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Perception of Police Officers

Social Psychology

Starcum

Abstract

This study focuses on social network, and social media and understanding what has a stronger grasp on people when expressing opinions or interacting with law enforcement. I have found the data below supports my hypothesis that social network matters more when interacting with police and having opinions on them. The data shows sixty percent of participants in Group A do not let social media affect their views or interactions with police. IN group B sixty percent of the participants allow social media to affect their opinions and interactions with police. This study also discusses how citizens discriminate and are prejudice against police and ways to remove those negative stigmas. The number one way to stopping negative stigmas is by being educated. Being educated on the issue at hand can help create a more understanding environment. Also by using the contact hypothesis and the extended-contact hypothesis we can reduce prejudice and discrimination between police and the public, and also eliminate negative stigmas in younger generations.

Introduction

Another unarmed man or woman is slain by a police officer. News outlets all over America are reporting on it. Giving viewers a play-by-play of what is happening. Americans are in a fury of rage on social media posting terrible things of the officer who feared for his life. Diminishing them to millions, and those who read may or may not conform to the ideologies of those posts. Police officers have displeased the public time and time again in the past decade. Media such as news outlets and social media has fanned the flame of that issue by portraying negative messages against the police force and the Justice system in its entirety. This paper will discuss hostile media and how individuals interpret that information fed to them, it will also look at which has a stronger grasp on people's perception, their social network or what they see online or in the news. Police brutality

has been reported and displayed on news outlets and social media, I want to know if a person's

relationship with an officer takes priority over media in their opinions on the issue.

Media has a hostile way of conforming watchers minds to their ideologies. With such

hostilities lied upon the minds of watchers it can encourage hatred and prejudice towards the

Justice system. As influential the media can be Social network[1] might have a tighter grasp on

one's opinions. If a person has a police officer as a spouse, parent, sibling, or close friend I

believe they will not let media influence their opinion on them and their job as a whole. Social

network is a key aspect of this essay, understanding ingroups and outgroups and how ideologies

such as those can create prejudice. Social networks I believe are highly influential, and can

influence a person's thoughts or feelings on an issue just as much as media could, if not more.

Another distasteful action reported is prejudice police have against people, but I want to

know the prejudice police experience. What prejudice does a police officer receive during a

traffic stop or patrolling a neighborhood or park? Do they receive disgusted looks or receive

verbal prejudice? It is very easy to point fingers and blame police but let us take a moment to

look at the otherside of the coin, what does our prejudice do to them? Police potentially face as

much prejudice as regular citizens do. Having slurs made for them like "Pig"[2] or "Narc,"[3]these

names leave a negative effect on police. Media can drive people to have horrible attitudes with

police officers making each encounter with them a negative one only creating more prejudice

and hatred towards them.

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[1] Social Network Theory- Examines relationships in terms of *nodes* and *ties*. Nodes are the individuals in one's network, ties are relationships between people.
[2] Pig- A derogatory term popular in the late 19th century and became prominent in the 20th century. Inspired from many games and magazines where police are portrayed as pigs.
[3] NARC- Referring to a narcotics agent, usually undercover.

This research can be significant in understanding the media, perception, social networks, and even how to combat prejudice. Many of these sources do not directly apply to my study but help me understand the working parts. Most studies similar to this one use the racial aspect and how police assign prejudice to those of different skin colors. But this study focuses solely on the perception of individuals not considering their race. This aspect I feel makes this study more interesting and unique. It is especially important to me because I have a dream to serve as a police officer, understanding the pain police officers can cause someone or what police officers may experience is important.

Lit Review

This paper utilizes sources that describe perception, media influence, discrimination, prejudice, how to reduce prejudice, and also speaks of the Implicit Association Test. All of these will help construct a paper to support my hypothesis by helping me and hopefully others understand all the topic I wish to touch on in this paper.

Measuring police perception[4] was intended to test Matrofski's six dimensions of service quality of policing. The researchers mailed surveys out and found after collecting data that Matrofski's test did not fit their study, they found a one dimensional was more appropriate in measuring public perception of policing. While conducting their research they found it was hard for the participants to distinguish the six dimensions, so they moved towards a one dimensional approach. This research used four traditions of theory and research. Service quality, justice, global notion of citizen satisfaction, and legitimacy are the most important factors in policing to keep the

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[4] Name of article

public content. However these have clear implications for several domains of research on

policing[5]. Measuring police perception is important so the justice system may try and conform to

the public's liking. It is undetermined if research models like these will be used to conduct

research, but looking at these four traditions will help understand what my participants may want

or expect out of their police force. This study can help me form my surveys and interviews and

also help understand the data to correctly group it together.

Hostile Media Perception has a strong influence of those who watch it. The corrective

action hypothesis[6] is one of the many methods used to define these tactics media uses to

influence the viewer. Media tries "correcting" what they perceive as wrong, they speak their own

bias opinions onto the public.[7] Conformity to these ideas ultimately depends on how the audience

perceives the information. If the media is only putting out negative images and clips of police

then majority of the public is going to assume police are corrupt and crooked. Understanding

media and how it conforms people's minds is a key part to this essay. It will help understand the

participants bias and emotions towards policing. Understanding media and its methods is a key

part to this study and is crucial to forming questions that participants will be asked.

Race and Perception of Police Misconduct(2003) discusses how certain people of

different racial backgrounds perceives police misconduct through media. This article discusses

how receptive people are to negative reports on police brutality and when they may be most

hostile towards police. "If media reports on a single incident of police abuse influence larger

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[5] Maguire, Edward R. Johnson, Devon.(2010) *Measuring Public Perceptions of the Police,* Volume 1 (1).

[6] Corrective Action Hypothesis- The presumed influence of biased media tries to correct perceived wrongs by voicing their own opinions onto the public sphere.

[7] Barnidge, Matthew. Rojas, Hernando.(2014) Hostile Media Perceptions, Presumed Media Influence, and Political Talk:Expanding the Corrective Action Hypothesis. *Journal of Public Opinion Research.*Volume 26(2)

views of the police, frequent exposure to media coverage of separate instances of police

misconduct might be expected to affect citizens' views of the police especially strongly."[8] This

direct quotation from the article explains how strongly people may feel towards a certain issue.

Understanding how hostile people may get after viewing negative images or videos of police

misconduct is crucial to this essay because media perception is a key part of my hypothesis.

   Public Opinions of The Police talks about how people's experience with police affects

their perception. People who have negative experiences with police tend to have a more negative

perception on police, those who have positive experiences have a more positive perception on

police, and those with neutral experiences tend to have a more negative outlook on police[9]. This

study also found that people have negative outlooks on police if friends or family say they have

had negative experiences, same goes for positive reports. This study ties in with my hypothesis

because it talks about how a person's social network can affect their view on police, having

people as influential as friends or family can alter and even set your views on police.

Understanding how important social networks are is the main piece of this essay because of my

hypothesis.

   Reducing Discrimination[10] is an article that identifies what discrimination is and how

people naturally place stigmas on other groups or people different from them. It talks about how

certain minority groups experience different types of discrimination and how people naturally do

it even if they mean no harm. This article also talks about how we as people can combat

prejudice, discrimination, and social stigmas. Education is a major weapon in the war against

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[8] Wietzer, Ronald. Tuch, Steven A.(2003). *Race and Perceptions of Police Misconduct. George Washington University.* Volume 1(1).Retrieved from
[9] Journal of Police Strategies and management Volume 1(1).
[10] Title of article

prejudice. Contact hypothesis[11] is another tool used in today's schools to reduce discrimination later in someone's life. Understanding discrimination, prejudice, and stigmas can help me conduct surveys and interviews for police officers or other law enforcement to understand what they witness day-to-day when interacting with the public. A unique twist to this study is understanding prejudice police officers face, this article is crucial to my understanding of prejudice, stigmas, and discrimination. This article also helps me understand *in-groups* and *out-groups,* which helps understand how people treat those in certain groups.[12] This article is filled to the brim with useful information for this study.

Methods

To collect participants I made a post on Facebook for anyone willing to participate. After I notified each volunteer I sent the emails containing my interview that had a video attached about police brutality. I found it important to not target a specific race, gender, income, location, etc. Having a wide variety of people from different backgrounds gives this study aspects from a variety of different people. This studies participants are from different races, genders, incomes, and locations which really widens the spectrum and allows this data to apply to many different walks of life. There are two sets of interviews, set A is for those who have police in their social network, set B is for those who do not have police in their social network. I sent emails to the participants based on if they had police in their social network or not. A video was attached to the document in order to collect data based on my hypothesis. The video contains clips of police brutality, each participant is required to watch that video before answering any of the interview

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[11] Contact Hypothesis- having people from different racial backgrounds interact with each other to reduce social stigma and hopefully improve attitudes towards each other.
[12] https://opentextbc.ca/socialpsychology/chapter/reducing-discrimination/

questions. Attaching the video is going to help me determine if social network has a stronger influence on someone or if their relationships influence their opinions more. Sending the video to someone with no relationship to police will see if the media is effective in altering a watchers mind. Both interviews share ten identical questions, but each survey has three to four questions specific to the group. The first ten questions are to establish how the individual feels about police brutality and how their emotions affect their interactions with police. The last three to four questions are to see if their feelings or responses are influenced by their relationships with police or the absence of relationships with police.

Results

This method section will contain two tables. The table below is for Group A(Relationship with officers). It contains very simplified responses from each participant to help readers understand the data better. Various colors were used to identify common themes in the responses, the colors used do not server a specific purpose they were just used to identify the common themes for each questions.

Group A / Participant number	Feelings towards police	Does social media affect their opinions towards police?	Do you feel obligated to defend police on social media?	Do stories of police brutality affect your interactions with police?	What emotions are strongest when seeing posts of police brutality?
A1	Sympathetic	No	Yes	No	Sad, confused
A2	Neural	No	Yes	No	Neutral
A3	Neutral	No	Neutral	Neutral	Confused
A4	Shocked	Neutral	Yes	No	Shocked
A5	Upset, furious	Yes	No	Neutral	Furious

After interviewing group A[13] the results seem to be consistent between all five participants. Participant A1 Showed a lot of sympathy towards police officers. They had strong emotions of confusion and anger when hearing about police violating someone's rights. Participant A1 did however feel compelled to defend officers on law enforcement, they don't allow social media to

affect their interactions with officers, if there is backlash towards law enforcement they feel extremely compelled to defend them on social media.

Participant A2 presented a similar chain of responses. When seeing police brutality on social media there is confliction in their emotions which leaves them neutral on most of those matters. When seeing police officers they feel emotions of joy and happiness and they do not let negative posts on social media affect their interactions with police. When seeing negatives post on social media they do not openly defend officers on social media but they do support them in most cases.

Participant A3 finds hard in some cases to show sympathy to police because they know there are too many police brutality videos or cases, however they do not feel all police should be targeted based on a handful of "bad cops." When seeing officers in public they feel safe but start to question the area they are in. When seeing police violate the rights of another person they have strong feelings of confusion and think it is highly unnecessary. When interacting with police they try to not let negative stories they saw affect their interactions.

Participant A4 feels shocked when seeing stories of police brutality, however they feel the media manipulates the story to turn the public against the police. They are friendly with

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[13] Group A- Participants with a personal connection to law enforcement.

officers because they work closely with police and went through the explorers program. They

feel bad for those officers who are trying to make a difference because their actions tend to get

covered up by officers who abuse their authority. They do not feel afraid when seeing officers in

public.They do not let stories of police brutality affect their interactions with police. When

seeing negative comments or posts towards police they feel obligated to defend them because

they view officers as heroes.

Participant A5 becomes very upset and furious when seeing stories on police brutality.

Social media does tend to affect how they view police as a whole. They usually do not get afraid

when seeing officers in public but try to be cautious. They don't feel invested to defend police

on social media. However their relationship with police encourages them to think highly of

officers.

The table below is for group B(No relationship with police). The table below is

simplified answers from five participants. This tables purpose is to help the reader understand the

data easier.

Group B / Participant number	Feelings towards police	Does social media affect their opinions towards police?	Do you feel obligated to defend police on social media?	Do stories of police brutality affect your interactions with police?	Do you believe not having police officers as friends or family affects how you react to news or social media posts/interact with them?
B1	Angry	No	Yes	No	No
B2	Lack of trust	Neutral	No	Neutral	No
B3	Fear	Yes	Neutral	Yes	No
B4	Angry/Upset	Yes	Neutral	Yes	No
B5	Angry/Upset	Yes	No	Yes	No

Participant B1 becomes angry when seeing stories of police brutality on social media. When in public and they see police they feel safer and not threatened. Posts about police brutality on social media do not affect the way they view police and it does not affect their interactions with police. When seeing posts on social media that target police they feel the need to defend them. They do not believe having a personal connection to police would affect how they view police or interact with them.

Participant B2 tends to not trust police after seeing posts of police brutality on social media. They believe police who abuse their authority should receive jail time. When seeing police in public they question the area they are in and wonder if police are monitoring them. Social media posts on police brutality "kind of" affect their views on police but not their interactions with police. They feel obligated to defend police on social media and they do not believe a relationship with police would affect their views or interactions.

Participant B3 have strong feelings of fear when seeing stories of police brutality. When seeing police in public they do not fear them but become very nervous and anxious. Seeing negative posts on social media about polie affect their views and their interactions with police. They are very neutral on defending police on social media. They do believe the absence of a relationship with police affects their opinions and interactions with police.

Participant B4 becomes sad and does not trust police when seeing stories of police brutality on social media. When seeing police in public they fear being harrassed and wonder if they are the next victim to police brutality. Seeing negative posts on social media affect their opinions and interactions with police. They are neutral on defending police on social media but

usually do not defend them. They believe the lack of police connection does not affect their views.

Participant B5 feels very strong negative emotions when seeing stories of police brutality on social media. They tend to feel anger and hatred towards police, when seeing police in public they are cautious because they do not want to be harrassed. When seeing stories or posts on social media about police brutality it affects their views and interactions with police. They refuse to defend police on social media. They do not believe the lack of personal connection affects their views and interactions with police.

Discussion

After reviewing all the data collected and identifying the common themes amongst them, I have found that the data does support my hypothesis. In group A sixty percent said they do not let social media affect their opinions on police. In group B sixty percent said yes, social media does affect their opinions on police. The feelings towards police are similar between both groups. However group B has more violent negative feelings towards police than group A. In group B most of the hostility is derived from social media and its negative portrayal of police. Participants fear police more and feel threatened by them. However that is not the case in group A, participants in group A show more sympathy towards police and have more feelings of disappointment instead of anger or rage. When seeing videos of police brutality only ⅕ said they do let stories of police brutality affect their opinions. As stated before ⅗ do not allow social media to affect their views. That supports my hypothesis by proving social network and relationships matter more than social media influence. Many participants in group A did not believe having a relationship with police affected their opinions but the data would say

otherwise. In group A only two participants could give a definite yes. The other three

participants felt in the middle, by reviewing their answers I found that their relationships with

law enforcement significantly affect their opinions and interactions with police. Not a single

participant in group A said "yes" to the question if social media affects their interactions with

police. Majority of the participants feel obligated to defend police from treacherous social media

posts and comments. This data is important especially in our hostile society because it brings to

light social medias methods of turning the public against our justice system. As a researcher

interested in joining law enforcement this data is critical to mending the divide between the

American public and law enforcement. Social media serves as the primary method for dispensing

information and opinions to millions, it also serves as a malicious tool for influencing people.

Understanding this study and its data can be the key in rebuilding a strong bond between police

and the public. Replacing emotions of fear and distrust with safety, security, and trust. Police can

utilize this data by trying to build stronger relationships with more people. The public can use

this data as a way to understand how strong social media truly is. Just a thirty second video of an

officer tackling a black man to the ground can spark a fiery outrage turning millions of americans

to attacking police. This data can also serve a purpose of reducing discrimination towards police.

In group B sixty percent allow social media to affect their opinions and interactions with police.

That means that sixty percent goes out ready to clash with police, assuming all police are vicious

animals looking to terrorize the public instead of protecting the public. It is always very easy to

say police are discriminatory and prejudice, but as citizens let's put the shoe on the other foot.

When people going out into public sharing similar ideologies with group B they discriminate

police, they may not explicitly state their prejudice or discriminatory thoughts to police but their

actions show it. Discrimination and prejudice thrives in environments where it is allowed.[14]The number one way to reduce these negative social norms is being educated. When participants use social media and second long videos as the primary source to influence their views it puts a significant amount of negative norms into the public scope. Another useful method would be the contact hypothesis[15], surrounding yourself with people involved in law enforcement may change your views and how you analyze those social media posts of police brutality. Or even utilizing the extended-contact hypothesis could be useful in reducing discrimination. Having friends who have police officers as family or friends could also help the prejudice placed on police. These methods could also be effective in reducing discrimination and prejudice police place on the public. Reducing all the negativity would be helpful in creating a more accepting environment. When citizens are difficult and not compliant, it really shows lack of respect for those who put their lives at risk everyday. Starting an interaction with police negatively will make the whole interaction negative and could potentially escalate the interaction making it violent. We don't look at the videos on facebook or social media that way though. We see a citizen being tackled to the ground, not the part where they are resisting the officers for ten minutes and then make a seen to avoid punishment. This data shows how social media ruins viewers ability to cooperate and respect police, how it creates emotions of distrust and fear by only showing the ten seconds of police using physical aggression. Those who have relationships with police are able to understand social media never shows the whole story. Not to say there is not police who abuse their power but a lot of the time it's just social media trying to fan the flames.

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[14] Stangor, Charles. Et al.(2014) Reducing Discrimination:*Principles of Social Psychology-1st International Edition.* Volume
[15] Mixing different groups of people to reduce prejudice and discrimination.

Conclusion

I was unable to use a true random sample, so I took a convenience sample at Freeport High school. This study was microscopic in the grand scheme of things, however I believe this study can spark research on a controversial issue. I was unable to find any studies that focused on the same issues as this study, many were similar but not exact. This study would be very useful to criminologists or people who are interested in understanding social media and social networking and how strong they are. In the interviews I collected background questions that were not used in the data section paper. I felt the information would have just been a distraction from the core data of this paper. The data may have been useful but due to my time limitations the background of each participant are vague. I avoided mentioning race, sex, income, area, ect because I feel I would not have been able to really broadcast the data I wanted. In this study social network and social media are the primary focus, adding race and things of that nature would have completely changed the focus and I feel this study would not be as unique and stand out. When distributing the interviews I made both groups watch a video compilation of police brutality, from there I asked them questions. I feel that my questions could have had more meaning, because all the responses were not in depth and I noticed the participants would have a hard time voicing their true emotions about the video. Perhaps offering a more professional or more comfortable environment would allow participants to really give their true emotions and really make this data viable. I also believe using more graphic images of police brutality would have received a stronger response. The video was not extremely graphic or gorey because this is a school study, but later if other researchers touch on this topic and use a similar experiment I believe more graphic images and a better environment will increase this studies importance

tremendously. This study I feel could be important in mending the divide between the public and police. Officers could attempt to build stronger relationships with more people and citizens can understand how strong social media actually is and not allow it to affect their opinions and interaction with police. This study also touches briefly on how citizens discriminate or place prejudice on police and some methods to reducing it. Expanding on that aspect can liven this study up and allow a more educational aspect. Reducing prejudice between citizens and police and understanding how to do it would help the divide. This study is just a small start to a wave of studies to come.

Understanding these relationships and how they affect interaction with law enforcement will help the violence and tension tremendously. In conclusion, this study can be of use to many people in different jobs and professions. Helping people understand social media deeper and how important social network is. This study is at the beginning of what I believe will be the next big topic to research.

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