Leslie Seawright's thoughtful, thorough study introduces us to a population of writers that most of us are not familiar with—police report writers—and shows us how their documents must thread their way through several layers of readers, all of whom bring their own assumptions and purposes to the reading. Seawright clearly demonstrates how a seemingly simple but actually deceptively complex genre shapes action in an important, active discourse community.

— David A. Jolliffe, University of Arkansas

*Genre of Power* offers a fascinating account of the travels of one police report through the judicial system. Seawright humanizes the process through observations, interviews, and her own unique access to the judicial system. Detailing the cultural and social capital of the writer of these reports and their readers, Seawright has produced the first book of its kind in the field of literacy studies as it relates to scholarship and genre studies, technical writing, and institutional literacies.

— Ellen Cushman, Northeastern University

The issues of how police officers write reports and how others read those reports have critical implications for people engaged in rhetoric, literacy studies, and critical pedagogy. In *Genre of Power: Police Report Writers and Readers in the Justice System*, Leslie Seawright describes the journey of a police report as it travels through the criminal justice system. Tracing the path of a police report from writer, to supervisor, to prosecutor, to defense lawyer, to judge, this study exposes the way in which power, agency, and authority circulate and accrue between writers and readers. The chained literacy event, created as a report moves through the system, is highlighted and its hierarchical nature examined. The book ultimately addresses the constraints of the police report genre and seeks to expose the complex and multifaceted rhetorical situation of report writing.

Due to her position as a police officer’s wife, Seawright was granted access to perspectives and realities of police writing typically reserved for those inside the police profession. Seawright obtained candid interviews and perspectives from police officers and supervisors, lawyers and judges. This book analyzes the writing and reading process of the officer writing the report and the report’s subsequent readers. Interlaced throughout the book are micro-chapters that offer glimpses into the day-to-day job of police officers. These vignettes, combined with Seawright’s description of her own life as wife and scholar, present a compelling picture of the complexity of police writing. This study challenges the idea that rhetorical and objective documents are possible to create in many organizations.

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INTRODUCTION

“All we have right now is what’s in the police reports, which is nothing. When I see those police reports, they tell me, ‘Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.’” (Justin Bamberg, lawyer representing the family of Walter Scott, qtd. in Fernandez)1

POLICE OFFICERS WIELD A GREAT DEAL OF POWER IN THE United States. Human and civil rights hang in the balance based on their observations, decisions, and documents. People go to jail. People don’t go to jail. Justice is served. Justice is not served. Police are heroes. Police are villains. How police officers wield their power and through what mechanisms are critical questions for scholars to answer. Several important philosophers and theorists have critiqued police practice and the institutions of State power.2 These discussions continue to filter down into composition and rhetoric, technical writing, and workplace writing studies to aid in the study of genre, agency, power, and social systems. Although police interviewing practices have been studied in good detail (Rock; Edwards; Haworth; Stokoe and Edwards; Kidwell and Martinez; Komter), fewer researchers probe the ways in which police writing, and specifically the police report, is taught and works in the system. (Campbell; Cotugno and Hoffman; Miller and Pomerenke).

“BAD” POLICE REPORTS

Prior to my research efforts at the Jackson Police Department,3 I had always heard that police couldn’t write; police reports were worthless documents; no one should ever trust what a cop wrote down. It was also well known in my academic and social circles that police reports were not allowed in court because of how poorly they were written (a misperception). My initial research into police writing revealed similar sentiments. Prosecutors, police chiefs,
defense attorneys, and even officers complained to me about how poorly police reports are written. I heard this sentiment expressed in casual conversations as well as in formal interviews with police chiefs, prosecutors, and defense attorneys. The mountain of texts dedicated to improving officer report-writing skills demonstrates the problems associated with report writing. Titles such as *How to Really Really Write Those Boring Police Reports* (Clark), *Plain English for Cops* (Meier and Adams), *Painless Police Report Writing* (Frazee and Davis), and my favorite, *The Best Police Report Writing Book with Samples: Written for Police by Police, This Is Not an English Lesson* (Michael), say a lot about how reports are viewed by officers and superiors. Report writing is seen as boring, difficult, convoluted, painful, and overly concerned with grammar. The manuals’ typical solutions are templates and simplified demands to include the who, what, when, where, how, and why of every encounter. They largely avoid the context of police writing as a rhetorical situation fraught with complicated audience needs and multiple, often conflicting, purposes.

It became clear to me after reviewing police academy materials and sitting in on two different report-writing training sessions that report writing was taught from a deficit model. Police cadets were instructed on how to write a coherent paragraph and use the correct word for a specific meaning. They were also instructed on how to organize the report, detailing the events chronologically. However, the majority of the police academy training I researched was spent on ground-fighting tactics, shooting practice, crime scene investigation, and multiple-choice test preparation. At the police academy in Arkansas, only 8 hours out of 430 were devoted to report writing (Seawright).

When I asked officers, lawyers, supervisors, and others what made a police report a “poor report,” the answers varied wildly. Officers seemed to think that poor grammar created poor reports. Supervisors and chiefs complained about a lack of professionalism in reports. Stephen Mathes, the police chief of the Jackson Police Department, complained that “basic grammar” just wasn’t present in police reports. He noted,
We are not just taking a raw recruit and trying to teach them law and police tactics but basic grammar in some instances. . . . If a defense attorney picked up a report that was poorly written they are automatically going to say, here is a person I can attack. I can attack credibility.

However, the lawyers I spoke with complained that their most serious concern regarding police reports was the amount of information that was often left out. Two hours after my interview with the Jackson police chief, I sat in the office of Chad Rucker, a local defense attorney, who stressed the importance of the police officer narrative over grammar in report writing. He emphasized, “Only in telling the story can all the details of the case come to light. Grammar does not matter. It could be written phonetically for all I care, just put down everything that happened.”

So within a matter of hours, a police chief had told me that grammar really mattered to defense lawyers, and a defense lawyer had told me that he couldn’t care less about grammar in reports. How was it that the police report genre could elicit such varied and contradictory expectations from its readers? These two men know one another. They have seen each other socially and even discussed cases from time to time, yet they have no comprehension of how differently they think about the content and form of a police report.

For the attorney, the content takes precedence over form because he is concerned about understanding the story of what took place; for the chief, the form in terms of grammar and professional presentation takes precedence. This difference in emphasis is just one of the struggles that officers must navigate when writing reports. The police report genre is critical because it links evidence, testimony, victims, suspects, and others in the legal system to one another and to the power of the institution or social system. This book tackles several questions regarding the police report genre. I explore what is at stake mainly in terms of cultural and social capital for police report writers and their readers. In addition, this text attempts to identify how the police report document accrues or loses power in the judicial system.
DISCOVERING POLICE WRITING PRACTICES

In order to understand the police report genre, its multiple readers and contexts, I conducted qualitative research over a period of six years. My methods included ethnographic field notes, interviews, observation, and discourse analysis. I spent more than 240 hours riding in police cars and going on calls with officers. In addition to hours of informal conversations with officers, I conducted formal interviews with eighteen police officers from multiple agencies in three different states. These officers included six police trainers, two supervisors, two chiefs, and one sheriff. In addition, I interviewed three prosecuting attorneys, two defense attorneys, and two judges. I reviewed thousands of pages of training manuals from three different departments. I reviewed forty hours of police training and police traffic stop video and personally observed the report-writing training class in two police academies. I read hundreds of police reports and many of the manuals that address police writing. In addition to my intensive study with the Jackson Police Department in Arkansas conducted over six years, I also conducted interviews and collected materials from a large urban city department in Oklahoma, a suburban department in Colorado, and two state university police departments. A grounded theory approach best fit the environment and needs of this kind of study. I started collecting data and interviews prior to understanding the problems associated with report writing. As I continued to research the writing of police officers, more questions emerged. These questions led to more data collection and comparative analysis, and so developed the cycle of grounded theory research that started six years ago and continues today. My main findings reveal surprising conflicts between reader expectations, the ways in which a police report “works” in the system, and how power circulates in the hierarchical chain of police report readers.

For instructors and scholars in composition, rhetoric, and other fields, discovering how such documents accrue power and how readers use the same document for different purposes is important. Knowing an audience, whether addressed or invoked to use the categories made famous by Ede and Lunsford (“Audience Addressed”);
“Among the Audience”), is not enough in many environments. Police officers know and interact with many of the readers who will read their documents, and also assume an invoked audience of potential jurors, media, and public citizens for their reports; yet in crafting their documents, officers are quick to ignore reader expectations that conflict with their own. Audience expectations and conflicts in power, genre, and a writer’s need for self-preservation create writing environments vastly more complicated than the picture we sometimes present to students. To ignore the realities of complex writing situations with multiple and conflicting audience interests is to ignore the true contexts of many of the genres that we teach, such as the report, proposal, letter, memo, and others.

THE COMMUNITY

Jackson, Arkansas, is a thriving city of around 55,000 people located between the green hills of northeastern Oklahoma and the stunning beauty of the Ozark Mountains. The population of Jackson is 62 percent white, 30 percent Latinx, and 2 percent African American. These racial demographics are similar to those of cities in the surrounding area. The Latinx population has increased dramatically over the past three decades, rising 137 percent from 2000 to 2010 alone. There are several Latinx-owned grocery stores, restaurants, and other business in the area.

Jackson enjoys a robust economy thanks to three large Fortune 500 companies headquartered in the area. Because of the region’s prosperity, residents of Jackson have a household median income 35 percent higher than the average for the state of Arkansas. Though the largest urban center is over 100 miles away, the smaller communities located in this section of Arkansas have a combined population of almost 350,000. A state university is located here, as is a community college and other regional colleges within commuting distance.

Jackson citizens enjoy a lively downtown area, recently renovated and renewed by the chamber of commerce, a golf course, several gated neighborhoods, an industrial area, and outdoor recreational areas. The town hosts several annual events including a Christmas
parade, July 4th celebration, Halloween carnival, food festival, and numerous expositions held at regional convention centers. Situated between two main highways that run through Arkansas, the community enjoys easy commutes between towns, tourism opportunities, and a vibrant location.

The Jackson Police Department’s new headquarters was recently constructed, and combines the call dispatch center, administration offices, records department, misdemeanor courtroom, holding jail cells, patrol room, and officer computer lab in a large building with an attractive façade. This new building is already at capacity in terms of available office space and multipurpose rooms. As the population of Jackson has continued to climb, so has the number of police officers and officials.

There are approximately 100 officers employed by the Jackson Police Department. The majority of officers are white males. At the time of my research, the only diversity in the department was provided by three Latinx male officers and two white female officers. Jackson police officers are hired in one of two ways: (1) as a recruit with little to no experience in law enforcement and no official certification, or (2) as a transferring police officer who is currently certified in Arkansas or another state. In the vast majority of cases, those hired have little to no prior experience in law enforcement. They are selected through a rigorous process that includes a background check, a psychological exam, a lie detector test, and interviews with a civil service panel, police officials, and the Jackson police chief. New employees are hired conditionally, based on their ability to complete police academy training and become certified officers in the State of Arkansas. Currently, there is no requirement for advanced degrees beyond a GED or high school diploma. Recruits must be twenty-one years old and have no felonies on their records.

The academy is located in Arkansas and includes recruits from several community police departments in the area. Classes are taught by officers from various departments in Arkansas who volunteer to teach a class or two each term. Once a recruit from the Jackson Police Department completes academy training, he or she is placed with a training officer who serves as a mentor for the fol-
lowering three months. During this period, the recruit learns the specific procedures of the Jackson Police Department and becomes introduced to the culture and customs of the department.

The chain of command at the Jackson Police Department, as in most departments, is a critical component of the system. Officers report to one of four shift supervisors who are at the rank of sergeant. This group of sergeants, along with other sergeants representing specific units such as SWAT or criminal investigations, report to one of two lieutenants who both report directly to the chief. Maintaining the chain of command in communication and reporting is expected of every new recruit and veteran officer. In this model, the Jackson PD is paramilitary in its structure, as are most police departments in the United States.

CHAINED LITERACY EVENT

Heath’s concept of the literacy event serves as a useful tool when looking at police report readers. Heath first identified the concept after observing women in a community working together to create meaning while reviewing, reading, and discussing a letter from the school district. She notes that the women “bring in knowledge related to the text and interpret beyond the text for their own context; in so doing, they achieve a new synthesis of information” (Ways 201). The reading of a text could not be separated from the previous knowledge, experiences, and beliefs the women held individually and collectively. Likewise, police reports are read, examined, critiqued, defended, refuted, and discussed by multiple audience members in multiple settings. Each individual brings his or her own context and knowledge to the interpretation of the text. Some of this meaning making is done by the reader on his or her own, and sometimes it is done with others, in court for example. The readers of the report form a chain whereby they read the report in a specific and hierarchal order.

The first to read the report after the officer has written it is the supervisor. He or she examines the document prior to its final submission, a responsibility that supervisors hold for all the reports from officers on their specific shifts. Next, the document goes to
the prosecutor, who must decide based on the information in the report whether to file charges against the suspect(s) implicated in the report. If charges are filed, the report moves to a defense attorney (private or public), who will be tasked in finding a way to defend the client. If the case moves to trial, the report may, at a certain point, come under the scrutiny of a judge. Though the judge may not read the actual report, because these are only rarely allowed as evidence, a police officer will be asked to testify. When officers testify in court, they almost always rely on their written police reports to refresh their memories of the events. Thus, the judge will hear and be able to act upon a report as it is used in court. As a result of their decisions, the readers are all linked to what is in the written document and linked by the hierarchy of the justice system and the order in which the report is read. As the report moves along the hierarchical chain of readers, linking and tying their decisions to one another, a chained literacy event is created.

The journey of the police report from one reader to the next constitutes a type of literacy event, but other literacy events reside in each link of the chain. Although the officer is responsible for writing the report based on his or her observations, I have observed officers often relying on one another for guidance in report writing. At the Jackson Police Department, many officers use the computer lab to write their reports at the ends of their shifts. When in the lab, officers ask questions of one another, search for the correct term, suggest proper charges, and offer support to the other report writers. When several officers have been on the same call, they will often review the call together and help the lead officer write the report. This collaborative writing effort includes reading and referring to other documents, such as state statute books, dictionaries, online forms, and policy and procedure manuals. A literacy event emerges even in the first stage of the police report’s chained literacy event.

Although the review of the report is often done solely by the supervisor on duty, he or she may review other materials or ask a lieutenant to read the document in order to determine what changes
the reporting officer should make in the report. If the supervisor
decides that the officer needs to make revisions, these suggested
changes are written and communicated back to the officer. The
officer then takes these written suggestions for revision, interprets
them, and incorporates the changes (or not) into the report for the
final submission.

Once the prosecutor’s office receives the report, it is read and a
decision is made about whether to file the charges recommended
by the arresting officer. The prosecutor may or may not agree that
probable cause has been met for the recommended charges. He or
she may not believe there is enough evidence to take the suspect to
trial, even though the initial arrest is legal and the officer had prob-
able cause in making an arrest. For court, a prosecutor must meet
a higher burden of proof than probable cause. The prosecutor’s job
in the initial reading of every report is to determine if, in fact, the
officer had probable cause for the arrest and if there is enough evi-
dence to file all or some of the charges in the report. When the facts
in a case are unclear, a prosecutor may decide to null process all but
the most apparent violation of the law.

A defense attorney works with his or her client, the prosecu-
tor, and witnesses to review the details in the report and construct
a defense. The attorney may highlight certain parts of the report
in order to persuade the prosecutor to accept a lower charge and
create a plea deal for a client. In reviewing the report, a client may
offer new information an officer did not include in the report or
refute details the officer did include. Witnesses, interviewed by the
defense attorney and questioned about the police report, may offer
additional information that changes the understanding of the event
documented in the report.

Finally, in court, all these people come together to utilize or re-
fute the police officer’s documentation of the events and arrest. The
multiple meanings and readings of the document must be consid-
ered by the judge and a verdict given. The chained literacy event
is thus made up of small but powerful literacy events occurring at
every link in the chain.
THE POLICE REPORT GENRE

The police report is a genre that documents the observations of a police officer within a legal context. The genre is created by officers but used by many. It is intended to serve the community’s interests by protecting citizens through the prosecution of lawbreakers. Few studies in rhetoric look specifically at the police report as a genre, despite the fact that scholars and the public at large are generally interested in the workings of police operations and organizations. Devitt claims, “Studies of particular genres and of particular genre sets . . . can reveal a great deal about the communities which construct and use those genres, and studies of particular texts within those genres can reveal a great deal about the choices writers make” (“Generalizing” 581). This book seeks to do just that. By following one text in the police report genre, I hope to reveal insights into the practices and beliefs of the police community. In addition, I hope to raise important questions about the police report genre and its complicated position between the officer and the court. Paré, for example, questions the fairness of genres to the parties involved and impacted by them (139–41).

It is critical that a study of the police report genre focus not only on the writer and the text, but also on how police reports are read and by whom. Bazerman argues that a genre “provides a writer with a way of formulating responses in certain circumstances and a reader a way of reorganizing the kinds of message being transmitted” (62). Genres shape not only the writer in the act of writing, but also the reader in the act of reading. Bawarshi, in agreement with Bazerman, claims that genres build context as much as they are within contexts. Genres “help us function within particular situations at the same time they help shape the ways we come to know these situations. Genre reproduces the activity by providing individuals with the conventions for enacting it” (340). In terms of activity and contexts, Bawarshi argues that “genres are social constructed cognitive and rhetorical concepts—symbiotically maintained rhetorical ecosystems if you will—within which communicants enact and reproduce specific situations, relations, and identities” (352).

In the following chapters, one police report document will be
examined as representative of the larger genre of police reports. The contexts that shape report writing as well as those contexts that are created by the writing will be considered.7

THE MATTER OF RACE
During the writing of this book, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, and many others became symbols for police brutality and systemic racism. While Baltimore, Maryland, and Ferguson, Missouri, were burning, citizens across the United States took to social media and the streets to protest the loss of what many deemed innocent lives. Even President Barack Obama noted during the riots in Baltimore, “We have seen too many instances of what appears to be police officers interacting with individuals, primarily African-American, often poor, in ways that raise troubling questions. This has been a slow-rolling crisis. This has been going on for a long time. This is not new, and we shouldn’t pretend that it’s new.” (qtd. in Davis and Apuzzo). President Obama expressed the frustration that many Americans share regarding race relations and police power in the country. However, while slogans like “Black Lives Matter” could be found on everything from t-shirts to Facebook profiles, a counter movement was quickly established. “All Lives Matter” and “Police Lives Matter” soon became rallying cries of the Right and police supporters. America found herself divided again in matters of police or state power and individual rights, protections, and freedoms.

These incidents are not unique in US history, nor is the public outcry that followed them. In 1992, Los Angeles burned for days after the Rodney King trial verdict in which four white officers were found not guilty in using excessive force during the beating of unarmed King (LA Times Staff). This level of violence against people of color and the subsequent protection of officers (often white) has become systematic in many places in America. Bonilla-Silva, citing several different studies, concludes that “blacks and dark-skinned Latinos are the targets of racial profiling by the police, which, combined with the highly racialized criminal court system, guarantees their over-representation among those arrested, prosecuted, and incarcerated” (2).
Bonilla-Silva blames this over-representation on the practice of how black or minority areas are patrolled. When police officers focus on and only patrol minority communities, they begin to see minorities as criminals (49–50). This belief may be a working part of their subconscious and may affect black and Latinx officers as easily as it affects their white coworkers. Of course, the system in which the officers work may be more to blame, as it incentivizes arrests and incarcerations over community building and engagement. So, when an officer sees his or her job as making arrests and getting the bad guys, and this officer mainly patrols minority communities, he or she begins to see these places as rife with crime and minorities as criminals. The system feeds itself, and the stereotype becomes a fixed bias.

Despite efforts in the last century to rectify institutional and systemic racism, civil rights laws, rather than overturning decades of prejudice and discrimination, have actually reinforced whites’ economic and social positions in society. The reason behind this is that whites fought fair housing acts, school desegregation efforts, and fair hiring laws so ferociously that the resulting legislation was often ineffective and unenforceable (Lipsitz 24–27). Even laws that seemingly have nothing to do with race, like Stand Your Ground laws, end up impacting minorities. The tragic fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin in 2012 is perhaps the most well-known example of the past few years, in which an innocent and unarmed African American youth was shot and killed by a civilian neighborhood vigilante. The Stand Your Ground law in Florida at the time of the shooting allowed citizens to shoot someone in self-defense even if retreat was an option. In 2014, rather than repeal the law that let Martin’s killer, George Zimmerman, go free, Florida lawmakers sought to make the law broader by allowing “warning shots” (Strassmann).

Many people claim to be color-blind when it comes to race, and I have heard many in law enforcement claim the same. There are problems with this view. Radcliffe notes that “many well-meaning people promote gender-blindness and color-blindness as ‘solutions’ to the ‘problems’ of gender and racial differences[;] . . . these blind-
nesses mostly reinforce the status quo” (134). Because we whites live in a white world, it is often difficult to see how the environment privileges our actions and ambitions.

Frankenberg interviewed dozens of white women in her study of race and feminism. She found that many of the women attempted to gloss over, downplay, or disregard the very real racial problems in their own communities and lives. She finds that despite our efforts to claim that racism doesn’t affect us or people we know, “racism shapes white people’s lives and identities in a way that is inseparable from other facets of daily life” (6). Facets, then, such as the day-to-day working life of a white police officer. This is important to my study because all of the people I interviewed and the subjects of the police report are white (and nearly all are male). In such a scenario, it would be easy to ignore race in the analysis, but because racism is part of the system that we live within, it is important to discuss it in terms of power and policing even when its role doesn’t seem immediately obvious. Mills reminds us, “The fish does not see the water, and whites do not see the racial nature of a white polity because it is natural to them, the element in which they move” (76).

This book records interviews with white male officers, attorneys, and judges. Their perspectives represent in many ways what it means to be white, male, and powerful in our society. Mills reminds us that the present reality of white dominance is “no longer constitutionally and juridically enshrined but rather a matter of social, political, cultural, and economic privilege based on the legacy of conquest” (73). I don’t want this book to be another attempt by a white writer to neglect completely the issues of race that lie beneath our entire society. Although this book’s primary focus is not on critical race theory, it is impossible to write about police and the justice system without including discussions of race and power.

**CIRCULATING POWER AMONG REPORT READERS AND WRITERS**

Winsor argues that “the generation of power through discourse should be examined . . . texts play a role in the way in which power is created and deployed” (11). This study specifically examines the
ways in which readers use police reports for their own purposes and how these readers gain, lose, or redistribute various types of capital in the process. I demonstrate that a police report’s position of power—and that of its writer—is determined by individual readers and their own authority or agent position within the larger system and context. Different systems and contexts affect or change the power the document holds for each reader. The position, status, and capital of the writer are at the mercy of various readers and their own interpretations of the text.

I use three categories of capital developed by Bourdieu to aid the discussion of power, the police report genre, and the chained literacy event. Bourdieu first used the idea of cultural capital in order to explain the social inequity he saw in education (“The Forms”). The concept of cultural capital has evolved over time to mean the knowledge, possessions, and traits that a person acquires while being part of a particular group, organization, or class. Cultural capital in this study will refer to accumulated skills and knowledge, not just facts but the knowledge of systems, patterns, and how things are accomplished in certain settings.

Social capital is described by Bourdieu as the “basis of the existence of the group . . . in the hands of a single agent or a small group of agents [who] . . . exercise a power incommensurate with the agent’s personal contribution” (“The Forms” 251). He gives the example of a father, the head of the household, who is the only one authorized to speak for a family. In this text, I use social capital as the reputation, status, stature, or prestige of an individual or group.

Finally, understanding symbolic capital is key to understanding how institutions remain in control and recreate themselves. Bourdieu claims symbolic capital is “that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it” (Language 164). Symbolic power is the control that people, organizations, or systems exert over their environments and over others. The subtle nature of this form of power, “invisible” as Bourdieu calls it, masks the agents who control it. This concept will be critical in understanding how police report writers and readers
come by means of power that affect the legal system and society. Each chapter in this book will look at how the different forms of capital and power I have outlined here circulate forward and backward to readers of the police report.

OVERVIEW
Police reports can deeply impact people’s lives and the system that is supposed to protect all of us. Their significance cannot be underestimated, and yet it remains that so little is understood about their writers and readers, contexts and constraints, power and purposes. As the quotation that opened this chapter reminds us, if a report says “nothing,” and if officers choose not to or are persuaded away from revealing all the facts and circumstances of an event, then justice cannot prevail. The aim of this book is to investigate how officers create these vital documents and how these documents are then interpreted by various readers. Essential to this investigation will be determining how the genre of police reports operates and how power accrues and circulates in the chain of readers. This discussion will include the topic of race and how the men I interviewed demand and distribute power through the police report genre.

While this book only closely examines the path of one police report, my interviews with report readers offer many ways in which these findings can be generalized more broadly. Many of the lawyers noted how similar the report that I showed them was to the ones they read daily. Thus, I believe that the findings from this one in-depth case study, taken together with the hours of ethnographic and interview research I have done outside of the study, allow for greater generalizability than the findings from this one report alone.

The first chapter introduces Officer Lewis, the writer of the report used for this study. I take you to the scene of the domestic violence disturbance and then back to the police department computer lab as Officer Lewis creates the report based on his observations. Each chapter that follows offers a portrait of a police report reader as he works to identify important information in the report and use it in ways that best serve his purposes. It will be clear early on that each reader is doing something very different with this re-
port and for very distinct purposes. The conflict between readers and writer will become apparent as interviews along the hierarchical chain are revealed.

In each chapter I discuss how the specific reader uses the document, how this use enables or constrains his own social capital, and in what way the police report genre is (re)creating the institution through symbolic power. Micro-chapters are also presented throughout the book. These short narratives offer glimpses into an officer’s experiences on the job. The narratives are intended to build on the qualitative data offered here, presenting a multifaceted picture of what it means to be an officer in day-to-day practice.
Leslie Seawright's thoughtful, thorough study introduces us to a population of writers that most of us are not familiar with—police report writers—and shows us how their documents must thread their way through several layers of readers, all of whom bring their own assumptions and purposes to the reading. Seawright clearly demonstrates how a seemingly simple but actually deceptively complex genre shapes action in an important, active discourse community.

— David A. Jolliffe, University of Arkansas

*Genre of Power* offers a fascinating account of the travels of one police report through the judicial system. Seawright humanizes the process through observations, interviews, and her own unique access to the judicial system. Detailing the cultural and social capital of the writer of these reports and their readers, Seawright has produced the first book of its kind in the field of literacy studies as it relates to scholarship and genre studies, technical writing, and institutional literacies.

— Ellen Cushman, Northeastern University

The issues of how police officers write reports and how others read those reports have critical implications for people engaged in rhetoric, literacy studies, and critical pedagogy. In *Genre of Power: Police Report Writers and Readers in the Justice System*, Leslie Seawright describes the journey of a police report as it travels through the criminal justice system. Tracing the path of a police report from writer, to supervisor, to prosecutor, to defense lawyer, to judge, this study exposes the way in which power, agency, and authority circulate and accrue between writers and readers. The chained literacy event, created as a report moves through the system, is highlighted and its hierarchical nature examined. The book ultimately addresses the constraints of the police report genre and seeks to expose the complex and multifaceted rhetorical situation of report writing.

Due to her position as a police officer's wife, Seawright was granted access to perspectives and realities of police writing typically reserved for those inside the police profession. Seawright obtained candid interviews and perspectives from police officers and supervisors, lawyers and judges. This book analyzes the writing and reading process of the officer writing the report and the report’s subsequent readers. Interlaced throughout the book are micro-chapters that offer glimpses into the day-to-day job of police officers. These vignettes, combined with Seawright’s description of her own life as wife and scholar, present a compelling picture of the complexity of police writing. This study challenges the idea that rhetorical and objective documents are possible to create in many organizations.

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