing in a different manner compared to Fox 10 Phoenix. Rather than simply showing the moments prior to the actual interaction, both sites choose to trim different sections of the video. With ABC News 15, the clip begins with Shaver already lying on the ground (i.e., viewers do not see the initial moment we are introduced to Shaver). After a momentary interaction between Brailsford and Shaver, where we hear Brailsford yelling out various instructions, the clip cuts out with Shaver getting up slightly from the ground with his hands up. It is at this moment we presumably understand that Shaver is about to get shot. The screen then cuts to black with nothing else being said or shown on our computer screens. AZ Central’s clip on the other hand, begins with a written warning (“Warning: Video Contain Graphic Footage). The video clearly contains a majority of the interaction between the police and Shaver. However, by the end of the footage (with ten seconds remaining), AZ Central chooses to not show the physical shooting itself. Rather, a caption comes up on the screen stating “Five shots are then fired by Officer Philip “Mitch” Brailsford”. With five seconds remaining, another caption pops up stating what the final verdict was in the case against Brailsford.

Although ABC 15 and AZ Central’s posts display more of the incident as compared to Fox 10 Phoenix, there is still a high degree of censorship, which in turn fails to provide a larger contextual understanding of the incident for viewers (Richardson, 2020). In this case, due to the insufficient context that was provided, viewers were able to construct their own narratives around the incidents (as witnessed in the comments section) (Crenshaw and Peller, 1992). Consequently, these interpretations play a large role in the video’s effectiveness (Beutin, 2017). The level of censorship displayed in this set of videos links back to prior discussions around the differential experiences
between the white and black body (Butler, 2009; Hook, 2013; Moore and Singh, 2020). Where Fox 10 Phoenix presented the officer in a holistic light by not displaying his actions in their post, ABC 15 and AZ Central’s posts maintain the purity of Daniel Shaver’s identity through the preservation of his physical body in the exact moment of his death.

Out of all five videos available for this particular case study, only two videos physically depicted the fatal moment where Shaver was shot. Interestingly enough, the sources that shared this were from two African American journalists and activists on Twitter. The remaining sources who are predominantly white news centres catering to the more mainstream public, chose to heavily censor their clips. Whether it was through simply depicting an introductory section (Fox News 10) or cutting out the actual shooting portion (AZ Central and ABC News 15), there is still a level of preservation around Shaver’s body visually. From the limited amount of time a viewer gets with these videos, the messaging around what we are seeing for the most part is clearly conveyed without ever seeing and/or hearing a gun shot.

Philando Castile’s Videos:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Source</th>
<th>Length of Footage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twitter: CBS</td>
<td>1 minute, 50 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter: Sky News</td>
<td>41 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox 10 Phoenix</td>
<td>10 minutes, 15 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>1 minute, 35 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>2 minutes, 31 seconds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The variety in length for Philando Castile’s footage is quite vast, with it ranging from 41 seconds to a little over 10 minutes. Similar to Shaver’s set of videos, the majority of videos depicting Castile’s death were relatively condensed and displayed the same scenes. Four out of the five videos (CBS, Sky News, USA Today, and NBC) all started their footage with a warning caption followed by the initial face to face interaction between Officer Yanez and Castile. The shooting itself takes places relatively early in each of these videos, with the remainder of the clips showing Officer Yanez in his final stance still holding the gun up to Castile (who we cannot see in the dashboard camera footage).

The only video where we do not see the actual shooting is in Sky News’ coverage, where they explicitly cut out the scene. Instead, the screen goes black following the lines “Don’t pull it out”. It is at this moment where viewers can assume that Officer Yanez fires the seven shots. The screen then cuts back to the scene with the subtitles “You just killed my boyfriend. He wasn’t reaching for it”. This decision to edit out this scene was particularly interesting because at no point do we as a viewer ever see Castile or his body, and thus we do not ever see it in a state of physical trauma. The removal of this scene has multiple effects here. For one, the fade to black here could help alleviate some of the trauma that may stem from visually seeing Yanez pull the trigger. The fade to black paired with our already curated understanding of this case is enough to know what will happen next. On the other hand, the fade to black can also initiate a sense of curiosity and/or confusion around the actions that followed that line (“Don’t pull it out”). Although it is fairly clear that Castile gets shot, the removal that scene allows for viewers to be confused about the situation at hand (i.e., did he pull it out or not? What happened next?) (Richardson, 2020). This in turn again leads to various interpretations of this particular narrative (Beutin, 2017; Crenshaw and Peller, 1992).
On the contrary to this depiction, there is Fox News 10’s coverage of the incident, which seems to do the opposite. While other outlets condense their respective footage, Fox 10 News shares the entire ten-minute narration of the incident. Rather than starting from the face-to-face interaction between Castile and Yanez, viewers see the entire preceding moments as Yanez follows Castile’s car for approximately 37 seconds. The shooting itself here takes places at around 1:40-1:45 of the clip, with the remaining 8:60-8:55 showing the aftermath of the incident (i.e., additional cops attending the scene, an ambulance arriving, cops attempting to do CPR). From an analytical perspective, the decision to leave in the aftermath of the incident seems quite political. Again, Fox News is fundamentally a conservative-based news organization that caters to republican viewers who often times hold a pro-policing perspective (Ackerman, 2001; Alterman, 2003; Brown, 2017; Collins, 2004; Morris, 2005). By placing a larger focus on the actions post-shooting (i.e., police officers attempting to do CPR, etc.) through time, Fox is attempting to shift the narrative around this incident in a way that best reflects the perspective of their demographic (Mills, 2017). In fact, in a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, it was found that approximately 79% of Republicans in the United States believed that police officers were doing “an excellent…job” of protecting people from crime; and about 75% of them stated that policing institutions around the country were doing “an excellent or good job” when it came to treating racialized groups equally (Brown, 2017). With this in mind, by emphasizing the “proactive” actions taken up by officers following the shooting of Philando Castile, Fox News is able to uphold the racial and policing narratives that viewers already possess.

When collectively analyzing the length of footage in relation to the production and censorship around depictions of police violence, it is clear that there a multitude of factors that influence what can be allowed to be seen. With the element of race, there is a clear notion of white fragility and
purity when it comes to how one frames the death of a white body, as seen with Shaver’s depictions or lack thereof. However, we also see the importance of news branding and narratives, and how that inner political agenda may influence the editing of such content. As witnessed within these two case studies, censorship and editing around content often relies on the ideologies and perspectives held by its main viewership. Often times, these clips are used to maintain the status quo regarding policing and racial narratives. Whether that is the protection of an institution or a white body, the ways in which news platforms censor and distribute video content is important to our understanding and relationship with this issue. As seen with the various videos, each version of the same incident can be quite different and can thus be interpreted differently.

3.2.2 The Angle and Proximity of the Footage

The perspective from which one films an event and/or incident can influence how a viewer understands that moment in time. As established in previous literature, there is a desire to establish objectivity within visual evidence and films in particular (Moore and Singh, 2018). The establishment of videotaping within policing institutions were fundamentally based around this notion of objectivity and accountability (Pagliarella, 2016; Taylor, 2016; Taylor and Lee, 2019; Walby, Louis, and Saulnier, 2019). However, much like the critiques presented by various scholars, the way in which we film and present such imagery may foster more questions and dilemmas rather than solutions (ibid). When examining the two sets of footage from these two cases, there are a number of similarities and differences that create relatively the same type of responses from both sets of viewers.

Both case studies utilize police-operated cameras to document the two events. In the case of Daniel Shaver, the angle of the footage stems from a body-worn camera. Based on what we can see from the footage, the camera looks to be positioned on the right side of the officer’s body or
gun. In this set of clips, the focus is specifically set on two things – the gun being used and the victim. Because the camera is placed so close to the gun, a larger portion of the space is occupied by that object, which in turn shifts our focus as viewers to that item. This was especially exemplified in some of the commentary provided by viewers (‘’...Why did this cop have such a high-powered gun in the first place?’’26, ‘’...I did notice he held his trigger finger in a straightforward position in this video’’27). Although the camera’s positioning here does not allow the observer to see much of the space or the person holding the gun for that matter, they are still able to pick up on some of the more obscure details and as we see in the comments, these factors have the ability to influence how viewers perceive the actors in the clip.

Another aspect of Shaver’s footage that is unique to his case study is his own presence in the footage. Given the proximity between the body-worn camera and Shaver, viewers were able to see a blurry-looking Shaver in a majority of the videos. By witnessing Shaver’s actions and emotional state in the video, individuals are able to feel a sense of connection to Shaver. There is also a sense of clarity around the incident that comes from seeing Shaver in the footage. Viewers are able to verify that Shaver’s actions are innocent by seeing them first-hand. Shaver’s presence in the footage will also become significant when analyzing commenters’ relationship to the victim. This relationship or advantage that is afforded to Shaver here is not necessarily given to Castile and his set of videos.

With Philando Castile’s footage, the video is taken from a dashboard camera placed in Officer Yanez’ car. The central aspect here when analyzing the dynamics of these videos is the element of distance. Unlike Shaver’s videos where there was a relatively close proximity between Shaver and

26 Commenter 261 of ABC 15 (Shaver)
27 Comment 106 of Fox 10 Phoenix (Shaver)
the camera, Castile’s videos are filmed at a further distance. There are several advantages and
disadvantages with this, and it is reflected in people’s observations. On one hand, this distanced
and unobstructed view allows individuals to get a sense of the external environment and the
background actions that were taking place at the time of the incident. A prominent aspect that
viewers acknowledged was the presence and actions of the second cop. Given the wider frame of
the dashboard camera, observers were able to point out that the second cop did not present the
same level of fear and aggression as Yanez (e.g., “Why did the other officer just back up and not
draw his weapon? Don’t you back up your partner? Isn’t that telling?”28).

By having a wider angle with the dashboard camera at a distance, viewers were able to notice
these secondary actions and utilize it in their interpretation and understanding of the incident. This
ties back to what Feigenson and Spiesel discuss in their chapter entitled “The Rhetoric of the Real:
Videotape as Evidence”. In their analysis of a case study, they examine the impact of visual
techniques, such as camera angles, and the effect these techniques have on people’s perceptions of
an event (2009). The point of view that a camera, specifically a dashboard camera provides is
unique in the sense that it is both internal and external to the event. Its physical steadiness and
placement present an external quality as if it is presenting an almost “godlike view” (ibid, p. 40).
The duality between the physical external distance from the event (as compared to a BWC) and its
presentation of every internal aspect of the event allows viewers to see a first-person point of view,
with access to every detail and element in that setting (ibid, p. 40-42). In the case of Philando
Castile, viewers were able to have that access and see the environmental setting and analyze the
other details outside of the one-on-one interaction between Officer Yanez and Castile. These

28 Commenter 575 of USA Today (Castile)
elements helped capture an alternative narrative that viewers seemed to focus in on (i.e., whether Castile was dangerous or not based on the second officer’s actions, etc.).

With that being said, this distance also presents many challenges when analyzing Philando Castile’s case. Given the placement of the camera, individuals are unable to actually witness the interaction between Yanez and Castile in great detail. In fact, at no point in the video do we ever see Castile, Castile’s partner, or the young child during the incident. The lack of Castile’s presence in the video creates many obstacles for viewers who are attempting to formulate an opinion around this incident. Many are still left in a state of confusion as there was no sort of concrete response around whether or not Castile had taken his gun out or not after being instructed not to. Although viewers hear Castile stating that he is not pulling it out, they are not necessarily satisfied (“Well we do not have the advantage of seeing what the cop saw. He may have over reacted. Can’t say if the driver was reaching, continuing to reach...wish we could see. It would clear up a lot!”). “From the dashboard cam in Officer Yanez’s car, you are only able to see what happens on the outside. ONLY Officer Yanez and the deceased’s girlfriend know what happened on the inside”). The sheer lack of visual documentation creates further confusion and debates amongst commenters. This in turn may foster differing opinions that influence how viewers choose to engage and connect with those who experience police violence.

3.3 Summary

In conclusion, as witnessed in this chapter, there is a great deal of importance that is placed on visual accessibility in relation to the overall understanding of race and affective response. The

29 Note: NBC’s post does display an old photo of Castile at the very end of their video. This is the only time viewers get to see what Castile actually looks like within the span of this video.
30 Commenter 496 of Fox News (Castile)
31 Commenter 765 of Fox News (Castile)
central takeaway that emerges from this chapter is in relation to the complex relationship that is formed between the viewer and the visual. As witnessed through various sections, there is a clear contrast between the production of this type of content and the reactions it produces. From a production standpoint, the visual presentations of both deaths reinforce what previous literature has shown us (i.e., the preservation of the white body/identity versus the degradation of the black body and its entertainment value). However, given the structure of our society as one that is centered around viewership and the synoptical gaze, the reactions these videos produce does not seem to align with what has been historically noted down. Again, there is also an inclusion of race and racial tactics being used in this different finding (i.e., white claims of racial disadvantage). In essence, people’s affective responses were not monolithic by any means. With this in mind, it is important to keep these findings in mind and look at how these responses develop when looking at other components and relationships within this research study.
Chapter 4: Relationality, Race, & Affect: Understanding the Relationship Between the Viewer, the Viewed, and the Social Context

“When I think of the torture and murder of George Floyd at the knee of a White police officer, I feel morally wounded” (Barbot, 2020, p. 1253).

In the previous chapter, I acknowledged the visual and digital techniques that were utilized to impact the relationship between the viewer and the content. The synoptical experience of watching these types of videos can have an emotional effect on individuals. Relationships can be formed between the viewer, the viewed, and the larger context. These relationships can be formed instinctually through our own emotional responses and interpretations (Barbot, 2020; Moore and Singh, 2018; Sontag, 2003; Woolf, 1938). As referenced in the first chapter of this thesis, I contextualize these emotional reactions and interpretations in a manner that coincides with what I define as “affective responses”.32 The specific points of interest identified by individuals (i.e., what stands out to them? What do they reference?), the standpoints they take, and the words that they use to articulate their thoughts (i.e., the aggressiveness and/or passiveness of their language) are all indicative of an intense force or reaction that they subconsciously and/or consciously experience when looking at these individuals on screen. The depths of these emotions as a consequence of visual evidence connect back to this formation of a relationship between the viewer and the viewed.

With this in mind, this chapter expands on the types of relationships that are formed between the viewer and the contextual elements of these videos (i.e., the people/“characters”, the space and/or context). At its core, this chapter aims to show how one’s application of racial tropes and/or

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32 I utilize Wyer, Clore, and Isbell’s piece as well as Reeser and Gottzén’s conceptualization of affect to curate this understanding of what an “affective response” looks like in this context. This is further discussed in Chapter 1.
stereotypes influence our ability to empathize with victims and the social issue at large (police violence). In order to better demonstrate this argument, this chapter will be divided into two sections.

The first section of this chapter will address the relationship formed between the viewer and the victims in the videos. The discussions that will be take place center around how race and racial stereotypes influence people’s perceptions around the “deserving and/or undeserving” victim (Beutin, 2017). By examining the language used by commenters, this section will unpack the various narratives that have been created by viewers based on race, racial stereotypes, and racial hierarchy (e.g., themes of criminality, career-man, fatherhood). The key point of this section is to understand how comparatively, there are differences between how we read white and black bodies during these moments of trauma. This is then followed up by the second subsection, which looks at viewers’ relationship with the social issue of police violence and racism. The discussions here center around how we acknowledge and/or deny the existence of racism, while also examining how these perspectives differ based on our own racial positioning and/or standpoint (i.e., white experience, black experience). In providing a deeper analysis of how individuals perceive these videos and this larger social issue, it will be shown that one’s perceptions around these videos and police violence at large are incredibly complex and may be greatly influenced by their own racial positioning and understanding around race and racial experiences.

Although both sections of this chapter (the relationship to the victim, and the relationship with the social issue) may seem distinct and possibly disassociated, the ways in which we view these two aspects are actually deeply intertwined. By providing the framework around how individuals view these victims based on their own narrative creation, it can greatly influence how they understand the actual trauma they are watching (e.g., if an individual reads a victim as undeserving,
it may enable them to view these cases differently – i.e., as something other than an issue of racism). Although the commentary that will be referenced between the two sections stem from different commenters, the essence of this larger discussion will highlight the overall connection that exists between race, affect, and relationality.

4.1 The Relationship Between the Observer and the Observed: Viewers’ Relationship to the Victims

In the first chapter of this thesis, I quoted Lyndsey P. Beutin when she asks, “what happens if the depicted victim is read as ‘not deserving’?” (2017, p. 12). The question she poses in her piece is both critical and serves as an insightful starting point for a larger discussion around relatability and empathy. If visual evidence is often regarded as naturally objective and neutral in its stance, how does it curate such diverse interpretations around what and who we are viewing? It is with this thought in mind that I set out to discuss the various ways in which individuals interpreted the content they were consuming. Specifically, this first section will focus on how viewers chose to engage with both Shaver and Castile as individuals.

This relationship between the observer and the observed is supposed to be an important aspect in regard to the effectiveness of visual evidence. There is a clear sense of distance between the viewer and what they are viewing, however, the vividness and “reality-like” imagery is meant to narrow down this distance and allow viewers to become “close” to what they are viewing; thus, allowing us to exude some sort of empathetic response. For example, in the case of domestic violence, images of abused individuals are supposed to help us understand the pain of gender-based violence, while simultaneously validating their experiences (Moore and Singh, 2018). The visual “closeness” acts on us and forces us to act. This responsive sense of connection via imagery to those who experience trauma is not a new concept and is replicated in this research study through
the element of language. The language that is presented by commenters highlights the ever-
complex relationship between viewers and the viewed. In this context, language serves as a looking
glass into how race has been constructed as a visual frame for several observers – even if they are
not explicitly acknowledging race in their commentary (Beutin, 2017; Mitchell, 2012). The
following discussion will explore this thought in greater detail by comparatively analyzing some
of the common patterns and themes that emerged from this dataset.

4.1.1. Positive Character Creation and Empathetic Language

“The Poor Kid” Narrative: Identifying the Victim as Innocent

The “poor kid” narrative encompasses two interrelated sub-nodes or subthemes that emerged
from analyzing commenters’ use of language: references to victimhood and explicit comparisons
to a child and/or child-like behaviour. This larger subtheme involved categorizing comments that
described victims in a state of vulnerability; words like “innocence”, “poor [man, person, etc.]”,
“harmless”, “kid”, etc. were all commonly referenced when describing the purity and innocent
demeanour of the victims. The following discussion will compare how both Shaver and Castile fit
into this category from the perspective of the viewers.

Identifying Philando Castile as” Innocent”

In terms of quantity, the number of comments that referenced the innocence of the victims
were essentially equal between the two cases (Shaver: 31 comments versus Castile: 32 comments).
Shaver’s 31 comments about his innocence make up approximately 72% of his overall positive
feedback and approximately 44% of the overall commentary describing him.33 For Castile, these
32 comments make up approximately 55% of his overall positive feedback and approximately

33 Shaver’s overall total for positive commentary (these are comments that positively describe Shaver) was 43
comments. The total number of comments describing Shaver in general was 70 comments.
28.5% of his overall commentary describing him. Again, as stated earlier, the most commonly used adjectives amongst both cases included “innocent”, “poor”, and “harmless”. Typically, these terms have various, sometimes contrasting interpretations. For one, they could be read as sympathetic and exude a level of emotional empathy. On the other hand, they can be used as terms to further patronize, insult, and/or cause offence to others (i.e., using the term to establish a superior/inferior relationship between oneself and the individual they are talking to or about). Given the context and general tone in which these terms were used, it could be argued that the application of these terms mainly followed the former. When it came to the application of these terms in this case, the common reasons and/or actions that were referenced in their justifications differed amongst individuals. In the case of Philando Castile, more commenters referenced Castile’s verbal honesty and communication. The following sample of comments exhibit this trend:

Commenter 73 of NBC (Castile): “Jesus, that is disgusting. The man shot was being respectful and telling him the truth about the weapon and this cop totally overreacted…”

Commenter 570 of USA Today (Castile): “Wow talk about serious over reaction to what sounded like a harmless man who was being honest with the police”

Commenter 831 of USA Today (Castile): “Jesus Christ that is terrible. That poor man lost his life because a police officer reacted before thinking. The man told the officer he had a firearm and kept telling the officer he was not pulling it out. Sad”

34 Castile’s overall total for positive commentary (these are comments that positively describe Castile) was 58 comments. The total number of comments describing Castile in general was 112 comments.
35 I come to this conclusion given the context and additional points made in the commentary (i.e., comparing the application of the term with the general language used in the commentary) as well as the underlying demeanour and tone expressed by the individual (i.e., does the follow-up language exude a sense of empathy or judgement?)
Commenter 679 of USA Today (Castile): \textit{“Insane. Can’t believe the cop did this to that poor man. He even said I’m not pulling it out. Heartbreaking”}

Castile’s honest communication, which seems to be a point of interest amongst commenters, resembles an analogy expressed by Sara Ahmed. Ahmed uses the analogy of a bear and a child to explain a fear-based relationship that is often seen in relationships between African Americans and police officers (2015, p. 7). In it, she states, “this bear makes an impression and leaves an impression” (ibid). Given the historical context of police violence, specifically police violence inflicted on black bodies, there seems to be specific lessons that are adopted by this racial community in their interactions with police officers (e.g., be polite, stay calm and remain in control, use your words carefully, exude non-threatening body language) (Lund, 2015). Much like the “bear”, police officers have not only made an impression on specific victims of police brutality but have left an impression on an entire community. In the context of Philando Castile, his honesty and communication that was widely praised by commenters was simply a part of the cultural rules he had to follow as African American man operating in a Eurocentric society (ibid; Du Bois, 1903; Smith, 2000). The emotional response towards Castile’s honesty exudes raw sympathy. The utilization of the term “poor” paired with reasons centered around a core value such as honesty further heightens and legitimizes the innocence of Castile in this case. We are compassionate towards him because we positively value his transparency (and that is clearly exemplified with this set of comments).

Now when contrasting the affirmative responses towards Castile, it is almost always contextualized within this juxtaposition between Castile himself and Officer Yanez. Not only are viewers validating Castile’s innocence here, but they are also using language to comparatively problematize the police officer and his actions (e.g., references to Officer Yanez overreacting).
This contrast between both men mirrors a portion of Ahmed’s discussion around the culture of compensation. In it, she reflects on the relations of innocence and guilt within injuries and how pain becomes transformed into this quantifiable basis for compensation (2015). Of course, with unequal power dynamics between races, the accessibility to such entitlement is different for each person (ibid). Nonetheless, the abstract point I am trying to make here is centred around the dichotomy between innocence and guilt that Ahmed refers to in relation to empathy (emotional compensation). For Castile to be viewed as innocent and gain one’s emotional compensation, there has to be a clear guilty actor who is present on film. In this case, viewers witnessed Yanez’s questionable actions both visually and auditorily, and thus it is easier for Castile to be seen as a victim in this larger narrative of injury and victimhood. This juxtaposition between guilty and innocent characters will also be explored in Shaver’s case study as well.

The final point of analysis here with Castile’s case study revolves around what seems to be missing within this data set. Although, commenters acknowledged the inappropriate nature of the officer’s actions, the comments themselves fail to capture the racial complexities of the incident. At no point here do they broaden out this conversation to include the historical and racial context of this incident (i.e., they do not include previous examples of similar incidents, they do not refer to racial profiling, etc.). The lack of context here simplifies this incident and becomes a new constructed narrative, disassociated from any sort of discussion around race (Crenshaw and Peller, 1992). In this newly created narrative, Castile is framed as an innocent man, with no reference to his position as an innocent black man. The term black is an incredibly important signifier here. The term black is not solely a racial description or label, but rather it is a figurative term that evokes certain narratives and/or stereotypes, often not associated with a term like “innocent”, which in itself signifies its own set of representations (Derrida, 1978; Guillemette and Cossette, n.d.;
Sontag, 1977). The disappearance of Castile’s position as a black man here when looking at this particular narrative of innocence may be a by-product of racial minimization as discussed in LeCount’s work or racial denial that is discussed by bell hooks (LeCount, 2017; hooks, 1996). With that being said, this finding here serves as an interesting point of analysis and will be re-examined in the latter section of this chapter.

**Identifying Daniel Shaver as “Innocent”**

When examining Shaver’s case study, there are several overlapping trends that emerge within this larger subtheme. First off, the juxtaposition between good and bad characters in relation to the curation of this “innocence” narrative is also existent with Shaver’s case (e.g., “The poor guy was being compliant and begging for his life...This was incompetence by an overzealous cop”). Again, we see an emotional compensation awarded to Shaver within this larger context of good vs. bad (i.e., Shaver as the poor guy vs. the bad, overzealous cop) (Ahmed, 2015). However, unlike Castile’s case study, which was focused on the victim’s actions and verbal transparency, Shaver’s emotional conviction is what serves as the point of interest here. Viewers were more captivated by the visual and auditory display of emotions conveyed by Shaver in the video. When connecting this to the previous section on visual accessibility, it would make sense that viewers resonated with Shaver’s physical displays of emotions because viewers were able to partially see them unlike with Castile. For example, viewers could witness Shaver’s passivity when he is on his knees. His level of fear exuded through his body language as he is attempting to crawl forward is experienced by spectators. In this case, visually seeing Shaver’s body and emotional display served as a testimony

36 Commenter 166 of AZ Central (Shaver).
37 It is important to note that there is visual footage of Castile post-incident taken by his partner where viewers are able to see Castile’s physical body. However, for the purpose of this research study, I am only focusing on the dash camera footage, which does not capture Castile’s physical presence.
that viewers were able to connect with thanks in part to the BWCs (ibid). With that being said, it is also important to note that BWCs do not always provide a clear depiction of what is occurring (as noted in the previous chapter on visual accessibility) and what viewers may resonate with may be based on a certain fragment of the video clip (Balko, 2018; Moore and Singh, 2018; Taylor, 2016; Taylor and Lee, 2019; Sontag, 2003; Walby, Louis, and Saulnier, 2019). In this case, the fragments that viewers were able to see enabled a degree of empathy for Shaver. The following set of comments provide a general outlook on how they saw Shaver fitting into this victim-based narrative.

Commenter 524 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “This young man was scared to death, was in shock or having a panic attack he could not think straight from stress”

Commenter 959 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “He murdered this poor man while he was begging for his life”

Commenter 42 of Shaun King–Twitter (Shaver): “This young man was obviously frightened… trying everything possible to cooperate with cops who had no intention of deescalating the situation”

Commenter 108 of Shaun King – Twitter (Shaver): “Oh my God they didn’t have to murder the young man scared out of his mind telling to follow directions. This is ridiculous…”

Based on this sample, it is evident that Shaver’s emotional response resonated with viewers. His vulnerability in this video translated into a clear demonstration of empathy on the part of the viewers, as exemplified by the overall tone of the comments themselves. Phrases like “this young man was scared to death” and other references to Shaver’s emotional state all helped curate a victim-centric narrative that equates Shaver’s physical body in a state of helplessness with innocence (Ahmed, 2015). Again, this in part may be due to the fact that Shaver’s pain is visually
captured unlike Castile’s, with the latter being absent from the direct frame. The effect of this difference allows viewers to vicariously experience and feel Shaver’s body in pain (Moore and Singh, 2018; Sontag, 2003; Woolf, 1938). When examining the language, we see this effect at play. The language here is centered around Shaver’s emotional and physical trauma, and the impact of this is exuded through continuous and exaggerated references to his emotions. By exaggerated, I am referring to the dramatic expressions stated by commenters. For example, Daniel Shaver was not only scared, but he was “scared out of his mind” or “scared to death”. These expressions not only heighten the severity of what we are viewing but it also displays the emotional connection felt by viewers (i.e., they are passionate about the content and the emotions they feel). Although we see glimpses of this type of language in Castile’s case study, it is not as prominent as it is with Shaver’s set of comments. Again, when referencing Ahmed’s piece, she emphasizes this interrelationship between language, emotions, and bodies. She uses the word “mourns” to exemplify this point by stating that this term can only be afforded to certain bodies (2015, p. 13). When applying this thought, we see that the language and expressions used by commenters are also playing a similar role here. These exaggerated expressions further heighten Shaver’s position as a white male victim.

**Labelling Daniel Shaver: The Term “Kid”**

Another element within this particular narrative around an “innocent victim” is the use of the word “kid”. When examining the term, there are several different ideas and representations that come to mind. For the purpose of this context, the term was often in relation to equating these men back to this sense of purity and innocence. By referring to a grown adult as a “kid”, there are certain implications around how one views that individual. Although the signifier represents again this child-like purity and innocence, the contextual application of the term can alter how it is
perceived and/or understood (i.e., either positively or negatively). In this comparison, we will see how Shaver and Castile’s cases differ when it comes to this label of “kid”.

As mentioned earlier, the number of comments that discussed these victims as being innocent were fairly even between the two cases. That being said, there is a clear disproportionality between the number of individuals who referenced these men as “kids” (Castile’s case study: 4 comments versus Shaver’s case study: 20 comments). The application of the term makes up approximately 7% of Castile’s total positive commentary (4 out of 58 comments) and approximately 3.5% of his total comments describing him (4 out of 112 comments). For Shaver, the comments describing him as a “kid” make up approximately 46.5% of his total positive commentary (20 out of 43 comments) and approximately 28.5% of his total comments describing him (20 out of 70 comments). When examining how individuals used this term for Shaver, it was often used to reinforce his role as the “victim”. Comments such as “I was in agreement with the police officer...then I watch the full video the kid did nothing wrong to be shot like that”\(^{38}\), “Anybody really think these kids are a threat?”\(^{39}\), “...Poor kid was so nervous!”\(^{40}\), and “The kid was frightened...not a threat at all!!!”\(^{41}\)” are all indicative of this point. This sample of comments utilize the term in a manner that is far more empathetic and positive towards one’s relationship with Shaver (i.e., it is not used in a demeaning manner).

Comments such as these ones associate the term “kid” with this idea of being “non-threatening”. This an interesting point of analysis because given the nature of all five videos, none of them display a large enough context to understand Shaver’s actions pre-incident and in some

\(^{38}\) Commenter 702 of ABC 15 (Shaver).
\(^{39}\) Commenter 764 of ABC 15 (Shaver)
\(^{40}\) Commenter 28 of AZ Central (Shaver)
\(^{41}\) Commenter 572 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver)
cases during the incident (depending on how each source edited the video). It is not necessarily a fact to the viewer that Shaver was not threatening in any possible way simply based on the footage alone. This notion of assuming Shaver as an innocent, non-threatening kid speaks to a larger discussion around race, victimhood, and specifically white innocence. White innocence refers to “the insistence [of] innocence or absence of responsibility [on] the…white person” (Ross, 1990, pg. 4). In this case, Shaver’s position as a Eurocentric settler and a white, male body helps perpetuate this notion of white innocence that is being conveyed through these comments (Alexander, 1994). For example, the comment “Anybody really think these kids are a threat?” is a perfect illustration of white innocence. This individual poses this question in a way that can almost be assumed as definitive. How could anyone think this man and his acquaintance are threats? It is almost assumed that he in no way could have posed a threat to any degree. In fairness, this could be a valid question, however, the viewer does not see enough or have enough context of the larger situation at hand to objectively make this claim.

**Labelling Philando Castile: The Term “Kid”**

Contrastingly, we see Philando Castile experience the alternative. The already minimal number of comments utilizing the term “kid” is further reduced when examining the tone and purpose of the word in the comment. An example of this is seen in Commenter 405’s (Fox News) perception of Castile, where they state, “The kid shouldn’t have pulled it out or reached for it. Yes, he did state he has one and he should have listened to the cop and not touched it. Obviously he did or the officer wouldn’t have shot and killed him. Total [self-defence]”. Unlike Shaver’s case study where individuals utilized the lack of footage to positively categorize Shaver as an innocent victim, this commenter does the direct opposite. They utilize the lack of context to penalize Castile for his actions, which are not actually confirmed through this footage (Dukes and Gaither, 2017). When
looking at this particular finding within the data, the narrative around Castile as a victim is different (Ahmed, 2015). For one, they are justifying the actions of the officer by constructing a moralized conclusion that is centered around criminalizing Castile’s presumable actions (i.e., this idea that Castile deserves what he got because he reached for the gun) (Hook, 2013).

To expand on this discussion, one can integrate the element of race into this analysis. Comment 405 of Fox News (Castile) exudes an underlying element of racial stereotyping. As stated earlier, one does not see Castile’s actions thus it cannot be confirmed if he did or did not pull out his firearm. However, to assume that he was pulling his firearm out and engaging in something that may be criminal seems to correspond with deep-rooted tropes that are historically linked to the black body. These tropes include being seen as inherently criminal (the reference to self-defence against Castile), bad and/or evil, unintellectual, violent, and uncivilized (Ahmed, 2015; Beutin, 2017; Hall, 2001; Levinson, Cai, and Young, 2010; Richardson, 2020; Tolia Kelly and Crang, 2010). Black bodies have been exempted from discussions around purity and respectability, and we have seen this same narrative being applied to how we view black bodies in correlation with our perceptions of innocence.

The black body is exempted from narratives around innocence and is almost exclusively linked to this type of “perpetrator-like” identity. Beginning from an early age, black males as young as ten years old were “not viewed in the same light of childhood innocence as their white peers but are instead more likely to be mistaken as older, be perceived as guilty…” (American Psychological Association, 2014). This is not surprising given that “to many non-Blacks, crime means black; Black male means criminal” (Howarth, 1997, p. 103). Howarth provides possible explanations as to why there is a false conflation between black identity and guilt. Reasons including utilizing black bodies to symbolize evil parts of white culture and using black bodies as a political tool to
oppose “soft” social policies (i.e., the image of a black predator is used to display the possible consequences of such policies) are all proposed in her discussion (ibid, pp. 104-105). This relationship between black bodies and guilt is further imbedded on an individual and systemic level. For individuals such as Commenter 405, there is a clear demonstration of this narrative through their own personal commentary. This is not a rare finding. In fact, in previous studies, people often implicitly associated black individuals with guilt (Howarth, 1997; Levinson, Cai, and Young, 2010; Young, Levinson, and Sinnett, 2014). Systemically, this narrative is permeated and reflected through the criminal justice system (e.g., black men at risk of getting arrested or shot, verdicts and judgements of guilt within the legal system) (Bodenhausen, 1988; Correll, Park, Wittenbrink, and Judd, 2002; Correll, Park, Wittenbrink, Saddler, et al., 2007; Correll, Urland, and Ito, 2006; Hale, 2016; Howarth, 1997; Levinson and Young, 2010; Young, Levinson, and Sinnett, 2014). This relationship becomes a part of what is known as racialized knowledge (Howarth, 1997).

These socially and historically constructed characteristics serve as a barrier in understanding and visually seeing Castile as a true “victim” (Beutin, 2017). This in turn affects the way the term “kid” can be read in this specific comment. My hypothesis here is that the term “kid” in Commenter 405’s post is used in a way that is demeaning, especially given the larger context and stance of the comment. The term is clearly not framed within this sense of empathy and connection, but rather within a specifically framed critique of Castile. Now, whether this was intentional on the part of the commenter is unknown at this time. However, given the underlying themes that are referenced in this comment (e.g., the assumption of guilt) paired with the traditionally conceived stereotypes that are often linked to African American men, the use of the word “kid” here is clearly different than how it was used in Shaver’s case study.
Summary

In essence, there are complexities that exist when one looks at the relationship between race and victim-based narratives. As we saw in this data, even though individuals were able to empathize with a particular “respectable” action demonstrated by Castile, there was still an inability to physically connect Castile to this metaphorical representation of a child. This may hint at a larger discussion around the limitations of victim-based narratives that are afforded to black and brown bodies. A central obstacle that seemed to be present when comparing the two cases was this idea of biases and assumptions. In the case of Shaver, preconceived notions of who he was and/or could be seemed to help benefit him when it came to garnering empathy and affective responses (i.e., people assumed he was a good guy, he was not doing anything questionable prior to the incident). This was the opposite for Castile (i.e., people assumed that he was probably doing something problematic). Again, there may be external factors that may influence people’s responses here; however, given the already-existent literature that touches on some of these topics, I would argue that race and racial tropes are largely intertwined here when it comes to understanding victimhood and innocence.

The Decent Person Narrative: Relatable Attributes

“He is a decent person” – it is a phrase often heard following a fatal incident between a civilian and police. In the case of George Floyd, it was about emphasizing his desire to make a better life for himself in Minnesota (Ebrahmji, 2020); for Breonna Taylor, it was acknowledging her career as a first responder (Robinson-Jacobs, 2020). These elements of character seem to help humanize these individuals and allow a worldwide audience to indirectly connect with who they are viewing. As Sontag poignantly states, interest is not enough to acquire compassion from others, but rather it is relatability that allows us to express empathy (2003; Moore and Singh, 2018). Positive values
around career, family, and morality help achieve relatability, which in turn can help individuals read victims as “innocent”. This research study saw these ideas emerge throughout the various data presented by commenters. This subsection entitled examines three central tropes that were commonly referenced by commenters: fatherhood, careerman, and lack of a criminal record. The three areas although different were all instinctively assumed to be characteristics of a “good and innocent” person. This in itself could be its own point of analysis; however, for the purpose of this study, I will be focusing on how individuals curated relationships between themselves and the victims using these three categories.

**Fatherhood**

Shaver and Castile’s respective positions as fathers seemed to resonate with viewers in terms of relatability. There seemed to be an inkling of compassion that was demonstrated by viewers in their comments when discussing this aspect of their identities. From an initial comparison, there seemed to be key differences amongst the two case studies. For example, when observing the sample of comments left under Castile’s videos, there was a bit more nuance and depth in comparison to the comments left under Shaver’s video. Now, there may be several reasons as to why this might be the case. One element of Castile’s case that connects him back to his position as a father figure is the physical presence of his partner’s child during the incident. As a viewer watching the clip, we do not know of the child’s presence let alone her existence until we see the second police officer taking her out of the vehicle post-shooting. It is at this moment where individuals may have felt a greater sense of sympathy towards what and who they were watching. Comments like “praying for the little girl in the back that had to watch her father be murdered”

42 Commenter 443 from Fox News source
told to seek out for help”\textsuperscript{43}, and “...this clearly was a family man wife and child in the vehicle spells not threat but the cop didn’t give a crap...”\textsuperscript{44} all exhibit this feeling at large.

There are a few things that are interesting here with these sorts of comments. For one, they all assume that the individuals in the car (Philando Castile, Diamond Reynolds, and the child) make up a heteronormative family.\textsuperscript{45} This is an important finding given that it may help explain the sympathetic nature of these comments. Heteronormativity and heteronormative bias have been often seen as prevalent in American culture and disseminated through cultural institutions (Duncan, Aguilar, Jensen, and Magnusson, 2019; Math and Seshadri, 2013; Skidmore, Linsenmeier, and Bailey, 2006), while the contrary has been often met with negative attitudes (Duncan, Aguilar, Jensen, and Magnusson, 2019; Friedman and Downey, 1999; ; Schwartz, Stratton, and Hart, 2016; Skidmore, Linsenmeier, and Bailey, 2006).\textsuperscript{46} Furthermore, the comments are also centered around Reynolds’ daughter and the emotional trauma that she will experience rather than emphasizing Castile’s physical death (e.g., “this man’s daughter had to watch her father...”, “praying for the little girl”). The language and labelling here around Castile as a father are often indirect. Although the term “father” is used in several of the comments, he is the not the predominant subject (i.e., the central focus is situated around the child and her experience of losing “her dad” right in front of her eyes).\textsuperscript{47}

The only exception here comes with the last comment, where the viewer explicitly labels and focuses on Castile’s identity as a father (literally calling him a “family man”). However,

\textsuperscript{43} Commenter 2314 from NBC source
\textsuperscript{44} Commenter 137 from Fox News source
\textsuperscript{45} There is also an assumption that Castile is the biological father.
\textsuperscript{46} Heteronormativity is often defined as the “preferential attitudes toward heterosexual relationships” and are often rooted within this notion of strict gender norms (i.e., males and females having distinct characteristics and roles) (Duncan, Aguilar, Jensen, and Magnusson, 2019)
\textsuperscript{47} This point will become further evident when analyzing Shaver’s set of comments
linguistically, the commenter does not stop with the words “this was clearly a family man”, but rather they go on to reiterate the physical presence of his family during the incident. When analyzing these two points further, I would argue that there are a variety of reasons for why these comments may be written the way they are. From one perspective, we could argue that the focus on the child and specifically her physical presence evokes a higher level of shock, sadness, and anger towards what viewers are watching (Ahmed, 2015; Moore and Singh, 2018; Sontag, 2003). It may reinforce the horrendous nature of this incident – how can a police officer shoot a man in front of his “own” child? Contrastingly, one could also see the framing as a way of trying to mentally connect Philando Castile, an African American man to his position as a ‘father’ (or father figure), a term that comes with its own set of signifiers.

The term ‘father’ as a signifier may represent or reflect different ideas, images, and meanings (Derrida, 1978; Guillemette and Cossette, n.d.). However, at its core, it is a positive identifying term. It is often times connected to the nuclear family structure – the epitome of “normalcy” and whiteness in western society (Domise, 2020). When commenters exaggerate Castile’s identity as a father figure (either implicitly or explicitly), not only are they trying to emphasize his relatability to mainstream white America (Nguyen and Anthony, 2014), but they are also inadvertently attempting to distance him from traditional perceptions and stereotypes that are often placed on African American men. These stereotypes are typically centred around this falsified correlation between black masculinity, hypersexuality, and promiscuity (ibid). In Love, Intimacy, and the African American Couple, the authors echo this by discussing how African American masculinity has continuously been linked to hypersexuality through continual references to specific narratives.

48 These heightened emotions like shock and anger are what leads individuals to consume this content and place value on it (Sontag, 2003).
49 References to the child may remind viewers that he is a father-figure
(Helm and Carlson, 2013). These narratives include but are not limited to being sexually experienced and having multiple concurrent sexual partners (ibid; Majors and Billson, 1992; Whitehead, 1997). Promiscuity and instability are key tropes here that are used to describe black families. With that being said, by acknowledging the presence of Castile’s family in the car and focusing on the child who is young, fragile, and innocent, viewers are subsequently portraying Castile as the antithesis of what is traditionally known of black men.

Nevertheless, Castile’s case study is a bit more complex than this. As we saw, this tactic to portray Castile as “different” than the average African American man was useful for some commenters who empathized with the visual content. However, the believability of Castile as a loving, stable father figure was harder to grasp for others. This seemed to be highlighted by Commenter 146 of Fox News (Castile) who stated, “Some [people] are ignorant...since he wasn’t married he’s not a family man...I know plenty of men who have custody of their children without a wife or girlfriend...so they’re not family men...”. Although Commenter 146 does not explicitly state his opposition, he hints at the external discussions that have been occurring around Castile’s family makeup (i.e., Castile possibly having a child with a different woman who is not his wife). Specifically, he touches on the possible vilification of Castile’s character due to his possible family structure.\textsuperscript{50} Unlike earlier comments that attempted to differentiate Castile using his family image, others seemed to be doing the opposite. Rather than distancing Castile from these hypersexualized tropes, they are utilizing them to narrate his life and character as “bad” (Ahmed, 2015). Again, we

\textsuperscript{50} This speaks to the deeper racial meanings around terms like ‘family’. In this case, there seems to be two different formats of what families may look like, with one being celebrated (i.e., the white nuclear format with the stable father role) and the other being scrutinized (i.e., modern versions of a family that are often connected to African Americans – extended families, stepfamilies, unmarried, blended families, etc.).
see viewers utilizing two opposing narratives to create two different types of relationships between themselves and Castile (one is more so positive than the other).

This is not the case with Daniel Shaver’s case study. With Shaver’s incident, there was no physical presence of children nor was there any way of knowing he had children based on the videos alone. However, that did not deter commenters from explicitly acknowledging his position as a father and a family man. The following comments demonstrate this:

Commenter 10 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “...No matter the verdict today, this video shows an unarmed man begging for his life. A hardworking father of 2 and loving husband...”

Commenter 249 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “This guy took a good workin and loving father and husband from this world. A man who found a homeless guy a hotel because he couldn’t stand to see him in the cold. A man who was away from his family weeks and weeks to provide for them...he killed a father of two little girls who want their daddy back. A wife who wants her husband to raise their two children with. Her best freaking friend”

Commenter 574 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “...No amount of money can bring your husband back or your kids dad”

Commenter 228 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “...He committed a murder and I hope to God he remembers the face of the father he took away every single night and he never gets sound sleep again.”51

These four examples are a sample of the types of comments associating Shaver with his position as a father and husband. The language here is explicit and exaggerated (e.g., loving father, a father who worked hard to provide for his family, hardworking father, “daddy”). In the case of

51 All comments that emphasized Shaver as a father derived from one source. The choice in commentary was not intentional – the other sources did not consist of relevant commentary.
Commenter 228, we see a heightened emotional reaction to having Shaver gone (e.g., Officer Brailsford never being able to forget about the loss). Although we do not see his family and/or the dynamics between him and his family, commenters are inspired to empathize with his social status as a father and how good he was at fatherhood. From the perspective of these viewers, Shaver was not only a father, but he was an outstanding one. These additional terms not only evoke strong emotions naturally, but they also romanticize Shaver (Sontag, 1977). In same manner where white, physical bodies are preserved and cared for in the hopes of maintaining some form of dignity (Moore and Singh, 2020), Shaver’s non-physical identity is trying to be preserved through these exaggerated comments. However, the preservation of his identity is not solely witnessed through these comments. When referencing back to the previous chapter, we have seen this take place through the types of videos made available to viewers (i.e., the lack of videos displaying his death, while there were more videos interviewing his family members and reporting about who he was as a person). This was not the case with Castile. Although, there were videos discussing Castile as a person, the individual responses provided by commenters did not seem to emphasize how he was as a father figure (i.e., there were no additional adjectives or descriptions about him as a father).

Additionally, Shaver’s role as a father within the backdrop of a traditionally conceived perception of a family (i.e., husband, wife, children) is not only unproblematized, but also advantageous within the larger discussions around his innocence (Hall, 2001; Richardson, 2020). As we saw with Castile’s case study, there were several debates that occurred around the structure of his family (e.g., discussions around his relationship/marital status, promiscuity, etc.) and in turn that influenced how people perceived Castile. This in itself is an interesting point for analysis. There is a particular relationship that we are seeing here between accessing background information (relevant or irrelevant) and one’s interpretation of the visual piece. In some cases, it
is our own deliberate need to find more information about the victim but in others it is presented to the public for consumption (e.g., media outlets providing more information for viewers to consume and utilize in their own analysis of the content). The exploitation of this type of targeted information (e.g., their criminal record, physical appearances, misperceived attributes regarding their character) shifts how we view these men and the incident at hand (i.e., for some, it begins to help justify the violence) (Smiley and Fakunie, 2016). In the case of Eric Garner, references to his physical attributes and past lifestyle were major influential points for public debate and it shifted how some examined that incident (ibid). For Michael Brown, articles implicating him to a robbery moments before his death had an effect on some in terms of how they viewed his interaction with officers (ibid). Most recently, debates around George Floyd’s health served as a questioning point for some – did he really get killed by the cop or was it due to a pre-existing health condition? (Abcarian, 2020). Although these points are not related to fatherhood and sexuality, the general idea of finding and presenting alternative narratives of someone’s character does have an effect on our interpretation of them.

With that being said, we do not see that same discussion taking place with Shaver. At no point does anyone question Shaver about his family structure, marriage, loyalty, health, conditions, etc. Even with some footage showing Shaver leaving a hotel room with a female acquaintance, viewers do not seem to assume any sort of narrative around hypersexuality and having multiple partners.\(^{52}\) It is never a point of discussion for commenters. Even with the various information provided by media outlets, it does not seem to trigger any sort of discussion for viewers. Rather, it further validates the larger narrative of his life that is so carefully being preserved by media and this set of commenters. Additionally, we do not seem to find any commenters in this case study who

\(^{52}\) The woman in the video is someone that Shaver had met earlier in the day (Lowery, 2017).
challenge or provide alternative perspectives on Shaver as a father or person in general (i.e., there are no comments that seem to deliberately attempt to discredit him – in this case, specifically as a father).

In essence, there were several differences between the two cases when it comes to this category of family and fatherhood. This theme was existent in both case studies and in many ways were utilized to further exaggerate the positive characteristics of both men. With that being said, it was also evident that there were some binary polarities that were present amongst the two sets of findings (Hall, 2001; Richardson, 2020). Though, both men were for the most part seen as relatable under this category, misconceptions around racialized bodies, family structures, and hypersexuality seemed to have served as barriers for several viewers watching Castile’s videos. However, this was not the case for Daniel Shaver. In addition, the various differences in how language, specifically how exaggerated terms were used between the two cases seems to suggest and/or exemplify this larger relationship between race, bodies, and language (Ahmed, 2015). As we saw, Shaver’s relatability seemed to be further heightened through additional characteristics and adjectives that were added by commenters. Comparatively, we did not see this elevation of character with Philando Castile. Thus, as we see here, the two men were ultimately positioned differently in various ways (Young, 1996).

**Good Working Samaritan: Career and Law-Abiding Citizen**

The elevation of one’s character in this context seems to be often associated with familiarity. As one observes the relationship between the observer and the observed, it seems as if people’s empathetic responses are driven by their acknowledgement of positive characteristics that they relate to. Similar to the fatherhood trope, the “Good Samaritan” narrative encompasses elements of one’s character that intrinsically relate back to positive morality. Things like a decent career
and a clean record are two aspects that seem to be well-respected within society. As witnessed in this set of findings, we see that both aspects are synched together to form an identity that viewers can empathize with and respect. Although these two tropes are different, they seem to coincide with each other here in terms of how they are applied.

When comparing the two cases, there is a clear acknowledgement of criminality (or lack thereof) within Castile’s case study. This seems to be a popular trend in the discussion, with references to his career as an additional piece to reaffirm his clean record. The following comments provide a brief reflection of this theme:

Commenter 177 of Fox News (Castile): “You can’t work at a school if you are a criminal”

Commenter 183 of Fox News (Castile): “Criminal? This man was Teamster who served lunch to children for a living”

Commenter 911 of Fox News (Castile): “…He was an elementary school cafeteria supervisor and everyone loved him. I remember when the shooting first took place there were reports that said Phil Castile had gang connections – it was a lie…”

Commenter 1018 of NBC News (Castile): “Philando Castile worked as a nutrition services supervisor at a Montessori School for grade students…Philando didn’t break the law…”

With this sample, it is apparent that there is a particular tone that is being expressed by the commenters. These comments serve the purpose of portraying Castile as a multifaceted man, while again attempting to oppose and/or distance him from stereotypical misconceptions that are often placed on African American men. These tropes heavily rely on the assumption that black bodies, specifically male black bodies are inherently “bad” and “criminal” (Ahmed, 2015; Alexander, 1994; Beutin, 2017; Butler, 2009; Graziano, Shuck, and Martin, 2010; Hook, 2013; Nguyen and

53 Fox News and NBC were the only sources to have comments that talked about his clean record.
Anthony, 2014; Sigelman, Welch, Bledsoe, and Combs, 1997; Weizer and Tuch, 1999). This consequently affects how viewers empathize and relate to the victim. This idea will be reinforced again when we look at the negative attributes assigned to Castile by commenters.

Nevertheless, the commenters above seem to be disassociating Castile from these pre-set narratives by reinforcing positive and relatable attributes that he possessed, one of which was his career. Each comment above tactfully uses his job at an elementary school to challenge the stereotypes of him as a thug and/or criminal. His role as a cafeteria supervisor is important here because it is a job that is naturally associated with positive attributes (e.g., friendly, polite, likeable) and is well-respected within mainstream society. The task of working with children is the antithesis of criminality and danger; and as all three commenters point out, Castile could not possibly hold this position if he did have a criminal record of any kind. By placing his career at the forefront of their arguments, commenters are trying to shift this set narrative about Castile and in turn alter others’ initial response of him from fear to empathetic (hooks, 1995). By emphasizing this element of his identity, he can be seen as the “exception” amongst African American men (e.g., hardworking, friendly, and relatable rather than dangerous and lazy).

When comparing this data to that of Shaver’s, it is evident that the impact of a career reference is not necessarily significant for viewers. In fact, there were only two people who actually implicitly referenced Shaver’s career and/or work ethic in their comment. Commenters 10 and 249 from ABC 15 were the only ones who briefly referred to Shaver’s career.5455 However, even with

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54 Comment 10 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “...No matter the verdict today, this video shows an unarmed man begging for his life. A hardworking father of 2 and loving husband...”

55 Comment 249 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “This guy took a good workin and loving father and husband from this world. A man who found a homeless guy a hotel because he couldn’t stand to see him in the cold. A man who was away from his family weeks and weeks to provide for them...he killed a father of two little girls who want their daddy back. A wife who wants her husband to raise their two children with. Her best freaking friend”
the brief mentions, it is important to note that at no point does either commenter mention Shaver’s explicit job position nor do they place his career at the forefront of their commentary. The only real connection that they make between Shaver and his career is through words like “hard-working” and “good working”, as well as briefly mentioning that he must travel for his job. When analyzing this further, it is interesting to see how Shaver’s comments differ from Castile’s, and how these differences are intrinsically connected to a larger discussion around how one views white and black bodies.

For Castile, the context of his character is pre-set within a racially historical narrative that associates black bodies with negative thoughts and stereotypes. This relationship in turn challenges the black body from being seen as “deserving” (Beutin, 2017). In this case, viewers who feel empathetic must rationalize their comments by configuring the African American to fit within this “Good Samaritan” fixture (e.g., “This man was not a career criminal like some. He made a bad choice years before but since has been a great citizen...”56). We do not see this happening with Shaver and white bodies in general. For example, there were far fewer comments trying to rationalize Shaver as a decent human being. The context in which he is situated within this incident and within the world is one that is exempted from historically and socially conceived stereotypes. There is no need to separate Shaver from a community of individuals who look like him – he is not an “exception” for individuals who are viewing these videos (i.e., he is naturally read as “non-threatening”).

Finally, in the case of Commenter 249 of ABC 15 (Shaver), the tone in which this individual is describing Shaver is far less argumentative in nature. There are no preconceived stereotypes that are being addressed in their commentary. As a reader, it seems to be formulated on the basic

56 Commenter 176 of Fox News (Castile).
understanding and agreement of his positive character and the points that are mentioned simply further exemplify that understanding (i.e., there is no disagreement with this perspective on Shaver). Additionally, when observing commentary about Shaver’s criminal record, there seems to be no indication that he has one nor do commenters mention it. Again, as we see here this type of language assigned to white bodies like Shaver is inherently different (i.e., we do not refer to criminality or criminal records because that is not a part of his racial script) (Ahmed, 2015; Nguyen and Anthony, 2014).

**Summary**

In summary, the differentiations we see between these two men stem from a larger relationship between race, racial narratives, and societal perceptions. In the case of Castile, there is a general trend amongst commenters to idealize him as “different” – different than what we know and expect of African American men. This is the complete opposite of Shaver’s data. Viewers of Shaver’s footage did not need to portray him as anything but “himself”. Commenters are not arguing for the decency of this man but are rather re-affirming it with words of affirmation. There seems to be no reason to differentiate Shaver from his racial population. The preconceived notions surrounding both men seem to display several significant differences. This will become important when looking at the following subsection, where these contrasting points will be far more exaggerated and emphasized within the commentary provided by viewers.

**4.1.2. Negative Character Creation via Language**

The previous subsection focused on the positive attributes that were assigned to the given victims. These attributes were aimed to portray these men as relatable and/or likeable, thus helping viewers and spectators alike to connect and empathize with them. As we saw, part of this tactic involved commenters having to reflect on and challenge preconceived notions and narratives, often
times rooted in racist ideologies. This happened to be the case for those who viewed and commented on Castile’s footage. That being said, although there were many attempting to see the positive elements of their identities, negative commentary still existed. The comments here center around themes of racial stereotyping and victim blaming. With this in mind, the following section will examine these two themes in greater detail.

When it came to the application of language used to villainize victims, there was a vast difference in how that transpired between the two case studies. When looking at the findings from a quantitative perspective, there was a clear numerical difference between the number of derogatory terms and/or negative labels placed on Castile versus Shaver. There were also stark differences in the tone of the comments between the two case studies. When assessing Philando Castile’s set of comments, there was a particular tactic or trend amongst the comments; utilizing racial stereotypes to address the victim himself and/or his behaviour and lifestyle seemed to be the most prominent pattern amongst the comments. Linguistically, there were many terms used to define the victim. Terms such as “criminal”, “perpetrator”, “suspect”, “retard”, “mentally handicapped”, “thug”, “ghetto thug”, “punk thug”, “gang banger”, and “drug dealer” were also used to describe Castile. All of these words not only villainize Castile and position him as an unlawful individual, many of the terms are also deeply rooted in racial stereotypes and misconceptions.

For example, the term “thug” (originated in India, meaning cheat or swindler) was a term that had been used politically by Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, President Obama, and Maryland Governor Larry Hogan to describe individuals protesting the death of Freddie Gray
The term has become a way to describe black bodies, specifically African American men who do not subscribe or meet the standards of “White America” (Smiley and Fakunie, 2016). Known as the politically correct replacement for the alternative racial slur against black bodies, the term “thug” has become a “nominally polite way” for European descendants to linguistically discriminate and minimize African Americans (Kutner, 2015; McWhorter, 2015; Smiley and Fakunie, 2016). In the case of Philando Castile, it is evident that this context is being applied here. This is further proven when analyzing the context of the comments themselves.

Terms such as “thug” or any of the other words used were contextualized within a larger scope of judgement around Castile and what people assumed was his lifestyle. Again, this is the opposite of what was seen in the previous subsection, where commenters utilized these terms in opposition to Castile’s character (i.e., as a method to contrast who he was with what is typically assumed of him). The following set of comments are a sample of the many findings that highlight this point:

Commenter 175 of Fox News (Castile): “…the shooting of the adult male criminal which inevitably ended his criminal lifestyle…one less pos [piece of shit] criminal off the streets. Thank God no officers were injured”

Commenter 112 of Fox News (Castile): “It seems like [Mr.] Castile subtly intended to shoot his way out of something. High on marijuana with a firearm. Who knows????”

Freddy Gray was an African American man who died of a spinal cord injury on April 19th, 2015 while in police custody (Lopez, 2016). The six officers involved were charged with his death. However, three of the officers were acquitted, while the chargers for the remaining three officers were dropped (Lopez 2016; Sung and Shoichet, 2016).

The term “thug” is also applied differently within African American communities, thanks in part to the transformation process of that term within the racial community. The impact of the term may differ when looking at who is utilizing the term.

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Commenter 1791 of NBC (Castile): “Castile partially matched a description of an armed robbery suspect, the car smelled like marijuana, and they were smoking with a child in the car...”

Commenter 1988 of NBC (Castile): “The officer knew he was high on drugs. Would you believe someone who says there not going to reach for a gun...”

Commenter 29 of USA Today (Castile): “He knew that as a criminal thug he was going to prison for illegally carrying an illegal gun. He valued freedom more than his life [or] the lives of anyone else”

Commenter 201 of USA Today (Castile): “He was carrying while high on cannabis. Child endangerment, felony misconduct with a firearm, DWI, public intoxication”

The comments here all display a level of judgement around Castile based on traditional notions and stereotypes around the black male body. The misconception around black bodies and aggression are presented in comments focusing on Castile’s criminal record and his supposed history of assault, which is something that is not indicated or talked about in the direct videos themselves. These comments play on the trope that black men are inherently dangerous and they pose a threat to society, specifically white society (Ahmed, 2015; Alexander, 1994; Beutin, 2017; Nguyen and Anthony, 2014). Although the racial background of all commenters is not verified for the purpose of this study, it is interesting to see the power dynamic that is displayed through these comments. By referencing points that are unknown to the viewer based on this content alone, it allows individuals to hold on to their rigid understandings about the “other” (LeCount, 2017). This in turn affects how individuals react to who they are viewing (e.g., is the victim relatable to the

59 Appendix A outlines a brief description of the commenters based off of either their Facebook or Twitter profiles. Racial identities are assumed in these descriptions based off what information is available; however, they are not confirmed by the individuals themselves.
viewer or not? Can the viewer express sympathy towards a member of the “outgroup”? (Weisbuch and Ambady, 2008). This point made by LeCount and others is not only relevant in Castile’s case study, but it is also still evident in more current examinations of police violence cases and societal responses (e.g., the argument around Ahmaud Arbery possibly trespassing, George Floyd’s past behaviour, etc.) (Lee, 2020; Silverman, 2020).

In the case of Philando Castile, the implication of drugs and drug use was also a common reference point amongst commenters. The use of marijuana was utilized as a reason for diminishing Castile as a person and/or validating the actions of the police officer. By portraying Castile as this irresponsible and unreliable drug user, it allowed for viewers to shift the blame onto Castile rather than the officers who were involved. For context, at the time of the incident and following commentary (2016-2017), only medical marijuana use was legal in the state of Minnesota (Minnesota Legislative Reference Library, 2021). Although Officer Yanez is the individual who shot Castile, Castile’s possible history of recreational marijuana use, which at the time was illegal, inadvertently forces him to be seen as a criminal who is capable of committing crimes while being “high”. The connection between marijuana-use and criminal behaviour is utilized in almost all of the sampled comments. This narrative is not new by any means. From Reefer Madness to Nixon’s “War on Drugs”, marijuana and other drug use have been closely linked to larger notions of criminality and danger (Gasnier, 1936; Pearl, 2018; Schwarcz, 2019). It has also been intrinsically linked to the element of race, which is why this common trend amongst commenters does not seem to be surprising (Pearl, 2018). Again, this dominant

60 These have been claims presented by spectators and media outlets
stereotypical narrative presents itself within people’s perceptions around Castile (LeCount, 2017).\(^{61}\)

Additionally, this perception of Castile as an irresponsible drug user is further exaggerated by commenters through their references to the child. As seen in the previous subsection around fatherhood, the insertion of the child was imperative to understanding Castile as a father figure and a family man. However, in this particular moment, we see the opposite taking place. Although Castile is still a father figure in the context of these comments, there is a clear difference in tone and context. Rather than idealizing him as the antithesis of other African American men (i.e., he is stable family man, has family values, etc.), commenters here are utilizing the child to reinforce Castile’s “negligence” (e.g., “He was smoking weed inside the car with his daughter in there”\(^ {62}\), “Also Was High AF [as fuck] while driving with a child in the care. Child endangerment...”\(^ {63}\)).

By focusing on the physical presence of the child paired with the assumptions that Castile was either high or at least using marijuana in the presence of the child, viewers are able to portray a very different image of Castile as compared to the commenters in the previous section. It provides a starting point for possible alternative narratives to be made about the situation at hand (i.e., missing the whole story, this is no longer about racial violence as opposed to something else, the victim was the real threat, etc.) (Johnson, 2015). We have seen this be the case with several incidents, including one of a 16-year-old black student being assaulted by a school officer at a Spring Valley High School in South Carolina (ibid).\(^ {64}\) The commentary that followed focused on

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\(^{61}\) Even in the context where recreational marijuana-use is legal, there is a continuous presence of stigma around users. As researcher Matt Reid states, claims of normalization around marijuana use is still “premature” (2020). Although stigmas have declined, it has still not completely disappeared (ibid).

\(^{62}\) Commenter 1030 of NBC (Castile).

\(^{63}\) Commenter 154 of Fox News (Castile).

\(^{64}\) This incident took place in 2015 and it involved a 16-year-old student named Shakara. At the time, Shakara got into a heated verbal discussion with her teacher and resisted the school administrator’s instructions (Klein, 2016). They later called on a school cop for assistance (Klein, 2016; Staff Reports, 2017). It is at that time, Officer Fields
reasons to villainize the student as a way of justifying the actions done to her in that moment. Even in cases where individuals opposed the level of violence used, there were still arguments centered around her behaviour that helped excuse parts of Officer Fields’ behaviour (ibid). In the context of Philando Castile, utilizing drug use and poor parenting skills created a way for viewers to question the validity of this shooting and it shifted the tone of people’s emotional response – from empathetic to now unaffectionate.

When taking a larger look at Castile’s set of commentary within this sub-theme, there is a cyclical relationship here in terms of the language used to position Castile and the rationale that commenters use to base these terms on; all of which are deeply tied to racialized misconceptions of blackness and the black man. This is something that is clearly not seen with Daniel Shaver’s set of comments. In the case of Daniel Shaver, there is an element of privilege that sifts through these findings. In terms of the quantity of comments, there were significantly less terms used to define Shaver in a negative way. That is not to say that every individual agreed with his actions and in fact many still empathized with the police officer’s actions and/or stance; that being said, there were far less aggressive terms used to define him, his actions, and/or his lifestyle.

In regard to the use of undesirable labels, such as “criminal”, “perpetrator”, “suspect”, and/or related terms, the only reference that was present within Shaver’s case study was the one presented by Commenter 148 of ABC 15 (Shaver), who stated, “Looks like the suspects were complying, unarmed, and they were cooperating”. In this quote, it is evident that Shaver and his peer (the female acquaintance who was seen coming out of the room with him) were labelled as “suspects”.

flipped the student and her desk to the ground and “dragged her across the floor and put her in handcuffs” (Klein, 2016; Staff Reports, 2017; Johnson, 2015). Both Shakara and another student, who attempted to protect her peer were both arrested under a vague South Carolina law (“makes it illegal for students to ‘disturb’ schools”) (Klein, 2016).
However, that label is juxtaposed with positive descriptors that identify Shaver as “complying, unarmed, and cooperating”. These adjectives contradict the negative effects that stem from being associated with such terms. In addition, when looking at comments in regard to Shaver’s lifestyle and the implication of things such as drugs and alcohol, there are minimal references to Shaver’s state of being at the time of the incident. Comments such as “The man was intoxicated, he was complying, no reason to shoot”65, “there were non-lethal ways to take the scared, drunk man with no escape route”66, “The man was drinking and he was reported to have a gun…I do not judge cops in life and death situations...”67, and “Too bad they don’t show footage of the ‘guy’ drunk and waving what people thought were a gun outside the hotel window”68 show that Shaver’s sobriety was noted by a few individuals, who interpreted that information differently.

For the first two quotations, the insertion of Shaver’s intoxication was not seen as a negative attribute, but rather was used to highlight his vulnerability. This is something that probably would not have been the case with someone like Castile, whose references to sobriety or lack thereof were utilized against him.69 The latter comments are more in tune with the tone of Castile’s set of comments – his lack of sobriety is weaponized and utilized as part of a larger victim blaming narrative. Nonetheless, based on the limited quantity of commentary within the subtheme, Shaver’s case study and specifically the language employed by commenters suggests that there are some discrepancies as to how we acknowledge white bodies versus black bodies. The process of categorizing and labelling others via language may be dependent on race and racial identity. As

65 Commenter 183 from Twitter Shaun King (Shaver).
66 Commenter 214 from ABC 15 (Shaver).
67 Commenter 9 from Twitter Tim Black (Shaver).
68 Commenter 170 from AZ Central (Shaver).
69 It is important to note that Philando Castile’s physical state of sobriety cannot be confirmed. Although commenters provided statements insinuating various claims, at no point does one see Castile’s physical body through these clips provided.
mentioned previously, this sense of purity associated with the white body becomes present here again in terms of labels associated with European descendants. In the case of Shaver, he is exempted from traditional narratives and tropes that would otherwise affect how he is viewed. Even with a few criticisms, his image as a relatable figure still holds true.

In essence, it is clear that people’s deeper emotional responses towards individuals stem from this element of distance that is formed through our individually created narratives. As a general observation of these findings, it seems evident that individuals empathetically respond towards others who are relatable. By this I mean, we create positive responses towards those who seem to follow our own accord and principles (e.g., agreeable actions, relatable emotional responses, positive associations). This is not necessarily surprising given that our own emotional responses are dependent on both our own group membership and others’ (Weisbuch and Ambady, 2008). Most often, those who are a part of our own group membership (ingroup members) are evaluated more positively than those who are not (ingroup favouritism) (ibid; Hunt, 2015). The narratives that were created to describe both Shaver and Castile functioned on a morally based ranking system. On one hand, some chose to view these men as admirable (e.g., the father with a career, the respectful and honest man), while others shifted their focus on other parts of who they are or could be (e.g., criminal, drug-user, alcoholic). Depending on what narrative people chose, the application of either one was applied to these victims of police violence and in turn affect how they viewed them both within this incident and outside of it.

The creation and application of such narratives becomes complexified when one acknowledges the element of race. As reflected in this subsection, race and racial identity largely influence the nature and tone of these narratives (i.e., what narratives we choose to assign, how we choose to assign them, etc.). This in part is congruent with studies pertaining to juror bias. Various studies
and research pieces have highlighted how racial ingroup/outgroup perceptions have influenced verdicts in legal trials. Hunt (2015) outlines how biases in attributions and discrimination influence jurors’ interpretations. For example, racial ingroup behaviour may be positively justified and in accordance with a more mitigating perspective as opposed to the interpretation of an outgroup member’s behaviour (ibid). She uses the example of a white juror assessing a white defendant versus a black defendant. In this case, a white juror may not associate a white defendant’s actions with their character (i.e., they are not a threat, but rather the crime was a by-product of external factors outside of their control, such as peer pressure, etc.), but in the case of judging a black defendant, they may see otherwise (i.e., a black defendant’s actions are reflective of who they are as a person – defiant, destructive, criminal) (ibid). This is known as white juror bias (Cohn, Bucolo, Pride, and Sommers, 2009). The opposite effect is also possible. This is when those who are racialized offer a more favourable interpretation of another racialized individual. Sommers and Adekanmbi found that black jurors tended to alter their judgements against minority defendants, given their sensitivity to possible institutional discrimination (2008; Hunt, 2015). Although this information reads as quite different from the discussion being had in this subsection, the thematic undertones of Hunt’s argument, among the others, are still applicable here in regard to understanding how commenters justify and interpret these men, both in character and their actions.

From a linguistic perspective, the language and basis for these narratives are intrinsically racialized. The fundamental understanding of the language used to describe victims or justify the “purity” of these victims are based on historically curated racial stereotypes. This is exemplified through the clear differences between Shaver’s and Castile’s respective comments. The white body in this case is rarely connected to criminalized behaviour or problematic actions, and if so, it is minimized (e.g., using the term “suspect” and following it up with the adjectives cooperative and
compliant to describe them). In the case of the black body, that is almost something that is easily assumed by many viewers. Even when Castile is portrayed as an “innocent man”, it is co-opted off of the assumption that he is different from his peers. The language used in the commentary point to this alternative understanding of him. In this case, he is the antithesis of blackness and the values associated with it; an identity that is more digestible for the white gaze. This can become a dangerous narrative and there are tremendous effects that stem from this particular finding.

4.2 The Relationship Between the Observer and the Social Context: Understanding Racism and Police Brutality Through Film

Film and visual evidence as a whole have the ability to create different kinds of relationships between the observer and the observed. As previously discussed, we have seen this come to light when examining how both Castile and Shaver were perceived by spectators. In order to expand on this conversation further, it is important to assess how viewers are able to relate to the larger subject matter at hand. With this in mind, it is imperative to look at the various truths that are formed from these videos. How do viewers acknowledge the larger issue at hand? How do they position themselves within the greater context of this issue? Visibility here is not the issue, but rather how these cases are being interpreted, contextualized and contested within the larger, online society (Hahn and Stalcup, 2016). This becomes the central underpinning for the following discussion.

This section will address the aforementioned questions by looking at how individuals have contextualized these videos either within or without the larger context (i.e., the issue of police violence and systemic racism). By examining the arguments presented by commenters along with the language they use in framing their points, I will demonstrate how race, specifically racial positioning, has been utilized in people’s own interpretation of what they are viewing. By first unpacking how people view this situation at hand (acknowledging and/or denying systemic
racism), and then leading into more specific, racially based discussions (white experience and perspective, black experience and perspective), one will be able to understand the multitude of ways in which individuals come to understand police violence through these videos. The key point to note here is that these videos are not indicative of a particular narrative nor do individuals curate this relationship between themselves and the issue/social context from a singular lens. There is complexity that lies within this relationship between viewer and social context.

The topic of police brutality, specifically against black and brown bodies has been an entrenched issue within the United States. The context of these cases is situated within a larger timeline that continues far before and beyond 2016. Although, the scenario that Daniel Shaver’s case presents (i.e., white body experiencing police violence), is not necessarily a common example of police brutality, the essence of what Shaver’s case highlights, that being the existence of state violence, is an important piece. For the purpose of this analysis, it is important to note that there were several other factors that had been noted, but not included in the discussion. Factors related to the personal background of commenters, such as their racial identity, socioeconomic status, political affiliations, and past life experiences, are all aspects that have the ability to shift or provide greater context for these comments. Given the constraints of this particular study, these additional pieces of information are not explicitly included in the written analysis portion of this study but were still considered and noted down in the data analysis portion of this research study.70

4.2.1. Acknowledgment of the Social Issue versus Denial of the Social Issue

In terms of establishing a relationship between the observer and the issue at hand, the initial point to start with deals with the believability of the topic. Viewers must either acknowledge or

70 Please refer to Appendix A for brief information about commenters that was considered in the data analysis portion of this study.
deny the presence of the social problem that is being displayed on camera. In regard to police violence and racism, there were several key patterns that existed amongst people’s commentary. First and foremost, it is important to note that the acknowledgement of racism within these incidents were most prominent in Philando Castile’s case study as compared to Daniel Shaver.\(^71\) The lack of acknowledgment in Shaver’s case may stem from a multitude of reasons. One factor that could be noted is how white victimization is quite rare with this type of violence (Butler, 2009; Hook, 2013; Ndebele, 2009; Richardson, 2020). When one examines this issue of police violence and racism, it is most often times understood as a racialized issue (i.e., an issue specifically targeting people of colour) and most filmed cases often involve black and brown bodies. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this is not surprising given the relationship between accessing this type of content and protecting white bodies from trauma; there is a general position of power and privilege that comes with being a European descendent in society.\(^72\) In essence, there is a clear displacement of white identities in these larger discussions around race, racism, and police violence.

Now, when looking at the sample from Castile’s case study, there are several patterns that come to light. The most common and obvious pattern is the explicit acknowledgement of Castile’s race as the single reason for getting pulled over and later getting shot by the officer. The argument around racial profiling within this incident was formulated in various ways by commenters. For many, they were linguistically explicit with their perspective:

\(^{71}\) In comparison, Daniel Shaver’s case study had two comments acknowledging the issue of racism. The first comment acknowledged the “racist system”, presumably referencing the legal system post-acquittal. The second comment utilized the racially rooted term “lynching” to acknowledge Shaver’s experience with police brutality. For greater context, the commenter described both the police officer’s conduct as well as the legal system’s setup as a “legalized systemic lynching”.

\(^{72}\) This is explored by other scholars and writers as discussed in the literature review (Chapter 1)
Commenter 41 of Sky News (Castile): “If that was a white male, the cop would have got him Burger king before arresting him.”

Commenter 1 of NBC (Castile): “The officer saw a black male, heard the word gun and lost his ever-loving mind to ‘fear’ and subsequently murdered an innocent man in front of his child. He had absolutely no business being a police officer if he was so afraid of a black man.”

Commenter 401 of NBC (Castile): “I want them to include the portion when the officer said he was pulling Philando over because he had a ‘wide set nose’ like a previous robbery suspect. He did NOT pull him over for broken tail lights. He pulled him over because he was racially profiling him.”

Commenter 886 of NBC: “Castile was obviously executed for the crime of being black.”

Commenter 108 of USA Today (Castile): “They have been getting away with cold blooded murder for years... Philando is just another black person who in the last few years alone haven’t received justice.... Should have never been killed... But that’s what happens when they treat our skin as a weapon.... No matter what....”

Commenter 197 of USA Today (Castile): “That’s racism. It’s objectively racism....”

Based on the terms used and the tone of these comments, it is clear that there is only one relevant narrative that exists in their interpretation of the videos – that is the existence of racism at play (i.e., the commenters are definitive in their interpretations and do not seem to provide other alternative narratives). Commenters 1 and 401 reference assumptions and stereotypes that are often associated with black men and the construction of “black authenticity” (Nguyen and Anthony, 2014). The construction of black authenticity refers to what is accepted as real or true for cultural products and people’s identities (ibid). In this case, these tropes built around the dangerousness and threat of black men fit into this construction. By referencing this, Commenters 1 and 401 allude
to the existence of racism within policing by outlining the wrongful imagery that is constructed of black men.

Commenter 41 takes this further by explicitly comparing Castile’s experience with the officer (and implicitly comparing the experience that racialized individuals in general have with officers) with that of a Caucasian person’s (e.g., “if he was white”). The individual here seems to be referencing Dylann Roof, a 21-year-old Caucasian male who was allowed to stop by Burger King following his arrest (Silverstein, 2015). The discrepancy between how Castile was treated as a threat while being innocent versus how Roof was treated with dignity and assumed as non-threatening, is what is being identified as problematic. In reality, Roof’s crime was far more dangerous than what Castile was doing (i.e., committing a mass shooting versus driving in a car with family), but Roof’s skin colour allowed him to be interpreted as “non-threatening”. This argument presented by Commenter 41 was also echoed by others in this sample. Viewers acknowledged these common tropes while also highlighting the submissive position of black bodies in America by utilizing this same comparative tactic in their commentary.

Commenter 501 of Fox News (Castile): “...I hate to say it...but, if he was white this would have never happened. It is just fact and the reality of today’s society. And it is sad.”

Commenter 25 of CBS Twitter (Castile): “What’s terrifying of a man annoying he has a cc permit? Would this have happened with a poor white family? I sincerely doubt it”

Commenter 1606 of NBC (Castile): “Not trying to be racist, but I wonder if the situation happened to be a different color man, would that cop still shoot the driver?”

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73 Dylann Roof was arrested for shooting nine individuals at a black church in Charleston, South Carolina (Silverstein and Blau, 2015)
Commenter 370 of NBC (Castile): “What would the verdict be if a black guy killed a policeman because he was in fear if his life. MURDER”

The four comments here present a larger debate around differential experiences based on racial identity. All four commenters emphasized how white bodies in this given situation would have had a different, possibly non-fatal experience with Officer Yanez. Commenter 370 takes this point further to address the differential experiences within the criminal justice system at large. By posing the question around what would happen if the shooter was African American, the comment itself ties back to previous research that examines the harsher treatment of black and brown bodies within the system (LeCount, 2017; Weitzer and Tuch, 1999).

The level of engagement and explicit references to race and racism within this incident indicates a strong relationship between the viewer and the subject matter. Individuals are not only referencing this particular example but are further extrapolating this content to question the larger issue at hand. That being said, this form of affirmation displayed by a large group of commenters was also juxtaposed with an equally large group of commenters who felt differently. Those who were proponents of denying the larger issue of racism were adamant about the disconnect between the specific case study and the issues around racism and/or police brutality. As LeCount would say, these individuals demonstrated a range of tactics related to symbolic racism ranging from full on denial of racial discrimination to implicit and complex ways of minimizing the existence of racism (2017).

When applying these themes to the following set of comments, it was evident that LeCount’s points were more so relevant within Castile’s case study than Shaver’s. For example, with Castile’s case, there were a variety of comments highlighting how this incident was not racially charged

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74 This is discussed in greater detail within the literature review
given the Officer Yanez’s Hispanic background. Comments, such as the following, show individuals minimizing the existence of racism within this incident by simplifying the reality and depiction of what racism looks like.

Commenter 46 of Fox News (Castile): “Lol and there’s the race card...notice the cop wasn’t white? Are the Latinos after blacks now?”

Commenter 56 of Fox News (Castile): “...here comes the race card...The cop was Mexican, not white...”

Commenter 978 of NBC (Castile): “...Race issue? Ummmm.... no. The cop is Latino...”

Commenter 638 of NBC (Castile): “BTW, the cop was latino, not white, and I am latin...Are we going to say latinos are racists now?”

By minimizing the issue of racism to be a “white versus black” issue, viewers actively denied the existence of racism while watching the videos. Officer Yanez’s racial position as a Hispanic man allowed commenters to shift the conversation away from race because he did not necessarily fit the typical description of a cop in this type of situation (i.e., a white male officer). By emphasizing the police officer’s position as a racialized individual, it allows viewers to delegitimize claims of racial discrimination (Bloch, Taylor, and Martinez, 2020). In Castile’s case, it can no longer be seen as an example of racialized violence, but rather it is positioned as a consequence of something else (e.g., a mistake on the police officer’s part, a mistake on Castile’s part, an “accident”).

Furthermore, based on the language utilized by these four commenters, there seems to be a defensive nature to the tone of their arguments. Similar to what we witnessed with the last chapter, the argument around race baiting seems to be applicable here as well. Given the structure of their

Refer to Chapter 3
comments and the perspective they take on, Commenters 46, 56, 978, and 638 do not interpret or construct this situation as a racial one (Crenshaw and Peller, 1992); again, thanks in part to their general understanding of racism as a “black versus white” relationship. In the case of Commenter 638, there is a specific type of defensiveness that stems from their personal attachment to the racial variables here. As an individual who identifies as “Latin” or Hispanic (the same as Officer Yanez)\textsuperscript{76}, their defensiveness may also stem from this fear of assuming that those who are like this commenter (similar in terms of racial background) are “racist”. From reading the comment, it may read as though this individual’s denial of racism stems from their understanding of this perspective as a “personal attack”. With that being said, by utilizing this argument that others are simply “bringing up the race card” in what they assume is a non-racial situation, they are insinuating that others are engaging in the act of race baiting.

Another key pattern that was found here dealt with viewers’ increasing level of empathy towards police safety and police culture. Many individuals emphasized the importance of protecting and prioritizing the lives of police officers in situations such as this case. The way they vocalized this point connects back to the previous discussion around criminalizing and blaming victims. The following comments show how commenters made this point in their pursuit to deny claims around racism:

Commenter 301 of Fox News (Castile): “Police don’t shoot based on color, they shoot on base of threat”

Commenter 442 of Fox News (Castile): “This guy did this to himself...there are thousands of people of every race and colour who get pulled over everyday while carrying guns and don’t

\textsuperscript{76} This information about their racial background is made present by the commenter within their post.
get shot. Playing the race card all the time just shows how worthless some people’s thoughts are. Hoping that officer finds peace”

Commenter 502 of Fox News (Castile): “If any person disobeys a direct order from an authority figure they need to do what they feel is necessary. To make this about race is ignorant”

Commenter 868 of Fox News (Castile): “I don’t think it was race he had a gun told the cop. Cop wanted to go home safe...”

Commenter 5 of NBC (Castile): “You didn’t see what the officer saw.... Officer was obviously in fear for his life and showed great emotion on having to shoot that man”

Commenter 1124 of NBC (Castile): “Had he followed instructions he would still be alive today. Racism had nothing to do with it”

Commenter 110 of USA Today (Castile): “This wasn't even a race issue... The guy put himself in that position, that led to that result...”

As seen above, this sample of comments demonstrate a variety of things in relation to viewers’ denial of racism and support for police safety. Comments, such as those presented by Commenters 868 and 5, emphasize this necessity to protect law enforcement by touching on the officer’s fears in that moment and the importance of him going home safely (at the expense of Castile) (Beutin, 2017). Additionally, viewers also mentioned the importance of following authority and shifted the blame on to Castile's individual actions rather than the social and systemic issue of racism (Commenters 110, 301, 442, 502, 868, and 1124). From their perspective, the imagery of Castile getting shot was a consequence of his own actions and ignorance – he got what he deserved (Hook, 2013, p. 10). The remaining commenters within this sample all made this point in different ways, however, they all explicitly reference the non-existent role of race within their respective
comments. When observing the tone of these comments, they are far more aggressive in the sense that individuals are more explicit in how they vocalize their denial. As Robin DiAngelo points out in her piece, this may be a display of white fragility (2011). The argumentative nature of these comments may be a consequence of racial discomfort and as a tactic, individuals may be attempting to “reinstate white racial equilibrium” via their counterpoints (ibid).

When one looks at Daniel Shaver’s case study, this discussion is not happening to the same degree. In terms of similarities, there is still this prioritization of the police officer’s safety and police culture that exists within Shaver’s case study. Commenters reference the danger that Officer Brailsford may have been in and discuss the inappropriate, unintelligent and/or risky behaviour taken up by Daniel Shaver as reasons for the fatal interaction (victim blaming and criminalizing victim’s behaviour). Furthermore, the denial of racism within Shaver’s case is also present. The following three comments exhibit this point:

Commenter 157 ABC 15 (Shaver): “Don’t make this [racial]…Because that has [absolutely] nothing to do with this at all”

Commenter 315 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “…I am so fed up with people making everything about the color of a person’s skin. My entire family is mixed…not one of them has ever done the ‘poor me’ when approached by law enforcement…follow directions, don’t get stupid or tough…”

Commenter 338 of Shaun King Twitter: “It’s really not at all what you’re making it out to be. Listen to what you are told and nothing else.”

Similar to Castile’s case study, there is a clear demonstration of denial and minimization around the impact of racism in this case. The viewers also reference race baiting to some degree in their commentary, with all three of them expressing various levels of frustration around the inclusion
of race in people’s interpretation of the visual content. Again, the emotional outbursts and general
defensiveness that are being captured in these comments depicts white fragility at its finest
(DiAngelo, 2011).

When comparing this to Castile’s case study, viewers utilized Officer Yanez’s position as a
Hispanic man to help reinforce this counterargument. In Shaver’s case, given that both parties were
of European descent, this same tactic is utilized by commenters, yet it is done a bit differently.
Unlike Castile’s set of comments, no one explicitly called out the racial identity of either Shaver
or Officer Brailsford; however, the implicit feeling around people’s denial seems to allude to this
same assumption around what is considered “racism” (i.e., racism as a black versus white issue,
with only black bodies serving as victims). When a case study such as Shaver’s presents an
alternative idea around police violence and race, I would argue that it becomes more difficult for
viewers to categorize this case as an example of “racism”.

Nevertheless, there were a few individuals who referenced an alternative argument, while
simultaneously disagreeing with the presence of racism. These individuals point to the abuse of
power as the key issue here, as opposed to racism. The two comments below fit this category:

Commenter 68 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver): “Police brutality is out of control, but it has
nothing to do with racism....”

Commenter 752 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “It doesn’t matter what colour you are if a cop has
murder on the brain...you’re going down! Cops are the only people that can murder legally”

This set of comments provide a far more complex take on this subject matter. Unlike the
commenters above (Commenters 157, 315, 338), these two individuals acknowledge the issue at

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77 White fragility refers to the state in which any level of racial stress becomes intolerable for an individual. This
may trigger defensiveness and outward displays of emotion, such as anger, fear, and guilt (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 54)
hand and provide accountability on the part of police officers and policing institutions (as opposed to blaming the victim for their own fate). Nevertheless, these two individuals still deny the existence of race and racism both within this incident and the issue at large. By taking this approach, these viewers are constructing a totally new narrative (Crenshaw and Peller, 1992). This narrative still encompasses the same idea of racial discomfort and denial that is presented in the prior set of comments (DiAngelo, 2011; LeCount, 2017).

The perspectives reflected in this section demonstrate the complexities around cases of police brutality and the multitude of takeaways that may stem from visually seeing these cases. There are various issues and relationships that are at play within a single case of police brutality (e.g., abuse of power, systemic racism, etc.). In the case of Daniel Shaver, there were a few viewers that were able to highlight these alternative factors, as demonstrated by the last two sets of comments. However, again, we see that race even in these comments were pushed back and denied from being a part of the overall discussion. In almost every counterargument within both case studies, the topic of race was almost always explicitly and adamantly denied as being a central social issue within these two examples. Commenters deliberately situated these cases as being external to the issue of racism and positioned them in other ways. This was a complete juxtaposition to those who acknowledged the element of race and racism within the context of police violence.

4.2.2. Relatability to the Social Issue: White Experience and/or Perspective

The previous subsection encompassed a complex outlook on how individuals understood the social issue of police violence and racism. While some embraced the interrelationship between the two areas, others were adamant about its separation and segregation. With that being said, the diverse range of opinions led me to wonder how one relates to the social issue on a personal level. The findings in this research study presented an opportunity to get some insight as to how different
people positioned themselves within the visual evidence. The most prominent and multifaceted set of findings stemmed from those who provided an insightful perspective from the white-bodied experience. With this in mind, the following subsection will showcase the two contrasting perspectives that emerged from the “white experience”. The discussions will highlight how individuals have resonated with the content. On one hand, witnessing of these videos seem to break a fourth wall for some, making this viewing experience far more fearful and “new”; while for others, these videos reinforce an issue that they argue is a common one for those who are white-bodied. Again, by providing both sides of the spectrum, the aim is to show the multitude of perspectives that stem from the white-bodied individual.78

*Fear and Victimization vs. A Common Experience*

A prominent subtheme that emerged when observing commentary related to the white experience was that of fear and victimization. Here, we saw individuals feel a sense of emotional anxiety and as a by-product of that re-positioned how they viewed this narrative (i.e., it felt like white bodied individuals were the target for this type of violence). This subtheme and general emotional response encompasses what LeCount would classify as white claims of racial disadvantage (2017). Although LeCount’s conception of this theme focuses on the anxiety stemming from achieving racial equality in a way that benefits racialized populations (2017), there are several elements within the findings here that mirror his discussion around systemic racism.

Commenter 557 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “America didn’t object loudly enough when it was happening to outside the mainstream….and now it’s ingrained that it’s perfectly fine to do it to anybody. It will happen more and more to just anybody”

78 Commenters’ racial backgrounds are referenced in Appendix A. It is important to note that this information stems from their social media platforms (e.g., profile photos, shared content, etc.)
Commenter 82 of AZ Central (Shaver): “...the MAIN issue is brutality of everyone. Bluntly put, that fact that he [Officer Brailsford] was exonerated after killing a white man scared me even more.”

Commenter 232 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver): “We are in danger”

Commenter 7 of Tim Black Twitter (Shaver): “Ist they came for the Blacks, I said Nothing for I was not Black, then they came for the Browns, and I said Nothing for I was not Brown, then they came for me...”

The commentary above demonstrates what I would label as “white fear”. They all either exemplify or point out a sort of fear that is based on losing social privilege. White bodies have lived in an environment that has insulated them from race-based issues and stress (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018; Hines III, 2016; Segall and Garrett, 2013). As Fine points out, this insulation has acted as protective pillows for individuals (1997), with many avoiding the discussion of this topic altogether (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton, 2008). By watching Shaver (someone who is a white-bodied individual) in this fatal interaction, it becomes an awakening for viewers that this experience is no longer just a “racialized one”, but rather it is something that they too may experience. In this case, avoidance and denial is no longer an option.

The language in these comments is an important point of analysis here. For example, in Commenter 557’s post, they use the term “mainstream” as a way to describe what could be assumed as white society. The use of the term “mainstream” to describe white experience and lives reemphasizes this conflated and overlapping relationship between white identity and “American” identity (Nguyen and Anthony, 2014; Pinder, 2010). Again, from this perspective, there is a reinforced normalcy and purity associated with the white body. Commenter 557’s point highlights the silence and segregation around racialized experiences that has taken place up until this point.
in time. The notion of silence turning into fear is also presented in Commenter 7’s post where they were transparent about their silence up until this point in time when it became a realistic issue for them (e.g., “and then they came for me”). The language used here when expressing fear was mostly contextualized from an understanding that this experience was historically an uncommon one for white-bodied individuals. 79

Although viewers discussed the fear associated with potentially experiencing police brutality, others presented commentary that otherwise suggested the commonality of this experience.

Commenter 1590 of NBC (Castile): “This was straight up murder but this happens to white people more than blacks they just don’t report it”

Commenter 346 of Fox News (Castile): “Then why are more unarmed white people shot [than] any other race? If whites were treated differently none would be”

Commenter 104 of AZ Central (Shaver): “Because is WHITE in A country that is RACIST against WHITE PEOPLE”

Commenter 954 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “Sad thing is if... Daniel Shaver was any other race it would have ended differently”

Unlike the previous set of comments, viewers here presented statements that aligned more with what LeCount notes as racial resentment (2017). Racial resentment is defined as when white bodied individuals believe that target groups (racialized populations) are being unfairly advantaged (ibid). In all four comments, the viewers presented the white body as the “typical” victim. They exemplify a different type of narrative that emphasizes this sort of notion that white bodies experience disadvantages too, if not greater than racialized individuals. For Commenter 104 of AZ

79 This aligns with what previous literature has discussed in relation to white bodies and physical trauma. Please refer back to the literature review in Chapter 1 for greater detail.
Central, it was the argument around reverse racism that helped highlight this point.\textsuperscript{80} Commenters 1590 and 346, made their respective points by presenting arguments centered around the quantitative differences between black and white bodied victims. In comment 954 under Shaver’s case study, the individual claimed that Shaver would have had a better outcome if he was another race, thus insinuating that white-bodied individuals experience far worse than their racialized peers. Racial resentment in Shaver’s case study was predominantly noticeable when discussing the news coverage – or the lack thereof (\textit{“Police murdered this unarmed man, but the media doesn’t care because he’s white”}\textsuperscript{81}, \textit{“It’s a shame that the police brutality and militarization issue got turned into a black only issue...”}\textsuperscript{82}, \textit{“I’m just saying why is no one marching in the street for a white guy?”}\textsuperscript{83}). These comments themselves often referenced the privilege that black bodies have in terms of garnering attention to their experiences.

In essence, it is fairly evident when having examined this set of commentary presented from the white gaze and/or perspective that things such as resentment and claims of disadvantage are present within people’s attitudes around police violence. On one hand, visually seeing a person who is relatable and/or similar to the viewer (i.e., one who is of the same race) may perpetuate feelings of fear and anxiety. These feelings stem from a shift in what individuals understand as possible experiences for them. In Daniel Shaver’s scenario, viewers no longer viewed themselves as exempt from experiencing police violence. Likewise, witnessing depictions of police violence experienced by other racial groups may also foster emotions of denial. Similar to earlier

\textsuperscript{80} Reverse racism: A misconception based on the idea that the Civil Rights Movements ended the subordination of communities of colour and had simultaneously led to the subordination of white bodies (Roussell, Henne, Glover, and Willits, 2017). This perspective perceives that there is great inequity experienced by white-bodied individuals (ibid; Norton and Sommers, 2011). It is often used to undermine efforts toward racial equity (Roussell, Henne, Glover, and Willits, 2017).

\textsuperscript{81} Commenter 173 of AZ Central (Shaver)

\textsuperscript{82} Commenter 387 of AZ Central (Shaver)

\textsuperscript{83} Commenter 931 of ABC 15 (Shaver)
discussions around acknowledgement and denial of racism, spectators were found to suppress the realities of racialized folks by placing themselves at the forefront of the discussion (victimizing themselves) in order to shift the narrative around police violence and in turn ignoring the deeper racial roots of this issue. The white and/or European-based outlook presents a complex perspective on how a particular population views and/or relates to police violence through visual evidence. This can then be juxtaposed with the contrasting perspective, that being the black experience.

4.2.3. Relatability to the Social Issue: Black Experience and/or Perspective

Entitled the “black experience and/or perspective”, this subtheme encompasses a different set of responses that provide an insightful understanding as to how viewers personally related to the visual evidence. Unlike the previous subsection where there was a contrast in perspectives (i.e., those who were fearful vs. those who were not surprised), this subsection shows a more unified set of reactions from both case studies. Here, the findings presented the lack of shock that people of colour felt when witnessing either set of deaths. Philando Castile’s videos triggered responses that displayed a level of frustration and despair, while Daniel Shaver’s death fostered a sense of frustration towards those who did not previously accept the legitimacy of this issue (police brutality). By expanding on some of these points in greater detail, the findings will show that those who are familiar with this particular reality are more likely to connect these videos to the larger issue at hand. Their affective response will also further demonstrate this point.

Commonality of Police Violence against Black Communities and the Continuous Burden

A common trend that seemed to be repetitive within this subtheme was the references to how prevalent police brutality has been against African American communities. Some commenters acknowledged the historical context in which black bodies have had to endure racial violence.
Commenter 42 of NBC (Castile): “It appears that way because it has never stopped from the end of slavery...just changed methods of how we are killed. I see it happening to many other race, but for me, for most Blacks, we are not just tired, but ANGRY, especially since we are the ONLY race told to get over things...”

Commenter 1390 of NBC (Castile): “We live in a country founded on White Supremacy with people still alive from an era when it was seen as an enjoyable picnic to Lynch Black People, so in no way am I surprised that these same White Supremacist are in the police departments and killing and harassing black people”

Commenters 42 and 1390 have highlighted the ways in which black bodies have experienced bodily trauma and how older methods of violence have only continued to be reproduced in different, more modern ways. The argument they present is further supported in additional literature documenting the historical relationship between state violence and blackness. At large, state violence has been perpetrated against black and brown bodies throughout time in various ways (Maynard, 2017). From lynching “newly freed” black individuals in the South as a means of control (NAACP, 2018.) to the current state violence being perpetrated within the confines of the American prison system (Davis, 2000), the ways in which this type of violence takes shape has continued to transform and regenerate throughout time84.

The current frequency of police brutality was also a commonly used point of discussion for many commenters. Philando Castile’s case was only one of many incidents involving the death of an African American at the hands of police officers. The following comments display how viewers acknowledged this common experience for black communities:

84 “Newly freed” as in those who had been recently given freedom post-Civil War (NAACP, n.d.)
Commenter 920 of Fox News (Castile): “…Can we all agree that this cop was too scared for his job and killed a guy while he was reaching for his wallet? This kind of thing happens in our communities on a regular basis. We can’t all be criminal reaching for guns”

Commenter 705 of NBC (Castile): “WARNING – being black in America can cause death and severe judgement”

The comments above depict the inequitable experience of black bodies living in America. The statements shown here align with what has been found in more recent research. In fact, according to the American Medical Association, it was found that African Americans are three times more likely to die during a police-encounter as compared to their white counterparts (Strazewski, 2020). The issue of police brutality has become a public health issue and consequently the emotional and social burdens of such violence are still placed on black bodies (Gershon, 2020).

Commenter 433 of NBC (Castile): “and it’s a shame that ‘black men and women’ have to try to figure out how to handle it…”

Commenter 785 of NBC (Castile): “Have you watched the news lately? Have you grown up in black skin? When police interact with us even 100% innocent, there energy makes us suspicious. You know, that we might be killed legally armed or unarmed. Not to race bait, but this is a very REAL reality for people of color”

Commenter 344 of Fox News (Castile): “And sorry to say this…but skin color whether you like it or not plays a big factor on how police act towards someone”

Commenter 1253 of NBC (Castile): “…How do you see a dark skin person? As an animal so dangerous or a human being, with like emotions and blood flowing in our bodies?”

Commenter 1200 of NBC (Castile): “This is why the black community distrusts cops. You follow orders and end up dead”
The commenters above have all expressed their frustrations around this burden. The struggle to not be seen as a threat by society and societal systems seems to be an exhausting and aggravating experience. As Commenter 433 of NBC pointed out, the exhaustion may stem from having the onus placed on black bodies to change other people’s perceptions of them. This parallels what Du Bois discusses in terms of the “double consciousness” and the weird space that black-bodied individuals must take up within the United States (1903; Smith, 2000). There is a dual identity that the individual must be aware of – who they are and how they are viewed by the white gaze (ibid). This idea is referenced in Commenter 1253’s post which highlights the juxtaposition between an African American’s socially assigned identity (i.e., an animal) and their inherent identity as a human being (i.e., with emotions). There is a powerful message behind the question being posed as it sheds a light on the complexities of how African Americans are viewed within society and how they must navigate these difficult and different paths. This point is furthered when acknowledging comments 433, 785, and 344, all of which are directed more around the differential treatment that is commonly experienced by African Americans. This in turn creates larger cultural trauma and emotions, as referenced in Commenter 1200’s post.

In turn, the findings presented predominantly in Castile’s case study demonstrates a particularly interesting perspective as to how individuals relate to a social issue that is inherently close in proximity to them. Given their understanding of this reality prior to Castile’s video, their reactions align with this understanding that this is a normalized experience. When dissecting the comments further, it was fairly evident that the tonal composition of the commentary reflected a more sombre tone, as compared to an aggressive and/or deflective feel (which was more so present in the white-centred perspective). This linguistic feel shifts when looking at the black perspective projected within Daniel Shaver’s case study.
Legitimacy of Police Violence: “Welcome to Our World”

When observing the set of comments under Daniel Shaver’s case study, there was a clear argument being expressed – that being the need to legitimize the issue of police violence. The killing of a white-bodied male (who is presumably the most privileged human being within society) at the hands of police officers seemed to be a symbolic moment for racialized individuals to make an important statement: welcome to our reality. Commenters in this case study emphasized the need to express how this atypical incident involving a white-bodied individual was a common experience for black communities. The following comments are a sample of what was found under Daniel Shaver’s set of videos:

Commenter 159 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “Now you know how we feel”

Commenter 749 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “Welcome to our world…the black one”

Commenter 87 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver): “That’s what minorities have been yelling and crying and marching [about] for decades...welcome to the world”

These comments have a two-fold effect. On one hand, it highlights the long history of differences between the realities experienced by African Americans and those who are of European descent. As explored in the previous section, African Americans have been subjected to various forms of racial violence for a long time, and the specific issue of police brutality is not unknown to this population. That being said, those who are of European descent have long been exempted from this reality. The secondary effect here stems from the language being used within these comments. It is aggressive and deliberate. Most importantly, it inadvertently calls out the long history of white silence around police brutality (e.g., Commenter 87’s post about advocacy done by racialized individuals throughout history). Phrases such as “now you know how we feel” and “welcome to our world” all point out the importance of Shaver’s death in regard to breaking that white silence.
and creating some sort of empathy towards black experiences, while bringing awareness to police brutality.

4.3 Summary

To conclude, this chapter has covered a multitude of ways in which relationality has taken shape within these two case studies. Building off what was discovered in the previous chapter regarding visual techniques, synoptics, and the initial start-up of a relationship between the viewer and the viewed, this chapter aimed to take the next step and further dissect the specific building blocks for this particular relationship. The purpose here was to explore the dynamics of this relationship from a micro (viewer to victim) and macro (viewer to social issue) perspective by examining the specific cues and triggers that curated a sort of affective response. In doing so, it was found that the relationships a viewer formed with both the victim and the social issue were quite complex and contingent on various external factors. The predominant factor here was race. For the first subsection, racial narratives and stereotypes were evident in the assessment of a victim. As we saw, preconceived notions and historically conceived racial tropes greatly influenced how one categorized a victim. Even with commentary that opposed such traditional notions, the reasoning provided by individuals was always situated within this general understanding that there was a certain traditional narrative at play and in this case, the individual was opposing such tropes. In the case of a white-bodied victim, the element of racial tropes was explicitly absent, yet implicitly present (i.e., the notion that white bodies are pure and superior was present even if it was not explicitly quoted).

When it came to examining people’s relationship with the social issue, we saw a variety of affective responses based on racial positioning. The more extreme reactions stemmed from a different racial positioning between the viewer and what they were viewing (i.e., the contrast in
tone between the white perspective and black perspective). Again, this stems from racial history and what we define as “normal”. The contextual history of a social issue like police brutality and how one chooses to interpret it greatly influences how individuals respond to it (i.e., is that person aware of the issue to begin with? Do they interpret that as normalized behaviour? Are they directly affected by it?). With that being said, this chapter showcased the complexities that exist within our own curated relationships that we form with the content we are viewing. As referenced numerous times throughout this section, these findings are far more complex than expected. This is especially the case when we examine an even more specific element of this audiovisual piece – the audio.
Chapter 5: The Racialization of Sound and Speech

“[People] believed they did not need their eyes alone to authenticate racial identity, presumed inferiority, and, in this instance, criminality... [White people’s] ... ears, their senses generally, could be used to detect blackness – or so they claimed” (Smith, 2006)

The previous two chapters of this thesis dissected the relationship between race and affect through a deeper examination of visual elements. Therein, we saw how visual techniques and figures influence the ways individuals categorize and empathize with people and social issues. From understanding how editing could be utilized to regulate historical racial narratives to incorporating racial stereotypes in our own construction of victims as good and bad figures, the visual aspect of film and videos has been well-established as an important trigger for affective response. However, the act of seeing is only one part of this audiovisual experience. From an emotional standpoint, audio tends to be the most dominant channel for conveying stories and triggers the most reactions from individuals (Alexander, 1994; Back and Bull, 2003; Crigler, Just, and Neuman, 1994; McHugh, 2014; Tsuneki, 1998). This may stem from the affective quality of sound and its ability to emotionally move listeners (McHugh, 2014). Sounds within videos allow others to visualize an event and engage with the content on an emotional level (Moore and Singh, 2018). In this case, the absorption of sound does not only resonate in our ears, but through our entire bodies, making it an experiential event (Gershon, 2013, p. 258). This in turn can greatly impact how individuals learn and feel about sociopolitical issues (Crigler, Just, and Neuman, 1994).

In the context of police brutality and filmed incidences of it, audio and sound are incredibly important in fostering emotional and subjective feedback. From the sounds of gun shots being fired to the somewhat chaotic dialogue between officers and victims, there is a sense of closeness that
is formed between the viewer and what is being viewed. In a more recent case study referenced in the introduction of this thesis, I briefly mentioned the case of George Floyd and his passing in 2020. In this incident, the sounds of Floyd crying for his already-deceased mother triggered deep emotional sadness and empathy from individuals all over the world, leading to vast movements and protests transcending past the United States (Longman, 2020; O’Neal, 2020). What Floyd and other cases of filmed police violence have shown us is that sound, specifically the sound of voices, can cognitively impact our emotions and unknowingly leave a lasting impression in our minds (Alexander, 1994; Crigler, Just, and Neuman, 1994; Weisbuch and Ambady, 2008).

However, the importance of sound should not only be measured by its significance in curating affect, but rather in its simultaneous ability to provide a deeper understanding around this concept of race and racial identity. From utilizing sound and speech to protect racial spaces to experiencing racial prejudice based on one’s non-standard dialect, sound has been (and continues to be) used to mediate larger narratives around race and racial perspectives (Fridland, 2020; Smith, 2006). The importance of sound (and non-visual senses in general) has been echoed in Smith’s work, in which he argues for an approach that takes into consideration the sensory history of race (2006). In doing so, he argues that one can fully understand the ways in which race is made, learned, and has arisen throughout time (ibid). Simply put, by moving away from traditional discussions that hold “race and racial identity...hostage to the eye”, individuals will be able to understand that one does not only “see race”, but they hear it as well (Smith, 2006, p. 9).

With this in mind, this chapter aims to unpack the ways in which sound has both influenced our ability to emotionally connect with content, but also how sound in itself is mediated through expectations that are grounded in racial tropes and narratives. In doing a comparative analysis of both Castile and Shaver’s audio, as well as the resulting reactions from listeners, I will show how
race in itself impacts how one not only speaks and presents themselves via sound, but also how we listen to and empathize with such audio. The structure of this chapter will be divided into two sections: Philando Castile’s audio and Daniel Shaver’s audio. Although the comments within this theme touched on various auditory sounds, such as background noise and secondary sounds (e.g., the sound of gun shots, etc.), the emphasis of this discussion will be placed on the victims’ voices and speech heard in the videos. By this I mean, the focal point of this discussion will center around what was said by both Castile and Shaver, how they conveyed their respective thoughts and messages, and how that in turn was interpreted by listeners. Through a careful dissection of the audio and commentary that were and were not provided by listeners, we will see how sound has played a large role in curating various affective responses.

This chapter will also dive into the ways in which race and racial narratives are upheld through sound and speech. Specifically, I will be assessing what others have deemed as appropriate and inappropriate when it comes to speech and language (i.e., the use of Ebonics in black culture vs. “Blaccent” in white mainstream culture). By thoroughly assessing Castile and Shaver’s case studies, one will come to understand how racial tropes, narratives, and regulations influence how white and black bodies speak and evoke emotion and truth claims through dialogue, and how that in turn influences our own understanding of sound and speech. This chapter will touch on the complex intersections of speech, sound, and race, while highlighting the contradictions that may exist within these relationships. In creating this discussion, we will see subthemes emerge such as how these intersections co-exist within the presence of authority, as well as regulations around masculinity.

5.1 Philando Castile’s Case Study
Philando Castile’s case study and specifically the examination of his audio presented some complex ideas and themes. When categorizing these findings, there were three central ideas that emerged from the commentary. The first was the relationship between sound and the creation of “truth” claims. Here, we saw listeners unpacking Castile’s narration and trying to define what could be read as truthful or not. From a racial lens, concepts around racial stereotypes and its association to truth and believability will become present in these discussions. The latter portion of this section relates to the interconnectivity between speech, tone, and racial expectations. We will see how race influences the production of speech and sound from both a dialectical perspective, but also through the manipulation of emotions itself. The literature around dialect and racial hierarchy, as well as the discussions around racial stereotypes will become applicable here. Overall, within this discussion, one will see the complexities and contradictions that exist around black bodies and speech.

5.1.1 The Importance of Sound: Creating Multiple Truth Claims from One’s Voice

When assessing Philando Castile’s case study, it was relatively clear that the element of sound played a large role in people’s interpretation of the incident. When looking at the initial footage presented by all five sources on both Facebook and Twitter, viewers were unable to directly see Castile in the clip nor were they able to directly view the confrontation between him and Officer Yanez (i.e., the camera was situated on a dashboard at a distance and Castile was still inside his vehicle). Castile’s voice was the only physically tangible part of his identity that was evident in these clips. His voice in this footage played a key role in filling in the missing pieces of information that were not presented visually within the video. Questions around what Castile was

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85 This is examined in greater detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis
86 By this, I mean to say that his voice was the only direct part of Castile that viewers could witness (since we are unable to see his physical body)
doing inside the vehicle and whether or not he was reaching for his weapon were all points of curiosity that were not necessarily answered visually. This in turn forced viewers to focus on what was being said as a way to help curate their own truth claim.87 The following three comments highlight this point by demonstrating how they chose to study and prioritize the audio and Castile’s words.

Commenter 69 of NBC (Castile): “Learn the facts and listen to the video. He wasn’t reaching for the gun. He was trying to advise the officer in order to retrieve his IDs he had to go near the gun”

Commenter 63 of NBC (Castile): “Dude listen to the audio. He said ‘I’m not reaching for it, I’m getting my ID’ LISTEN TO THE AUDIO”

Commenter 550 of Fox News (Castile): “He said ‘I’m gonna have to pull it out’ listen to it again but louder this time. [I’ve] watched this over and over trying to make sure what [I] heard.”

Commenter 951 of NBC (Castile): “Sorry but I studied it, playing that segment over and over focusing in on the audio of Castile...You can even hear Castile’s wife begin to attempt to vocalise something, but never fully does...”

Commenter 536 of Fox News (Castile): “It’s true. He said I’m not pulling it out. Gotta play it 2-3 times to hear it correctly”

All five individuals reiterate the importance of listening to the audio in order to better understand the incident. This brings up an interesting argument around the relationship between sound and

87 I use the term “truth claim” as opposed to “the truth” because there is not an objective truth that can be derived from these videos. Given the nature of this content paired with the subjectivity derived from the individuals themselves, the “truth” is dependent on how one views the footage. In this case, there is no accurate and objective truth.
what individuals claim to be the “truth” In their individual ways of stating this point, commenters present an argument based on the connection between the “truth-seeking” process and the act of listening. Similar to what Moore and Singh state about how images bring one closer to the truth, we see parallel discussions being made here with the aspect of sound (2018). Commenter 69’s post briefly encompasses this point with their reference to learning the facts of the case and listening to the audio to support and supplement that information.

The following commenters further this point by emphasizing the importance of listening as a method for seeking truth. For Commenter 63, the emphasis of listening is evident through the writing of their post. They begin with encouraging others to partake in this process and end with that same claim, except using capitalization of all the letters this time to emphasize the same argument (“LISTEN TO THE AUDIO”). The juxtaposition between that part of the comment with the other non-capitalized words is interesting because it alludes to that being the central point and thought of this comment. It also could be read from an emotional-based lens. Brand and others point out that emotions not only influence what we write, but how we write it (1985, p. 6). In this case, the capitalization of those words could be seen a way of expressing heightened emotions felt by Commenter 63 and is directed towards their online peers (i.e., frustration, anger, etc.). This could be assumed given that the commenter begins their post with the word “dude”, referencing a possible response to another individual within a larger (possibly heated) online debate.88

For Commenters 550, 951, and 536, they make the same claim as their peers, but instead they take a different approach to how they voice their perspectives. They decide to emphasize their own listening experience within their commentary. Specifically, they emphasize the need for repetition

88 It is important to note that the commenter did not directly reference another user in their comment, thus I cannot verify who they are specifically talking to.
to better validate their argument (i.e., repeatedly listening to it at a louder volume, studying the segment by playing it over and over again). Their comments connect to an interesting point brought up by Crigler, Just, and Neuman, who discuss the importance of repetition when it comes to sound and the curation of affect (1994). In their piece, they state that repetition of verbal information can influence the strength of that message (ibid; Graber, 1988; Gunter, 1980; Robinson and Levy, 1986). Although Crigler, Just, and Neuman refer to this argument within the larger context of television messages, the essence of what they are stating seems to hold true in this case as well. By repeatedly listening to the audio of Castile speaking, not only are individuals searching for some sort of clarity, but with each repetition, the message of what Castile is saying (i.e., “I’m going to have to pull it out”, etc.) becomes stronger and more impactful for the listener. Simultaneously, this phrase also becomes seen as more “truthful” to that individual with each repeated listening. This essence of “truth” (or what they deem as the “truth”) is important in the curation of affect as it may help curate a sense of empathy for Castile.

With that being said, while we see the importance of Castile’s voice and specifically his own narration of what seems to be happening inside the vehicle, there was not a true consensus that was reached by commenters in terms of the truthfulness of Castile’s audio. Although commenters within this data set seemed to have all placed an emphasis on the impact of sound in relation to “truth seeking” and providing clarity, their interpretations of what they were hearing differed. The following comments provide a brief insight into some of the discussions that took place in the comments sections.

Commenter 10 of Fox News (Castile): “No the words he chose were – I have a gun, and I am pulling it out...told him three times NO”
Commenter 500 of NBC (Castile): “…After Philando said, ‘I have a firearm’ the cop said ‘Don’t pull it out’.”

Commenter 14 of Fox News (Castile): “The guy was told not to reach for the gun THREE TIMES. He had more than enough time to replace his hands on the steering wheel. He continued to reach. Yes, it was justified.”

Commenter 821 of USA Today (Castile): “He clearly told him not to reach and obviously continued...”

Commenter 436 of Fox News (Castile): “It’s obvious the victim’s intent was not to shoot the officer by the fact that he told him he had a gun in the first place”

Commenter 476 of Fox News (Castile): “He clearly said he had a firearm. Why did you shoot him...”

Commenter 771 of Fox News (Castile): “He CLEARLY STATED I HAVE A FIREARM [IN] THE CAR SIR...If he was a threat he would have NEVER MADE THE STATEMENT TO [BEGIN] WITH!!!!”

The contrast in perspectives as demonstrated through this sample reflect the ways in which interpretations of sound and audio influence people’s perceptions around truth. Similar to what was seen with visual processing, there is a power that stems from how one interprets content, consequently influencing the effectiveness of visual and auditory evidence (Beutin, 2017). However, the process of interpretation is not simple, nor is it monolithic by any means. In fact, as Back points out and is referenced in Gershon’s piece, what one hears and does not hear is personalized and socio-culturally contextualized (Back, 2009; Gershon, 2013). Thus, the creation of an ultimate truth in this case is not possible, as the examination of sound is a diverse process and varies depending on the individual and their experiences.
What is interesting here in this study is that the soundscape is relatively consistent – at no point do commenters deny hearing Castile’s voice stating the words “I’m not pulling it out”. However, the interpretation around what did and did not happen inside the vehicle is still contested by viewers. This may stem from how commenters chose to prioritize and contextualize the audio. In the case of the first four comments, individuals contextualized Castile’s comments within the larger dialogue between him and Officer Yanez. They focused on Officer Yanez’s sound bites indicating to not reach for the gun. This was followed up by their confusion as to why Castile did not follow Officer Yanez’s verbal instructions. The attention and believability of Officer Yanez’s sound bites as opposed to what is being said by Castile plays into a larger narrative that is constructed around policing as an institution of authority and truth. Alpert and Noble state that police are often required to be trustworthy and honest (2009, p. 238). In fact, officers are often “held to a higher standard than nonpolice as they represent the government as agents of the law…their word and their ‘honesty’ [are] taken over that of a civilian” (ibid). Although they discuss this point in relation to legal proceedings, the applicability of this argument here seems fitting. As noted in works like “Police Misconduct, Media Coverage, and Public Perceptions of Racial Profiling: An Experiment”, while people’s perceptions around policing vastly differ based on race and personal experiences, there is still a population of individuals who believe in the truthfulness and authority of police officers (Graziano, Schuck, and Martin, 2010). We see this being exemplified through this section of comments supporting Officer Yanez’s portion of the audio (e.g., comments 10 to 821).

This is then juxtaposed with the following three comments in this sample (comments 436, 476, 771) that feel otherwise. These three commenters follow what Commenters 69 to 536 state earlier in this chapter, which is that Castile’s verbal narration of his actions is indicative of what was
happening inside of the vehicle at the time. Points around honesty, intent, and being seen as non-threatening were all made in these three comments. This is an important thing to note down as their arguments around the validity of Castile’s words integrate ideas that are linked back to narratives around race. For example, Commenters 436 and 771’s references to his honesty around his weapon are linked back to certain rules and regulations regarding police interactions that are followed by black communities (e.g., use your words carefully, be polite, etc.) (Lund 2015). The reference to him being seen as “non-threatening” is also linked back to traditional stereotypes placed on black men (e.g., they are dangerous, inherently criminal, etc.) (Alexander, 1994; Beutin, 2017; Hook, 2013; Nguyen and Anthony, 2014). Again, by using his audio and the words he uses to identify him as “non-threatening”, commenters inadvertently paint Castile as the antithesis of the traditionally black identity. This complex relationship between sound, speech, and race is further examined in the following subsection of this chapter.

In essence, as witnessed in this subsection under Philando Castile’s case study, there is a great significance that comes with the element of sound in visual pieces of evidence. In the context of Castile’s story, sound and specifically speech provided by the victim served as a crucial source for individuals to create their own truths. Given the lack of access in this visual piece (thanks in part to the angle of the camera), listening to Castile’s intentional yet unintentional narration was a central way for viewers to understand the actions and interactions that were otherwise unobtainable. Nevertheless, as we see here, sound does not provide a unified interpretation of the “truth”, nor does it necessarily provide clarity. The role of the viewer and their individual

89 This is explored in the previous chapter (Chapter 4)
90 By “intentional yet unintentional”, I am referring to Castile’s intentional narration for the purpose of his own safety at the time of the incident; yet it is unintentionally serving as a narrative piece for viewers to listen to and follow along with.
perceptions and biases they hold greatly influence how they choose to unpack and contextualize what they hear. It can also greatly impact what individuals choose to hear and prioritize, as exemplified with the incorporation of Officer Yanez’s sound bite. The role of sound in Castile’s case study is important and as we will see in this following subsection, depicts complex narratives around speech, racial narratives, and affect.

5.1.2 Code-Switching, Speech, and Race: Unpacking Castile’s Speech

In the initial literature review provided in Chapter One, there was a prominent discourse around the racialization of sound and speech. Specifically, scholars in this field made the distinction between normative white speech and the “other” (Chun, 2001; Fought, 2006; Harris, 2010; Newman and Wu, 2011; Trechter and Bucholtz, 2001). To summarize, whiteness within the realm of language and sound studies is often seen as an elevated form of language, exuding promising characteristics and qualities such as intelligence and class (Fought, 2006; Ogbu, 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 1998). This is contrasted with the language of the “other” – in this case, Ebonics or African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Fought, 2006, p. 45-46; Harris, 2010). Rooted in American history and shaped by the experiences of slavery and segregation, this form of speech is now often associated with negative racial prejudices and stereotypes such as laziness, deviance, being uneducated, being seen as overtly masculine, and inferiority (Flores, 2020; Fought, 2006, p. 53; Guo, 2016; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 1996, p. 6). These beliefs are often highlighted through anecdotal evidence seen within mainstream media (Popp, Donovan, Crawford, Marsh, and Peele, 2003). Elements of speech such as speech patterns, tone, cadences, and pronunciations of words are all points of criticism for black speakers (Harris, 2010).

Nonetheless, it could be argued that the accent and linguistic features often associated with AAVE and/or Ebonics is not the issue at hand, but rather it is the speaker themselves. As of
recently, we have seen the emergence of the “blaccent” both in entertainment and societal spheres (Flores, 2020; Jackson, 2018). “Blaccent” is an integration of the words “black” and “accent” and refers to the imitation of “Black English” by those who are not a part of that racial population (Guo, 2016). Early evidence of usage started in 2003 on older internet forums and made a resurgence in 2009 during President Obama’s presidency, when it was noted that he would code-switch between accents depending on the racial population of the crowd (Alim, Rickford, and Ball, 2016; Henderson, 2014). More recently, “blaccent” is specifically referred to its current definition—an accent that is characteristically African American and is often synonymous with its appropriation by non-black speakers—“verbal blackface” (Barr, 2018; Guo, 2016; Jackson, 2018; Palmer, 2019). Given the usage of this term, it is often seen as a “cultural call out” towards those who are not a part of the culture itself.\(^9\)

Currently, the “blaccent” has been used in multiple forums by non-black individuals such as TikTok, Instagram, and the music industry, for comedic purposes and monetary gains (Flores, 2020; Jackson, 2018). This appropriation and usage of AAVE or Ebonics by non-community members to appear popular, youthful, likeable, and/or funny resembles what Bourdieu would conceptualize as cultural capital. The key interest here is how dominant classes manage to appropriate and monopolize resources and effectively utilize them for their own benefit (Bourdieu, 1973; Goldthorpe, 2007). In turn, this type of privileged access allows individuals to reap additional benefits and/or “provides returns to their holders” (Boudieu, 1973; Goldthorpe, 2007, p. 4). When applying this to the use of the “blaccent”, we see parallels in how cultural capital is

\(^9\) In many present-day cases, the term is used within the context of holding someone accountable for their appropriation of black culture and black sound. More popular examples in which this has taken place would include debates around the use of black accents by popular white musical artists such as Iggy Azalea (Guo, 2016; Lenard and Balint, 2020).
being earned through the appropriation of speech. Although it appears to be a “downward” moving mobility as opposed to an “upward” movement (i.e., moving downward to fit in with a racial class that is “below” them), there is a type of cultural benefit that non-black individuals gain by monopolizing off of traditional black speech. Again, as mentioned previously, these benefits include monetary gains as well as social status (i.e., this idea of being seen as trendy and/or cool in today’s society).

The irony here between the use of a “blaccent” versus Ebonics is evident, especially given the contrary reactions towards the users of these types of speech. While non-black speakers acquire greater capital and are praised for their use of this accent, those who are black and use this dialect receive the opposite. They are perceived as unintelligible, aggressive, and hostile (Flores, 2020; Fought, 2006; Locke, 1993; Ogawa, 1971; Popp, Donovan, Crawford, Marsh, and Peele, 2003; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 1996). Although utilizing Ebonics within mainstream culture has become a prominent trend and somewhat normalized, it is reserved for only a few (i.e., non-black bodies). When applying this to the case of Philando Castile, it could be argued that by speaking in traditional Ebonics and/or African American Vernacular English, Castile would not reap any sort of benefits (i.e., being seen as likeable, friendly), but rather would further perpetuate his inferiority, thus, demonstrating a linguistic contradiction that is existent. The effects of this double standard are also further witnessed when examining how black populations have been forced to utilize code-switching as a tactic for survival and upward mobility.⁹²

Given the dichotomy between these two abstractive forms of speech and their deeply rooted connections to racial hierarchy and stereotypes, it is not uncommon to see racialized individuals

⁹² Code-switching in its basic formation refers to the shifting from one linguistic code to another (language or dialect). The term is often broadly discussed and used in linguistics and/or other related fields (Morrison, C.D., 2017; Nilep, 2006).
become bidialectal in certain situations and spaces (Fought, 2006; Harris, 2010). Bidialectal refers to one speaking both AAVE or Ebonics and a more “standard” (often times “white”) dialect (Fought, 2006). The process of switching between the two forms of speech dependent on space can be seen as an example of Du Bois’ double consciousness at play. In the case of Philando Castile, it can be assumed that he must take on a different view of himself through the eyes of Officer Yanez in order to “properly” conduct himself during the interaction. Castile’s manipulation of speech and sound in order to survive this incident is similar to earlier historical examples of how black bodies utilized sound and speech for resistance and protection. For example, those who were enslaved were quite aware of “the vigilant eyes of their masters” and would thus “smother” their own sound for their own safety and protection (i.e., learned how to walk silently, emphasized the importance of whispering, etc.) (Smith, 2006; p. 31). In this same way, Castile’s careful control of his words and emotions (i.e., his choice of words, his calmness) was in part a “smothering” of his own sound.

His approach to verbally engaging with the officer using a “whiter” way of speech is a survival tactic, often used by black individuals to get around structural and systemic obstacles (Harris, 2010). From a linguistic perspective, it could be argued that Castile does this by verbally incorporating a more standardized and Eurocentric form of language into his speech. From the brief recording of his voice in the video, there were certain points that indicated a switch into this different type of speech, moving away from what is popularly known as “sounding African American” (Newman and Wu, 2011). For one, there was a sense of formality in how Castile spoke in terms of language (e.g., using the word “Sir” to address the officer, acknowledging his weapon

93 By “properly”, I am referring to conduct that is seen as non-threatening and appropriate from the perspective of others (i.e., the police officer, white mainstream society, etc.)
as a “firearm” as opposed to “gun” or another term). Casual language, historically “black” words, and slang terms often associated with Ebonics and now the “blaccent” were non-existent during Castile’s interaction with the officer. This helped provide a sense of clarity around what Castile was saying. From a listener’s perspective, this resonated with many commenters. The following set of comments are a sample of how they expressed their positive affirmation towards Castile’s speech.

Commenter 417 of Fox News (Castile): “The guy warned the officer in a respectable voice he had a gun…”

Commenter 847 of USA Today (Castile): “he said as clear as day I’m not pulling it out WTF”

Commenter 245 of USA Today (Castile): “…the man clearly and calmly…told him he had a gun…”

Commenter 194 of NBC (Castile): “…The man politely and [calmly told the officer] ‘I have a firearm on me’…”

All of the comments here praised Castile for not only being upfront and honest about his possession of a firearm, but they also positively responded to the tone and overall manner in which he stated it. For Commenters 847 and 245, they point out the clarity in Castile’s words. For these listeners, they can clearly understand what he is saying in the clip. There is a clarity in his language and the important point that Castile is trying to make (“I’m not pulling it out”) is easily

94 By “historically ‘black’ words”, I am referring to what John R. Rickford defines as terms that have been used within black communities, with their cultural meanings being virtually unknown to those outside of the community. He uses the examples of “kitchen” (hair at the nape of someone’s neck) and “ashy” (dry skin that appears white on darker skin) to make this point. These are different than slang terms, which are often known or stereotypically conceived in mainstream society (2004).

95 A reason for this lack of casual language may stem from the general nature/tone of the interaction itself (i.e., interacting with one who holds a position of authority). However, given the historical and racialized context/history around traffic stops, this may be an additional reason for intentionally speaking in this manner (i.e., to avoid being seen as stereotypically “black”, and experiencing fatal and dangerous consequences)
comprehended by these listeners (i.e., no use of slang terms or dialect that is new to other non-racialized individuals). Commenters 417 and 194 expand on this same response, but instead connect this argument to themes of respectability and politeness. This comparison that is formed by commenters further speaks to the elevation around white speech and dialect over its counterparts, as well as the linguistic/racial dichotomy that exists (Fought, 2006; Harris, 2010; Newman and Wu, 2011; Ogbu, 1999; Trechter and Buchotz, 2001; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 1998). In this sense, we see the dimensions of power between these end points of opposition (i.e., black and white speech, superior versus inferior dialect, etc.) (Mirón and Xavier, 2000). From the perspective of the commenter, Castile sounded respectable rather than disrespectful, polite rather than savage-like. His verbal presentation passed off as believable in the sense that he sounded like the antithesis of what would otherwise be expected from a black man – that being uncivilized, dangerous, deviant, and inherently bad (Ahmed, 2015; Beutin, 2017; Hall, 2001; Nguyen and Anthony, 2014; Richardson, 2020). Castile’s success with code-switching here stemmed from both his use of formal language and clarity, but also his calm tonal demeanour. This was pointed out by several commenters, including the ones above. This in part leads us to the next subsection of Castile’s case study, which examines how Castile’s emotional demeanour and speech encompasses traditionally racialized narratives thrust upon black bodies, specifically black men in America.

5.1.3 Speech, Race, and Emotion: Unpacking Castile’s Calmness

While analyzing Castile’s set of videos, I found it surprising to hear the calmness in Castile’s voice as he is talking to Officer Yanez prior being shot at. The initial lack of fear and panic in his voice is both chilling and interesting. As touched on in the previous set of comments provided by listeners, the calmness in Castile’s voice was a key point that resonated with individuals in their assessment of him and the incident. The lack of exaggerated emotions, such as anger, fear, and
stress, in his tone seemed to be associated with this sense of innocence, peacefulness, and maturity. As you will see in the following set of comments, his tonal demeanour was more so linked to character building (as discussed in Chapter 2), specifically seeing him as a non-threatening figure.

Commenter 162 of Fox News (Castile): “There was nothing in Philando’s voice that would indicate any malice or aggression whatsoever, yet Yanez was already reaching for his gun and unholstering it upon hearing that a gun was in the car”

Commenter 2100 of NBC (Castile): “...[you] could [hear] the victim TELLING him of his gun!!!... he didn’t sound angry... trying to comply...”

Commenter 2355 of NBC (Castile): “...his voice was calm...and his kid in the car...he didn’t sound like he would have killed a cop in front of his child either...”

Commenter 555 of USA Today (Castile): “Exactly I mean Philando was so calm and non-threatening he didn’t sound aggressive, he was simply letting the [officer] know that he has a gun on him, if anyone could justify this shooting they have ulterior motive”

Commenter 558 of USA Today (Castile): “Philando tone was non-threatening...”

Commenter 635 of USA Today (Castile): “There was no threat in Castile’s tone, he said he wasn’t grabbing the gun”

When assessing the comments for any sort of affective responses, the comments themselves do not necessarily exude an exaggerated degree of emotion. Compared to other data sets in alternative topics and subtopics, these comments are far more neutral and analytical in tone; this is compared to what we have seen thus far with the other commentary provided in previous chapters (i.e., other comments were heavily emotional in nature and utilized heightened language, it was easier to unpack commenters’ emotional stance). Commenters do not necessarily use emotional language or grammatical techniques to emphasize any sort of emotional reaction (with
the exception of Commenter 2100 who utilizes capitalization and exclamation marks to hint at some emotional resonance – possibly shock, frustration, and/or confusion). With that being said, it could be argued that the general wording and arguments at large seemed to hint at feelings of agreeance with Castile, possibly empathetic towards him. The main argument for that is how commenters supported how Castile chose to speak to the police officer in that moment. This is paired with what could be read as a sense of confusion felt by some individuals (i.e., unsure as to how his calm demeanour could lead to him getting shot, “he didn’t sound like he would have killed a cop in front of his child either…”, “if anyone could justify this shooting they have ulterior motive”).

Statements such as “there was nothing in [his] voice that would indicate malice or aggression”, “he didn’t sound aggressive”, “[his] tone was non-threatening”, “he didn’t sound angry”, and “he didn’t sound like he would kill a cop”96 are all interesting points of emphasis, but it poses the question, what does it mean to sound “threatening” or better yet “non-threatening”? How does one sound if they are about to “kill a cop”? These questions force us to examine Castile’s tone of voice and particularly how his racial position in this context intertwines to create this response from listeners. In doing so, it would be imperative to examine how speech and displays of emotions are intrinsically racialized at its core. Wilkins states that emotions and one’s ability to express them are not evenly distributed (2012). Often times, race is associated with emotions and behaviour, both in terms of what they look like and how they are used (Smith, 2002). For black bodies, expressions of emotions through speech and sound come at a price, specifically risking being seen and painted as a stereotype (i.e., “the angry black person”) (Hackman, 2016; Wilkins, 2012). Ahmed talks about this in relation to this idea of producing discomfort as a person

96 Quotations are all from comments above (Commenters 108 to 113)
of colour. As a black individual (or a person of colour in general), there is a sense of discomfort and uneasiness that one’s body produces to others around them and consequently this forces these groups of people (racialized individuals) to work harder to make others (white-bodied individuals) feel comfortable around them (Ahmed, 2013). Even when we may align in other ways (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, etc.), the difference in race creates this tension (ibid; hooks, 2000). In this case, Castile’s explicit display of calmness is there to both ease the officer in that moment, but also unintentionally eases the discomfort that listeners may be experiencing. This is all further exemplified in the commentary above (i.e., the relatively positive and/or empathetic feedback).

This requirement of producing comfort around one’s own black body may stem from a larger understanding around race and how racial identities come with certain “emotional bases” (Smith, 2002). This in turn leads to a variety of socially constructed behaviour (e.g., speaking a certain way, monitoring physical behaviour, etc.) (ibid). The best way one can exemplify this point is through the socialization of black men in their early stages of development. To be male and black in society means that one must cope with continuous forms of racial and gender profiling at varying degrees (Aymer, 2016). In preparation for this reality, African American men are often socialized early to have limited affective responses for their own safety (i.e., learning how to not express anger in order to stay alive) (Smith, 2002; Wilkins, 2012). In this sense, black men are often taught that their demonstration of emotions must be intrinsically linked to a plan of action or a goal (i.e., there must be a purpose for their emotions otherwise it is a risk to their physical and social safety) (Shweder, 1994; Smith, 2002).

97 Ahmed references hooks’ example of white feminist activists who share this bonded union amongst each other yet become increasingly tense when a woman of colour enters the room. This is in direct reference to Ahmed’s discussion around the “angry black woman” trope (Ahmed, 2013; hooks, 2000).
98 I say “unintentionally” here because in that moment it is most likely not known to Castile that there would be people listening to his audio.
As Ahmed states, this carefulness to exude vulnerability through speech could be categorized as emotional “hardness” (2015). This lack of visible emotions, specifically in the case of Philando Castile, is not necessarily indicative of a lack of emotions felt by him, but rather it a demonstration of a different emotional orientation (i.e., his calmness is relational to what is happening and has a purpose – to not get killed). This complexity around the controlling of one’s emotions as demonstrated by Castile is indicative of the double jeopardy that African American men must experience (Smith, 2002). In this case, African American men are not only subjected to the pressures of following traditional rules around masculinity, thanks in part to western gender norms, patriarchal rules, and tropes around masculinity in itself (hooks, 2004; Kimmel, 1994; Reeser and Gottzén, 2018), but they must also be aware of their racial positioning within society given the existence of racism and racial prejudice (Smith, 2002; Wilkins, 2012). In this sense, black men must also conform to white-determined standards for what is appropriate or not (hooks, 1995).

Experiences of racial inequality as well as the history of slavery and racism play a key role in the emotional and affective responses curated by those who are of colour (ibid; Wilkins, 2012). Violence against black bodies during enslavement, the Jim Crow era, the civil rights movement, as well as during the lynching and re-lynching of black bodies via police brutality have all curated certain emotions that have transcended throughout time and space (Aymer, 2016; Smith, 2002). From this perspective, African American men are constantly at risk and “are in fact deeply fragile” (Hackman, 2016). But again, as mentioned before, these emotions stemming from generational trauma must be controlled and often suppressed. Scholars in this field label this requirement as the “racialized feelings rule”. The “racialized feelings rule” is defined as “the emotional norms [appropriated] to…given [situations or contexts]” (Wingfield, 2010, p. 252). This consequently forces African American men to take on what Hochschild’s would call “emotional work”, which
is when individuals privately attempt to suppress and/or produce emotions in either themselves and/or others (Hochschild, 1983; Wilkins, 2012; Wingfield, 2010). For African American men, this would involve self-prohibiting certain expressions, such as anger, towards issues and/or situations of racial inequality (i.e., “killing their rage” to appease white peers) (hooks, 1995; Wilkins, 2012).

To further this discussion, it is important to note that the level of acceptance and expectations towards others’ ability to suppress their emotions and conduct this “emotional work” differs based on one’s racial and social positioning. By this, I mean that there are different expectations and varying standards around who should be suppressing their emotions and to what extent. To reiterate Wilkins’ point, emotions and one’s ability to express them are not evenly distributed (2012). There are different standards when it comes to what we define as acceptable emotional behaviour. This is exemplified in a particular comment left by an individual on the NBC Facebook page. It states, “The cop was cussing not [because] he did anything wrong but he did not want to have to shoot anyone… [Officer Yanez] seemed very nice and cordial…” 99 Although Officer Yanez exudes a high degree of fear and stress, as exemplified through his yelling and cursing, individuals such as this commenter still find empathy for the officer by validating his verbal conduct.

Furthermore, they create a positive character creation by insisting that he “seemed very nice and cordial”. This perspective is further reiterated by another individual, stating, “the reason the cop’s voice became panicked could have been because he saw him reaching for the gun…The girlfriend must have also been reaching for it.” 100 Again, the individual here is articulating the

99 Commenter 2020 of NBC (Castile).
100 Commenter 487 of USA Today (Castile).
same support and understanding for Officer Yanez’s display of emotional distress. They further this by supporting him at the cost of Castile and his partner (i.e., assuming and painting a picture of them as deliberately doing something wrong and/or criminal). When looking at these reactions, there may be various reasons for this. The difference in expectations may stem from Yanez’s position of authority as an officer (again, linking back to previous the discussion around authority and trust) (Alpert and Noble, 2009), the differences in racial tropes and stereotypes associated with different racial groups (i.e., being African American versus being Hispanic and the different stereotypes individuals must navigate), and/or the macro racial hierarchy that exists (Gayles and Tobin, 2006). With this in mind, it is important to note that while we praise Castile in comparison for his emotional control and the ‘lack of cussing’, it begs the question, *would one still empathize with Castile had he demonstrated the same emotional verbal tone as Officer Yanez?* Given the literature around black bodies and speech as presented earlier in this chapter and throughout this thesis, along with commenters’ positive reactions towards his calmness and respectability, it could be argued that the response would be different.

To summarize, the level of emotional work demonstrated by Castile throughout this brief interaction reflects the additional layers of difficulty that are placed on black bodies in their ability to verbally articulate themselves as emotional human beings. As evident through this case study, the double jeopardy that is associated with displaying emotions as a black man derive from both conceptions around masculinity and race. As a “man”, there is a certain level of emotional control that is often associated with masculinity and is projected on the male population (Reeser and Gottzén, 2018). To project a sense of emotional impairment and stoicism are all linked to a western masculine emotional regime, which praises emotional suppression as a sign of strength rather than weakness (ibid; Seidler, 1989). In the case of a black man, we see these expectations of emotional
control further elevated thanks in part to the additional stigma associated with black men and emotions. By controlling one’s emotions to portray this sense of calmness, it opposes traditional negative portrayals and ideas often associated with black bodies. Castile’s civilized restraint reflects a sense of civility and poise, often linked to both this idea of evolution and white narratives (Ahmed, 2015; Hall, 2001; Richardson, 2020). His temperament opposes what would otherwise be associated with black bodies – that being a “black savage” – purely emotional and unintellectual (Tolia-Kelly and Crag, 2010).

This point is further validated through these findings, specifically the positive nature of the commentary provided by listeners. By pointing out Castile’s calmness in both tone and demeanour, and further linking it to this non-threatening perception, it supports these larger arguments around blackness and the threat that is present when black bodies articulate and convey what would otherwise be a normal range of emotions given the circumstance (i.e., sounding angry and/or frustrated towards the continuous harassment of black bodies in America). By suppressing such emotions, Castile becomes relatable and likeable to some extent. The listener is no longer scared of Castile but could rather empathize with his vulnerability, without having to understand his frustrations as a black man. As we will see with Daniel Shaver, these standards and notions around acceptable behaviour are removed from people’s listening experiences. Unlike Castile, we will see Shaver free to express his emotions and not bounded by negative tropes around race, masculinity, and emotions.

5.2 Daniel Shaver’s Case Study

When assessing Daniel Shaver’s case study and specifically the commentary provided in response to his audio, there were some initial clear differences when compared to Castile’s set of data. From a quantitative perspective, Shaver’s audio was not necessarily a common point of
interest for commenters given the lack of reference to his audio clip. To provide context, out of the 381 useable comments either discussing and/or referencing the auditory interaction between the victims and officers, only 95 comments pertained to Shaver’s case study (approximately 25% of the total audio-related comments). Within the 95 comments discussing Shaver’s audio, only 16 of those were solely discussing Shaver (approximately 17%), with the remaining 79 comments (approximately 83%) focusing on Officer Brailsford’s voice and role in the larger audio clip provided. The greater emphasis on Brailsford’s voice may stem from the fact that his voice was the most coherent and clearest piece of audio found in the clips. Overall, given these numbers, there may be a few reasons as to why this may be the case. For one, contrary to Castile’s case study, Daniel Shaver’s video (the visual) is presented differently to the viewer. We see Shaver in this video and for the moments that we do not see of him (due to editing), we are given a written narration of the encounter and the actions that follow. These visual frames and cues provided by either the clip itself or by editors of the footage allow most spectators to understand what is happening within this interaction. With that being said, this does not necessarily mean that commenters interpreted the event in the same way. In fact, as we will see, the audio and elements of the audio were diagnosed quite differently by many listeners.

While reading this subsection, one will notice that Daniel Shaver’s case study presents many of the same themes and larger discussions presented in Philando Castile’s set of data. Nonetheless, there are several differences in terms of the general direction of these discussions presented by commenters. This will all be touched on within the following two subsections. For the purpose of this chapter, I will be focusing on two central ideas that emerged from the data set provided. First,

101 It is important to note that the recording device (BWC) is placed on Officer Brailsford’s upper body. This means that the recording device is located relatively closer to Brailsford’s mouth and is thus able to pick up on his voice better as compared to someone like Shaver, who is standing at a distance.
I will touch on this idea of sound and the multiple interpretations of sound. The themes that emerge from this subsection such as victim-blaming and the emergence of multiple “truth” claims will parallel discussions found in Philando Castile’s case study. However, unlike Castile’s case study where the victim’s voice was the central point of analysis, I will be tailoring in on the audio presented by Officer Brailsford. My reason for doing this is in part because of the number of comments focusing on Brailsford’s audio bite as well as the quality of those comments. This will then be followed up by an examination of how displays of emotions via sound influence people’s affective response. By unpacking Shaver’s level of emotional vulnerability, we will see how tropes of masculinity are challenged in this larger absence of racial regulations. As a researcher and a reader, we will see the largest differences here between Shaver and Castile’s case study.

5.2.1 Understanding the Event and Who is At Fault: Multiple Interpretations of Sounds

Understanding an event through sounds and specifically one’s verbal narration of an event is interesting in the sense that words and verbal dialogue can be interpreted quite differently by individuals. Similar to visual analysis, how we interpret audio within visual evidence affects its overall effectiveness (Beutin, 2017). We saw this exemplified with the case of Philando Castile, where there were a lot of visual gaps and the audio became the central point for interpretation. With that data set, individuals presented a variety of arguments and perspectives around what they were hearing and posed this central debate around whether his words aligned with his actions. This became the great debate in that case study and individuals evaluated every tonal element of his voice to find some sort of response. When shifting the focus to Daniel Shaver’s case study, we see certain initial differences (as outlined earlier) that would make one question whether we would see parallel findings. As a researcher, my expectations revolved around this idea that we would see very different results with Shaver’s case. My hypothesis centered around the relationship between
audio and visual. Given that we see the initial interaction between Shaver and Officer Brailsford, along with visually witnessing his vulnerability, my presumption was that individuals would empathetically analyze the audio in accordance with that visual. The clarity (or at least clearer than Castile’s visual) of the visual element would possibly produce a more monolithic interpretation of the audio. However, when observing the data, I was ultimately incorrect.

Although the visual piece here is significant, the impact of visuals is often tempered by other variables. One of these variables is whether or not the visuals presented reinforce or contrast the audio messages (Crigler, Just, and Neuman, 1994). Here, we see audio at the forefront of the discussion. This argument relies on how audio and sound are initially consumed and interpreted by others, and how that in turn relates back to the visual component. In fact, the audio track itself serves as the dominant channel for conveying a story and providing information that others will gather and respond to (ibid). When applying this to Shaver’s case study, we see this being apparent, specifically with the role of Officer Brailsford’s audio. As shown in the statistics presented above, many listeners referenced Officer Brailsford’s audio in their commentary. His narration throughout the clips was a significant piece for many individuals who were processing the videos.

When it comes to this process of truth-seeking and understanding the realities of this incident, people utilized Brailsford’s speech to unpack the details of that event. In doing so, there a central debate emerged amongst commenters. These debates involved examining (a) the clarity of Brailsford’s instructions and whether they were realistic or not for an individual to follow and (b) whether his instructions were followed by Shaver or not. These two areas of discussion influenced how individuals affectively responded to the larger incident at hand (e.g., was it justified? Who did they empathize with?). The following comments are a sample of the diverse perspectives presented by those who listened to the audio.
Commenter 360 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “Hmm so someone in an authority position that was clear, concise, and had an authoritative tone gave directions. I guess this generation can’t handle life without being bubble-wrapped”

Commenter 566 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “The officer clearly several times loud and clear told the suspect to listen to his instructions. Or it may cost him not to survive...”

Commenter 88 of AZ Central (Shaver): “Excellent police work!! Clear, concise instructions...”

Commenter 335 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver): “If you can’t listen to the video and recreate all of the cop’s commands, then you’re the stupid one”

Commenter 449 of Shaun King (Shaver): “These instructions are confusing and borderline contradictory. Guy didn’t have much of a chance”

Commenter 126 of AZ Central (Shaver): “WOW!!! Couldn’t even finish this...how can you keep your hands above your head and be told not to move them and then be told to crawl. You can’t crawl without your hands...UGH!!! These demands made zero sense”

Commenter 188 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver): “Don’t put your hands down for any reason! Now crawl towards me! Who can crawl without their hands down? This was murder. Why not approach when he was flat on [the] ground with [his] arms out? Pathetic.”

Commenter 623 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “The officer tells him to crawl towards him. How can he crawl with his hands up? And he couldn’t say anything or he’d be shot. It was like a deadly game of Simon Says.”

**Supporting Officer Brailsford’s Audio**

The first four commenters above (Commenters 360, 566, 88, 335) present a specific type of interpretation of Brailsford’s instructions. Here, they do not see Brailsford’s instructions as being
confusing nor problematic, but rather view Brailsford as an individual simply doing his job. The affective responses exuded by these individuals range from confusion and annoyance to what could be described as proud and congratulative à la Commenter 88. While some express their feelings of support through statements of affirmation, others portray a sense of defensiveness in their support. For example, Commenter 360, while expressing their support for Brailsford’s verbal and physical actions, produced a sense of defensiveness towards the larger society at hand – particularly calling out “this generation”. Their reference to “bubble wrap” hints at this larger argument around society becoming “too soft” in the age of political correctness. Although political correctness has been used in various ways throughout history, it has now become synonymous with hypersensitivity (Chow, 2016). As Commenter 360 points out, people’s opposing reactions towards Brailsford’s directions and actions is simply indicative of this age in which political correctness gone to the extreme.

Commenters 566 and 335 share this same sense of defensiveness in their messaging as well. Commenter 335’s point reaffirms their stance around the clarity of Brailsford’s instructions by claiming that one must be unintelligent to not understand the directions given. The defensiveness here stems from the shift in blame. Rather than questioning the clarity of Brailsford’s actions, it seems as if they are implicitly blaming Shaver for not following the instructions and attacking his intelligence based on the final results of this incident. The commenter also seems to be targeting those who feel differently about the instructions (i.e., those who believe the instructions were not clear). Commenter 566 mirrors this same argument but is much less aggressive when making

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102 Discussions about political correctness often centre around this debate of free speech and free choice versus inclusion and civility (Chow, 2016)
103 It is important to note that the term “you” used in Commenter 335’s post is not in reference to someone specific (i.e., there is no name or account that is mentioned or tagged in their comment). In this sense, it is fair to assume that
their point. Instead, they restate what Officer Brailsford mentioned in the initial moments of that interaction as a way to justify that there was some rationale for the actions that followed.

When observing these three sampled comments (along with the other comments within this data set that are not mentioned), is interesting to note that Shaver’s racial position as a Caucasian man did not seem to play a role in how individuals interpreted him and this incident from an auditory perspective here. By this I mean, Shaver’s position as a white male body did not seem to produce a monolithic interpretation of Brailsford’s audio, where he (Shaver) is seen in a favourable way. In fact, these comments while supporting Brailsford, seem to inadvertently act on this idea of victim-blaming Shaver (i.e., how does he not understand the instructions? The officer warned him, Shaver’s actions are a possible risk to Brailsford). This is further exemplified through the following comments as well.

Commenter 29 of AZ Central (Shaver): “Did you listen to the instructions cause I clearly heard him say not to put his hands behind again. Officers are just supposed to trust you don’t have a weapon back there and wait for it??...if he had just listened this wouldn’t have happened”

Commenter 221 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver): “Deceased was repeated told over and over to not put his hands in his small of his back. After the fourth time he did again. Police need safety 2”

Commenter 263 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver): “…He told him not to reach behind his back or he would shoot, he reached and got shot. Very sad but he should have followed instructions”

the comment is generally targeting those who feel differently (and again, possibly attacking the intelligence of Shaver).

104 This is from the perspective of assessing Brailsford’s auditory component in relation to Daniel Shaver. Shaver’s audio will be examined in the following subsection.
These comments, similar to the ones provided by Commenters 566, 88, and 335, reiterate the “mistakes” that Shaver made, which led to his death. The commenters reference the clarity and repetition of Officer Brailsford’s instructions to again make this same argument that the onus of responsibility should be placed on Shaver himself (rather than the officer who shot him).

When comparing these comments and this general idea of victim-blaming, we see parallels with Philando Castile’s case study, in the way that individuals also placed a lot of the onus on Castile and his actions, rather than the officer and the larger system at hand. With that being said, this is not a trend that is specific to these two cases themselves; rather, this notion of victim-blaming, and ultimately, the denial of a broken system is often noticeable in a lot of commentary provided by those who view police violence incidents involving African Americans (as victims) (Dukes and Gaither, 2017; Moody-Ramirez and Cole, 2018). Individuals argue that this inequitable treatment and frequent deaths are simply a by-product of the victim’s actions as opposed to a result of a systemically imbalanced and broken system (Beutin, 2017; Crenshaw and Peller, 1992; Graziano, Schuck, and Martin, 2010; hooks, 1996; LeCount, 2017; Sigelman, Welch, Bledsoe, and Combs, 1997; Weitzer and Tuch, 1999). In the case of George Floyd, it was the “drugs in his system” (Hill, 2020); for Tamir Rice, it was the fact that he was playing with a toy gun and there was a lack of communication (ibid); for Breonna Taylor, the blame was put on her boyfriend (ibid). Finally, with Castile and Shaver, the error was respectively on them, rather than the officers involved and the system at large.

Although we see white bodies more reluctant to acknowledge systemic issues like racism within the police force when the victims are those who are racialized (Graziano, Schuck, and Martin, 2010; LeCount, 2017), to see this applied to a case where a Caucasian man is the victim seems to oppose or at least present challenges to previous notions around the conceptualization of
white victimhood and white victimization. In previous chapters of this thesis as well as in previously written pieces of literature, there have been many discussions around the preservation of white bodies and white victimhood (Butler, 2009; Hook, 2013; LeCount, 2017; Ndebele, 2009). In this sense, it is almost to be expected that most people would villainize Brailsford’s audio for the purpose of protecting Shaver and his “purity” as a traditional “American person” (Nguyen and Anthony, 2014). However, this is not the case; and similar to what we saw with the visual interpretation of this content, individuals have clearly interpreted, contested, and contextualized Brailsford’s audio differently depending on their stance and experiences with police in America (Graziano, Schuck, and Martin, 2010; Hahn and Stalcup, 2016).

In this particular interpretation, individuals exhibit “cop fragility” (Cooper, 2020) by protecting Brailsford because of his employment position – many of whom noted down the importance of their (police) safety within their comments (e.g., Commenters 29, 221, 263). Cop fragility refers to the oversensitivity to criticism around policing (ibid). In many ways “cop fragility” parallels what was discussed earlier in this piece – “white fragility”. In the same manner in which racial stress becomes intolerable and curates a sense of defensiveness around issues pertaining to race (DiAngelo, 2011), cop fragility embodies the same degree of tension and defensiveness; except in this case, it is centered around one’s employment status rather than their racial position. With that being said, my own hypothesis is that both concepts are not mutually exclusive by any means. In fact, there may be an overlap between the two. By utilizing this idea of “cop fragility”, they may be underlying degrees of “white fragility” taking place simultaneously.

105 Shaver’s traits as an individual and how he is read by others is further examined in Chapter 4 of this thesis
106 Refer back to Chapter 4
It is not surprising that this idea of “cop fragility” is mirrored here in these findings. Given the nature of policing and the support of the institution at this time (2016-2017) via counter-movements such as Blue Lives Matter (a direct response to the racially conceived and motivated movement known as Black Lives Matter)\textsuperscript{107}, which began in 2014 (Mason 2020), as well as the following legislative and political support that furthered this pro-policing message (e.g., four US states including Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, and Kentucky enacting reforms to include hate crimes against officers, Republican politicians openly supporting such messaging, etc.), it is almost expected that these specific perspectives would be present within this set of commentary (ibid; Bacon Jr., 2016; Guariglia, 2017).

With that being said, it is still unusual given the argument discussed above (white victimhood, white victimization, and protecting white bodies), to see this applied within this particular context where the victim is racially apart of the “ingroup” (Weisbuch and Ambady, 2008). Although discussions around Blue Lives Matter and the protection of officers can still be continued here, for the purpose of this project and to avoid oversimplifying this topic, I will cut off this discussion point by stating that this data presented here may hint at further discussions that may be had in regard to policing and perceptions of empathy within cases of police violence. It would also require looking at the hierarchy of identity, specifically understanding the hierarchal relationship between race and professional status. Given the consistent support by these individuals for Brailsford’s audio and actions, it poses the question whether white bodies are always protected in these incidences and whether social and employment status is prioritized over racial position.

\textbf{Against Officer Brailsford’s Audio}

\textsuperscript{107} This is an example of the overlap between “cop fragility” and white fragility
To juxtapose the supporting commentary, I also found many individuals who interpreted the sound bites as highly problematic and in many cases an exemplification of how one misuses their power to create more damage and trauma for those involved. Commenters 449, 126, 188, and 623 all utilize the lack of clarity and absence of reality and practicality as two predominant argumentative points in their commentary. To reiterate, the following comments are what was presented by these four individuals:

Commenter 449 of Shaun King (Shaver): “These instructions are confusing and borderline contradictory. Guy didn’t have much of a chance”

Commenter 126 of AZ Central (Shaver): “WOW!!! Couldn’t even finish this…how can you keep your hands above your head and be told not to move them and then be told to crawl. You can’t crawl without your hands...UGH!!! These demands made zero sense”

Commenter 188 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver): “Don’t put your hands down for any reason! Now crawl towards me! Who can crawl without their hands down? This was murder. Why not approach when he was flat on [the] ground with [his] arms out? Pathetic.”

Commenter 623 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “The officer tells him to crawl towards him. How can he crawl with his hands up? And he couldn’t say anything or he’d be shot. It was like a deadly game of Simon Says.”

When collectively analyzing these four comments, it is fairly clear that the individuals themselves express a sense of possible annoyance, shock, and/or confusion towards Officer Brailsford’s verbal cues. For the most part, the language used in these comments were fairly expressive, with Commenters 126 and 623 having the most expressive commentary. Commenter 126 starts off their comment with a pretty exaggeratedly-written word – “WOW!!!” – written in

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108 This point will be revisited in the following subsection of this chapter
all capitals with three exclamation marks that follow. The way in which this commenter writes this word is indicative of an emotional influence that is being felt by the individual (Brand, 1985). This is then followed up with the words “Couldn’t even finish this” and finally ends with “UGH!!! These demands made zero sense”. By stating how they were unable to listen to this footage and then having that followed up with a sound that one would typically make when frustrated, the commenter is providing an open insight into their affective response towards the content. By stating that they are unable to finish consuming the content, they are making it clear that this piece is both disturbing and frustrating to witness thanks in part to the unclear instructions provided by Officer Brailsford. Commenter 623 reiterates this same point by incorporating a particularly interesting analogy at the end of his comment (“it was like a deadly game of Simon Says”). This analogy is interesting because of its dramatic tone in describing Officer Brailsford’s instructions. The game of Simon Says is child-like in nature and light-hearted; however, placing the word “deadly” right before it changes the temperament and insinuates that something is twisted or absurd here.

Additionally, three out of the four comments above (everyone besides comment 449) also pose (possibly rhetorical) questions in their commentary. The questions are centred around how one could possibly move, in this case crawl, with their hands not on the ground. This seemed to be an important point of discussion for commenters within this data set. The practicality of Brailsford’s verbal directions were interpreted in a way that made no sense to listeners here (e.g., “how can you keep your hands above your head and be told not to move them and then be told to crawl. You can’t crawl without your hands”, Now crawl towards me! Who can crawl without their hands down?”). Commenter 623 also notes that Shaver was unable to communicate with the officer without risking his safety at that time, thus making it more challenging for Shaver in those
moments. It is important to state that this particular point brought up by Commenter 623 regarding his inability to communicate is not necessarily shown in the footage provided by ABC 15 (i.e., at no point do we hear Brailsford tell Shaver to stop talking). However, we do hear Brailsford telling Shaver’s female companion to stop talking (“young lady shut up and listen”), which may be enough for some viewers to assume that this was also expressed to Shaver. Commenter 623 may have also come to this conclusion and/or assumed this knowledge from other sources such as other clips showing the incident for a much longer time frame, news stories, and articles. Either way, this topic and point at large highly resonated with individuals listening to the audio.

The final interesting observation from this data set relates back to how individuals here shifted the onus back on to Officer Brailsford as opposed to Daniel Shaver. In the last set of comments, we saw a clear emphasis on Daniel Shaver and his actions. Individuals were intentionally critiquing Shaver in relation to the instructions provided by Brailsford. In this case, we see the complete opposite happening. The focus is now more so on Officer Brailsford’s lack of clarity and how that in turn became the central cause for Shaver’s death. Commenter 449’s statement reinforces this by pointing out that Shaver (“the guy”) did not really “have a chance” to survive this incident and come out alive after this altercation. Based on the directions given and the tone of Officer Brailsford’s voice, it seemed as if the idea of de-escalating the situation was not considered by the police in that moment and the ability for Shaver to survive was again not a possibility (as presented by Commenter 449).

In essence, this subsection of analysis shows the ways in which auditory assessments can be diverse in nature and produce a variety of impressions. As witnessed through these two opposing stances, the narrative of an incident and who one chooses to villainize and sympathize is not monolithic nor is it always agreed upon. The examination of sound, specifically the voice of
authority in this case, is dependent on people’s stance on a variety of external elements such as institutions like policing, social and counter movements like Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter, and personal experiences with figures of authority (i.e., personal police interactions). What one views as impractical and confusing might be “clear as day” for another. In a case like Daniel Shaver, the results are far more complex than what could be expected, as race no longer becomes a predominant point of conversation – thus we as a population can no longer utilize racial tropes to justify our opposing views (e.g., “he sounds like a criminal thus he deserved it”). With that being said, the perspectives here are still not monolithic nor is there any sort of consensus around what we are hearing and consuming. Even in the “absence” of race, there are similar patterns of justification that one may use to validate violence. The next subsection will build on these contradicting ideas by examining how Shaver’s audio relates to narratives around masculinity, and how that in turn influences a listener’s perception of him. Similar to the revelations experienced in this specific analysis, we will see many traditional and conservative conceptions of masculinity and affect being broken, thanks in part to the surprising and more modern reactionary responses provided by listeners in this study.

5.2.2 Sound, Emotions, and Masculinity in the Absence of Race

There were many points of contradictions and surprises found in the last subsection examining the interpretation of Brailsford’s verbal instructions. The most dominant contradictions lied in how Brailsford’s resonated with individuals. For some, it made sense and was perfectly okay, while for others, it was read as inappropriate, confusing, and unnecessary. With that being said, consumers of the audio presented an interesting perspective around audio and masculinity. From what we saw with Philando Castile, there was a complex interrelationship between sound/speech, racial narratives and limitations, and the exhibition of masculinity. With that being said, this begs the
question, *how is sound/speech affected in the absence of race and racial limitations? How does the consumer of sound understand what they are listening to, and further, how do they react to it?* The following discussion will attempt to unpack these questions by analyzing the reactions stemming from listening to Daniel Shaver’s voice.

When examining Daniel Shaver’s voice within the larger context of the videos, there seemed to be a different point of focus for listeners as compared to what was emphasized with Philando Castile’s case study. In fact, Shaver’s case study and the subsequent data centered around the examination of his voice seems to be a complete juxtaposition of what was discussed in Castile’s dataset. While a portion of those who listened to Castile’s audio praised him for his calm demeanour and lack of emotional presence when speaking, those who heard Shaver’s voice seemed to empathetically respond to his emotionality and display of vulnerability. The following comments are a sample of some of the comments presented here:

Commenter 39 of Shaun King (Shaver): “I started tearing up and shaking when he begged for them not to shoot”

Commenter 173 of Shaun King (Shaver): “…he was scared shit and crying from the shoutings… are you even human?”

Commenter of 490 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “I am absolutely disgusted. That poor man was crying pleading for his life and following all instructions”

Commenter of 121 of ABC 15 (Shaver): “This footage is beyond horrible. You can hear the fear in the victims voice and the taunting in the officers. It’s sickening and very sad to say the least”

All four of the sampled commenters are direct in expressing their affective responses towards the incident, with all of them specifically targeting Shaver’s voice as a trigger point. Shaver’s
vulnerability, and specifically the element of fear in his voice was a central point of reference for many listeners. For Commenter 39, they point out that they experienced a visceral, physical reaction (e.g., physical shaking and tearing up) when listening to Shaver at his most vulnerable (i.e., begging to not be shot at). Although they provide a brief commentary describing their experience, Commenter 39’s similar physical and emotional reactions to Shaver’s emotional display exemplifies what is known as the emotional contagion mechanism (Juslin and Västfjäll, 2008; Juslin, 2009). Emotional contagion within the context of sound refers to a process where an emotional reaction is “induced by music simply because the listener perceives the emotion expressed in the music, and then ‘mimics’ this expression internally…[this] leads to an induction of the same emotion” (Juslin, 2009, p. 13). Emotional contagion is often associated with empathy (Huber, Barber, Faragó, Müller, and Huber, 2017). In this case, it could be argued that Commenter 39’s response of empathy is formed through the mimicking of certain emotions originally demonstrated via Shaver. This includes the crying, which we hear slightly in his voice as well as the physical shaking, which is evident visually.

When moving forward with the other commentary, we see that there are similar arguments and emotional themes presented by the other three individuals. For Commenter 490, there was a sense of disgust that they make widely known. This sense of disgust could be directed towards either the officers and their lack of responsible actions, or towards the incident as a whole. The commenter does not necessarily specify what they are specifically disgusted at, but we do know that it is not towards Shaver given the following sentence of that comment (“That poor man was crying pleading for his life and following all instructions”). In their commentary, they implicitly label Shaver as an innocent victim through their use of language. For example, they used the term “poor
man” to further re-emphasize his vulnerability.\footnote{Note: It could be argued that the term “poor man” could be used in a condescending manner depending on the context. However, given the larger context of this comment, it would seem to appear that this is used more in an empathetic manner rather than one that is deliberately condescending.} This is furthered by their reference to Shaver’s voice and actions (e.g., crying and pleading, he followed all instructions). Commenter 121 echoes this same messaging. Although, they do not use a specific term such as “poor man”, they do however voice their disgust and shock towards what they were witnessing (“the footage is beyond horrible...it’s sickening and very sad...”). Furthermore, they reference the vulnerability in Shaver’s voice as something that was impactful for them (“you can hear the fear in the victim’s voice”). What is additionally interesting about Commenter 121 is that they went further with this point and truly juxtaposed Shaver’s tone of voice with that of the officer’s (“the taunting [tone] in the officers”). Here, we see that individuals are no longer just focusing on Shaver’s tone of voice, but rather individuals are situating sounds within the larger context and comparing sounds to get a sense of the incident. The insertion of this comparison between Shaver’s fearful voice and Officer Brailsford’s “taunting” has a two-fold effect. For one, it creates this further disgust towards what is happening in this video – consequently, further demonizing the officer. Simultaneously, it is also allowing for further empathy to be felt for Daniel Shaver in that moment (i.e., he is not only suffering and crying, but he is also being taunted in that very moment).

Finally, with comment 173 there is a shift in terms of the general format of the comment in terms of how an individual chose to express their affective response. By this I mean, the other three commenters within this sample chose to clearly articulate how they felt – whether it was by creating an “I feel” statement or by utilizing adjectives to describe the incident as a whole. This is not necessarily the case with Commenter 173 and their post. In this comment, we see a sort of justification or reasoning provided as to why Shaver sounded the way he did. By doing this, it
helps produce a sense of empathy and care for Shaver because it provides a contextual understanding as to why we hear what we are hearing from Shaver. This is then followed up with the question “are you even human?”. This is a particularly interesting rhetorical question to pose. At its core, it hints at this interconnectivity between emotional empathy and what we define as being a “human being”. By stating this in their comment, the individual questions whether others who do feel differently possess “normal” or what would otherwise be characterized as significant human capabilities such as empathy (Hoare, 2020). Again, this speaks to similar themes that have been addressed throughout this piece regarding the multitude of interpretations. Although Commenter 173 seems to assume that this would otherwise be a monolithic interpretation given the contextual understanding of Shaver’s sounds, this does not seem to be the case given the framing of his comment (i.e., it appears to be a response to an opposing and/or alternative perspective)\(^\text{110}\).

In essence, with all four cases, we see that Shaver’s audio – the unclear crying and begging – was equally as haunting as visually witnessing his physical state in those moments. One not only sees the disjointed movements at this point, but they hear the actual “terror” (Alexander, 1994, p. 83). Even in moments when the listener cannot seem to adequately distinguish what Shaver is stating, it still has impact (e.g., people’s resonance with his crying). This is not surprising given that human sounds, typically universally understood sounds like laughing or crying, are often detected faster by human beings as compared to speech (Montgomery, 2016). This may be because human beings often pay closer attention to emotions when expressed through sounds (again, as compared to when it is expressed via speech) (ibid). The emotional display and its generally

\(^{110}\) It is important to note that the commenter did not tag another account or individual in their commentary; however, given the framing of the comment, it may seem as if this is a response to an opposing comment written under this video.
positive feedback are specific to Daniel Shaver’s case study within the context of this larger research project. Part of this may be a by-product of the non-existent racial barriers that seem to coincide with Shaver’s narrative. Shaver is not tied down to larger, over sweeping racial narratives and stereotypes that typically impede on one’s ability to outwardly express emotions. With that being said, that is not to say that Shaver’s audio is not complex by any means.

The emotional vulnerability that Shaver displays challenges preconceived notions around masculinity. With the exclusion of racial discourse, there have been various studies examining the relationship between masculinity and emotions. In a simplified context, proposals around gender and emotions have for the most part curated this conclusion that men, although feeling equal or greater level of physiological arousal, often “keep in” emotions internally as opposed to their female peers (Buck, 1977, 1984; Chaplin, 2015; Levensen, Cartensen, and Gottman, 1994). The suppression of emotions to produce an identity centered around unemotionality and stoicism was (and could be argued still is) an active attempt at distancing themselves from perceptions of weakness, irrationality, and dependency (Ahmed, 2015; de Boise and Hearn, 2017; Pease, 2012; Reeser and Gottzén, 2018; Seidler, 1989, 1994). As Ahmed eloquently puts it, being overtly emotional is often assumed to be linked to this notion of being “soft” – which is an unfavourable trait to embody (2015).¹¹¹

Given these notions around masculinity or at least what is associated with the performativity of this particular gender (Butler, 1990, 1999; Salih, 2007), it is in some ways surprising to see Shaver “break” in this moment (although, given the contextual background, it may be

¹¹¹I am specifically focusing on the engrained notions of masculinity that have been existent within society for a long period of time. It is important to note that the social construction of gender is continuously evolving; and for the purpose of this research, I am predominantly focusing on the more engraved and rigid conceptions of masculinity.
understandable), and it is further interesting to see how the feedback towards his emotions are rather supportive. Individuals viewed Shaver’s vulnerability as a favourable quality within this data set, and it does not seem to detract from how they view him as a ‘man’ (i.e., there are no sort of comments questioning his masculinity and strength in that moment, but rather there were people praising him for whatever strength he had in that moment). Even in commentary that emphasized Shaver’s ‘softness’ (e.g., references to him begging, crying, being at his most vulnerable), it was never completely interpreted as an insult and/or threat to his position as a ‘man’. This data in itself opposes earlier points – his vulnerability and contradictions to traditional conceptions of masculinity were seen as a positive attribute, rather than a negative one. When assessing why this may be the case, it could be argued that this is a by-product of society’s shift in defining masculinity and the relationship between men and “emotional honesty” (Reiner, 2016). The empathetic responses to his vulnerability could also be cultivated by the context of the situation (i.e., either individuals read his emotion as appropriate for the moment or it may just be more appropriate to provide sympathetic responses to his death rather than being critical about his displays of masculinity – thus risking being called out as “tone deaf”). But these responses could also be further mitigated due to Shaver’s own position as a young, European descendent expressing himself in America.

From a racial lens, it may not necessarily be surprising that Shaver’s vulnerability rather than calmness was praised by individuals. As pointed out earlier in this piece, there are different expectations around emotional performances and what is seen as appropriate and inappropriate depending on characteristics of identity such as race, gender, etc. (Wilkins, 2012). For example, if we look at the displays of anger between a white man and a man of colour, the interpretations of how these emotions are read are completely different. As Wilkins points out, white men displaying
“situational anger” is an exemplification of control, while specifically black men’s anger depict a lack thereof (ibid, p. 38). This is further exacerbated by racial stereotypes that loom over black men more so than they do over white men. These stereotypes include being seen as intrinsically bad, dangerous, unnecessarily emotional, and/or threatening (Ahmed, 2015; Alexander, 1994; Beutin, 2017; Hall, 2001; Nguyen and Anthony, 2014; Richardson, 2020; Tolia-Kelly and Crang, 2010). The lack of additional barriers and obstacles that are derived from racial tropes allow men such as Shaver to exude their emotions without being read as an “uncivilized savage” (Tolia-Kelly and Crang, 2010); this may be in part due to the “natural” relationship that whiteness has with themes of intellectual development, culture, and reason (Hall, 2001; Richardson, 2020). In this case, Shaver’s emotions are credible and can be rationalized without any sort of doubt – this is opposed to his racialized peers who experience the same events (Wilkins, 2012).

In essence, although Shaver’s set of data presented by listeners challenges traditionally conceived notions around masculinity and thus brings a sense of complexity to how we understand sound, emotions, and masculinity. His findings also reinforce certain notions around the relationship between sound, racial privilege, emotions, and masculinity. Although men at large risk being portrayed as “soft” and facing certain consequences for that, there seems to be a certain sense of empathy and understanding that is afforded to Shaver as opposed to Castile or other racialized folks in the same circumstance. We see that Shaver in those moments was allowed to emotionally express himself through sound and this question of calmness is never really presented by anyone – even in commentary that supports the officer. The spectators and listeners of his soundbites empathize with his emotionality, and even in moments when we cannot understand what Shaver is actually saying, we still afford him the benefit of the doubt and react empathetically to how he feels. This is not necessarily the case with someone like Castile, who in that moment,
was held to a higher standard in terms of maintaining his composure both physically and with how he spoke. At large, this subsection highlights the complexities that exist between sound, speech, and emotions in the “absence of race.” What we truly see is that Shaver’s racial position is still intrinsically involved here and has an effect.

5.3 Summary

This chapter delved into various themes and ideas in relation to audio as a whole. As we saw throughout this chapter, audio is integral to understanding how one responds to such content. Sound produces affective responses in a way that non-auditory content cannot. The sounds that one hears can deeply shift and/or reinforce how individuals come to understand what they are viewing. In the cases of Castile and Shaver, the sound portion of the videos helped provide clarity for those who did not and/or could not visually comprehend or see what was happening at the time of the incidents. With that being said, the central idea that resonated throughout this chapter relates back to the relationship between race, sound, and affect at its core. As witnessed through both case studies, race is deeply integrated into both how one produces sound and how one hears it. Whether that is through linguistics or tone, the racial position of who is speaking creates an impact on how it is interpreted. Even in cases such as Shaver’s where race may seem absent, it is still implicitly present and that was further proven through the data that was gathered within this research study. In conclusion, we see that many of the same arguments found within the visual realm of this research study have reappeared within this section as well.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

“The visual archive circulates. The date function on the camera may specify precisely when the event happened, but the indefinite calculability of the image allows the event to continue to happen and, indeed, thanks to these images, the event has not stopped happening.” (Butler, 2009, p. 86)

6.1 Key Takeaways: Summarizing the Research

The central takeaway that one could collectively find from this piece is that the overall relationship between race and affect within the confines of police violence is complex. The chapters themselves highlight the plurality of what individuals resonate with, ranging from visual accessibility to the sounds they hear. Amongst those chapters, there was a diverse range of patterns, trends, and themes that emerged from the commentary provided. Although some of these findings mirrored what previous literature and research had shown us, there were others that challenged previous arguments, theories, and assumptions. The comparative element of this study brought forth with the different racial backgrounds allowed us to capture these similarities and differences in a way that brought attention to the deeper nuances that exist when assessing the relationship between race and affective responses. The following point and summary reflect the central takeaway from this piece.

_the aspect of race is always existent – whether that is through the production of these videos or how we experience them on an emotional level._

This by far is probably the most important takeaway from this project. In every aspect of this thesis, the influence of one’s race played a large role in how the victims’ narratives were presented and understood by spectators. In Chapter 3, racial positioning took shape in the “presentation” portion of their cases. There was a clear contrast that existed between the two cases. Here, we saw
previous theories and writings around race and violence being reproduced in this particular data set (i.e., Daniel Shaver’s death being protected as best as possible, while Castile’s death being overtly passed around and shared by outlets and people). Racial hierarchal narratives were clearly being upheld through how their deaths were being presented by organizations and outlets — producers of this content. With that being said, by comparing commentary, we found opposing and contrary reactions from everyday viewers. Unlike producers of the content, viewers did not want to protect Shaver’s death by hiding it, but rather they wanted to disperse this content outwards — make it public, garner attention from mainstream media. Again, race played a role even in these reactions. Although the comments went against previously written notions around white bodies and trauma, these reactions were based off of reproducing a white victimization narrative, and in doing so, implicitly produced an argument for the protection of the white race. These comments also simultaneously denounced police violence as a racial issue.

The existence of race in the overall experience of watching these videos also came through in how individuals viewed victims. In Chapter 4, people utilized racial tropes, stereotypes, and narratives as an effort to understand and emotionally connect and/or disconnect with victims. The relationship between the racial identity of the victim and the affective response produced by the viewer was mediated by racial tropes and how individuals applied them to each case. In the case of a white bodied victim, it seemed to be a bit easier for viewers to see him as a decent and innocent human being. This was compared to Castile, where commenters seemed to deliberately provide additional justification for characterizing him in a positive manner. There was a clear pattern of portraying Castile as the antithesis of what he would otherwise be seen as. In this case, race was clearly at play, especially in the moments where viewers were trying to separate him (Castile) from his predetermined racial narrative. Race was a still a driving force in how viewers saw him and in
the case of Castile, his racial identity was assumed to produce negative labels, whereas with Shaver, his racial position as a white man allowed him to be viewed without any sort of negative, historically driven narratives (even when there were critiques, such as his intoxication, it was always framed as an “error” rather than attaching it to his identity as a label).

Finally, with audio, the influence of race was permeated here through a variety of ways – even when it did not seem to be the case. From a reactionary standpoint, the standards in which individuals defined acceptable and unacceptable audio was incongruent between the cases. From a linguistic perspective, the argument around race and specifically racial hierarchy seemed to be noticeable, given the use of code switching done by Castile (i.e., speaking in a way that is culturally “higher” and more respectable). The emotional responses towards the act of code switching seemed to support this case (i.e., people emotionally and practically resonated with his language and how he spoke). Racial narratives and stereotypes were also at play here given people’s attempt to differentiate Castile from his preconceived racial identity. In this case, the disappearance of his own dialect was something that was seen as positive and appreciated by listeners.

Chapter 5 also delved into the complex relationship between masculinity, emotions, and sound, and how those together look different based on one’s racial identity. This seemed to be the case when comparing the sound bites of Castile and Shaver. For individuals, Shaver displaying vulnerability through sound (i.e., crying) was largely more accepted. Although restricted by gender tropes and narratives, there was an exception that was given to Shaver in this moment. Even in this situation, where race is not necessarily “present”, Shaver’s racial background as a white man allowed him to break certain societal and cultural expectations without any sort of repercussion or judgement. Race is existent here. This is more so evident when we compare Shaver’s audio to Castile’s. Though we did not hear Castile display vulnerability until the moment he was shot (i.e.,
yelling), his calm composure is what people respected and praised about his soundbites – no one even questioned why he was not more vulnerable in that moment. As I argued in this chapter, Castile may not be allowed to show his vulnerability given the contextual and historical background of this moment (i.e., the history of a black man’s relationship with police officers). His racial identity does not allow him to be vulnerable without being read as a threat or on the opposite spectrum, weak, both by the officers and listeners online.

In turn, in all areas of this project, we have seen how race has inserted itself into the varying discussions that have been produced. From the production of content to the following reactions, race in some form permeates through it all. Even in moments where race does not seem to be evident – Daniel Shaver’s case – race is still present. This in part may be because race is far more complex than what we as individuals come to know it as. The engraving of racial tropes, racial stereotypes, racial privilege, and racial denial are so intrinsically deep that it comes to light when we further examine our own responses to such content.

6.2 Contextualizing this Research: The Importance and Applicability of this Study

The year 2020 brought racial violence, specifically police violence against racialized populations to the forefront of mainstream conversations in a way that had not necessarily been seen in a very long time. I say this not to invalidate the work of scholars and activists who have been pushing for this topic to be heard long before the death of George Floyd amongst others, nor am I saying as a point of ignorance or disregard for the various protests and marches that have sparked discussions previously; these include but are not limited to the Los Angeles protests (commonly referred to as the LA Riots) following the Rodney King case, New York protests following the fatal shooting of Amadou Diallo, the St. Louis protest following the death of Anthony Lamar Smith, the Ferguson protests centered around the death of Michael Brown, and
the Baltimore protests following the Freddy Gray incident (Poon and Patino, 2020). The re-emergence and prioritization of this topic in white, mainstream media as Giesbrecht points out, is a consequence of a multitude of environmental and social factors coming together to force individuals to pay attention (2020). Much like 1919 with the Red Summer (Ortiz, 2020), individuals are openly and simultaneously witnessing racial violence in front of their eyes, all while experiencing a global pandemic in their communities (McCoy, 2020). With people being “cooped up” in their homes with no other sort of distraction, there is no option to ignore people’s experiences with racial and police violence (Giesbrecht, 2020). Furthermore, individuals are utilizing social media at a much higher rate and it is serving as a “connecting glue” to not only witness and pay attention to such violent acts, but to actively engage with it (whether that was through sharing posts, commenting on them, performing solidarity through hashtag activism, etc.) (Giesbrecht, 2020; Zilles, 2020).

With the reality of staying home and being forced to pay attention, 2020 became the perfect storm for individuals to be able to stand up for issues, such as racism and state violence (Giesbrecht, 2020). With that being said, I say this all not to argue that we are far removed from these issues. In fact, the continuous inflictions of violence perpetrated by police officers across the country and the world post-summer 2020 would say otherwise against this claim that we are better off now. But I state this here as a reminder for the reader. Although yes, there has been some progress in this area regarding how we view racism and policing (and as an ally, I am hoping this progression continues to take shape as opposed to being a temporary point of discussion), there is

112 The Red Summer of 1919 refers to the period of time in which there was a simultaneous experience of mob-led racial violence against black individuals and a third wave of the Spanish-flu pandemic in America (Ortiz, 2020). The term ‘Red Summer’ was used by NAACP leader James Weldon Johnson in reference to the bloodshed that had occurred during that time – both from the violence and the pandemic (ibid).
still much more to be done. As a reader, one may be looking at these cases of Shaver and Castile as a reflection of the past. To some, 2016 may seem too far back in the past to ever be useful or relevant for current discussions. One may ask themselves: *how does this thesis resonate with the reality that we are living currently? What is the purpose of this research and why does this matter?* These are all important questions.

At its core, understanding people’s emotional responses to social issues is important, especially when it is a social issue like this. Analyzing people’s emotions provide a deeper insight into how we as a society look at and prioritize certain topics; and it does it in a way that is raw and different. One is able to capture more from an emotional response than a non-personal statement. We see the biases, the judgements, the first-hand gut feelings within an emotional response. This is furthered through space, particularly the space that I chose to gather my data – social media. Social media commentary is an incredibly popular act of engagement and is a huge part of how individuals express their thoughts on issues (as outlined in Chapter 1). This informal space allows for rich discussions to take place (likely thanks in part to the level of anonymity one has on these channels).

These discussions and comments of one expressing how they feel are not trivial and/or useless by any means. In fact, they have the ability to trigger larger repercussions and consequences that move past the social media space and into larger institutional and legal domains. We have seen this take its course with cases like Ahmaud Arbery, where heavy commentary and sharing on social media led to the start of achieving legal accountability via the arrests of the murderers (Boggs, 2020). In George Floyd’s case, people’s reactions online (and later in other areas of the media) led to the arrests of all four officers as well as the introduction of a proposed new bill entitled the

\[113\] I say partial accountability as the case is still ongoing and no verdict has been reached yet.
George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020 (2020). For Breonna Taylor, the reactions led to the passing of Breonna’s Law, a measure that bans no-knock warrants, among other things (Boynton, 2020). In essence, these legal changes and shifts in policy are all derived from what is originally conceived within the digital space. These are all by-products of larger online discussions and emotional reactionary statements from individuals. As a researcher, I would argue that in order to better understand the formation of these policies and larger systemic changes, it is imperative to understand the initial inspirational point – that being the individual response.

Furthermore, this research in itself is incredibly timely thanks in part to both the research questions posed as well as the findings that have come out of it. The initial macro-level research questions that I had conceived in the early stages of this research were meant to touch on the relationship between race and affect; but I was also quite curious about this sub-question around internalized racial bias in relation to affect. By including a comparative element to my research study, I was hoping to understand how this particular type of bias may possibly influence how individuals viewed these visual moments. This point of curiosity and further questioning that inspired this project is something that is not only important but is a relatable approach that is being replicated in our current societal climate. We are seeing more and more individuals posing these same questions in regard to more present-day examples.

Additionally, the applicability of this study is furthered by the type of data and findings that were managed to be gathered through this project. Although contextually set between the years of 2016 to 2017, the findings, that of which have been summarized above, are not necessarily specific to that time period. The range of emotional reactions exhibited by individuals via their commentary have not only managed to support and further certain theories around race, visual evidence, and

114 We have yet to see any sort of other legal accountability take shape in Breonna Taylor’s case.
affect as proposed earlier by scholars and writers alike, but it has also continued to be reproduced throughout time post-2016/2017. By this I mean the themes, patterns, and trends analyzed from these two cases are still present and applicable to current responses seen online (e.g., denial of racism, victim-blaming and utilization of racial tropes, empathetic responses, etc.). By producing an in-depth analysis, which aims to contextualize the commentary within these two cases, the discussions provided here throughout this piece may help further contextualize current commentary and help situate them within the larger context of this issue (i.e., we can understand how certain reactions and commentary unintentionally or intentionally reproduces racial narratives, patterns, ideas). This thesis also unexpectedly shows the parallels in which current day discussions and themes around this topic are emulations and reproductions of what we have seen in past cases (i.e., people’s arguments around cases like Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, etc. are similar to what was seen with Philando Castile and in some cases Daniel Shaver. They are not simply “one-off” commentary, but rather they fit into a larger pattern that has been reproduced by others and transcended throughout time and space).  

In essence, this subsection highlights the importance and applicability of this research. As mentioned at the beginning of the thesis, my inspiration for this project started with the Rodney King case and how individuals interpreted and expressed their reactions at that point in time. As a younger millennial living in the age of social media, my hope was to take this idea and bring it into a more modern and timely space. With that being said, while doing this project, I quickly realized that this project transcended into a far larger and timelier piece. Unbeknownst to me, the

115 I use the term “unexpectedly” here because as a researcher, I was not prepared for the degree in which these themes would be present in today’s society. The social context and timing of Castile and Shaver’s cases was different than what we are seeing now in regard to discussions around race and policing within mainstream society and media.
many pieces of information that I had gathered became pivotal points for how I myself interpreted what was happening in 2020 and now in 2021. As a reader, I hope that one is able to utilize this information in a way that allows one to see the parallels that exist and hopefully provides them with a toolset that enables them to better understand others’ perceptions and reactions toward police violence and race.
Appendix A: Commenter Information

A.1 Castile’s Set of Commenters

**Source 1: CBS – Twitter**

Commenter 25 (Castile): This individual identifies as a 3rd generation German American (as listed in their biography). They currently reside in Oklahoma and has had Twitter since 2010. Based on their profile, they seem to be active in social justice and political work (i.e., profile shows their admiration for civil rights activist John Lewis, among other things). Politically, they seem to repost content that aligns with the Democratic party.

**Source 2: Fox News - Facebook**

Commenter 10 (Castile): The individual appears to be a white female (this is based on profile photos that are made public).

Commenter 21 (Castile): She identifies as a married female from Dayton, Minnesota. Based on photos, she appears to be a white individual.

Commenter 46 (Castile): Based on the profile, the individual appears to be opposed gun-law regulations. Their images also appear to be supportive of the Trump-Pence presidency. The information available on their profile stems from shared memes (other information is not made public). Their racial background is unknown.

Commenter 56 (Castile): The individual identifies as a female and based on images, appears to be white. Given the nature of her images and posts, it could be assumed that she is a Republican and/or holds conservative values (i.e., profile picture is Joe Biden with the words “Not My President”, has images of the confederate flag, images with Trump Pence endorsement logo, etc.)

Commenter 112 (Castile): This profile is relatively private. Based on what is accessible, this individual identifies as a male and appears to be a person of colour.
Commenter 137 (Castile): He identifies as a male from Casa Grande, Arizona. He currently resides in Gilbert, Arizona. Based on images and further information on profile, he appears to be Hispanic.

Commenter 146 (Castile): The Facebook profile does not seem to provide much information regarding this commenter. Based on images available (including profile picture and publicly tagged), the individual appears to be a black female.

Commenter 154 (Castile): This individual identifies as a female. Based on her profile pictures, she appears to be a white female. She joined Facebook in 2008.

Commenter 162 (Castile): This individual identifies as a male. Based on images, he appears to be a white male. His posts seem to indicate that he is religious and/or spiritual (various religious-based posts and statuses).

Commenter 175 (Castile): Based on his profile, he identifies as a male currently living in Queen Creek, Arizona. Based on the images and posts available, he appears to be white and possibly holds conservative views (i.e., anti-Democratic posts and memes were shared on his profile).

Commenter 176 (Castile): Her profile biography states that she identifies as a female. Based on her pictures, she appears to be a white female.

Commenter 177 (Castile): He identifies as male who is currently married. He currently resides in the state of Arizona. Based on profile pictures, he appears to be a white male.

Commenter 183 (Castile): Based on the Facebook profile, he identifies as a male from St. Louis. His description states that he is a husband and father. Based on the images provided, he appears to be a black man.

Commenter 301 (Castile): Based on the images available on the profile, the individual appears to be a white female. Her posted content appears to show a more conservative political view. This
is based on the images that endorse the 2020 Trump-Pence campaign. She also appears to have a family, with possible grandchildren.

Commenter 344 (Castile): She identifies as a female from the state of Arizona. Based on images, she appears to be white.

Commenter 346 (Castile): This individual appears to be a white male who currently works at Target. Based on profile information and images, he is in a relationship and has a child. His profile also states that he attended ITT Technical Institute for Criminal Justice.

Commenter 405 (Castile): She identifies as a female from Phoenix, Arizona. Based on her profile, she has six children and appears to look white based on her profile picture. Her photos also seem to demonstrate she is religious and/or spiritual to some degree – this is based off of her background photo, which is a quote of Philippians 2:3 – 4 NIV.

Commenter 417 (Castile): This individual identifies as a single 36-year-old mom. Based on her images, she appears to be a white female.

Commenter 436 (Castile): They appear to be a black male from Detroit, Michigan. They previously studied computer science at Arizona State University and architecture at Iowa State University. Based on their posts, they seem to be a supporter of former President Barack Obama and is an advocate for Black Lives Matter.

Commenter 442 (Castile): The individual identifies as male and joined Facebook in 2013. Based on available images, he appears to either be interested in serving or directly employed as a first responder (either as a paramedic or firefighter based on images). His racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 443 (Castile): Individual has a relatively private account. Based on their profile picture and other available images on the profile, they appear to be a black woman.
Commenter 450 (Castile): She is a married female from San Antonio, Texas. She currently resides in San Diego, California. Based on images, she appears to be a person of colour.

Commenter 476 (Castile): The individual identifies as a married female with children. Based on photos, she appears to be in an interracial marriage with a black man (her racial identity is a bit difficult to specify).

Commenter 496 (Castile): This individual identifies as a female. Her profile is otherwise private and not much else can be gathered. Her racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 501 (Castile): Based on the profile available, he identifies as a Hispanic male from Brawley, California. He currently resides in Tolleson, Arizona and is currently married.

Commenter 504 (Castile): She identifies as a female from the state of Indiana. Based on her biography, she is married and rescues animals. Her racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 536 (Castile): This individual identifies as a male from Apopka, Florida. He is currently employed at a store that sells guns and rifles such as AR-15s. Based on images and content on his profile, he appears to have a family and may possibly be Hispanic.

Commenter 550 (Castile): This individual identifies as a female; and based on her current and past profile pictures, she appears to be a white female.

Commenter 565 (Castile): She identifies as a female. Based on the private profile, not much else is known about this commenter. Her racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 727 (Castile): The individual’s profile is unavailable, either due to personal changes around the accessibility of her profile, or it has since been deleted.

Commenter 765 (Castile): She identifies as a female. Based on posts, she appears to be a Trump supporter (i.e., posts excusing the insurrection, positive comments about Donald Trump). Her racial identity is unknown.
Commenter 771 (Castile): The individual’s profile is unavailable, either due to personal changes around the accessibility of her profile, or it has since been deleted.

Commenter 911 (Castile): She identifies as a 35-year-old female living in Viborg, Denmark. Based on her profile, she appears to be a person of colour (specific racial identity is difficult to specify).

Commenter 920 (Castile): Based on available images, this individual appears to be a male person of colour. Their posts depict someone who holds a more progressive political view (i.e., posts that criticize Republican candidates, conservative policies)

Source 3: NBC - Facebook

Commenter 1 (Castile): Based on the profile, this individual appears to be a female who currently resides in Salt Lake City, Utah. Their photos seem to indicate that they support the Black Lives Matter movement (i.e., has an image post of Black Lives Matter #BlackoutTuesday). Their background photo is also an image of Malcolm X with one of his quotes “one day may we all meet together in the light of understanding”. Her racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 5 (Castile): The individual’s profile is unavailable, either due to personal changes around the accessibility of her profile, or it has since been deleted.

Commenter 42 (Castile): This individual appears to be a black male from Saint Petersburg, Florida. They appear to have their own clothing business (this is listed under current employment).

Commenter 63 (Castile): This individual is a married male from Oklahoma, City, Oklahoma. Based on images and posts, he appears to be a white male.

Commenter 69 (Castile): She identifies as a married female who has children (based on her profile biography). Based on images available, she appears to be a black female.
Commenter 73 (Castile): This individual appears to be a female from Keystone, Florida. The profile states that they live in Jacksonville, Florida. They appear to be white based on images that are publicly accessible. Based on their stated interests, their political affiliation may veer towards a more Democratic stance (as opposed to a Republican one) (this is based on her following Vice-President Kamala Harris).

Commenter 194 (Castile): He identifies as a self-employed male. Based on images, he appears to be a person of colour.

Commenter 344 (Castile): Individual appears to be a white female. Based on their profile photo, they identify as an ally of the Black Lives Matter movement (their profile photo is the BLM sign).

Commenter 370 (Castile): The profile is relatively private. Based on images, the individual appears to be a white male.

Commenter 401 (Castile): Based on her profile, she identifies as a female who is a full-time mother and wife. She also appears to be black based on publicly accessibly photos.

Commenter 433 (Castile): She identifies as a married female from Cleveland, Ohio. Based on images, she appears to be a black female.

Commenter 500 (Castile): Based on what is accessible (i.e., photos on their timeline), they appear to be a black male. Their shared content does not seem to provide much more information besides his interest in music.

Commenter 638 (Castile): The individual’s profile is unavailable, either due to personal changes around the accessibility of her profile, or it has since been deleted. Based on the individual’s name listed with the initial comment as well as the information provided via her comment, the individual is Hispanic or at least Hispanic origins (i.e., they self-identify within their comment)
Commenter 705 (Castile): This individual’s profile is incredibly private (i.e., only accessible material is general memes). The individual does identify as male. His racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 723 (Castile): This individual identifies as male. Based on his profile pictures, he appears to be a white male.

Commenter 751 (Castile): Based on images, she identifies as a female, who also appears to be white. She is from Louisville, Kentucky and currently resides in Virginia. Based on her profile, she seems to be active in the social justice field. She is a Black Lives Matter supporter (based on photos).

Commenter 785 (Castile): The individual’s profile is unavailable, either due to personal changes around the accessibility of her profile, or it has since been deleted.

Commenter 886 (Castile): He is a married man from Bronx, New York. He currently resides in Port Saint Lucie, Florida. Based on his profile, he appears to be interested in music and has encouraged individuals to vote in the previous elections (based on the image of Michelle Obama, it appears that he may be a Democrat or at least was supportive of the Democratic party in previous elections). His racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 951 (Castile): This individual identifies as a male. Based on his shared content, he appears to hold politically conservative values and/or opinions (i.e., memes that criticize Democratic politicians and perspectives). His racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 978 (Castile): This individual identifies as female. Based on the available images, she appears to be white and possibly religious and/or spiritual (i.e., there are several images referencing Jesus Christ).

Commenter 1018 (Castile): He is a male from Cartagena, Colombia. He currently resides in Kansas City, Kansas. He appears to be a person of colour.
Commenter 1030 (Castile): This individual identifies as a male who currently resides in Compton, California. He states that he is originally from Moroleón, Guanajuato and appears to be a person of colour.

Commenter 1124 (Castile): The individual appears to be a white male from Brainerd, Minnesota. His profile biography states that he is college-educated and worked as a former carpenter.

Commenter 1200 (Castile): This individual identifies as a female, who appears to be white. Based on photos, she looks as if she has a family.

Commenter 1253 (Castile): This individual identifies as a male, who appears to be black. Based on his public posts, he seems to be a religious and/or spiritual person (i.e., many posts about Christianity and spirituality).

Commenter 1390 (Castile): This individual appears to be a black male. Based on public posts, it appears that they are from the state of Michigan and is a supporter of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Commenter 1429 (Castile): She identifies as a female. Her biography states that she is married, has children, and is currently a hairstylist. Based on the images, she appears to be white.

Commenter 1590 (Castile): He identifies as a male on his profile biography. Based on images, he appears to be white and older in age (i.e., pictures with what can be assumed are his grandchildren – if not, just younger children). The content he shares on his page all follow a more conservative political perspective (i.e., memes criticizing Democratic politicians, images supporting Donald Trump).

Commenter 1606 (Castile): Based on the profile, he identifies as male and appears to be a person of Asian descent.
Commenter 1791 (Castile): This individual identifies as a male from Waianae, Hawaii. He currently resides in Charleston, South Carolina. His profile states that he is a former Marine at the US Marine Corps and has a past in the tech field. Based on images, he appears to be a person of colour.

Commenter 1840 (Castile): She identifies as a female from Texas. Based on her photos, she appears to be a black female, who is supportive of Black Lives Matter and race-based issues. She appears to be well-educated (i.e., studied culinary arts at the Art Institution of Houston, studied non-invasive cardiology at St Lukes School of Adult Cardiology, studied Social Services Management at the University of Phoenix).

Commenter 1923 (Castile): She is a married individual who identifies as a female. She is currently a certified veterinary technician and an animal hospital in Wisconsin. Based on images, she appears to be white.

Commenter 1941 (Castile): He identifies as a male and based on images, he appears to be a white.

Commenter 1988 (Castile): This individual’s profile is private and not much information can be gathered. Based on the images that are publicly accessible, they appear to be white and either reside, are from, or enjoy rural area(s) (there are numerous pictures of fields and farming area).

Commenter 2020 (Castile): Her profile biography states that she is a female, a mother and wife, as well as a religious “believer/follower”. She is from Lithonia, Georgia and currently resides in Atlanta, Georgia. She appears to be white and her profile picture indicates that she is not a supporter of President Biden (i.e., picture is of a logo that states the words ‘Impeach Biden Harris’). Her background photo also shows memes and pictures supporting the claim of voter fraud.

Commenter 2100 (Castile): She identifies as a female who previously worked at jewelry store. Based on available images, she appears to be a white individual.
Commenter 2143 (Castile): He identifies as a male. Based on images, he appears to be a white individual.

Commenter 2314 (Castile): This individual identifies as a male from Omaha, Nebraska. He currently resides in Plattsmouth, Nebraska and has children. His racial identity is not clear based on his profile.

Commenter 2355 (Castile): Based on her profile, this individual appears to be a black female.

Source 4: Sky News – Twitter

Commenter 41: Based on the individual’s profile, it is difficult to gather any sort of information regarding their background. Based on their followers list, the individual does not seem to veer towards a particular political side (it is fairly balanced – they follow Fox News, but also various Democratic politicians). They joined Twitter in 2010. Their racial identity is unknown.

Source 5: USA Today - Facebook

Commenter 29 (Castile): The profile provided is fairly private. Based on their profile picture, they appear to look like a white male. Their public posts appear to be conservative in nature. For context, there are several posts supporting All Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter.

Commenter 108 (Castile): She identifies as female. Based on the images available, she appears to be a person of colour.

Commenter 110 (Castile): Based on images, he appears to be a male who is also a person of colour (possibly Hispanic given some photos of this individual holding up the Puerto Rican flag).

Commenter 197 (Castile): She identifies as a female from Foxborough, Massachusetts. She is currently a muscular therapist and a mother. Her descriptions also states that she was or is a graduate student. She identifies as a ‘philomath’, which is someone who loves learning and
studying. She also states that she is a vegan. Her racial background is difficult to specify (she is possibly a person of colour).

**Commenter 201 (Castile):** He identifies as a male from Daleville, Alabama. He states that he is currently a Correctional Officer Sergeant at the Florida Department of Corrections and was formerly a Corporal at the US Marine Corps. Based on available pictures, he appears to be white.

**Commenter 245 (Castile):** This individual identifies as a male from the state of Illinois. He is previously educated – studied at Illinois State University. His racial identity is unknown.

**Commenter 322 (Castile):** This individual identifies as a male and is from Sacramento, California. He currently resides in Houston, Texas. His racial identity is unknown.

**Commenter 343 (Castile):** This profile is incredibly private. Based on an image and the name of the commenter, it appears that this individual may identify as a male. Their racial identity seems to be a bit ambiguous.

**Commenter 487 (Castile):** She identifies as a female from the state of Alabama. She is currently employed at the Clay County Board of Education. Based on images, she appears to be a white individual.

**Commenter 555 (Castile):** This individual identifies as a male from Queens, New York. He is previously educated from Nassau Community College. Based on images, he appears to be a black individual.

**Commenter 558 (Castile):** This is the same individual as Commenter 555 (Castile) of USA Today.

**Commenter 570 (Castile):** He is a married male who currently resides in Sydney Australia. Based on images, he appears to be a white individual, who also possesses a managerial position at his place of employment.
Commenter 575 (Castile): The individual identifies as a female. Her profile is relatively private and other information about this commenter is unavailable to the public. Her racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 635 (Castile): This individual appears to be a white female. Their profile biography states that they previously attended the University of Texas in Austin.

Commenter 679 (Castile): This individual identifies as female and appears to be white based on her available photos. Based on her listed place of employment, she seems to reside in the state of Arizona. She may possibly have children of her own based on photos.

Commenter 821 (Castile): This individual identifies as a male from Houston, Texas. He has an academic background (based on listed qualifications) and appears to be a white individual.

Commenter 831 (Castile): She identifies as a female, mother of two children. Based on available images, she appears to be white.

Commenter 847: This individual resides in Las Vegas, Nevada. Their posts seem to indicate that they oppose racism (has a photo with a filter that says “I stand against racism”). Based on photos, he appears to be a black male.

Commenter 902 (Castile): This individual identifies as a male and based on a few of his statuses, he appears to identify as Irish American. Some of his posts seem to indicate that he holds conservative perspectives on certain topics (i.e., posts about anti-abortion, etc.). He appears to be white.

Commenter 955 (Castile): This individual identifies as a male. Based on images, he appears to be an older-aged white male.

Commenter 1757 (Castile): Identifies as a married female. Based on images, she also appears to be white. Her posts seem to indicate that she is interested in politics and/or is politically active.
A.2 Shaver’s Set of Commenters

Source 6: ABC 15 - Facebook

Commenter 10 (Shaver): Based on profile, this commenter identifies as a 31-year-old female with six children. Based on publicly accessible photos, she appears to be white.

Commenter 38 (Shaver): She identifies as a female and based on images she appears to be white.

Commenter 121 (Shaver): This individual appears to be a white male from Phoenix, Arizona. He is previously educated, having studied at Glendale Community College and Phoenix College.

Commenter 141 (Shaver): This individual is from Annandale, Virginia and currently resides in Sarasota, Florida. Based on shared posts, this individual seems to hold very progressive political views (i.e., they seem to be a supporter of Bernie Sanders). They seem to be advocating for a “revolution” based on past statuses and shared posts. Their racial background is unknown.

Commenter 148 (Shaver): This individual identifies religiously as an Agnostic. They describe themselves as relatively progressive (National Progressive Party is labelled as their main political view). The individual studied non-profit business management and completed their B.A. at Arizona State University. They were born in Yuma, Arizona and currently resides in Brooklyn, New York. Their racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 157 (Shaver): She identifies as a female who has been married for 32 years and has 3 children. Based on images, she appears to be white.

Commenter 159 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a male from Houston, Texas. Their racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 228 (Shaver): The commenter identifies as a male from San Jose, California. He identifies as Agnóstico and appears to be white.

Commenter 249 (Shaver): Same commenter as Commenter 10 (different comment).
Commenter 261 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a male from United Arab Emirates. He currently studies biochemistry at Arizona State University.

Commenter 315 (Shaver): The Facebook profile states that she identifies as a female. She is currently self-employed but has previously worked at USAA and Paparazzi Independent Consultant (Jewelry store in Kentucky). She appears to be white.

Commenter 360 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a male. His profile is otherwise private. His racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 460 (Shaver): The individual’s profile is unavailable, either due to personal changes around the accessibility of her profile, or it has since been deleted.

Commenter 490 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a female from the state of California. Based on images, she appears to be a white individual.

Commenter 524 (Shaver): She identifies as a female from San Diego, California. The public profile is relatively limited, and her racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 557 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a male. Based on his profile, he seems to have fairly progressive views around politics and social issues (this is based off of his shared posts). His racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 566 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a mother from Eloy, Arizona. Based on images, she appears to be Hispanic.

Commenter 574 (Shaver): This individual appears to be a female from Waco, Texas. They currently reside in Lake Havasu City, Arizona. Based on limited images, they appears to be white.

Commenter 623 (Shaver): The individual identifies as a father from East Layton, Utah. Based on images, he appears to be a white male.
Commenter 644 (Shaver): They identify as a self-employed individual with a background in finance. Based on images, they appear to identify as a white male. This individual is from Germany but resides in Arizona. They are educated and received their M.B.A. from New Mexico State University.

Commenter 702 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a male. Their profile is extremely private and not much else can be found (i.e., racial identity is unknown, etc.)

Commenter 708 (Shaver): This individual appears to be a white male from Phoenix, Arizona. They previously studied at Glendale Community College. Based on photos, they appear to be married and has children.

Commenter 749 (Shaver): She is an engaged female who is currently studying Special Education at Grand Canyon University. Based on photos, she appears to be a black female.

Commenter 752 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a female from Eloy, Arizona. She currently resides in Casa Grande, Arizona, and is married. Based on images, she appears to be a person of colour and possibly holds conservative political views (i.e., images supporting Trump-Pence 2020)

Commenter 764 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a male. Their profile seems to indicate that they are either Republican and/or hold conservative values (i.e., posts supporting Trump, posts that are anti-antifa and anti-BLM). What is interesting here is that their profile also displays various images of Indigenous people (there is commentary or captions provided with the images).

Commenter 928 (Shaver): This commenter appears to be a white male. Their biography states that they are married and/or has a partner. Based on their statuses, they appear to have conservative views and/or supports the Republican party (i.e., has anti-DNC posts, etc.)
Commenter 931 (Shaver): This individual is a married male, who appears to be white (based on images). The profile is relatively private and not much else can be found.

Commenter 954 (Shaver): She identifies as a married female from Savannah, George. She currently resides in Statesboro, Georgia, and is a mother, nurse, and a “love of Christ”. Based on images, she appears to be white.

Source 7: AZ Central - Facebook

Commenter 7 (Shaver): The individual’s profile is unavailable, either due to personal changes around the accessibility of her profile, or it has since been deleted.

Commenter 28 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a female. Based on images, she appears to be a person of colour. Her posts seem to indicate that she is either progressive and/or holds progressive values (i.e., she was a supporter of the Biden/Harris campaign, she was a supporter of Hilary Clinton during the 2016 campaign). She also seems to demonstrate that she is a supporter of the BLM movement (i.e., supportive posts of Breonna Taylor – Say Her Name, etc.). Her profile biography states that she “loves all people”.

Commenter 29 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a female who is a medical assistant instructor at Arizona College. Based on images, she appears to be a white individual.

Commenter 82 (Shaver): Based on the profile, this individual identifies as a male. There is not much information available here. His racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 88 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a male. His racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 104 (Shaver): This individual identifies a male and based on images, he appears to be white. His profile states that he studied at Rice University in Houston, Texas. His profile also indicates that he is an incredibly proud Irish Texan.
Commenter 126 (Shaver): She identifies as a female from Macomb, Illinois. She currently resides in Scottsdale, Arizona. Based on images, she appears to be a white individual.

Commenter 166 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a female from Phoenix, Arizona. Her racial identity is difficult to specify based on the available content on her profile.

Commenter 170 (Shaver): He identifies as a male from Mesa, Arizona. Based on available images, he appears to be white and has children.

Commenter 173 (Shaver): Individual identifies as a male. Based on posts and shared content, he appears to hold conservative political views and is against defunding policing institutions. His racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 312 (Shaver): This individual appears to be a white male from San Diego, California. He currently resides in Mesa, Arizona and is married.

Commenter 387 (Shaver): Based on the profile, this individual identifies as a male and appears to be white. Based on posts shared by the individual, he appears to hold conservative political and social values (i.e., images of confederate flag, etc.). There is also content that is racially insensitive and problematic that has been shared on his profile (i.e., derogatory posts of Michelle Obama comparing her to a monkey).

Source 8: Fox 10 Phoenix – Facebook

Commenter 10 (Shaver): She identifies herself as a female. Her profile states that she is a mother and wife. Her photos seem to indicate that she may be white.

Commenter 106 (Shaver): He identifies as a male and appears to be white. He is currently married and is employed as an automotive service technician.

Source 9: Shaun King Twitter

Commenter 39 (Shaver): This individual’s Twitter profile no longer exists.
Commenter 42 (Shaver): Based on the profile picture, this individual appears to be a black male from Abuja, Nigeria. They have had their Twitter account since 2015.

Commenter 66 (Shaver): Based on their biography, they identify as an atheist and appreciates cannabis. Their profile photo seems to indicate that they may identify as a male. Their past tweets seem to indicate that they may have progressive social and political views. Their racial background is difficult to specify.

Commenter 68 (Shaver): The profile is relatively private. Besides a love for the game of soccer, not much can be found about this Twitter user. The individual has had Twitter since 2014.

Commenter 87 (Shaver): This individual has had Twitter since 2009. Based on past tweets, this individual appears to hold progressive political views. Their racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 108 (Shaver): This individual’s account no longer exists on Twitter.

Commenter 173 (Shaver): This individual appears to be a female based on her profile picture. Their profile biography states that they are a supporter of the Black Lives Matter movements (has the hashtag #Blacklivesmatter with fist emoji). The individual’s racial background is difficult to specify (possibly a person of colour).

Commenter 183 (Shaver): Based on the profile photo and name provided, the individual appears to be a relatively younger (possibly young to middle age) white male. They have had their Twitter account since 2010.

Commenter 188 (Shaver): This individual identifies as a male. He uses the pronouns he/him. He is from Indiana and first joined Twitter in 2014. Based on his profile picture, he appears to be a white male.
Commenter 221 (Shaver): This individual appears to be a married male born in 1997 (this is based on their profile biography and picture). They appear to be a white male who joined Twitter in 2015.

Commenter 232 (Shaver): This individual appears to be a white male from Manchester, England. They joined Twitter in 2011.

Commenter 263 (Shaver): This individual appears to be Hispanic or at least speaks Spanish, based on the language of their tweets. They joined Twitter in 2015.

Commenter 294 (Shaver): Based on posts, the individual seems to be a Republican, but opposes Trump-supporting politicians (calls them “fake GOPs). They joined Twitter in 2012. Their racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 335 (Shaver): This individual is the same commenter as Commenter 338 of Shaun King Twitter (Shaver).

Commenter 338 (Shaver): The individual appears to be a younger-looking white male. Their Twitter account was created in 2016.

Commenter 437 (Shaver): The individual appears to hold progressive political and social perspectives based on retweeted content. They state that they are from Brixham and joined Twitter in 2013. Their racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 449 (Shaver): This individual identifies as queer and uses the pronouns they/them. They describe themselves as a “commie” (slang for communist and/or supporter of communism). They joined Twitter in 2017. Their racial identity is difficult to specify (possibly a person of colour).

Commenter 515 (Shaver): This individual appears to be a black female (based on profile and background photos of herself). They have had Twitter since 2011.
Commenter 572 (Shaver): Based on their profile picture, this individual appears to be a white female. They are from the District of Georgia and their posts seem to indicate that they are politically engaged (i.e., reposts a lot of political news – mostly leaning towards the Democratic/progressive side). They have had Twitter since 2009.

Commenter 591 (Shaver): The individual appears to be a black male based on their profile and background images. Their biography states that they are an aspiring writer and poet. They joined Twitter in 2012. Their past posts include news stories about racial violence that have taken place in the US.

Source 10: Tim Black Twitter

Commenter 7 (Shaver): This individual has had their Twitter account since 2011. Based on re-tweeted posts, they appear to hold conservative political views (i.e., re-tweeted posts that are critical democratic politicians and current President Joe Biden). Their racial identity is unknown.

Commenter 9 (Shaver): This Twitter account is no longer available. It has been recently suspended.
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