

Public perception of the police assignment

Sociology



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Abstract The media portrayal of policing is filled with both positive and negative representations of police work. As a result, a complex relationship exists between media consumption and public attitudes towards the police. The purpose of this study is to test the impact that media consumption has on attitudes toward police misconduct. The research design proposed for use in this study would be the experimental design, a two-group, posttest-only, randomized experiment. **Introduction**

The public impression of police use of force, as brutality, in modern day policing continues to be a sensitive issue for law enforcement agencies across the nation. Police agencies across the United States deal with accusations of misuse of force on a daily basis. Justified or not, images of police utilizing force continue to strike a nerve in the American public. However, police use of force incidents are often misconstrued by the community due to the media frenzy utilizing misrepresentation of facts and propaganda techniques.

These techniques undermine the authority of the police and diminish the trust that the community has in its police force. Therefore, because of these few publicized police use of force incidents, the public's perception of police use of force incidents continues to be seen as negative and brutal. There are several different media forms, and each type might portray the police in different manners. As a result, this research will utilize different media consumption including different types of news reports, to include the internet, different newspaper articles and television newscasts.

If the media, defined as the independent variable, would ethically report the true nature of events to the public, defined as the dependent variable, then the public's perception of police use of force would not be negative and bias. Background and Literature Review Numerous incidents of police use of force can be found everyday in law enforcement agencies throughout the country. USA Today alleges police brutality is up since September 11th. However, the article also points out that the number of cases is small compared to the 800, 000 sworn police officers patrolling within the United States of America.

This article demonstrates how the media is instrumental in misleading the public in regards to police misconduct (Johnson, 2007). Coa & Huang (2000) researched the citizen complaint rate of police misconduct and identifies the reasons citizens complain. They determined that certain socio-economic groups view use of force as brutality even when it is justified and necessary. Along these same lines, Dowler & Zawilski (2007) summarized field work, researched and gathered data on the media's portrayal of policing and how it impacts the public perception.

Their research describes how the media can have a direct negative influence on the public's perception on the issue of police use of force. There are documented cases where the media has distorted incidents of police use of force when the force was justified as a result of the individual's attitude and actions towards police. Engel conducted a study that explains the tendency of a suspect to resist the officers independent of the police officer's behavior.

The study explained that the suspects' resistance and disrespect toward police, regardless of social and economic standing, coupled with the

suspects' violent actions towards the officers illicit a use of force response from the officers. The study examines the thought that some citizens have a propensity towards aggression towards the police (2003). When these incidents are caught on tape the media is notorious for airing only the officer's response and not the order of events that prompted the use of force.

Police agencies continue to examine less than lethal use of force options in an effort to reduce the injuries to officers and suspects. The agencies continually educate their officers on the use of force continuum and the public perception of police action. One study focuses on various uses of force methods utilized by police agencies. This journal article discusses data on various types of less than lethal use of force weapon systems and the effect they have on the suspect and the officer who was forced to use it. It examines the future of police action and new advances in suspect restraint systems (Albert, 1999).

Research Methods The research design proposed for use in this study would be the experimental design, a two-group, posttest-only, randomized experiment. There are several demographic variables to consider such as race, gender, age, household income, education, victim of crime, victim of violent crime, charged/arrested for a crime, etc. , which will be included in the analysis by utilizing content analysis and a coding system. By utilizing content analysis we can learn a great deal about popular culture and many other issues through studying the characteristics of messages delivered through the mass media (Bachman & Schutt, 2007).

In order to alleviate the problems of creating a coding process only highly trained and qualified personnel will be utilized to create and administer this study. The two groups created for this study will be randomly selected adults of the general population. One group will have access to the use of force documentation, to include the law enforcement agencies summary of events, as well as the media's portrayal of the incident. The comparison group will only be provided with the media's various news reporting of the alleged brutality incident.

A pretest is not required for this design. Because random assignment is being used, it can be assumed that the two groups are statistically equivalent to begin with and the pretest is not required. In this design, the interest is in determining whether the two groups have differing opinions toward police use of force after viewing the subject material. The group's sensitivity toward the use of force will be measured and compared by testing for the differences of perception using a post-test, intense interviewing, questionnaires, and surveys to determine attitudes.

The posttest-only, randomized experimental design is the best research design for assessing cause-effect relationships. It is easy to execute and, because it uses only a posttest, is relatively inexpensive. The population of my study would be adults randomly selected from major metropolitan areas with a sizeable police force having greater than 1, 600 sworn officers. The sampling methods used would be probability sampling, utilizing stratified random sampling. This is a way of sampling the entire population.

This type of sample focuses on important subpopulations and ignores irrelevant ones. It tends to improve the accuracy of estimation and is a very efficient sampling method. Furthermore, by utilizing this method we have the option of using proportionate stratified sampling which would eliminate any possibility of an error in the samples distribution of ethnicity or disproportionate stratified sampling that include in the sample intentionally varying the sample from what is in the real population.

Once the groups have reviewed the material provided to their group a post-test and intensive interviewing will be conducted by trained personnel to question the participants and to seek in-depth information on the participant's feelings experience and perceptions. During these interviews questionnaires and surveys will also be conducted to collect and compile pertinent information. In order to alleviate ethical issues, such as confidentiality, deception, the participant's well-being, etc. participants will be provided with a copy of the study plan, explaining the process and their role in the survey. Further, prior to participating in the study, all participants will be required to sign an acknowledgement of understanding document and will be required to sign a waiver form. Conclusion In conclusion, any examination of media impact on public attitudes is complicated by the perception of media content. It is inherently difficult to sort through the complexities in police portrayals on television and in news articles.

The media's portrayal of the police is filled with both negative and positive images, and it is within this contradictory framework that public attitudes toward police abuse or misconduct are shaped. This study will be beneficial in attempting to discover if the media consumption, in the form of network

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news, is related to attitudes toward the frequency of police misconduct.

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