

# 2017 COUCH-STONE SYMPOSIUM KEYNOTE ADDRESS: THE INTERACTION ORDER IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AND THE CASE OF POLICE LEGITIMACY

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## ABSTRACT

*In this keynote address, I use Georg Simmel's sociology of social forms approach to amend Erving Goffman's interaction order perspective into a contemporary analytical framework for empirical analysis of everyday life in our twenty-first century mediated social order. For Goffman, the interaction order provides a foundational basis for social order. As a cornerstone of the human condition, Goffman maintained that most of us spend our daily lives in the direct presence of others. However, rapid advancements in interactive media formats in the last few decades have given rise to an unprecedented twenty-first century interaction order. Many of us now also spend our everyday lives in the mediated presence of others, the effects of which parallel those of face-to-face interaction in importance. These changes, I contend, provide a necessary occasion to reimagine Goffman's interaction order. In what follows, I first provide a brief synopsis of Goffman's interaction order. Next, I outline the twenty-first century interaction order and illustrate the importance of Simmel's formal sociology in amending Goffman's original framework in relation to this unforeseen order. Finally, to highlight a few key points – I incorporate empirical examples from my work as it relates to*

*police legitimacy. I conclude with some suggestions for future research and note a few limitations.*

**Keywords:** Interaction order; Erving Goffman; Georg Simmel; formal sociology; social media; police legitimacy

## INTRODUCTION

It is a real privilege to be asked to speak at the 2017 Couch-Stone symposium held this year in conjunction with the Midwest Sociological Society (MSS) conference in the great Midwestern city of Milwaukee. This year also marks the 40th anniversary of the journal *Symbolic Interaction*. These joint meetings are historically significant for the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction (SSSI), and in some lesser ways, for me personally.

At the MSS meetings in 1973 (also in Milwaukee that year), the organizational seeds of the SSSI were sown, bearing fruit initially in our annual symposium beginning the following year in 1974. Three years later, *Symbolic Interaction* (the flagship journal of the SSSI) and *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* each launched. Over the last 40 years, these two publication outlets have remained the principle venues dedicated exclusively to publishing symbolic interactionist related research. What surely sounds like a variant of a common bar joke (“A group of symbolic interactionists walk into a bar and – wait was it a pub? A pole? Would lawyers – as members of the bar – be present?” Interpretive chaos ensues!), birthed a scholarly organization dedicated to the exclusive study of a variety of social issues associated with everyday life practices.

According to legend, Norman Denzin corralled the late Carl Couch and other interactionists into a Milwaukee bar in 1973 – as Couch (1997) later recounted – to discuss “stupid statements about symbolic interactionism” that had been made in an article published in the American Sociological Association’s (ASA) flagship journal the *American Sociological Review* (ASR) (Couch, 1997, p. 101). Forged in booze, most appropriately in a city celebrated for its brewing traditions, an alliance of “outsiders, rebels, and malcontents” together created “a society of symbolic interactionists who would be committed to the pragmatic tradition that all started with G. H. Mead” (Denzin, 1992, p. 2 cited in Flaherty, 1997, p. 96). And so it all (officially) more or less began.

For me personally, albeit in much less exciting fashion and sans alcohol, the 2001 MSS conference (in St Louis that year) was the first academic meeting that I had ever attended. I was then a third-year undergraduate sociology major at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. I would attend my first Couch-Stone symposium five years later in 2006 (as a graduate student at Arizona State University) in Athens, Georgia. It was there, in Athens, that I was introduced (initiated?) to the group of symbolic interactionist outsiders, rebels and malcontents, many of whom have since become mentors and good friends. There are some wild stories from these meetings, one with some shenanigans as a result of

a mistaken identity as a celebrity, but again I digress – back to the topic at hand.

Before I continue further, let me take a brief moment to explain the title of my talk. It is my hope that a short explanation will help outline what it is that I would like to accomplish this afternoon, which, let me firmly state outright, will not be some sort of grandiose treatise on the state of symbolic interactionism at the turn of the twenty-first century (sorry to disappoint!). Suffice it to say, amidst the warranted criticisms and testimonies of symbolic interactionism (e.g., Fine, 1993; McGinty, 2016), the perspective is alive and well with more than a dozen variants of interactionism thriving today (for a partial list, see Jacobsen, 2017, p. 19). It is my intention this afternoon to provide fresh enthusiasm and renewed methodological excitement in the study of the minutiae in the mediated social domain, what has been called the “mediated communication order” (Altheide, 2014).

In my modest attempt to accomplish this task, I will first provide a brief overview of Erving Goffman’s (1983) seminal paper, *The Interaction Order*. Next, I suggest one way in which we might reimagine Goffman’s interaction order (applicable in today’s mediated social domain), by revisiting Georg Simmel’s influence on Goffman. It is also my hope that a reimagination of this sort might address, in some less direct ways, some concerns expressed in the past about Goffman’s methods. But, more importantly, for our purposes this afternoon, I anticipate that a reimagined twenty-first century interaction order may aid Goffmanian scholars and those working within variants of interactionism in their own work in the contemporary mediated social domain.

The first part of the title of my address unapologetically appropriates the title of Goffman’s paper originally scheduled to be delivered in person as his presidential address to the ASA. Goffman’s talk, and what would be his final paper, “*The Interaction Order*,” was completed before his untimely death and published posthumously in the *ASR*. His address can be read as a summation of his life’s work on the systematic analysis of face-to-face interaction. Goffman identified the interaction order as a domain that provides a foundational basis for social order – an ordering where face-to-face interaction in its own right could be subject to sociological investigation.

Goffman’s legacy has been written about extensively and his ideas have been subject to numerous interpretations, debates, and warranted criticisms – far too many, in fact, to adequately discuss in my remarks that will follow (as a few nice examples, see Jacobsen, 2010; Smith, 2006; Treviño, 2003). My intention is not to provide a robust or even cursory review of these materials. Instead, I wish to direct some of my attention, in small part, to Goffman’s lack of any published discussion of his methodology. Short of a transcription of one tape-recorded talk he gave on fieldwork in 1974, “Goffman never published anything on the topic” (Lofland, 1989, p. 123). It is for this exact reason that:

Sociologists encounter difficulties in following in Goffman’s footprints, it is said, because Goffman lacked a “method,” in the sense of an explicit set of reproducible and teaching procedures for collecting and analyzing sociological data. Goffman told his readers relatively little about how he gathered his data and selected the examples that figure in his analyses. Thus

complaints accumulate around the disparate data sources found in Goffman's work and the absence of reliable procedures for analysing the minutiae of interaction. (Smith, 2006, p. 110)

Through some empirical examples from my own recent work on police legitimacy, I hope to illustrate how investigating select elements of the mediated communication order can provide approaches for examining the minutiae of mediated interaction in Goffman's footprints. To do so, I will illustrate how social media can be viewed as a distinct social form and, thus, might provide an occasion from which to consider a renewed emphasis on method in the twenty-first century. The minutiae of interaction online, and the data these interactions now produce for systematic collection and analysis, have never before been as available to us as they are today – more on this momentarily. This brings me to the second part of my address title, twenty-first century interactionism, the theme of our symposium.

An unprecedented mediated social order has emerged in the twenty-first century – an order identified as “the most important social change since the industrial revolution,” or what Altheide (2014, p. xi) calls “the mediated communication order.<sup>1</sup>” If interactionist work has taught us one thing, it is that social order is a symbolically communicated order. Recent developments in communication and information technologies have given rise to a mediated social order that is arranged entirely of electronic forms of communication. The rules and logic of social order govern everyday interactional relations, and the mediated communication order, as an emergent developing social order, is certainly no exception. A significant factor of the mediated communication order relies principally on media performance (Altheide, 2014). Research has shown that media are the dominant social form to which all major social institutions conform (Altheide & Snow, 1979, 1991) – a process that now extends to how individual actors conform (i.e., media performance) in the twenty-first century mediated communication order.

Consider the BBC report “The rise in selfie deaths and how to stop them” to briefly illustrate the important point of media performance. According to the story, the first report of a selfie-taker actually dying in the process occurred in March 2014. Since this time, there have been at least 127 similar selfie deaths across the globe. Individuals are literally dying for the perfect photo – the idea being: “The better your selfie, the more likes you can pick up on social media [...] it is no longer enough to simply snap a photo in the mirror” (BBC, 2016). Perhaps if Goffman today were writing his most acclaimed and best-selling book (Treviño, 2003), it may have been called *The Presentation of Selfie in Everyday Life*. But again, I digress.

The mediated communication order, I would like to modestly suggest, provides an important occasion to revisit some of our intellectual roots as our scholarship develops in the present. One way we might do so is to (re)consider Simmel's influence on Goffman. I am of course not suggesting that others have not taken up these considerations; they most certainly have, quite nicely, in fact, and I would refer you to Gerhardt (2003, pp. 143–156) among others (see Davis, 1997; Smith, 1989 as nice some examples). Rather, again considering

Simmel's influence on Goffman – particularly in the context of the mediated communication order – may, in some discernable ways, help to reconcile a few methodological concerns noted above of Goffmanian scholarship in the overall quest of understanding minute forms of interaction in the mediated order.

This now brings me to the last part of the title of my address, police legitimacy. My recent work has focused on communication and information technologies and related changes to policing. To illustrate a few key points – outlined above and discussed further in what follows – I will incorporate empirical examples from published and ongoing work as it relates to contemporary forms of police work, and police legitimacy in particular. Before doing so, I turn first to a succinct overview of Goffman's "Interaction Order."

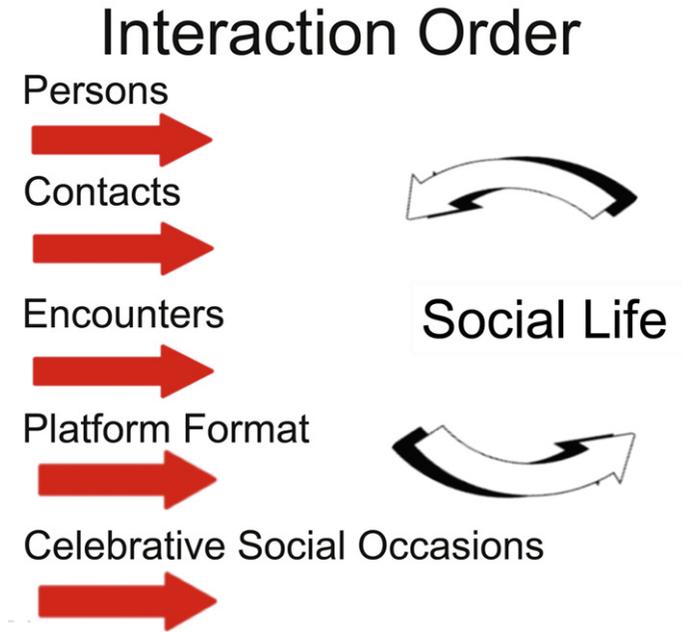
## THE INTERACTION ORDER

For Goffman, the interaction order provides a foundational basis for social order. As a basic "fact of our human condition," Goffman (1983) asserted that the vast majority of us spend our everyday lives in "the immediate presence of others." The social domain then, or interaction order, is like any other order subject to scholarly inquiry (such as the political or economic order). Goffman suggested that those investigating the interaction order should use a micro-level form of analysis. Goffman identified five basic micro-level units: *persons*, *contacts*, *encounters*, *platform performances* and, lastly, *celebrative social occasions*. Together, these units for Goffman constitute the conceptual basis of everyday social life (see Figure 1).

*Persons*, or in Goffman speak, "human ambulatory units," involve people in various states as the smallest level units of analyses, in the form of individuals, couples, files, and processions, or people in lines together waiting for something. *Contacts* occur on occasions when a person comes into the "response presence" of the other, in the face-to-face or through mediated forms such as telephone or mail correspondence. *Encounters* occur through co-presence "where in principle everyone has the same right to contribute" (Goffman, 1983, p. 7). *Platform performances* comprise of social situations where activity occurs before an audience, including media platforms like radio or television. Lastly, there are *celebrative social occasions*, the final and largest interactional unit according to Goffman. These occasions involve coordinated gatherings of a shared circumstance, such as a wedding.

## THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY INTERACTION ORDER

The emergence and rapid advancement of the internet has served as a catalyst for a profound seismic transformation in social reality wherein *platform performances on online platforms like social media are now of paramount importance in the mediated social order*. More than three billion people now access the internet. If Goffman were writing today, perhaps he may suggest that a great many of us spend our everyday lives in the *mediated* presence of others on sites like



*Figure 1.* The Interaction Order.

Facebook or Instagram – global developments that have not gone unrecognized.

International groups like the United Nations have proclaimed access to the internet a basic human right. Countries like France and Sweden have made similar declarations. Basic access to the internet has also been an expressed concern in other countries. For instance, in 2015, former United States President Barack Obama, calling upon the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to expand internet access, announced in a speech in Cedar Falls, Iowa, where he was promoting community broadband, “Today, high-speed broadband is not a luxury, it’s a necessity” (Calamur, 2015). The following year, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), an independent public authority tasked with regulating broadcasting and telecommunication in Canada, determined that access to broadband should be available to the public across the country. According to CRTC chairman, Jean-Pierre Blais:

The future of our economy, our prosperity and our society – indeed, the future of every citizen – requires us to set ambitious goals, and to get on with connecting all Canadians for the 21st century. (Kupfer, 2016)

This statement, one of numerous similar examples offered by government and nongovernment officials across the world, helps signal the significance of communicative media formats in everyday life that not only connect us, but also,

and more importantly, enable people to *interact* with one another electronically in a mediated social realm.

Advancements in interactive media formats have given rise to an unprecedented social order – an order, I contend, the effects of which parallel those of face-to-face interaction in importance. Interaction effects that were previously only achievable in the face-to-face realm are now achievable in online spaces. A few examples include employment opportunities, entertainment, dating, banking, and online shopping – *all platformed social activities now routinized in the mediated communication order*. In the late 1990s, it was somewhat taboo to connect face-to-face (i.e., meet in person) with contacts first made electronically online. Now online (first) to offline (second) meetings are a regular, if not *encouraged* and sometimes an *expected* practice (e.g., online dating).

In the twenty-first century, for many, and especially millennials (those born between the early 1980s and late 1990s), *to be social is to be mediated*. The mediated communication order emerged at the turn of the last century with the public arrival of the internet. The internet is a global information exchange system consisting of billions of networked devices. The internet became more accessible with the spread of home computers in the mid-1990s. This version of the internet, sometimes referred to as Web 1.0, consisted of a publishing platform where user access meant only reading websites, but not modifying the content of those sites. In other words, Web 1.0 lacked an interactive component.

Its successor, Web 2.0 emerged in the early 2000s and distinguished much of the web as we recognize it today in its current form. Unlike its predecessor, Web 2.0 is user-generated and its various facets operate as a dynamic user-driven platform, paving the way for the mediated communication order. Ian Eckert, a director of digital development, helps succinctly illustrate this point:

Web 2.0 isn't about pushing out information to your audience – it's participatory and inclusive [...] The audience and the content is blurred [...] in the past, participation meant a letters page or feedback slot, but that's essentially one-way traffic. Now, it's two-way traffic [...].  
(quoted in Jones, 2007)

The development of Web 2.0 has been attributed to various participatory websites, most notably, the controversial digital media-sharing site Napster, first launched in 1999 (Lamont, 2013; Schneider, 2018a; Scholz, 2008). Napster's pioneering software at the time enabled a decentralized network of computers where individuals could access and copy files (e.g., often copyrighted music and movies) from other linked computers around the world. Napster helped provide an early foundation for what would later become the mediated communication order, a social order that relies principally on interactive electronic media formats. These formats – or platforms – are known by a great many names, but are usually generically referred to as social networking or as social media. A few popular examples include sites like MySpace (launched in 2003), Facebook (launched in 2004), YouTube (launched in 2005), Twitter (launched in 2006), and Instagram (launched in 2010).

While initial versions of social networking sites first appeared in 1997 (boyd & Ellison, 2007), Napster is credited as paving the way for Web 2.0, and

thereafter, social media platforms like MySpace and Facebook (Schneider, 2018a). According to Lamont (2013): “Facebook, iTunes, and other towering digital giants flourished using elements first teased or pioneered by Fanning’s software.” My focus henceforth will be upon social media platforms. These sites, as interactive platforms, and related communication and information technologies, such as smart phones and tablet computers that connect people to the internet – and social media – thereby enabling mediated interaction, comprise the vast majority of the *public*<sup>2</sup> mediated communication order.

### *Social Media and the Public Mediated Communication Order*

There is no precise or shared definition of “social networking,” a phrase often used interchangeably with other monikers like social media or new media. Nevertheless, all forms of these interactive media platforms, whatever they are called, share similar and distinct characteristics: they permit creation, depend upon audience participation relative to the manufacture of content, and involve varying degrees of user engagement. For our purposes here, social media can be understood as a hybrid of social interaction and media. Defining social media in this way allows for conceptual flexibility so as to include those interactive media formats involving a variety of “technical and social practices” (Mandiberg, 2012).

All interactive media rely on audience *and* content. That is to say, audience and content together comprise the most significant features of all social media platforms. To interact in the public mediated communication order simultaneously produces content. All manifestations of social media then can be understood as a distinct social form in the Simmelian sense, which I will outline momentarily – one that is populated by the content (specific) of the form (general) that each together produce the mediated communication order, as we recognize it today.

All forms of interactive media in the mediated communication order, no matter what they are called, share one fundamental characteristic: *the production of audience representations in the form of documents*. Documents can be conceptualized as “any symbolic representation that can be recorded or retrieved for analysis” (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, p. 5). The mediated communication order – a social order comprised entirely of documents – is an altogether empirically based order. One approach then to the scientific examination of this social order might rely on the collection and examination of documents. Utilizing a variety of rigorous methodological procedures, researchers can follow explicit and reproducible procedures for collecting and examining social media data materials – including selections of the minutiae of infinite mediated interactions in the twenty-first century interaction order – thus providing one specific manner of addressing the methodological criticisms levied at Goffmanian-style analysis.

There are of course many good and reliable research methods suitable for the collection and analysis of social media data. As one example, consider qualitative media analysis and its 12-step procedure for the systemic collection and

analysis of social media data materials as detailed in the second edition of *Qualitative Media Analysis* (Altheide & Schneider, 2013; see also, Schneider, 2018b).

### *Social Media as a Social Form*

The development of the sociology of social forms, or what is otherwise known as *formal sociology*, is attributed to the pioneering work of Georg Simmel. The task for the social scientist, according to Simmel, involves the recognition and understanding of the social *forms* themselves that structure the types of social interaction (i.e., content) that take place. For Simmel then, the totality of social order is comprised collectively of social interactions by individuals and groups. As noted by Simmellian scholar David Frisby (1992), Simmel “sees society as constituted by interactional ‘forces’ between individuals. This enables him to reflect upon our experience of society in every single social interaction in which we engage” (p. 14). According to this perspective advanced by Simmel, the concern for the sociologist rests with understanding the form itself since to do so provides insight into the very nature of social order. The study of society then is not the study of interactions per se, but rather, the study of those patterns that structure interactions. A point cogently illustrated by Lewis Coser (1977, pp. 179–180):

The sociologist does not contribute to knowledge about the individual actions of a King John, or a King Louis, or a King Henry, but he can illuminate the ways in which all of them were constrained in their actions by the institution of kingship. The sociologist is concerned with *King John*, not with *King John*. On a more abstract level, he may not even be concerned with the institution of kingship, but rather with the processes of conflict and cooperation, of subordination and superordination, of centralization and decentralization, which constitute the building blocks for the larger institutional structure.

Recognizing social media as a distinct social form – where all forms of interaction are simultaneously structured by media platforms – allows us to understand the possibilities that govern the interaction order in the twenty-first century. Because of Simmel’s “pioneering work in the interactional domain,” he is credited as first acknowledging the interaction order (Levine, 1989, p. 114). While Goffman did provide some early “appreciative references to Simmel,” Goffman’s writings do not engage “very seriously with the methodological arguments Simmel educed to legitimate a focus on the interactional domain” (Levine, 1989, p. 115). It is here where I hope to show how we might reconcile some of those methodological concerns noted briefly in relation to Goffman’s work.

Scholars have recognized Goffman as a formal sociologist (e.g., Smith, 1989); however, such recognition is not universally shared (Maseda, 2017). Among those who place Goffman in this Simmellian categorization, it has been noted that Goffman’s approach toward the interaction order “is the same as Simmel’s” (Smith, 2006 p. 31; see also Gerhard’s discussion of the analytical resemblance between Simmel and Goffman). “The basic argument behind this [formal sociology] categorization is that Goffman was following Simmel’s study of the forms of sociation” (Maseda, 2017, p. 13).

Media have long been recognized as a type of social form (see Altheide & Snow, 1979). This recognition is informed by a *formal sociology* approach (see Simmel, 1950, pp. 21–23), the purpose of which is to avoid broad generalizations in lieu of an analysis of the “social forms themselves” as forms that “are conceived as constituting society” (Simmel, 1950, p. 22). The recognition and subsequent examination of media as a social form provides an analytic distinction between the investigation of form and the study of content, what Simmel referred to as the “material of sociation,” where form remains constant and content is fluid (Simmel, 1950, pp. 40–41) as nicely illustrated above by Lewis Coser. “Simmel’s image of sociation, however, is interaction with both form and content” (Duncan, 1959, p. 101 cited in Lundby, 2009, p. 109) and an exploration of interaction in the twenty-first century mediated order helps illuminate this perspective.

### *The Twenty-first Century Interaction Order and Platform Format*

Social media provide new unforeseen empirical opportunities – with equal parts form *and* content – to develop Goffman’s (1983) interaction order framework in stronger relation to formal sociology. The reach and significance of the mediated communication order in contemporary forms of interaction cannot be overstated. Consider for a brief moment that Facebook, the world’s most popular social media site, now has two billion monthly users.

*We are all media performers in an age of mediated communication.* The social order is not only negotiated and socially constructed; it is increasingly electronically arranged and formatted for organizational and commercial purposes. (Altheide, 2012, p. 51, emphasis added)

Social media (form) *depends* entirely on audience participation (content). Consider how content is tailored to fit the medium; 280 text characters or less in a tweet on Twitter, an image on Instagram, or a video on YouTube. Individuals can of course post text, images, and video on all of the aforementioned social media platforms, however, how individual users orient to the form of each platform differs. User orientations are consistent with the use of grammar as form as outlined by Simmel (see Simmel, 1950, p. 22). All of this is meant to suggest an increased, and I contend here, a *central* importance of Goffman’s *platform formats* analytic unit in the twenty-first century interaction order where all mediated forms of interaction *must* now occur *through* platform formats (see Figure 2).

In Figure 2, we might imagine the following: *persons* as individual accounts on social media platforms. *Contacts* might be understood to represent “friends” or “followers” on platforms. *Encounters* are marked by periods of participation where individuals are co-present on the same platform where activity may occur through interaction with user posts in the form of text replies or “likes,” understood as an endorsement of a user post. Lastly, *celebrative social occasions* could represent group forums or perhaps collective posts such as those made in response to a shared circumstance such as a natural disaster. *Platform formats*

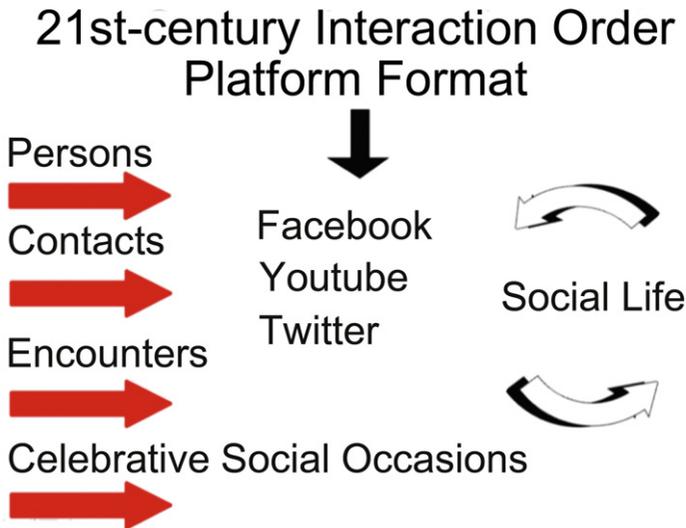


Figure 2. The 21-Century Interaction Order

as illustrated in Figure 2, unlike in the face-to-face interaction order in Figure 1, *structure all forms of interaction in the public mediated communication order.*

Simmel and Goffman (if, for the moment, we can agree to consider him a formal sociologist), were each concerned with the analysis of form over content. Social media – as interactional media – provide new exciting opportunities to empirically develop formal sociology in specific relation to form *and* content. This approach builds upon *media logic*, a theoretical model developed by media scholars David Altheide and Robert Snow (1979, 1991). Drawing upon Simmel, Altheide and Snow (1979) argue that mass media constitute a specific type of social form with a particular communicative grammar that influences how information is constituted, perceived, and interpreted. Media grammar – as a type of logic – is now a dominant social form to which all major social institutions align and structure institutional activity. A process that now extends to how individuals interact through media performance in the twenty-first century mediated communication order.

In what follows, I consider a few developments, from institutional activity to individual interaction, specifically related to police legitimacy in order to illustrate a few key points.

## POLICE LEGITIMACY

Police legitimacy rests on citizen perceptions of fair police procedures as judged by publics (Tyler, 2004) and can be defined as “the judgments that ordinary citizens make about the rightfulness of police conduct” (Skogan & Frydl, 2004, p. 291). Ordinary citizens learn about police work, including police conduct, from media more than from actual direct experience (Macauley, 1987; e.g., see

also Schneider, 2012, 2015, 2018c). Until the advent of social media, public knowledge of the rightfulness of police conduct occurred principally through traditional news media outlets. With a heightened awareness of this process since the 1990s (Mawby, 2002), police organizations have attempted to exert more control over their public perception through mass media (see also, Ericson, 1982). Media logic, as form, helps to explain this process.

Media logic consists of an “analysis of social institutions-transformed-through-media” (Altheide & Snow, 1979, p. 7). Scholarship has explored changes in sports and politics through media as basic examples (e.g., see Frey & Eitzen, 1991). Doyle (2003) examines changes to policing through television media in his analysis of the TV program *Cops*. First aired in 1989, *Cops* “was the first reality-TV program about crime to use actual video footage as opposed to re-enactments” (Doyle, 2003, p. 33). *Cops*, now in its 30th season, is one of the longest running televised shows in history.

Before the advent of *Cops*, there had been isolated instances of *cinémavérité* or fly-on-the-wall documentaries recording police in action, not always offering favourable visions. [...] While some police forces in major American cities were initially reluctant to co-operate with *Cops*, it soon became clear that appearing on the new reality show would [...] *prove a much safer bet in protecting the police image.* (Doyle, 2003, p. 33, emphasis added)

Protecting the police image, or “image work” refers to “all activities in which police forces engage [...] [to] project meanings of policing” (Mawby, 2002, p. 1); this includes “repair work” (Goldsmith, 2010) or “presentational strategies” (Manning, 1978). While called different things, what remains consistent is that this work exists in relation to the police legitimation process itself (Mawby, 2002). Regarding *Cops*, representatives of Langley Productions (the producers of *Cops*) contact police for permission to shadow officers with a camera crew. Police are filmed for several months at a time. Once filming has concluded, police administrators then review footage for approval. To help illustrate the point, consider a thematic news report covering the revelation of an episode of *Cops* set to feature the Green Bay Police Department in Wisconsin.

Reported as “the worst-kept secret in the city,” Green Bay Police Captain Kevin Warych confirmed after filming had concluded that Langley Production had been shadowing police in Green Bay for months. While the filming was apparently widely known to residents, the police department was unable to confirm the presence of TV camera crews because they were informed by Langley that “doing so leads to fake emergency calls by people hoping to get on television” (Boillier & Le Duc, 2016). According to Warych, “police and city leaders will be able to approve any scenes before they air,” continuing, “In working with the crew, we’re able to review the video to determine what’s good and what’s bad” (Boillier & Le Duc, 2016). Determinations made by police are culled from the approximately 50–60 hours of footage for every one-hour air-time of *Cops* (Doyle, 2003).

The above example helps show how police work at the institutional level is shaped by media formats (television) and influenced by Hollywood-style entertainment. Officers become actors. Police administrators like Warych take on the

role of producers who coordinate and plan production. Police administrators also have a hand in directing and editing film, and thus a direct role in the creative process itself. None of this has anything to do with popular understandings of police work per se, understood generally as crime work (Ericson, 1982). With *Cops* and other less popular albeit similar examples (e.g., shows like *Police, Camera, Action!* or *Traffic Cops*), our attention and concern – à la formal sociology – are with the *form* and not with the *content*. The form in this above circumstance has influenced police actions and the manner in which police now engage in various legitimacy practices (i.e., image work). However, the form (television) does not allow for viewers' reactions or other related information to be included (in the form of posts such as those made on YouTube) and made public. Televised episodes of *Cops* only represent *content*.

In the mediated communication order, *form* and *content* are one and the same. In my last book *Policing and Social Media: Social Control in an Era of New Media*, I trace police development of new uses of social media to meet various institutional and strategic objectives (Schneider, 2016). This includes police presentation of experience and information carefully produced to meet strategic aims, where increased importance is placed upon police media performance as the most significant factor of the mediated communication order in relation to police legitimacy. And while police are able to control and manage information in some circumstances, and not others, a key point to emphasize is that events become quicker and *more* media-focused.

Regarding the issue of police legitimacy, the public mediated communication order allows us to empirically examine how people interpret police conduct from social media platforms like YouTube. The minutiae of interaction online (form), and the data these interactions now produce (content) for collection and analysis can help provide new empirical insights into police legitimacy. Consider citizen engagement with police body worn cameras (BWCs) on YouTube as one illustrative example.

#### *Police Legitimacy, Body Worn Cameras, and the Twenty-first Century Interaction Order*

Police BWCs were first piloted in 2005, the same year that video-based social media platform YouTube launched. BWCs are small video- and audio-recording devices usually worn on the chest of front-line police officers. The devices were first piloted in North America when police in Victoria, British Columbia outfitted officers with BWCs in 2009. The devices have quickly spread worldwide across police services. Despite no universal consensus across interested stakeholders, as well as mixed empirical findings about the uses of BWCs or the benefits that these devices may bring, research, nevertheless, reveals that the implementation of these devices has prompted “significant unanticipated changes in police practice” (Sesay, Ramirez, & On-Ook, 2017).

One notable change involves the authorized<sup>3</sup> release of selected BWC videos in an effort to address police *account ability* concerns. “Accountability entails an obligation to give an account of activities within one’s ambit of responsibility”

(p. 136) whereas, “account ability,” Ericson (1995) explains, refers to “the capacity to provide a record of activities that explains them in a credible manner so that they appear to satisfy the rights and obligations of accountability” (p. 137). BWC footage fulfills this twofold aim.

Footage is mostly not available for public viewing for a variety of reasons (e.g., privacy issues) and can therefore be concealed from public view by police. A growing trend in contemporary policing involves the *official* release of BWC footage to news media outlets. Many of these exact same police video products also appear on YouTube despite the fact that these videos were never intended to be on YouTube (Schneider, 2018d). Institutional changes to policing that have incorporated media logic (form) coupled with citizen interactions (content) in the public mediated communication order provide opportunities to empirically understand elements of police legitimacy, or the judgments of everyday citizens concerning police conduct.

As one example<sup>4</sup>, consider the following post made to YouTube in response to the authorized release of police BWC footage of a police shooting of a suspect.

This is a perfect example of a good cop. He only shot twice and for good reason. he was alone in a hallway and needed to get the suspect down without getting shot. as shown in the video, he only shot twice and stopped knowing the man was down. he also had prefect [sic] shot placement and didn't need to expend any more ammo. What made it even better was how he asked the guy if he was hit and checked his body for injuries instead of tackling him and beating him down. if we had all officers like this the world would be perfect. no brutality BS like other cops.

This YouTube user provides a judgment about the conduct (i.e., use of force) of an officer in question as depicted in a police-produced video. This is just one post from the 87,691 user comments that I collected, offered in response to eight BWC videos on YouTube (for a further discussion of these data materials, including methodological details and analysis, see Schneider, 2018e).

Other user comments were less forgiving, for example, “fuck the police” appeared dozens of times. The point to stress is that police legitimacy is never about the individual police action itself, but rather, the interpretations of the particular action in question. It is in these spaces where we can peer into the minutiae of interaction that must now be filtered through the *platform format*. Individual users (*persons*) in the public mediated communication order navigate to YouTube where they come into the response presence of others (*contacts*). The possibility for anyone to equally contribute (*encounters*) occurs through the act of posting a comment to YouTube. User posts may occur in response to a shared circumstance (*celebrative social occasion*) such as a BWC video. And all of the aforementioned in the public mediated communication order must be filtered through the platform format itself, in this circumstance YouTube. A process further illustrated in the exchange below between users on YouTube.

Police release authorized BWC videos footage to news media and these videos now appear almost simultaneously on interactive platforms like YouTube. Consider the PoliceActivity account as an example as one of the most popular YouTube channels to feature BWC footage. The channel describes itself

as “your source for daily police related news, pursuits, shootouts, and more.” The channel has more than 400,000 subscribers. In response to the video “Bodycam Footage of Police Fatally Shooting Man with His Own Gun.” One YouTube user (A) wrote:

I have a crazy idea. If you're carrying a concealed weapon (legally or illegally), maybe, just maybe, don't ignore instructions and try to evade the police. Maybe.

In direct response to this post, another user (B) wrote:

evading police or not following police instructions isnt punishable by death that [is] not the law. Cops are not judge, jury and executioner. Unless a cop informs you that you are being detained (and they have to have a suspicion of a crime committed [sic]) you have every right to walk or run away and not answer questions. Learn the law. Cops are not God. They cant murder people just for not treating them like they are God that must be bowed down to, feared and every command followed under threat of death. Cops break the law all the time trying to enforce it. You have the right to bear arms, having a gun on you is not a crime. I open carry and have been stopped more than a couple times by pussy scared cops who dont [sic] even know its legal to carry.

User A replied:

don't defend this guy [deceased suspect]. They [police] had reasonable suspicion that he had been commuting [sic] a crime and had reason to detain. Then he tells them he's unarmed when he has a gun. Then he attempts to run away and pulls his gun, and gets killed WITH HIS OWN GUN. How ironic. Cops had every right to kill him.

This particular exchange between user A and user B continued further for a short time before it turned into name-calling. Nevertheless, this specific thread of comments continued with other user contributions to the conversation.

User C: police have a right to kill ??? wtf?

User A: they have a right to defend themselves, which is what this cop did.

User C: 15 shots in the back. Yes that's how they defend they selves. Wow.

User A: 15 shots is excessive, I won't argue that. But the guy suspected of committing a crime probably shouldn't have lied about his concealed gun, run from police, and apparently pulled his weapon.

User D: I just want to know of all these commenters, who was actually there to see what happened?

User A: the guy had a gun and you can see it at 0:58 [in the video]. The gun fired by the cop was from the perpetrator.

These brief exchanges between users are just a few thematic examples of the thousands of similar posts offered in response to BWC footage on YouTube. On the one hand, citizen judgments offered in response to police conduct in the public mediated communication order utilize the influence of media logic. On the other hand, these judgments could not be offered as content without the platform format. *One necessarily relies on the other.* The mediated communication order represents an epistemological shift away from the prior dominant transmission model of mass communication, as previously understood by

numerous scholars, including Goffman's (1983) *platform format* analytic unit, as conceptualized in his interaction order schematic. The recognition of social media as a distinct social form — in this circumstance, YouTube and as the above examples highlight — allows for the empirical investigation of elements of the public mediated communication order, a contemporary, and increasingly dominant order in twenty-first century social life. Additionally, such investigations can provide much needed insight into that manner in which social cues — such as police body worn cameras — may inform how users define social situations.

## CONCLUSION

The mediated communication order or twenty-first century interaction order is a social order that exists like any other and increasingly parallels the face-to-face interaction order in terms of importance and social significance. To be social is now to be mediated. The task of the sociologist who examines everyday life is to understand “the ways in which human beings construct order across their social situations” (Douglas, 1970, p. 12). If we are to follow in the footsteps of Douglas, Goffman, and numerous others, who have offered so many insights and taught us so much about everyday life, a significant and growing task of those who call themselves symbolic interactionists is to facilitate better understandings of our mediated social order. Much work clearly remains.

It was my intention this afternoon to provide some enthusiasm and methodological excitement to a reimagination of Goffman's interaction order in our quest to study of the minutiae in the mediated social domain in the twenty-first century. The study of every day as it unfolds on interactive media platforms provides exciting opportunities and challenges to empirically develop both *form* and *content* in the mediated communication order. The manner in which *persons*, *contacts*, *encounters*, and *celebrative social occasions* are filtered through *platform formats* in the twenty-first century interaction order will continue to underscore the construction of mediated social reality. These developments will continue to impact events, actions, and social interactions, including the construction of police legitimacy, only briefly addressed here today.

It is my hope that my modest reimagination of Goffman's interaction order — as an analytical framework for the empirical analysis of everyday life — has provided some methodological excitement in the study of minutiae in the mediated social domain. The mediated order is an empirical order. All forms of interactive media in this domain produce documents. These empirical nuggets of data can be systematically collected and analyzed. Any social scientific examination of the mediated communication order must rely on the use of a research method to collect and examine documents. As such, this allows others to follow explicit and reproducible methodological procedures. Criticisms will no doubt continue to be levied toward Goffman for his lack of discussion of his methodology. However, as we continue to move forward with our own work in the twenty-first century mediated order, those engaging in Goffmanian-style analysis can perhaps avoid such criticisms.

This is not to suggest, however, that what I have presented here today is without warranted limitations. For example, Goffman's work has been criticized for being "too empirical" (Smith, 2006, p. 125). The approach that I have outlined today might be justly criticized as hyperempirical. Further, there are also numerous methodological concerns that I have not specifically discussed today, and for this reason, many good questions do remain. Part of the excitement, however, are the new opportunities and challenges posed in our investigation of the mediated communication order. I look forward to the work in this area as it continues developing. Let the interpretive chaos ensue! Thank you.

## NOTES

1. Despite some conceptual nuances, some outlined herein (e.g., public vs. private, social media, etc.), I will use the expression mediated communication order interchangeably with the twenty-first century interaction order.

2. Text messaging and other *private* mediated communication (e.g., Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, etc.), while significant, and a part of the mediated communication order, will not be the focus of this talk. All references henceforth in the body of this text made to the mediated communication order should be taken, whether directly specified or not, to refer exclusively to the various *public* elements of this electronically arranged social order.

3. Evidence reveals unauthorized leaks of BWC footage by police insiders do occur. I have referred to this developing phenomenon elsewhere as *surreptitious image work* – however, I will not focus on unauthorized leaks herein (see Schneider, 2018d).

4. All quotations from YouTube user posts have been transcribed exactly as they appeared online. They have not been edited for proper grammar or spelling.

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