Media Portrayals of Black Lives Matter

Mariah Pampeno

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MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF BLACK LIVES MATTER

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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December 2019
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This study examined politically left and politically right online news media article portrayals of the Black Lives Matter movement. The movement’s goal was to create a movement where modern racist practices were challenged and corrected, while keeping marginalized people (queer, black women) visible. The primary research question explored in this study is: How does the online media on the political left and the political right depict the Black Lives Matter movement? In this study, there is a focus on framing theory and how it informs media portrayals of social movements. Literature on social movement emergence and organization, how new media is used to relay information, and how media constructs and contributes to the discourse around social movements was reviewed. For this analysis, I collected articles focusing on the Black Lives Matter movement from two online news outlets, Fox News and Daily Kos, published between 2014-2017. A review of 145 articles from these two online news outlets, whose readership is on the politically far left and right, made it possible to assess early depictions of the movement in mainstream media. Articles were coded for emerging themes, which focused on the portrayals of publication, membership, tactics, tone, and the presence of black women. The findings of this study provide a nonrepresentative understanding that two news media outlet platforms, whether politically conservative or liberal, portray the Black Lives Matter movement inaccurately by not providing accurate framing of the movement, its message, or its members based on how the movement self-identifies.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Alicia Garza, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, and Opal Tometi, longtime social activists, founded the Black Lives Matter hashtag and social movement after the 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of Trayvon Martin. The creation of this organization had been a movement in the making. It was not a reaction to one-time tragedy that happened in Florida. Rather, it was the response to decades of abuse that people of color have faced in their communities by the authorities that were meant to keep them safe; Trayvon Martin’s death was the last straw. These three individuals aimed to create a social movement specifically for those living on the margins of society. Women, queer, and transgender people were to be seen, heard, and to take on leadership roles within the budding Black Lives Matter social movement.

Historically, social movements have challenged the status quo and relied on the media to get their message reaching an audience (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). One way social movements do this is by utilizing mainstream media. Social movements must often depend on the media accurately conveying their message (Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, & Augustyn, 2001). However, organizers cannot always rely on the news media to appropriately relay their message to their audience. In fact, media reporting of protest groups has taken on a negative tone in the past 40 years (Di Cicco, 2010).

Social movements need their audience to agree with and actively support their message and goals for them to be successful. Print and broadcast news media have previously delegitimized and demonized the Black Lives Matter movement as well as omitting explanations for protests and goals throughout the movement’s history (Leopold & Bell, 2017). Though the message of the Black Lives Matter movement was initially spread throughout social media
platforms, like Twitter and Facebook, it was important for other media platforms, such as online news media, to pick up the movement. Studies have shown that protest groups (Di Cicco, 2010), like the Black Lives Matter movement (Leopold & Bell, 2017), have been misrepresented in the news media.

Mainstream news media often misrepresents protest groups when reporting on events. Therefore, I find it especially important to provide a detailed description of the events that resulted in the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. The events that took place in February 2012 were the impetus for the start of a modern movement that focused around human rights of the marginalized in American society. Most of this conversation was filtered through print, talk show, and reporting news media.

In the gated community called Retreat at Twin Lakes in Sanford, Florida on February 26, 2012, Trayvon Martin was walking home from a convenience store with an AriZona fruit drink and a bag of Skittles with the hood of his sweatshirt pulled up. A local resident, George Zimmerman, who is a Hispanic man and was a part of a neighborhood watch group, spotted Martin and felt that he was a threat to the community. After dialing 911, he reported to the dispatcher that there was a “suspicious guy…looks like he’s up to no good or he’s on drugs or something” (Hillstrom, 2018). Members of the neighborhood watch group were instructed by law enforcement patrols to not carry weapons and report suspicious activity to authorities. Zimmerman, however, ignored the authority’s directions to not carry a weapon.

On the phone with his girlfriend, Rachen Jeantel, Martin said that there was a “crazy and creepy” man watching him (Hillstrom, 2018). After noticing that he was being followed, Martin ran away from his pursuer. Zimmerman, not listening to the dispatcher who warned him not to follow the suspect and to wait for police to arrive, pursued Martin. Though the two got separated,
they ended up running into each other again. Jeantel recalled that she heard Martin ask why the man was following him and then the start of an altercation right before the phone call ended. The dispatcher was still on the phone when a gunshot sounded. When police arrived minutes later, they found Trayvon Martin dead on the street from a gunshot wound to the chest (Hillstrom, 2018).

Zimmerman, who was is Latino, admitted to shooting the unarmed teen and stated that Martin had punched him in the face and proceeded to slam his head into the pavement. In a claim of fear for his life, Zimmerman confessed that he had shot Martin in self-defense. Sanford police accepted Zimmerman’s account of events and decided not to file charges against him. It was only when Martin’s parents fought for a trial for their murdered son that national attention was drawn to their cause. Celebrities, political leaders, writers, and protestors expressed their feelings with different forms of illustrative action such as photographed hoodie wearing, speeches, and marches (Hillstrom, 2018). The case went to trial in July 2013. The defense had to prove that a reasonable person would have felt threatened in the same situation. The prosecution had to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Zimmerman did not act in self-defense (Hillstrom, 2018).

As continued protests sparked public attention, the news media began reporting the events to their target audience. Left leaning news outlets provoked increased pressure on authorities to file charges while more conservative news outlets played off of Zimmerman’s perceived whiteness and defended him, arguing that he had the right to shoot Martin based on the Stand Your Ground laws of the state Florida (Hillstrom, 2018). The trial lasted three weeks and ended after a 2-day, 16-hour deliberation. In the end, the jury found Zimmerman not guilty. They concluded that although Zimmerman pursued Martin, he was not engaged in unlawful activity,
had a right to be where he was, and that being met with force he had the right to stand his ground and act in self-defense to prevent bodily harm to himself (Hillstrom, 2018).

When news of the acquittal broke, protestors held marches and rallies for days across the country (Hillstrom, 2018). This acquittal sparked outrage from the black community. Alicia Garza noticed that most people, although disgusted by the acquittal, were not surprised. Most argued that the United States criminal justice system has always been biased against people of color. However, some noted that this event should be a lesson that black people should consider when wanting to live safely in a white society.

These observations and conversations led Garza to write “Love Letter to Black People”, a letter arguing that black people should not accept blame for being victims of violence and should also not alter their appearance or behavior to assimilate to white society (Fessler, 2018). Patrisse Khan-Cullors added the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter to the letter and posted it on Twitter. Opal Tometi created a social media strategy around the hashtag to encourage people to share their views about why black lives matter (Hillstrom, 2018). This was the beginning of a movement that became a centerpiece in the modern journalistic conversation about race in the U.S.

This current study involves a content analysis of media portrayals of the social movement, Black Lives Matter. I will be focusing on how two media sources frame the movement based on published articles. This analysis explored the question: How does the media depict the Black Lives Matter movement? I was also eager to explore whether race and gender were addressed in these depictions. Specifically, the driving focus of this study was to examine how a movement such as Black Lives Matter, which is meant to represent women and men of color, is portrayed by political left and political right online news media.
Using framing theory, combined with a brief review of the literature on media portrayals of social movements, highlights the media’s importance in framing movements and their members. In using framing theory to understand the processes in which social movements and media get messages to their audience, a theme emerges. Specifically, that the media has consistently excluded or devalued black women from the movements that they were meant to benefit from, either because of their race or their gender. Instead, the media highlights the actions of white men and women or black men within these movements. This exclusion of black women in social movements is not new. The Civil Rights Movement, although having an immense black, female membership and leadership, was also unable to make the black women visible in the media (Nance, 1996). This study is meant to understand how politically left and politically right online news media portrays the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement and whether those same themes are present.

**Researcher Positionality Statement**

I was born into a lower middle-class, white family that grew and flourished into a diverse collective of individuals throughout my teenage years. My father was a construction worker and my mother an at-home health aide. My mother had me and my biological sister and we lived comfortably in a trailer in a rural town. When I was about 6 years old, my parents decided to become foster parents, a decision that changed my life forever. We started taking in foster kids. One Christmas morning, my sister and I woke up to a baby boy in a walker under the Christmas tree. As time went on our family fell in love with the little boy and hoped to make him a permanent member of our family. After years of custody battles, we were finally able to adopt him.
A few years later we received a call from the hospital asking us if we would take in a black child who was being separated from his mother because of drug use. He was born with drugs in his system and my parents decided to take in the baby boy, not even hesitating to pick him up when he was able to be released from the hospital. A year later we got another call, our foster brother’s biological mother had had another child while she was incarcerated. This baby boy also was born with drugs in his system and my parents picked him up once he was ready to be discharged from the hospital. A couple years later, after the biological mother’s rights were terminated, my parents adopted the two black boys, creating a bigger and more diverse family than they had realized.

Our family was now made up of biological children and adoptive children, white children and black children, neurotypical children and non-neurotypical children. It was through my parent’s love for helping people that I was able to grow up in a household that contained so many different personalities, abilities, and viewpoints. However, living in my small rural town did not teach me about the different life experiences that my brothers would face compared to me. I had grown up in a loving family that “did not see color” and therefore never talked about racial disparity or structural inequality. It wasn’t until I went to college that I understood that there are major differences when comparing my experiences alongside the experiences of people of color.

Once I changed my undergraduate major to sociology, I was able to take classes that explained how we shape society and how society shapes our experiences. This was a significant moment of understanding for me because I learned that my brothers could face a completely different, and more dangerous, reality than me. After taking a race and ethnic relations class, my eyes were opened to a host of historical inaccuracies in textbooks and menacing racialized policies that still target minorities today. My social movements class articulated the changes that
disenfranchised groups of people have pursued just to live a life of equality. The driving factor behind my interest in this subject are the everyday worrying about the safety of my brothers, who are black boys with mental disabilities.

Because of my personal family makeup and interest in helping others, I thought that studying the depictions of a contemporary black-led movement could help me gain an understanding of how to help the people in my everyday life. During my senior year of my undergraduate degree I decided that I wanted to help others who were on the receiving end of racist policies and practices in our country. By the time I got into grad school, I had decided that social movement studies were what I wanted to pursue. On my two-year journey through graduate school I decided that I wanted to study a movement whose aim was to help minorities and those on the margins of society; enter Black Lives Matter. As Black Lives Matter has gained visibility, I felt that it was important to understand how news outlets are portraying a movement whose goal is to help those affected by racist policing and systemic practices.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focuses on social movements, framing theory, media portrayals, and the formation of the Black Lives Matter movement. A definition of what constitutes a social movement, how they are created, and approaches that conceptualize social movement sustainability are addressed. Having a working definition of what a social movement is provides an understanding of how social movements create change. It is also important to understand how framing theory informs the media’s framing of social movements. This theory provides an understanding of how the media can influence a social movement’s efficacy and longevity. Next, a review of media and its portrayals of events will provide explanations of the media’s importance in framing movements. Lastly, a detailed history and review of literature on the Black Lives Matter movement will also be presented for a comprehensive understanding of the movement’s structure and goals.

Social Movements

Social movements have been using the media to bring attention to their struggles for decades. An important aspect of a successful social movement is that it can gain the attention of the media and use it to its advantage. However, because social movements are often about changing the status quo of the society they emerge from, the mainstream media is often unforgiving to the cause. If movements are not careful, the media may give more attention to radicals or offshoots and create a frame that is outside the social movement’s goals. (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003). This section of the paper focuses on social movement approaches and organization, how multiple types of media have relayed information, and how media constructs and contributes to the discourse around social movements.
Approaches and Organization

Social movement researchers’ studies have evolved over the past fifty years, focusing more on understanding them rather than demonizing them. Prior to the 1960’s, sociologists had labeled social movements as mobs devoid of reason that stirred emotions of those around them (McCarthy & Zald, 2003). Once social movement scholars began to recognize that social movements were interconnected organized groups of individuals speaking for a cause, they tried to better understand them (Goodwin & Jasper, 2018). This portion of the paper will focus on what social movements are, how and when social movements are formed, and how they carry out their message.

Because of social movement literature’s evolving understanding of social movements, having a concrete definition of a social movement that is different from other forms of protest such as revolutions and riots can be complicated. For this study, I will be using Goodwin and Jasper’s (2003) definition of a social movement. A social movement as described by Goodwin and Jasper (2003) is “a collective, organized, sustained, and noninstitutional challenge to authorities, powerholders, or cultural beliefs and practices” (p. 3). Using this definition of a social movement, there is a need to understand how scholars have explained when and why social movements have formed.

Social movements provide underrepresented people a voice to help them attempt to change their situation within society. There is much literature on social movement foundation, organization, and tactics used to incite change and make progress for social movements audiences. (Andrews & Caren, 2010; Fell & Voas, 2006; Goodwin & Jasper, 2003). This literature focuses on the situational needs within a society and a group of people to successfully start a social movement. These are important concepts for scholars to explore and make sense of.
because the emergence of a movement is unprecedented in its complexity and can redefine the
definition of a social movement itself. The emergence and organizational structure of a social
movement inform how a movement is understood in its social context, as well as how a
movement utilizes media to spread its message.

In the 1960s and 1970s there emerged a group of researchers who understood social
movements through the theoretical lens of resource mobilization. In this school of thought, social
movements first needed to have a certain level of resources, mainly money, for the movement to
be sustained. These theorists posited that enough discontented people could be found to fill a
movement; however, if the movement itself did not garner funding, the movement would not last
(Goodwin & Jasper, 2003). This initial theoretical lens of social movement studies opened the
field and allowed researchers to explore the complexities of social movements.

Social movements from the past 60 years are categorized as new social movements,
which focus more on human rights and environmental issues than the materialistic or economic
issues that were raised in the past. These movements benefit from a wide range of organizational
structures. Some have made it important to have a decentralized structural approach.

Organizations that have a decentralized, egalitarian way of organizing in which there is
no one in the movement that is calling the shots. This allows participants more flexibility with
the use of resources and ideological focus. When a social movement is decentralized, individuals
within the movement can decide what cultural components, such as messages and symbols, they
wish to portray to their audience (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003). This way of organizing considers
the individuals that make up the group as well as the cultural components the group wishes to
express in the most efficiently organized way. However, this approach can often lead to conflict
in social movement focus and tactics.
Some movements have a very bureaucratic hierarchically structured system in which members are paid staff that efficiently acquire funds from supporters. This perspective depicts participants in a social movement organization as valuable resources, hoping that members will dedicate time and money to the cause. This can create competition between multiple social movements, or other organizations, for those resources. These movements have been widely researched by resource mobilization theorists (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003).

An example of a social movement organization that is highly structured is Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). The structure of this organization plays an important role in how they are perceived by the public and how they can acquire the funds necessary to push forward their mission. This top down structured organization includes a central office and independent chapters worldwide. The role of the central office is to support local chapters and conduct national programs. At the corporate organizational level of MADD, the president is always a victim member, or someone whose loved one died from a drunk driving accident, of the organization. However, this does not mean that they are the sole driving and decision-making force in the company. This responsibility is too great for a president, so the management of the central office goes to the executive director, leaving the president as the public spokesperson that drives the passion of the organization (Fell & Voas, 2006).

MADD had grown from a single grassroots movement to a top-down structured organization with over 375 chapters in 48 states with affiliates in Great Britain, New Zealand, and Canada (McCarthy & Ziliak, 1990). The rapid growth of MADD led to the increased contribution to the public’s understanding of the impaired-driving problem and the nation’s legislative changes regarding alcohol consumption, drunk-driving, and underage drinking and
driving (Fell & Voas, 2006). However, this is only one organizational approach, other scholars see social movements in a more political light.

Though scholars still argue that resources are an integral part of social movement emergence and sustainability, Goodwin & Jasper (2003) provide varied explanations for the creation and sustainability of social movements, especially those of a political nature. During the 1970s, other scholars have focused more on political opportunity and economic shifts to explain the emergence and sustainability of a political social movement. Through the political process approach, scholars found that the importance of political and economic ebbs and flows throughout society ushered forward the public need and space for social movements. It is in this school of thought that social movements are seen as political because they are making demands for legal change (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003).

Looking at social movements through the lens of a political process theorist also provides an understanding of why social movements are created. Social movements studied through this theoretical lens are defined as having a goal of pursuing economic or political achievements for their constituents. Therefore, there must be a political need for a movement to be successful. If there is no political opportunity for the movement then the importance of the movement comes into question, rendering its existence useless. It is in this light that social movements always have been and will continue to be a political force, often organized like a political party and advocating for group interests (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003).

These structural approaches of social movements are limited. As Goodwin and Jasper (2003) argue, the major weakness of these approaches is that they see participants as individuals who make rational decisions, being that the decision to join a movement will directly benefit them as an individual. However, many people join movements that have nothing to do with their
personal daily lives, going against the idea that people join movements only to benefit their personal situations. It is not always a highly structured environment or the direct needs of participants being fought for that gets the most success.

Social network theory scholars find it imperative to understand the social ties that people have with each other to understand how and why a social movement emerges. Once researchers started studying social movements as organized groups rather than mobs or riots, they found that many social movements were connected by their membership. Researchers with this perspective argue that it is the connections that people have to each other that allow a social movement to form. These connections consist of those in movements who have family, friends, or colleagues in other movements. It is because of these established ties that others agree to participate in another social movement (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003).

Researchers found that participants and leaders from one movement may also choose to participate in another movement, providing not just one but multiple movements with more participants and resources (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003). These connections provide an opportunity for potential recruits to join a social movement, therefore scholars could argue that if these ties to one another did not exist a social movement would never be able to form and grow. Though these theories and processes may help create understanding of how and why social movements emerge on a structural level, they do not understand social movements on a cultural level.

Structural approaches focus more on the concrete aspects of how and why a social movement emerges and is sustained, placing importance on funding, political opportunity, and social ties (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003). A cultural approach, one that is taken in this study, is necessary because it offers the ideological reasonings of participants as to how and why a social movement emerges and is sustained. The cultural approach to understanding social movement
emergence and sustainability is based on the idea that social movements create “efforts to control the direction of social change largely by controlling a society’s symbols and self-understandings” (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003, p. 13). Understanding the cultural approach to social movements means to provide effort to the understanding of the participants, their ideologies, and intentions because perception is the important aspect of this approach.

Focusing on a cultural approach in understanding how social movements emerge and are sustained shifts the importance of larger societal structures and resources to the perceived perceptions, rhetoric, and symbols of the movement. This approach, as Goodwin and Jasper (2003) explain it, emphasizes social movements that already have formal rights, but feel they need to make a bigger impact by bringing attention to an issue outside of formal organizations. This approach can also be attributed to new social movement organizations, emerging outside of economic issues and moving into focusing on human rights and other subjects, as stated earlier. This is where the morality of a social movement emerges and is the driving factor in its sustainability. Through a cultural perspective, groups of people learn what they want through the organizers of the social movement. They bring attention to issues or ideas that the audience has not previously experienced, thought of, or felt, creating a moral opportunity for movement participation (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003).

Though scholars from these various schools of thought have different perspectives on the significance of each other’s research, it is important to be familiar with them to understand the possibilities of a modern social movement’s emergence and sustainability. Once it is understood as to why a social movement emerged it is easier to understand how that movement is organized. Much of the studies of social movements have been sporadic and contested, and research on social movement organization has followed a similar path.
Because there are so many different approaches to understanding the efficiency of social movements, ideas about efficiency are varied as well. The approach of understanding why and when social movements occur produces different notions of how structure is important to meeting the goals of such movements. Though many of the approaches listed above have studied the emergence of social movements, it is still highly contested as to what type of organizational structure is most efficient at accomplishing a social movement’s goal. Now that I have provided a basic understanding of social movement approaches and organizational structures, I will now address how media frames social movements, which has been important field of inquiry in social movement studies.

**Media Framing of Social Movements**

One of the goals of social movements is to get their message out to an audience that could be sympathetic to their cause (Curdy, 2012). This pushes social movements to attempt to use the media to help mobilize the public to their cause and validate its existence. Social movements’ reliance on news media shows how important this relationship can be for the development and success of a movement. By using the media, social movements are also able to enlarge the scope of reporting and open the issue for debate, which can potentially increase the power of the social movement (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). Historically, print and broadcast media has shaped the public agenda and influences constituents’ opinions of the issue that a social movement is presenting. There are many different types of media: print, television, film, social media platforms, online news media, etc. In this study I will specifically focus on online news media. Online news media also helps define the social movement, providing its audience information on who the leaders are, the movement’s goals, and the tactics used by the movement to reach their goals (Andrew & Caren, 2010).
A social movement getting their message to the media and having it framed in a positive light can make all the difference when getting endorsements or funding for their cause. Some social movements may use tactics like marches, rallies, or other eye-catching activities to get the attention of the press. However, the news media can use a frame to spin the movement’s message to their tailored audience. The frame that the media presents portrays a certain version of the reality of the social movement or situation (Entman, 1994). Gans (1979) found that U.S. journalists specifically find importance in stories where the context relied heavily on American values, such as individualism and pastoralism and refrained from publishing stories with ideological excess and social disorder. In assessing the media coverage of social movements Koopmans (2004) established that factors like geographic proximity, the size of the protest, its potential for conflict, drama or sensationalism, along with the notoriety and/or celebrity of participants were important in determining which stories were published. Though the focus of a social movement’s message has shown to influence media coverage, social movement tactics have been found to influence media coverage as well.

The option that news media has in reporting on a social movement’s goals and providing audiences for a social movement’s message relies heavily on how and what tactics the movement utilizes. Andrews and Caren (2010) found that the organization and the tactics used by social movements affected the amount of coverage a social movement received. The concepts of insider tactics (e.g. lobbying, press conferences, and educational campaigns) and outsider tactics (e.g. blockades, occupying buildings, and establishing counter-institutions) were established. Overall, this study found that news media were more apt to report on organizations that had greater organizational capacity and used more insider tactics. Andrews and Caren (2010) also found that although membership was an important resource, organizations that did not require membership
were more effective at securing media attention than small membership organizations. They also found that organizations that used outsider tactics gained less news coverage. In the next section of this literature review, I will focus on utilizing a theoretical framework perspective to better understand how social movements and media utilize framing to provide messages to their audience.

**Theoretical Framework**

The major theoretical framework that will be applied in this study is framing theory. To understand how social movements are portrayed it is important to understand the power that framing has over messages of social movements and the perceptions the public receives about them. Framing theory uses the collective action frames or sets of beliefs and meanings that legitimize social movement messages and activities, to focus attention on what is or is not relevant (Snow, 2007). This process of defining what is important is used by both social movements and the news media. Snow (2007) explains that collective action frames help individuals not only interpret what is important but also raise a call to action by challenging existing views of reality.

To properly apply framing theory to media portrayals of social movements, it is important to understand the process of framing. Though the conceptual process of framing has been years in the making, currently (Snow, Vliegenthart, & Ketelaars, 2018) there are nine important concepts that contribute to this process; collective actions frames, core framing tasks, master frames, discursive mechanisms/processes, discursive opportunity structures, frame crystallization, frame alignment processes, frame resonance, and framing hazards, which will be addressed below.
Snow (2007) describes the framing perspective as one derived from symbolic interactionist and constructionist ideologies, denoting that social movement meanings are not automatically or naturally attached to the events or experiences that are encountered. Rather, that meaning is constructed from the social movement activists and participants, as well as outside participants (e.g. the media, antagonists, and non-involved bystanders). Collective action frames are those which assign meaning to what is relevant and irrelevant (Snow, 2007).

Collective action frames are the product of the framing process that social movements go through. Collective action frames are sets of beliefs and meanings that legitimize social movement messages and activities. This collective action frame focuses, articulates, and elaborates on the elements that create the whole frame as well as mobilize potential members, convince bystanders to support the cause, and broaden the movement’s base while neutralizing opponents. Though the collective action frame provides an overall view of what encompasses a social movement, the other concepts and processes involved in framing theory help provide a greater understanding of this process (Snow, et al., 2018).

A collective action frames success in facilitating mobilization is relative to three core framing tasks: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing. Diagnostic framing involves the diagnosis of an event and the attribution of blame. Prognostic framing is the articulation of a solution to the problem. This frame outlines the tactics for success as well as counter arguments to the adversary’s proposed solution. Lastly, motivational framing involves the call to arms or the message of the importance of mobilization. This process contends with the issue of the free-rider problem, in which potential members do not actively participate but reap the rewards if the movement is successful in their activities. To combat this, motivational
framing accents the severity of the problem and implores potential activists to act now rather than later, often playing on emotions (Snow et al., 2018).

Master frames provide an expansive or inclusive scope of a social movement’s meaning. While collective action frames are content specific, master frames provide a wider understanding of the category of the movement. By providing a wider contextual definition of a social movement’s goal, there can be a greater community of movements fighting for the same ideological views. Examples of master frames include broad generalizations of what the movement finds important, such as the civil rights, women’s rights, and environmental justice organizations (Snow et al., 2018). In meaning making, social movements must utilize framing mechanisms to attract an audience’s attention and provide accurate messaging.

Discursive process, or the framing mechanisms utilized for collective action framing to occur, are frame articulation and elaboration. Frame articulation involves the compilation of issues, events, experiences, and cultural items to generate meaning. This practice is important in how an issue for a social movement is portrayed as reality (Snow et al., 2018). Frame elaboration highlights events, issues, or beliefs enough that they become more relevant. Social movements engage in frame elaboration when they emphasize and focus on specific topics or issues important to their cause. Media practice this by providing time and space to a movement’s message by prioritizing it in its publications (Snow et al., 2018).

Discursive fields and opportunity structures shape the course of conversations, meetings, and written communications among movement leaders and societal members, which can aid or hinder a social movement’s framing efforts. Discursive fields evolve during the debate about issues and events. These fields provide an open forum to debate the problems, goals, and ideals that social movements and their opposition carry. Those whose interests are aligned with a social
movement and those who are at odds with the goals of a social movement create a dialogue of how cultural materials and actors will affect them (Snow et al., 2018).

Working within discursive fields is a discursive opportunity structure, which encompasses ideas and values within a political culture, making a movement’s message more or less accessible to particular collective action frames. Media can shape this discourse within the discursive field through the framing process. This process has shown to be evolving, or ever changing, in that because social movements are actively engaging in the maintenance of its message’s meaning, framing is a process that takes place across time, context, and audience. Sixth, the concept of frame crystallization refers to the ascendance of one or more frames over competitors. This frame variation further contextualizes how social movement frames vary regarding events and issues as well as across time (Snow et al., 2018).

The process of frame alignment encompasses the strategic efforts of social movement actors and organizations to link their interests, with others to create more resources and combine campaigns and activities. Frame alignment process includes four processes; frame bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation. Frame bridging involves linking ideologically similar but structurally disconnected frames on an issue. Frame amplification consists of embellishing, crystalizing, and invigorating values or beliefs so they become more dominant than other values or beliefs. Frame extension is the evolution beyond the social movement’s initial issues. Finally, frame transformation is the changing of the prior understanding and perspectives of the movement to more current understandings (Snow et al., 2018).

Frame resonance is argued to be the ultimate measure of effectiveness of the collective action frames and strategies in that it measures whether such frames have resonated or appealed with the target audience. Lastly, there are four different kinds of framing hazards, or errors, that
affect the credibility of preferred frames by undermining resonance or the processes of frame alignment; ambiguous events or ailment, framing errors or mis framing, frame disputes, and frame shift. Ambiguous events are when there is uncertainty about the application of alternate frames. Framing errors happens when a diagnostic frame is wrong or not applied appropriately. Frame disputes occur when parties with opposing views dispute on how to define what has happened. To conclude, a frame shift involves the displacement of one frame to another because of a change on the grounds in which the first frame was based (Snow et al., 2018).

In understanding how framing processes affect social movements, it is easier to understand how the news media can use these concepts and processes to reframe the movement that they report on. This section has provided a detailed description of how social movements and the media can both use processes to frame issues, values, and belief to their target audience. In the next section I will be providing examples of how the media has specifically used some of these processes and concepts to frame individuals, events, and social movements.

**Media Portrayals**

The media is integral in delivering messages and ideas through communication platforms to local and national audiences. The information and focus of media often reinforce the already established opinions and beliefs of their audience. For the purposes of this research study, the term media is going to be defined as “the institutions and infrastructures that make and distribute content” (Couldry, 2012). Media, like many other institutions, are influenced by economic, political, social, and cultural forces (Andrews & Caren, 2010). Because of the societal need to have information readily available, media has been an increasingly important tool for framing the flow of information of individuals, events, and social movements.
The media has framed individuals and events so those outside the organization can understand the message of a movement. In this study I will specifically focus on online news media. The types of online news media that I am using are news articles published on online news media outlets, not counting Twitter feeds or videos. News media has been portraying content that specifically follows the beliefs and ideals, of their target audience. Online news media that can accurately capture and maintain their audience’s attention are also able to further shape attitudes about gender and racial minorities by purposefully playing off already formed stereotypes (Berger, 2007).

It is important to know that online news media provide entertainment and information that its target audience accepts, ensuring its continued readership and popularity. Providing an alternate or more realistic view of gender and race descriptions would likely only happen if the portrayal proved profitable (Lindsey, 2011). It is important to understand how women and people of color are portrayed in the media. These portrayals can solidify preconceived ideas or stereotypes, making it difficult for social movements created by these individuals to get their message framed accurately.

**Gender and Race**

It is important to understand how women and people of color are portrayed in the media because these portrayals can solidify preconceived ideas or stereotypes, making it difficult for social movements to get their messages framed accurately. The racialized and gendered stereotypes of women and people of color are reproduced by the media, portraying a false sense of reality for consumers (Hall, 1981). Some of these stereotypical presentations are of people of color being aggressive, criminalistic, and dangerous. Others are specifically geared toward women and how they are sexualized, and more specifically, how black women are often
portrayed as angry or exotified. These gendered stereotypes, along with racialized stereotypes, push black women to the social lows of both their race and their gender when portrayed in the media (Hall, 1981).

Gendered stereotypes are derived from mainstream media that portray a false reality that viewers believe if they see it often enough (Hall, 1981). Often, women are not thought of as leaders or revolutionaries because of stereotypes that present them as too emotional, irrational, or lacking the intellect to cultivate resources. Instead, the lack of representation of leadership roles by women is often attributed to their “natural” differences in ability in comparison to men (Rothenburg, 1988). Historically, the story that white men have deemed important and the actual truth has been far from the real-life actuality of those consuming information from popular media sources. Media and television have created cookie cutter stereotypes for the men and women that it portrays. White men have predominantly been the writers, producers, and funding sources of information and beliefs going out to the public (Hall, 1981). Therefore, it is safe to presume that media’s consumption by the masses, whether it be through print or electronic sources, has often only told a narrow version of a story; that of what white men wish to portray as the important truth.

Media portrayals often portray white men as leads, casting women and people of color aside in importance and representation. When looking at male roles in the media, they are predominantly superior to females and rely on the stoic, breadwinner stereotype. These men, who are usually white, have white-collar, corporate office jobs that they come home from every night as they are greeted by their doting and loving wife. This stereotype also portrays these men as emotionally stunted and hypermasculine, relying on the subjugation of their female counterparts to cement their superiority. This idea of hypermasculinity is even more prominent
when in portrayals of black men. Men depicted in working class families, are more often portrayed as men of color, and are more prone to feel delegitimized when their wives go outside of the house to help financially provide for the family. These depictions often result in black men being portrayed as aggressive and even violent due to their shortcomings outside of the home (Huntoon, 2009).

The media has played a role in continuing and promoting gendered stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, leaving no room for identities that fall in the middle of this spectrum. Television shows and movies bolster and feed off dramatized femininity, leaving women with shows that portray them as catty, materialistic, baby-obsessed, and overly emotional. This type of media also shows girls and women that the only value they can achieve is that of outside feminine beauty and as well as a means of reproduction. However, these stereotypes are different when talking about women of color.

When black women are represented in the mainstream media, they are often portrayed as a token Mammy character, Jezebel, or Sapphire (Huntoon, 2009; West, 1995). During the 1950s, television media shows mostly depicted black women as housemaids or mammies. These depictions usually centered around a white, middle-class family, in which the black woman was more of a supporting role, or token character (Huntoon, 2009). By the mid 1960’s, although stereotypes were expanding and men and women were broadening their roles; men being pictured in the household more and women being pictured outside of the home, black women were still shown as lesser due to the alternative roles of the Jezebel and the Sapphire. These portrayals depicted black women as animalistic, oversexualized, aggressive, argumentative, and angry. These stereotypes bolstered the already substantiated claim that black women specifically, were inferior and needed to be controlled by men (West, 1995). These examples promote and
display how the gendered stereotypes reproduce a false sense of reality for consumers of media. These stereotypes depict women, and more specifically women of color, as highly sexualized or angry. By playing off already formed stereotypes as portrayed by mainstream media, news outlets can convince their audience that the gendered and racialized stereotypes that they see on television are fact.

The stereotypes of people of color being labeled aggressive has shown recent presence in media attention given to tragedy. News outlets audiences are more inclined to feed into stereotypes and not take the tragedies that people of color face as seriously as they should. Prime examples of the media utilizing stereotypical fictions lies in the coverage and reporting of some of our nation’s disasters, such as the portrayals of people of color during Hurricane Katrina, in which different portrayals were given to people committing the same acts.

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit the southern Gulf Coast of the United States and in the wake of this catastrophic event there was a racialized response from the government as well as the news media. New Orleans was one of the cities that was it hard during the storm and its residents were forced to fend for themselves amid a stagnant moving U.S. government response. Citizens, most of whom were black, were left to fend for themselves because of the government’s slow and ill-prepared response to the crisis. As a result, there were a disproportionate amount of black and poor that were not prioritized during relief efforts. The lack of assistance the black community in New Orleans faced showed the structural racism that still had a firm hold on modern government.

This was not the only structural form of racism that poor blacks in the south had to face. They were also the victims of racialized biased in media coverage. Often, people of color were being labeled as looters, vagrants, or criminals (Ransby, 2018). News articles pictured black
citizens with groceries in their hands, describing them as looting stores and stealing goods. Running parallel to these articles were also articles picturing white citizens with groceries in their hands, describing them as finding food at grocery stores (Bouie, 2015). Hurricane Katrina provides an accurate illustration of how the news media portrays people in need differently, based on their race.

Hurricane Katrina provides an example of how the racialized stereotypes reproduced a false sense of reality for consumers of media. These stereotypes depicted people of color as lesser, criminal, and dangerous. By playing off already established stereotypes as portrayed by mainstream media, online news media can reinforce the negative stereotypes their audiences perceive to be fact. The framing of individuals and events by online news media is important in understanding how a collective, such as social movements, will also be framed.

This literature has provided an overview of framing theory, media portrayals, and social movement structure and organization. The Black Lives Matter movement is essentially an active critique to the ongoing systematic state brutality that blacks have been facing in the United States (Black Lives Matter, 2019). Using framing theory provide a theoretical understanding for how the movement frames itself as well as how the media frames the Black Lives Matter movement. It is in the next section that the information provided provides an important understanding of how the Black Lives Matter movement operates. Provided is a history of the formation, organizational structure, and tactics used of the Black Lives Matter social movement.

**Black Lives Matter**

The Black Lives Matter movement was a call to action created by Patrisse Khan-Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi, giving the black community a voice in the wake of police shootings of people of color throughout the nation. Black Lives Matter has been prominent on
social media platforms like Twitter since 2012. The death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri propelled Black Lives Matter into the national news. The continuous killings and lack of legal action or justice for the victims’ families by the United States judicial system was the kindling that gave fuel to the spark of the movement; the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012. The murder of Trayvon Martin and eventual acquittal of George Zimmerman in 2013 brought insurmountable grief to the black community, igniting the fire of social justice movements the Black Lives Matter movement (Ransby, 2018).

In August 2014, Michael Brown, an unarmed eighteen-year-old, was shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Officer Wilson was responding to call of a reported theft and had stopped Michael Brown and his friend Dorian Johnson to question them. Though there are conflicting reports, there was a struggle and Brown ran away from Wilson. After following Brown, the officer discharged his weapon 10 times, striking Brown with at least six bullets, two hitting him in the head. Brown’s body was left at the scene for over four hours after the shooting, propelling sustained protests throughout Ferguson (Hillstrom, 2018). While some peacefully protested, using nonviolence, a small group did vandalize and loot over the course of the protest, ending in the Missouri governor calling in the National Guard (Ransby, 2018).

After the shooting, church leaders held a vigil for Brown’s family and friends. Citizens peacefully protested Ferguson police headquarters demanding an official apology for leaving Brown’s body in the street and wanted Officer Wilson to be held accountable for his actions. After this incident, protests remained peaceful after authorities asked that activities be conducted in daylight house. Days later, after a group of protesters refused to disperse, police began firing tear gas into the crowd to break them up. By August 15, Officer Wilson was identified as the
officer involved in the shooting and authorities released surveillance video of Brown trying to steal a box of cigars (Ransby, 2018).

The controversy with the release of the surveillance video increased tensions between demonstrators and the police (Hillstrom, 2018). The video seemed like a demonization of Brown, consequently providing a justification for his murder. The community expressed open distaste for the police department’s actions. At night peaceful demonstrations gave way to activities like throwing rocks or bricks at buildings, starting fires, and the destruction of property. Police in armored trucks, with assault weapons and rubber bullets, and tear gas confronted demonstrators. In trying to take control of the streets, the National Guard was called in to restore order to Ferguson (Hillstrom, 2018).

In November, to the dismay of the community, the jury did not bring charges against Officer Wilson. Brown’s family and the community rejected the prosecutor’s explanation and rioters set fire to Ferguson’s business district. Demonstrations took place in 170 cities across the country and many protestors adopted the Black Lives Matter hashtag to express their views (Hillstrom, 2018). Black Lives Matter movement organizers also contributed to the demonstrations and organized die-ins, or staged scenes of them lying on the floor meant to illustrate them as being dead. This tactical work is meant to provoke the emotions of onlookers and to show how black lives don’t matter to the nation (Hillstrom, 2018).

Because most of Ferguson’s police officers were white, there was an increase in the residents’ fear and the visibility of systematic racism and exploitation throughout the city of Ferguson. This brought pressure on the Department of Justice (DOJ) to investigate the Ferguson City Police Department. Their findings indicated that there was consistent and continued harassment and intimidation of the town’s black residents. The DOJ also found that the police
force in Ferguson was exploiting money from its black residents. Disproportionate fining of black residence for minor offenses and traffic violations were used to fill the municipal’s coffers, providing them with extra funding (Hillstrom, 2018; Ransby, 2018).

The combination of the charges against Officer Wilson being dropped and the findings that proved the systematic racial injustice occurring in Ferguson, the flame for change burned even hotter. The Black Lives Matter movement became more than a hashtag on Twitter and received publicity in news media. It was after this publicity that the movement gained a wider audience, creating the need for understanding the movement’s formation and organization.

**Movement Formation and Organization**

The founding members of the Black Lives Matter movement, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi are long time organizers and activists. Women, queer, and transgender people of color were prioritized to take on leadership roles within the movement by the founders. Understanding where the founders came from provides valuable insight into their creation and formation of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Patrisse has been an organizer since she was a teenager (Kahn-Cullors & Bandele, 2017) and is also a co-founder of Founder of Dignity and Power Now. She is a Fulbright scholar and is also a Sydney Peace Prize awardee. Alicia Garza, who identifies as a queer black woman, challenges the idea that it is only black men who encounter police violence and therefore leads with an intersectional lens that was derived from Black Feminist Thought, outlined later in the section. Opal Tometi is a social media strategist and organizer. Opal is credited for creating online platforms and heading social media strategy during the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement. Currently, she is leading the Black Alliance for Just Immigration, educating and advocating for immigrant rights and racial justice within immigrant communities (Black
Lives Matter, 2019). The background information of the founders is informative in understanding the structure and ideological beginnings of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The co-founders were able to use their expertise to utilize Twitter to create a rallying cry for those hit hardest by racist authoritative actions. The goal of the movement was to “connect Black people from all over the world who have a shared desire for justice to act together in their communities” (Black Lives Matter, 2019). These women recognized that previous black liberation movements depicted black heterosexual, cisgender men as leaders and strategists, leaving the black women within those movements as background characters. Those within the Black Lives Matter movement have shown to be influenced by this idea of Black Feminism. Black Lives Matter finds importance in the dedication to the inclusion of the LGBT community and has an approach that highlights gender, class, citizenship, sexuality, and environment. This ideology has been reflected in the movement’s organizational structure.

The definition of Black Feminism is controversial. Some believe that all African American women, regardless of their ideas are black feminists because of their living perspective as a black woman (Scott, 1982). Though some have criticized this definition is built on the foundation of a questionable biological category, being of African American descent (Collins, 1991). Some believe that both black women and men can be included under the label “black feminist” so long as they possess a feminist consciousness (Guy-Sheftall, 1986). Through this definition, it is understood that black women’s unique social location forces them to struggle both as women and as African American. However, Scott (1982) also criticizes Guy-Sheftall’s (1986) definition because it also based upon the notion that one must be black to experience black feminist thought. Though Collins (1991) argues that creating a definition that claims
anyone can have the ability to develop black feminist thought risks devaluing the experience and vision that black women bring to this process, she notes that a definition is needed.

The definition that Scott (1982) provides is one that encompasses an outside perspective while not diminishing the experiences and ideas that black women bring to the forefront. The working definition of Black Feminist Thought that will be utilized in this study is one that Collins (1991) provides in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* as one that “a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community” (p.39). This definition allows for Black women to be at the center of discussion about inequalities and experiences while permitting others to join the conversation.

The founders believed it ought to be their goal to maximize their movement by prioritizing queer, black women (Black Lives Matter, 2019). Learning from previous liberation movements, today’s generation of activists in the Black Lives Matter movement are heavily influenced by the radical Black Feminist ideologies of the 1970’s (Ransby, 2018). This ideology also heavily influenced the organizational structure of the Black Lives Matter movement. The founding members made it a point to reject a hierarchical, centralized structure and a charismatic leader. They cited that falling into this traditional structure would diminish the potential of the movement and would leave a would-be leader open to being discredited or possibly assassinated. They also rejected this structural idea because it left the potential for marginalized individuals (LGBTQ, women, and low-income) to be lost or left out of the movement (Hillstrom, 2018).

Detractors pointed to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s and the idea that its centralized structure and charismatic leadership is what made the movement so powerful and effective. Believing that a centralized power structure is paramount in achieving a goal, critics of
the Black Lives Matter movement also argued that the movement’s meaning and focus would fall into obscurity. Though there have been questions about the group’s goals on a national level, the Black Lives Matter movement was created to help communities at a local level and their structure is the guiding force behind its effective (Hillstrom, 2018).

This chapter-based, member-led movement grew into a global network committed to acting together and creating a world where people of color have social, economic, and political power. Black Lives Matter grew into a local chapter-based movement that prioritized a collective leadership model, ensuring that all voices within the movement were heard (Hillstrom, 2018). The founders believed that for this movement to benefit its supporters it needed to be a decentralized, member-led movement. Consisting of more than 40 chapters, Black Lives Matter members organize and build local power to intervene in state and vigilante-inflicted violence against black communities (Hillstrom, 2018). Though the structure of the Black Lives Matter movement is important in how it operates and provides its message, the tactics should also be explained to detail how the movement frames itself.

As stated earlier, the media has often provided evidence or stories and put a racialized or gendered portrayal on it to sell their viewpoint of how the events unfolded (Bouie, 2015; Ransby, 2018). Video evidence provided by police car dash cams, Facebook videos, and Twitter feeds have unmasked violence thought to be eradicated by the idea of a “post-racial” society, i.e. one where race is not a contributing factor to how individuals are treated. The authority in charge of serving and protecting black communities has been shown to actively target them instead. Social media, Twitter and Facebook specifically, played a huge role in the mobilization and the spreading of information early on throughout the movement. From video recordings of police brutality, to the distribution of informational materials, to event meeting times and places for
protests; social media was, and still is, the essential piece of the puzzle for social justice movement influence (Hillstrom, 2018).

While the movement has utilized social media to push their messages and inform their followers. Social media, especially today, can have intense influence over social movement members, actions, and accomplishments (or pitfalls). For instance, social media can be a powerful tool in providing information to citizens when other media forms are controlled by an overpowering regime or shut down altogether. It is also a relatively efficient way in amassing protestors with common goals (Tufekci, 2017). However, it is not just a positive mobilization tool; it can also have its drawbacks. Social media can have its share of fringe groups or users who are intent on pushing misinformation and creating discord. For instance, the Dream Defenders cofounder Phillip Agnew challenged the unquestioned role of social media, critiquing it as a forum that can promote individualism and distract from face-to-face organizing efforts. Phillip Agnew, along with many others caution those who do not challenge the overreliance of social media; therefore, other forms of media must be taken into consideration (Ransby, 2018).

Black Lives Matter utilizes a host of tactics when organizing, both conventional and nonconventional. For instance, after Michael Brown was killed by Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson, co-founder Patrisse Cullors organized a national bus ride during Labor Day weekend. With the help of Darnell Moore, the Black Life Matters Ride gathered over 600 people and helped support those suffering physical attacks by law enforcement. Once this ride was complete the founders used Ferguson and St. Louis as examples of what was happening in black communities across the nation. This event resulted in the first Black Lives Matter chapters in other communities and towns (Black Lives Matter, 2019).
In 2017, organizers from Black Lives Matter along with many other civil rights groups and coalitions co-sponsored a “Right to Know” bill, which would authorize public access to internal investigations into police officers who are found guilty of serious misconduct or have killed someone. While Black Lives Matter did not create this bill, the organization used legal political practices to get it passed. Hundreds of organizers, families, and Californians made public testimonies, called legislators, and wrote letters to pass the “Right to Know” bill (Black Lives Matter, 2019).

Among conventional strategies utilized, Black Lives Matter also uses more unconventional tactics to spark conversation and pull attention to the injustice that black communities are facing. Utilizing illustrative techniques has been a prominent strategy for the movement. Black Lives Matter will often use pop-up coffins to represent black individuals killed at the hands of law enforcement. These coffins often represent black victims killed at the hands of law enforcement. Another unconventional tactic predominantly used by the Black Lives Matter movement is protest demonstrations, often taking place in the heart of communities and along major highways (Black Lives Matter, 2019).

This literature has provided a basic understanding of social movements, media, and framing theory, and the Black Lives Matter movement. It is necessary to understand the structure and organization of social movements and media and how their relationship with media affects their message. Understanding the theoretical framing background and previous research provides a solid foundation for my research in finding out how news outlets portray the Black Lives Matter movement. This literature has shaped how I have designed the overall research methodology for this study. In the next section, I explain my research question, the research
methodology utilized, and an overview of the media bias chart that was used in the data collection for this study.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter, I discuss the research design as well as the sampling strategy criterion I used to collect my data. Content analyses are often used to identify core consistencies and meanings (Patton, 2002). I used a qualitative content analysis of articles from two online news media outlets, Fox News and Daily Kos, to examine how the Black Lives Matter movement is portrayed by the politically left and right. I chose to use a content analysis so I could get a qualitative understanding of how the Black Lives Matter movement is portrayed in online news media. A qualitative content analysis includes “…any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002). For this analysis, I collected articles based on a set of specific criteria, then attempted to make sense of meanings and themes that emerged from the documents.

As the literature review provided a foundational understanding of how individuals, events, and some social movements have been portrayed by the media, I was interested in understanding how the modern Black Lives Matter movement is portrayed. I analyzed news media outlet articles to assess themes and patterns of Black Lives Matter media portrayals. This study aims to explore the question: How does the online news media on the political left and the political right depict the Black Lives Matter movement?

Sampling Strategy

For this study, I chose to look at articles about Black Lives Matter from the first five years of the movement, my goal is to ascertain how the media has framed the movement. Specifically, I analyzed news articles published between 2013-2017, that are of lower journalistic
quality, and focus on the politically far left and right as the target audience. I chose to analyze lower journalistic quality news sources so future research could focus on higher quality news sources. Another reason for focusing on lower quality news sources is that they might provide more biased coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement. I chose to analyze politically left and right news sources to understand if there was a difference in portrayals between two different ideological sources. The quality of a news outlets is measured from the 4.0 edition of the Media Bias Chart created by Ad Fontes Media (2019) as sources that can have both investigative articles that focus on the discovering information of public interest and opinion articles that focus on persuading an audience.

The individual news outlet sources were ranked through a process that measured quality and bias in the content. Other qualities such as ratings and popularity are from a small but representative sample size of articles analyzed from each source. The overall ranking of a source was distinguished by a weighted average, an algorithmic translation of the news outlet articles raw scores. These raw scores were compiled by multiple raters that judged an article from a news source on quality and bias. The quality score was compiled using measurements of element scores, sentence scores, and unfairness instances. The element score is an evaluation on a scale of 1-8, corresponding to the vertical categories as seen on the chart. The sentence score is evaluated for veracity (true vs. false) and expression (fact vs. opinion). Lastly, raters took a final measurement of unfair instances (Ad Fontes Media, 2019).

In the bias ranking, raters measured three variables: topic selection and/or presentation, sentence metrics, and comparison. Topic selection and/or presentation assessed the topic of the article itself and how it was presented in the headline. Categories in this variable spanned from “most extreme left to most extreme right.” This variable measured bias by omission in the topics
that were covered by other sources. The second variable was sentence metrics. This measured biased based on discrete instances throughout the article, not ones that are related to “political position”, “characterization”, and “terminology” (Ad Fontes Media, 2019). Lastly, as a comparison, the overall bias was scored and compared to other articles on the subject. This provided an opportunity for the ranking analysts to measure bias by omission. This is done by comparing the article topics and the facts that were present or omitted from the articles.

Based on the information provided from the Media Bias Chart, I decided it would be informative to assess the portrayals of the Black Lives Matter movement of two news media outlet that possessed the same bias and quality ranking but had opposite political affiliations. By measuring quality and bias content using the variables described above, analysts were asked to consider whether the variables measured showed extremely low reliability or extreme bias. The analysts were instructed to weigh their scores either downward or outward considering these factors, thus providing the positioning on the Media Bias Chart.

The news outlets that were selected to use in this study were Daily Kos and Fox News. They were of the same overall quality and are on opposite sides of the political spectrum, providing an exploratory view of liberal and conservative ideas pertaining to the Black Lives Matter movement. The methodology for designating a news outlet as “left” and “right” is to make sure that political concepts that fall outside of strictly “liberal” and “conservative” labels are counted. In this context, the designation of “left” and “right” still encompass fundamental liberal or conservative ideologies as well as concepts that might be outliers but relative to the political “left” or “right” (Ad Fontes Media, 2019).

As previously stated, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of news articles from Fox News and Daily Kos to investigate the media’s representation of Black Lives Matter. There was
no need to seek out other sources because I gathered enough data to meet saturation and repetition. As these are publicly available documents, IRB approval is not necessary. I utilized a criterion sampling strategy, meaning that all the articles I decided to collect met a set of predetermined criteria that assured the same quality among the articles (Creswell, 2013).

When collecting articles from the Daily Kos website, I utilized their advanced search. I specifically searched for the term Black Lives Matter and made sure it was in the title because I wanted to make sure that throughout my search the articles that came up focused around the organization, rather than just mentioning the organization somewhere in the article. Although I used this filter for my article search, there were still articles that came up that did not contain Black Lives Matter in the title. These articles were still utilized because I had decided that if the article more than mentioned the Black Lives Matter movement it would be put into the analysis. Next, I inputted the date range of July 1, 2013 through December 31, 2017. By doing this I was able to improve the inclusion of the articles that pertained to Black Lives Matter. My initial query resulted in 1,119 articles in total from the Daily Kos website.

My process for gathering articles for my study was somewhat similar for Fox News. When collecting articles from Fox News I was also able to utilize an advanced search engine, although it was different than the Daily Kos advanced search engine. For this search engine I used the search term Black Lives Matter. The difference from the Fox News search compared to the Daily Kos search engine is that for Fox News I was only able to specifically choose the site (Fox News or Fox Business), section (different categories of news), content (story, video, slideshow, list, or recipe), and date range. For this search engine I utilized the Fox News website as well as the story content specification, deciding I did not want to be analyzing pictures or videos of Black Lives Matter. The dates utilized were the same as the dates used for the Daily
Kos search (July 1, 2013 through December 31, 2017). My initial query on the Fox News website resulted in 3,290 articles.

For both websites, I filtered the articles to populate by date, providing every article in chronological order. Because I did not put quotations around the search term Black Lives Matter, my search results came back with an 4,409 articles. To narrow down the number of articles chosen for analysis I went through each article and made sure that the ones I picked contained information describing the Black Lives Matter movement or information pertaining to protestors, police, or events that would garner action from the movement.

During my initial round of data collection, I noticed different patterns in the articles from Fox News and Daily Kos websites. As I analyzed articles that contained the phrase Black Lives Matter, I found that many of these articles were just Twitter threads that had relatively little writing from an author. Mostly, the articles had a headline that pertained to protests or Black Lives Matter and then just had picture after picture of twitter posts either from supporters or opponents of the movement. I was not just looking for a reiteration of Twitter threads or pictures of protests. This study was meant to qualitatively understand how online news media were journalistically portraying the Black Lives Matter movement through the content they were providing in their writing. This initial issue prompted me to reevaluate my search terms, criteria, and quality of sources gathered. It was during this phase of analysis that the articles that contained Twitter posts or Twitter threads were taken out of the selection process.

As I continued through each website, evaluating whether or not Black Lives Matter was present in the article, I accumulated an appropriate data saturation for the research to continue to the analysis phase. For this analysis, articles were chosen if they contained the phrase “Black Lives Matter” or had information about a protest, gathering, or vigil. At the end of this data
collection I accumulated 72 articles from the Daily Kos website and 153 articles from the Fox News website. The total of 225 articles were collected and used for the next step of the analysis. The next section describes the detailed process of analysis that I conducted when reading through each article.

**Analysis Strategy**

Once the news articles were collected, I utilized NVivo (a qualitative data analysis software) to code the articles so I could determine if there were differences in media portrayals from these two politically ideologically conservative and liberal media sources. First, I determined whether the content of the article chosen was pertinent to the Black Lives Matter movement. Some of the articles pulled for analysis contained Black Lives Matter in the title, however the article had a focus on something unrelated to the movement or possible movement members. I determined if the article’s content directly depicted an action, participant, or collective group possibly representing Black Lives Matter. If this article only briefly mentioned Black Lives Matter and focused on a different topic completely it was placed in a cursory folder.

Articles that were put into a cursory folder, meaning the information in the article was not detailed enough to properly engage in conversation about the Black Lives Matter movement and the article was removed from examination. If the article focused on Black Lives Matter or mentioned Black Lives Matter movement activities it was placed in a content folder, for inclusion in the primary analysis. After conducting this preliminary analysis, there were 41 articles from Daily Kos and 104 articles from Fox News that were identified as having content specific to Black Lives Matter for the next round of analysis (see Table 1).
Table 1

*Count of Articles Analyzed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Source</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Kos</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Articles</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After I completed this preliminary analysis, I then grouped the articles based on their focus. All articles were categorized by what the article was about. The categories that came out of this analysis were: About BLM, Events, Media, Protests, and Trials (see Table 2). At this level of analysis most of the articles were grouped within the Protest category. Articles in this category focused on protest activities either related to or possibly related to the Black Lives Matter movement. The next most used classification was in relation to articles focusing specifically on the Black Lives Matter movement.

Table 2

*Categorization by Article Focus*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Focus</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About BLM</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trial</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Articles in the About BLM category focused on Black Lives Matter movement leaders or members. Some articles specifically focused on trial dates of police officers or movement members. These articles were categorized as Trials and focused on trial events and activities. Next, there were a few articles where the author focused on events that took place. In the Events category, the articles focused on political events during candidate rallies. The difference between the Protest category and the Events category is that articles in the protest category mainly
focused on protest activities, whether they were well planned out or thrown together last minute. Articles in the Events category focused on planned political rallies or political events that were taking place at the time. The least number of articles in a given classification was related to the Media category. It is in this category that authors spoke to their interpretation of how the media frames the Black Lives Matter movement. After all 145 articles were analyzed based off this categorization process the next focus for this analysis was on the Author.

Next, each article’s author was assessed. Upon collecting articles in my sampling strategy, I noticed that many articles from both websites were authored by outside sources. This categorization process was necessary for determining if the article author was a staff member of the news outlet the articles were collected from. This data was able to be collected because authors were present at the top of each article prior to the main content. By collecting author data, I was able to gather the source of information being published on the news outlet’s websites. This categorization resulted in classifications such as Associated Press, Community, Other, and Staff (see Table 3).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorization by Author of Article</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associated Press</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overwhelming majority of articles found for both news outlets were not authored by official staff members. For the Fox News website, most of the articles were authored by the Associated Press and followed a formulaic style in relaying information to the audience. For the Daily Kos website, most articles were authored by Daily Kos community members, not staff
members, and followed more of an opinion or emotional tone when relaying information to the audience. This preliminary understanding of authorship influence to the next categorization of analysis; Article Tone.

In the next level of analysis, the subject of Article Tone was assessed. In this level I determined if the title specifically stated Black Lives Matter and then if the article’s content was positive, negative, or neutral (see Table 4). This is an important step because social movements use the media to get their message out and grievances heard (Boyd & Mitchell, 2016). Therefore, the media using or not using the organization’s name is telling about how they frame it, either giving recognition to the movement or not. Of the 145 articles analyzed, most of the articles contained Black Lives Matter in the title.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorization by Article Tone</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BLM in title</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLM not in title</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After assessing the title of the article, I focused on whether the articles overall tone was positive, neutral, or negative. An article would be categorized as positive in tone if the language was supportive of the movement’s ideology, message, or tactics. Articles categorized as neutral provided no language either supportive or critical of the movement’s ideology, message, or tactics. Articles categorized as negative provided language that was critical of the movement’s
ideology, message, or tactics. Of the articles that contained Black Lives Matter in the title, most authors wrote about the movement in a negative tone. Often, they were critical of the movement’s tactics and the author’s perceived idea of what the Black Lives Matter movement represents. Of the articles that did not contain Black Lives Matter in the title, the majority of authors wrote about the movement in a neutral tone. There was a distant, formulaic quality to the articles. They mostly focused on stated facts such as protest size, police presence, and number of those arrested.

As this movement was created by black women, I thought it important to assess the portrayals or possible lack of portrayals of black women in the articles analyzed in this study. This far into the analysis I had notice that most of the articles that talked about the Black Lives Matter movement focused on talking about their protesting in relation to the death of a black man or a black teenage boy. At the end of this analysis I could not remember how many articles that had mentioned black women as victims of vigilante or state violence. Because of this lack of focus, I felt that it was necessary to go back through and code for black women’s visibility within and around the movement. Therefore, I created the category; Mention of Black Women.

With this new code in mind, each article analyzed was checked for any mention of queer, black women. All articles were analyzed to determine if the content included any mention of black women. This analysis of the mentioning of black women within the articles text led to the creation of multiple subcategories; Black Lives Matter Founders, Black Lives Matter Organizers, Family, Remembrance, Black Bystander, and Unlawful Detainment of Black Women (see Table 5). Of the 145 articles analyzed in this study, only 35 articles mentioned black women.
Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorization by Mention of Black Women</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black bystander</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLM founder</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLM organizer</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembrance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlawful detention of black woman</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the articles that mentioned black women focused on relaying information about the founding members of the organization. The next category that was most utilized was the mention of Black Lives Matter organizers, this category focused on specifically named women. Content related to women who are/were family members of victims was also published. In this category, female family members were portrayed in relation to the death of their male family members. Some articles also briefly mentioned black women killed by police and were coded as Remembrance. Though there were a small number, one of these articles specifically focused on the injustice and invisibility of the deaths of black women. Lastly, the fewest number of articles focused on black bystanders and the unlawful detention of black women. This analysis showed an overall lack of acknowledgement of black women within all the articles analyzed. The significance of the coding and analysis for the mentioning of black women in the articles will be addressed in the findings.

The examination of codes provided the emerging themes for online media portrayals of the Black Lives Matter movement. These themes focused on the portrayals of publication, membership, tactics, tone, and black women. These themes are presented and analyzed in the findings section of this study. They are also examined later in the discussion section of this study.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine how politically left and politically right online news media portrayed the Black Lives Matter movement. To get at this, two news websites were selected to assess how they portrayed the Black Lives Matter movement. The examination of my codes highlighted emerging themes of media portrayals of the Black Lives Matter movement. These themes focused on the portrayals of publication, membership, tactics, tone, and black women. There were five relevant findings that came about through this study.

Finding 1

Prior to July 2014, there were no online news depictions of Black Lives Matter from either of the websites in this study. The Black Lives Matter movement was created after the death of Trayvon Martin. It was Martin’s death and the lack of justice that created a need for the formation of the movement. Part of the reason that there were relatively few articles could be that prior to Michael Brown’s death in 2014, the movement’s prime tool in getting their message out was social media. The social media website, Twitter, was used in their earlier tactical strategies of getting their message out to the public.

Prior to the death of Brown, the online news sites examined in this study showed a lack of movement importance by only publishing content related to Trayvon Martin’s killing, not the movement. Two years later, after the death of Michael Brown, the Black Lives Matter movement forced the media to pay attention to the issue of police brutality on black bodies. It was not until the massive public outrage of the black community after the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, that the movement gained publicity. This public outrage illustrated an increase in motivational framing from the movement, or a call to arms (Snow et al., 2018), highlighting the
importance of the need for the Black Lives Matter movement. This is when the news media started to cover the massive protests that Black Lives Matter engaged in, making them more visible in the public sphere.

This increase in media coverage after the use of disruptive, unconventional tactics by Black Lives Matter movement follows past research on media portrayals of social movements. Research in social movement coverage by news media has shown that the more unconventional or violent tactics utilized by a social movement, the more likely the news media is to publish articles about the movement (Koopmans, 2004). The study of this movement shows that prior to the mass protesting that happened in Ferguson after the death of Michael Brown, there was relatively little reporting of the Black Lives Matter movement. After Brown’s death in 2014, the majority of the articles collected focused on protest events and the disruptive tactics that the movement utilized during this time. This focus of reporting on disruptive tactics continued up to the end of December 2017, as was the end date of article collection for this study.

Finding 2

There was a lack of identification in protestors’ membership to Black Lives Matter. During the analysis, articles were categorized by Article Focus. In the Protest subcategory, many of the articles did not provide a direct link to the Black Lives Matter movement. By this, I mean the articles analyzed did not specifically state that protesters were affiliated members of the Black Lives Matter movement. Many of these articles provided an indirect link, lumping protestors as members because they would chant “Black Lives Matter” or carry signs with “Black Lives Matter” written on them. Examples of these portrayals include:

Several dozen protesters gathered outside the Dane County Public Safety Building on Saturday before starting to walk toward the scene of the shooting, holding signs that read,
"Black Lives Matter.” Protesters also shouted the slogan Friday night after the shooting. (Fox News, 19-year-old Wisconsin man dies after being shot by police officer, 2015)
At least 13 people were arrested after protesters holding Black Lives Matter signs blocked all southbound lanes of Interstate 95 in downtown Richmond, Virginia Monday, local media reported. (Fox News, Black Lives Matter activists arrested after protest stops traffic in Virginia, 2016)

Participants’ direct identification to the Black Lives Matter movement provides an understanding of how the movement is being portrayed by the media. By not providing concrete instances of membership, it makes it more difficult for the audience to understand if the Black Lives Matter movement is behind the protesting events and tactics that are taking place or not. This lack of distinction in membership may also lead an outside audience to believe that the movement is unorganized. This lack of accurate representation for the Black Lives Matter movement could pose possible issues in obtaining or retaining members in the movement.

Finding 3

Most of the articles that were analyzed focused on the tactics of the movement. In assessing the media coverage of social movements Koopmans (2004) established that factors like geographic proximity, the size of the protest, its potential for conflict, drama or sensationalism, along with the notoriety and/or celebrity of participants were important in which stories were published. The articles gathered in this study showed that protesting activities were those that were majorly covered by online news. Over half of the 145 articles that were analyzed mainly focused on protests and 79 articles mentioned specific tactics utilized by the movement. The online news media’s focus on direct and indirect tactics by Black Lives Matter movements
activists provides a specific undertone in framing the movement, which will be discussed later in this study.

The tactics that were focused on through most of the articles were unconventional tactics. As stated earlier, movements that utilize unconventional tactics such as protests, tend to garner more attention from news media outlets (Koopmans, 2004). Of the articles that focused on tactics of the movement that majority of them covered protest events where there was chanting, Black Lives Matter signage, and road blockages. These unconventional tactics were the most covered and ultimately provide a negative frame of the Black Lives Matter movement because they are confrontational and may impede daily activity for non-participants. Examples of this type of coverage include, but are not limited to:

On Saturday, several dozen protesters holding signs and chanting "Black Lives Matter" — a slogan adopted by activists and protesters nationwide after recent officer-involved deaths of unarmed blacks — marched from the police department to the neighborhood where the shooting took place. (Associated Press, Organizers planned gathering in Wisconsin following fatal shooting of 19-year-old, 2015)

A crowd of activists gathered on a bridge over the Chicago River and started marching north shortly before noon, as police lined up along Michigan Avenue. Some demonstrators chanted "16 shots and a cover-up," a reference to 17-year-old Laquan McDonald who was shot 16 times. (Fox News, Protesters disrupt shoppers at Chicago's Magnificent Mile on Christmas Eve, 2015)

Something that was also telling about this finding is that news media outlets were eager to report on the unconventional, disruptive tactics that the Black Lives Matter movement has utilized, however there were relatively few articles illustrating the more conventional tactics that
the group also uses. For instance, the Black Lives Matter movement has confronted officials, listed possible policy changes, and hosted teach-ins to help make citizens aware of their rights. Though these are popular tactics for Black Lives Matter chapters to utilize, only seven of the articles mentioned the movement’s more conventional tactics. By only publishing articles focused on and around disruption, violence, police presence, and number of participants involved, the news media provide a certain frame that shows the Black Lives Matter movement in a negative light.

Finding 4

Most of the articles from Fox News were authored by the Associated Press and most of the articles from the Daily Kos were authored by community members, not Daily Kos staff. When looking at Fox news, the publishing of articles about Black Lives Matter did not seem to happen unless there was possible violence or arrests. In these articles, there was a formulaic writing style involving police presence, number of participants, and arrests that occurred. These publications were mostly devoid of emotion, opting for a matter of fact, seemingly unbiased writing style.

Oakland police say at least 45 people were arrested following a largely peaceful protest against police killings. The arrests came toward the end of a day when thousands of protesters took to the streets of San Francisco and Oakland on Saturday to join in a national demonstration against the killings of unarmed black men by police. Oakland police spokeswoman Johnna Watson says that hours later a crowd of about 500 remained. She says police arrested at least 45 people for crimes such as vandalism, failure to disperse and resisting arrest. (Associated Press, 45 arrested as thousands join police protests in Oakland, San Francisco, 2014)
News outlets reported that demonstrators later blocked traffic on the FDR Drive in Lower Manhattan, spurring arrests. Police didn't immediately have information on the number of arrests. In Oakland, California, hundreds of protesters briefly blocked Interstate 880, a major freeway, on Friday night. There were no immediate reports of any arrests or injuries. (Associated Press, Eric Garner protests continue for third night, 2014)

Although these articles were published on Fox News, the authors of them were mostly Associated Press. The Associated Press articles also took on a more neutral tone when reporting about the Black Lives Matter movement. This style of writing and sourcing of articles is almost the complete opposite when looking at the articles published by the Daily Kos.

Like the Fox News website, Daily Kos staff were rarely in the mix of article authors. The Daily Kos website mostly published articles by community members, i.e. members of the website and not professional journalists. Most of the pieces that were published on this website had a lot of emotion and justification of Black Lives Matter movement goals and tactics, such as:

So in retrospect, the BLM strategy in Seattle, and subsequently, seems brilliant. When I first saw the video of the initial confrontation with Bernie and O'Malley, I was initially a bit critical of what I saw as rudeness. But after thinking about it, I realized that in-your-face rudeness is strategically sound b/c it gets attention. (Nickel1946, The Black Lives Matter Movement: It’s Going to be Big, 2015)

Most of the articles published by the Daily Kos were positive in nature regarding the Black Lives Matter movement and had “Black Lives Matter” in the heading. Overall, there was only one article that was written by a Daily Kos staff member. As shown by these findings, the author writing the Black Lives Matter article is telling in the focus in content and tone that Fox News and Daily Kos had in publishing stories about the movement.
Finding 5

There were relatively few articles related to queer, black women. Based on the research of the Black Lives Matter movement, I expected that there would be articles relevant to queer black women either taking leadership roles or the movement exercising speech over the violent killings of queer black women. In this content analysis there were relatively few articles that mentioned either queer, black female leaders of the movement or the protesting of queer, black women killed at the hands of state or vigilante violence. This shows a discrepancy in the frame elaboration process of how the media portray the Black Lives Matter movement.

For this content analysis approximately 24% of articles talked about queer, black women. These articles were then broken up into six categories: Black bystanders, Black Lives Matter founders, Black Lives Matter organizers, Family members of black victims, Remembrance of black women, and Unlawful detaining of black women. The most references to queer, black women were mentions of the Black Lives Matter movement founders. Most of these references to the founders were quotes from founding member Alicia Garza on the movement’s ideology and tactics. For instance, there were times when Alicia Garza had made a comment on the movement’s non-endorsement of national candidates such as Bernie Sanders, stating:

Black Lives Matter as a network will not, does not, has not, ain't going to endorse any candidates, Garza said in the AP report. Now if there are activists within the movement that want to do that independently, they should feel free and if that's what makes sense for their local conditions, that's fantastic. But as a network, that's not work we're engaged in yet. (Robert King, Black Lives Matter won’t endorse 2016 candidate, 2015)

There were also multiple instances where the founders spoke about their tactics and membership organization.
What people are seeing is that there are less demonstrations, said Alicia Garza, one of three women credited with coining the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag after a jury acquitted a neighborhood watchman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin in Florida in 2012. A lot of that is that people are channeling their energy into organizing locally, recognizing that in Trump’s America, our communities are under direct attack. (Macias, A new survey reveals that most Americans have an unfavorable view of Black Lives Matter, 2017)

We’re not just about hitting the streets or direct action…it’s a humanizing project, co-founder Cullors said. We’re trying to re-imagine humanity and bring us to a place where we can decide how we want to be in relation to each other versus criminalizing our neighbors or being punitive towards them. (Macias, Black Lives Matter movement to be awarded the 2017 Sydney peace price, 2017)

While most of the articles that covered queer, black women were about the founders of the movement, relatively few of the articles covered queer, black women who have been victims of violence. Although the movement was created to shed light on the violence that people in the black community face, there was a purposeful focus on the representation of queer, black women in the creation of this movement. There were only 6 articles out of the 35 that mentioned queer, black women in the Black Lives Matter movement that focused on the remembrance of black women. Most of the articles that contained a remembrance of a black woman mentioned Sandra Bland, which got widespread attention in 2015 after she was found hanging in a jail cell three days after a routine traffic stop. One important issue with the reporting of queer, black women within these articles is that there was no distinction that those talking were queer or black women. When looking at these articles, I had to look up some of the people that were written
about because I did not know and could not identify from the text that they were queer or black women.

The most distinguishing fact of this portion of the research was that there was only one instance where an article was published that contained an in-depth description of the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement. This article was published on the Daily Kos website and focused on black women who are victims of police violence. The author of this article, Kelly Macias, accurately provided the foundational ideologies of the movement as well as the coverage, or lack thereof, that victimized black women receive from the media. For instance, this article discussed the reason behind the creation of the movement as:

When Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi and Patrice Cullors founded the Black Lives Matter movement, their intention was to talk about the ways that all black lives are routinely denied basic human rights and dignity and the role of state violence in anti-black racism. It is fitting that this movement was founded by black queer women—women who no doubt understand the ways in which the voices of marginalized groups (women, LGBTQ, disabled, undocumented etc.) have been historically left out of conversations on racial justice and black liberation. In fact, they were purposeful in explicitly centering those groups in the hopes of building a more inclusive and modern black liberation movement. (Kelly Macias, Seattle mother called police and was shot by them, reminding us black women get killed by cops too, 2017)

This article also proposed an understanding that the Black Lives Matter movement only focusses on state violence against black men, leaving black women out of the conversation:

Yet, for many, Black Lives Matter has somehow become synonymous with addressing state violence against black men while women are left out of the discussion altogether.
Black women are centered in the conversation insofar as they are portrayed as mourning mothers, partners or relatives of slain black men but not positioned as victims of violence themselves. This is completely inaccurate. Black women are killed in disproportionate numbers by the police. While we represent only 13 percent of the female population, we account for 33 percent of all women shot to death by police. (Kelly Macias, Seattle mother called police and was shot by them, reminding us black women get killed by cops too, 2017)

**Limitations**

The focus of this research was to examine how media news outlets portrays the Black Lives Matter movement. In this study, the media news outlets that were analyzed were of low quality and had considerable liberal and conservative leanings. By choosing these news outlets I was only able to analyze the extremes of journalistic quality and political leaning. It would be useful if further research focused on higher quality news outlet sources. Analyzing more quality news source could provide a better understanding of how quality news outlets portray the Black Lives Matter movement as well as addressing the degree of influence they would have on the movement’s audience. Quality news sources tend to reach a wider audience; therefore, it would also be helpful to research news outlets that have more viewing. Measuring readership of news media outlet articles would be a better way to understand the reach that news outlets can Black Lives Matter.

Social media was not focused on in this study. The Black Lives Matter movement has a large social media following on Twitter (over 300,00 followers) and Facebook (over 300,000 likes or members?). This study did not seek out information posted from the movement on social media. Gathering this sort of data could have provided more detailed information on the message
that the movement has been trying to portray through a more direct line of communication to their audience. Lastly, future research may include a more detailed understanding of the visibility of queer, black women within online news media articles. Although this study focused mainly on portrayals of the Black Lives Matter movement, it would be beneficial to open this up to the exploration of queer, black women within and around the movement.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This research is important in understanding how news outlet media portrays the Black Lives Matter movement. The findings above coincide with previous research conducted regarding media’s framing of social movements in that it provided insight into the issue that the modern Black Lives Matter movement faces in its relationship to online news media. Themes that came up were centered around coverage, official membership, authorship, focus on disruptive tactics, visibility of women of color. In this section I will be explaining the broader implications that these issues pose for modern social movements such as Black Lives Matter.

The initial finding in this study showed that just because a movement is formed does not mean mainstream news media will provide that movement with a platform. The Black Lives Matter movement was created after the 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of Trayvon Martin. In this study, Black Lives Matter did not get online news media attention until after the death of Michael Brown, a time in which the black community of Ferguson publicly protested under the Black Lives Matter movement direction.

Martin’s death was the diagnostic frame of the movement, or the diagnosis of an event that attributes blame (Snow et al., 2018). While the movement had created framing elaboration by highlighting events, issues, and beliefs (Snow et al., 2018) about state and vigilante violence on black bodies, the media showed a lack of frame elaboration by not providing accurate publications dedicated to the movement. Black Lives Matter has a diagnostic frame that attributes blame to state and vigilante inflicted violence against black communities. The movement’s prognostic frame, or the solution to the problem is to organize and build local movement power to intervene in state and vigilante inflicted violence (Hillstrom, 2018).
However, this study shows that online news media is not portraying the Black Lives Matter movement’s whole message of intervening in state and vigilante justice. Although the news media started publishing about the Black Lives Matter movement, this study shows that there is a lack of frame elaboration. The frame elaboration the media utilized focused more on protests rather than the message the movement was making.

Article publications have been previously analyzed and have shown a discrepancy between the message the movement is trying to get to an audience and the overall message that is published by news media outlets (Koopmans, 2004). From the findings derived from this research study, Fox News and the Daily Kos fall into the unfair practice of not portraying the messages of the Black Lives Matter movement accurately. As per this finding, the study shows that there are consequences for social movements if their message is not distributed by the media (not having directly relevant articles prior to 2014) or if the media does not focus on proper frame elaboration (publishing on protest rather than movement message). This misrepresentation of the Black Lives Matter movement’s message has provided opportunities for framing disputes, or an opposing view, that has attempted to redefine violent state and vigilante events directed toward people of color (Snow et al., 2018).

During this study, most of what online news media focused on when it started publishing about the Black Lives Matter movement was the tactical choices and protests of those possibly in the movement. Because social movements rely so heavily on news outlet media to get their messages across, it is important that social movements can properly utilize the media’s attention in a clear and concise manner, making it more difficult for the media to reframe their intentions. This study found that both liberal and conservative politically leaning news media outlets published many of their articles on public protests. These protests were covered in a way that
alluded to membership with the Black Lives Matter movement but did not actually state official memberships.

Modern movement organizational structures could be playing a role in the lack of official membership representation. Seeing as how the Black Lives Matter movement is a chapter-led, decentralized movement, there are relatively few professional positions that one can hold within the organization. Because this movement is less strict on official membership qualifications, it can make it difficult to accurately identify true members of the movement from fringe groups or radical offshoots. Joining the movement consists of signing up for emails that provide information on launches, network actions, programs, and partnerships (Black Lives Matter, 2019). There is not a lot of information as to if you get official membership identification, which makes it more difficult for potential members to assess their role within the organization and for news media to assess individual’s relationship with the movement. This was relatable to the present study in the direct or indirect linkages that were portrayed in the online news articles.

In these examples, protestors that were holding signs with sayings depicting Black Lives Matter movement ideologies were assumed to be official members. This kind of coverage could result in message discrepancies for the audience and affect support of the movement. Protests were also portrayed as acts of looting and rioting, mirroring the portrayals of Hurricane Katrina victims. Not only were protests racialized, the portrayals of victims were also racialized. For instance, news outlets were publishing a photo of Michael Brown making a hand gesture that might lead some to believe was a gang sign (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). By publishing this specific picture, news outlets were able to cater to their audience, mostly white and middle class, and feed into the stereotype of young black boys being aggressive “thugs” or criminals.
Both Fox News and Daily Kos lacked staff writer’s coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement. Both websites had either third party or community members journal articles published on their websites and had fewer official staff covering the Black Lives Matter movement. Of those published by Fox News, with the author titled as Associated Press, articles focused on protest size, police presence, arrests, and tactics used. The Associated Press is an independent, not-for-profit news cooperative that works with companies to provide content and services (Associated Press, 2019). Many of the articles that were collected for this content analysis from the Fox News website were published by the Associated Press.

Although Fox News and Daily Kos were relatively low on the quality of sources from the Media Bias Chart. There were numerous articles collected from the Fox News website from the Associated Press, which on the update version of the Media Biased Chart 5.0, has a higher ranking than both Fox News and Daily Kos. Articles from the Associated Press were formulaic and devoid of any real emotion, making it seem more neutral than anything else in their portrayals of the Black Lives Matter movement. Because Fox News accumulated many of their Black Lives Matter articles from the Associated Press, it is likely that this brought down the amount of bias in the articles collected for this study.

Both news outlets focused on the tactics of the Black Lives Matter movement and rarely went beyond protest strategy when covering events and messages from the movement. Queer, black women were also given a backseat to black men and black boys who have fallen victim to violence. Throughout this study, black women had been left out of the discussion in and around the movement. This research has added to that knowledge, showcasing that it is difficult for social movements to get their message portrayed accurately by news media because the focus is mostly on unconventional, disruptive tactics and not message spreading.
This lack of representation of queer, black women further disengages the movement from its Black Feminist roots. This disengagement portrays a different message than the movement has laid out for its members and audience. The twist of the movement’s message can confuse, disenfranchise, or anger members and potential members. This instance relates to discursive fields, or the structures that shape the course of communications between members and the audience (Snow et al., 2018). This provides room for the debate of issues of the movement’s message, which can result in lack of participation or outright disengagement from the movement for an audience or members.

Frame elaboration highlights events, issues, or beliefs enough that they become more relevant. Media practice this by providing time and space to a movement’s message by prioritizing it in its publications (Snow et al., 2018). In this study, both Fox News and Daily Kos provided little publication on queer, black women in and around the Black Lives Matter movement shows that there is an inherently important portion of the Black Lives Matter movement that is not being given proper publication space. This lack of representation, is potentially hurting the movement’s collective action frame, thus negatively affecting its membership base as well as the foundational ideologies the movement was created from.

An example of consequences of inaccurate framing from the movement as well as the media is the need for a new movement called #SayHerName. This movement was created by the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) and the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies at Columbia Law School (CISPS) in December 2014 a response to the lack of attention that black women received in the wake of state and vigilante violence (African American Policy Forum, 2019). There were consistent depictions of black boys and men being portrayed in the media or focused on during the Black Lives Matter protests, further excluding queer black
women from the conversation. The Say Her Name movement was formed as a response to this lack of visibility for queer, black women, and the movement’s aim is to increase visibility for women suffering from violence, not to take away momentum from the Black Lives Matter movement (African American Policy Forum, 2019).

In this study, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of two online news sources to determine how the politically left and right portrays the Black Lives Matter movement. Although the content analysis in this study is a nonrepresentative sample of all online media news sources, it did provide an exploratory idea of how some online news media sources are portraying the movement. Though this research has added to already compiled literature, there is still room for more exploration. Findings provided introductory ideas for future research and ideas on how to improve limitations, should this study continue. Overall, this study provided informative ideas of how politically left and politically right online news media portrays a modern human rights movement, such as Black Lives Matter.
References


