Chapter 16

Violence Trending: How Socially Transmitted Content of Police Misconduct Impacts Reactions toward Police Among American Youth

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Abstract

Videos of police abuse are often spread through technology, raising questions around how perceptions of police are impacted by these images, especially for 18–24-year-olds who are constantly "logged on." Limited research investigates the impact of social media on attitudes toward police accounting for age and race. The present study utilizes 19 in-depth interviews with a diverse sample of urban college students who regularly use social media in order to understand how they have been impacted by this content. The findings suggest the necessity of using an intersectional framework to understand the impact of tech-witnessed violence. While no gender differences were uncovered, racial differences did surface. White participants described being minimally influenced by videos of police misconduct, rationalizing it as a "few bad apples." In contrast, participants of color, except those with family members in law enforcement, described being negatively impacted. Viral content contributed to negative opinions of police, emotional distress, and fears of victimization. Ultimately, videos of police brutality do not impact young populations equally. Instead, they are comparatively more harmful to young people of color who spend more time on social media, can envision themselves as the victims, and experience feelings of fear, despair, and anger after watching these videos.

Introduction

Attitudes and reactions toward police are complex and result from various factors including gender (Brown & Benedict, 2002), race (Brunson, 2007; Gau & Brunson, 2007), and age (Brunson, 2007; Flexon, Lurigio, & Greenleaf, 2009). First-hand and vicarious encounters with police are also impactful in shaping attitudes (Papachristos, Braga, & Hureau, 2012; Rosenbaum, Schuck, Costello, Hawkins, & Ring, 2005; Tyler, 2006; Weitzer, 2002). Contemporary literature demonstrates that face-to-face encounters can have profound effects on an individual's opinion of law enforcement, especially if the interaction is marred by perceptions of biased, disrespectful, indifferent, and untrustworthy officers (Novich & Hunt, 2016; see also Tyler, 2006).

Emerging evidence suggests that vicarious experiences shared by family and friends through social networks can also shape one's perspective of and response to police (Dowler & Zawilski, 2007; Lim, 2015; Papachristos et al., 2012). There has been growing concern and awareness of police misconduct and brutality as a result of viral social media (Tynes, Willis, Stewart, & Hamilton, 2019). Research demonstrates that media functions as a key mechanism for shaping attitudes toward police (Dowler & Zawilski, 2007) and, perhaps more concerning, witnessing officer-initiated abhorrent violent behavior (AVB) causes psychological trauma, depression, and posttraumatic stress among viewers who can identify with the victim (Tynes et al., 2019). Police misconduct shared through social media may be more harmful to young people of color when compared with their white counterparts because they invest more time and energy into social media, and social media increases their ability to witness misconduct against people of their racial and ethnic background. Conversely, social media provides young people of color a platform to express themselves and raise concerns relating to their marginalized social experience (Grasmuck, Martin, & Zhoa, 2009; Lee, 2011). It is therefore important to investigate perceptions of and responses to police using an intersectional framework that accounts for race, age, and social media usage.

In response, this chapter is premised on a study that utilizes interviews with a racially diverse sample of college-aged participants and examines if and how their perceptions and feelings toward police are impacted by social media and videos of police violence transmitted via technology. The chapter will first provide an overview of current literature on attitudes toward police. The second section will describe the methodological strategies employed in the study, and the third section will present the findings. Finally, the chapter will end with a discussion of how the salient findings, which are that participants of color are disproportionately negatively impacted by violent police videos, fit into the broader context of contemporary empirical research.

Literature Review

Attitudes Toward the Police

There are many factors that contribute to an individual's attitude toward police. Extensive research indicates that race and ethnicity are a significant predictor in

determining attitudes toward police (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Brunson, 2007; Gau & Brunson, 2007; Novich & Hunt, 2016). In America, people of color, especially young Black and Latino men, have more negative views of the police when compared with white men (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999). This is likely due to minority populations experiencing greater levels of poor officer treatment, including discriminatory and aggressive police behavior (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Fratello, Rengifo, & Trone, 2013; Novich & Hunt, 2016; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999).

Attitudes toward police also appear to be influenced by gender, whereby females tend to hold more favorable opinions of police when compared with male counterparts (Weitzer & Tuch, 1999). However, American women of color generally view police more negatively when compared with white women (Brick, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2009; Hurst, McDermott, & Thomas, 2005). Age is also significant, with young people more likely to view police less favorably than older people (Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Hurst, Frank, & Browning, 2000a). This may be due to the increased probability of a young person being stopped by the police than an older one or the tendency of older residents to desire safety in their community, which law enforcement can provide (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Lee, Lim, & Lee, 2015; Lim, 2015).

Overall, young populations hold strong opinions about police (Brick et al., 2009; Brunson, 2007; Flexon et al., 2009; Leiber, Nalla, & Farnworth, 1998) and these attitudes are profoundly impacted by direct experiences with law enforcement (Brick et al., 2009; Flexon et al., 2009; Leiber et al., 1998; Novich & Hunt, 2016; Rosenbaum et al., 2005). Encounters where individuals perceive police as dishonest or untrustworthy, or feel stripped of their agency, negatively impact perceptions of police legitimacy (see Tyler, 2006). However, personal relationships can mitigate negative responses, especially for individuals that have a personal connection to a law enforcement officer (Lee et al., 2015; Lim, 2015).

Impact of Social Media on Perceptions of Police

Emerging evidence suggests that attitudes toward law enforcement are also formed via vicarious experiences from family, friends, and community members (Brunson, 2007; Hurst, Frank, & Browning, 2000b; Papachristos et al., 2012; Rosenbaum et al., 2005; Weitzer, 2002; Wu, 2013). Most citizens in the population have an opinion on law enforcement, despite the fact that "[four] out of [five] Americans do not have direct contact with police officers during any given year" (Rosenbaum et al., 2005, p. 360). Opinions about police are likely formed as a result of experiences witnessed or learned about from family, friends, or posts on their social networks (Papachristos et al., 2012). There are several theoretical frameworks that may explain the impact of socially transmitted videos of police behavior on perceptions of law enforcement. Research suggests that media is "decoded" or understood differently depending on the unique background of each viewer (see Hall, 1980, p. 107). The different groups of viewers, of which there are many, may understand media differently depending

on an individual's self, gender, family, class, nation, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age (Fiske, 1986; Hall, 1980).

In terms of age, social networking platforms may create a social modeling atmosphere for young people. These platforms are where young people learn through observing others, especially those they hold in esteem, and follow suit (see Lim, 2015). Premised on Bandura's (1962) imitation theory, research suggests that there are three kinds of social modeling: live (an individual demonstrating a certain behavior in real time); verbal (descriptions or explanations of a particular behavior); and symbolic (real or fictional characters found in media, books, or online). "Symbolic" personas, both real and fake, offer a behavioral model through secondary sources like social media, television, and literature (Lim, 2015, p. 675). Social media sites like Facebook and Instagram create easy access to symbolic models since friends, family, and groups can post videos and caption them so that the "correct" opinion can be easily obtained while scrolling through a feed. Due to their more persistent uses of these sites, young people may be more impacted by highly publicized events. With regards to police specifically, research suggests that young people's reactions may be significantly impacted if those highlighted virtual events focus on procedural injustice, police misconduct, and AVB on behalf of police (Reisig & Correia, 1997; Tynes et al., 2019; Weitzer, 2002).

Indeed, people are negatively impacted by witnessing AVB and/or traumatic events online (TEO) (Feinstein, Audet, & Waknine, 2014; Holman, Garfin, & Silver, 2013; Tynes et al., 2019). Seeing graphic footage of extreme violence can evoke involuntary memories (Clark, Holmes, Woolrich, & Mackay, 2016) or can cause acute stress, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression, especially if such footage is viewed frequently (Feinstein et al., 2014; Holman et al., 2013). While people of all backgrounds are no doubt harmed, witnessing socially transmitted AVB perpetrated by police may be more harmful for populations of color. Not only does the footage contribute to negative attitudes toward law enforcement (Weitzer, 2002), but also it may cause individual and community-spread psychological trauma (Tynes et al., 2019).

Social media posts that showcase police in a negative light affirm what minority communities have experienced for decades (Aymer, 2016; Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Bryant-Davis, Adams, Alejandre, & Gray, 2017). Children of traditionally marginalized ethnicities are raised to fear and expect police harassment, and this fear limits their mobility and informs social behavior (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). Social media featuring police misconduct solidifies these feelings of "fear, despair, and anxiety," which has a traumatic impact on the brain and can lead to brain dysregulation, stress, PTSD, and self-destructive behavior (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017, p. 855). Further, this type of content raises fears of victimization among social media consumers of color (Callanan, 2012; Dowler, 2003; Kohm, Waid-Lindberg, Weinrath, Shelley, & Dobbs, 2012). Higher levels of fear are found in the African American community and are generated when the violence portrayed through the media source is in the same geographical area as the individual viewing the content (Callanan, 2012; Dowler, 2003; Kohm et al., 2012). Additionally, Tynes et al. (2019) examined the impact of witnessing viral

videos of race-related police killings of unarmed citizens among youth of color and found that viewing AVB that was directed at one's own racial/ethnic group was related to an increase in PTSD and depression. The researchers also raised concerns that, given how easily transmitted this content is among peers, the negative impact may contribute to community-wide mental health problems.

Racial differences may be further exacerbated if the individuals are "logged on" often. Contemporary research suggests that people of color are heavy consumers of media content of police misconduct and are more likely to believe it is frequently occurring (Dowler & Zawilski, 2007; Tynes et al., 2019). Additionally, research suggests that people of color interact with social media differently than their white counterparts (Chan, 2017; Grasmuck et al., 2009; Lee, 2011). People of color invest more time and energy into networking platforms because of the opportunity it creates to be heard and to connect with others of similar racial backgrounds. On social media, users can consume information through posts, determine its relevance to their own experience, and further develop their understanding of their racial identity (Chan, 2017; Grasmuck et al., 2009).

How responses toward police are formed is complex and requires an intersectional framework. Age and race can play an important role, as does first-hand and vicarious encounters with law enforcement. Social media and the transmission of police violence through social networks is increasingly of interest to researchers, especially when examining young people of color. In response, this study utilizes interviews with young, heavy social media users to investigate how technologically transmitted videos of police misconduct may impact their reactions toward officers. Paying close attention to racial differences, this investigation attempts to narrow the scholarly understanding of how social media may influence their feelings about police.

Methodology

The qualitative data were collected from September to November 2018 on an urban college campus as part of a semester-long undergraduate Research Methods course. These interviews solicited feedback on participants' experience with and attitudes toward police, social media usage, and the impact of video content on opinions of law enforcement. The data included 19 participants: men (53%, $n = 10$) and women (47%, $n = 9$). The largest ethnic group was Latinx (42%, $n = 8$), followed by white (37%, $n = 7$), Asian (11%, $n = 2$), and African Americans (11%, $n = 2$). The target age range was 18–24 years, given that this age group consumes social media at higher rates and visit more platforms than other age groups (see Smith & Anderson, 2018). The participants indicated that they used one or more popular social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

The interviews were conducted in English, typically lasted 30 minutes, and took place in various campus locations. No compensation was provided. The data were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, redacted, and anonymized. The interviews were semistructured and included open-ended questions concerning the

participants' opinion of police, experiences with content about police shared on social media, and if and how they believed social media impacted their perceptions of police. Each interview was read repeatedly and was systematically inductively coded. The analysis was refined using narrative analysis, where long narratives of personal experiences were organized sequentially and broken down into coded categories salient to the current investigation (Presser & Sandberg, 2015), as well as progressive focusing, which was the ongoing evaluation of relationships between themes, trends, and concepts throughout the entire coding and analysis process (Chambliss & Schutt, 2016). The data were arranged on matrices to ensure that patterns, comparisons, and deviant cases could be assessed thoroughly (Maxwell, 1996) and all cases were included (Silverman, 2006).

There were several limitations. The interviews were conducted by different individuals so the follow-up questions were not standardized. The research used a college-aged population, which is often viewed as a convenience sample, not representative of the larger society, and can produce findings that may not be generalizable. However, this population was the intended target because this age group is most active on social media compared with other age groups (Arceneaux & Dinu, 2018; Chan, 2017; Lee, 2011; see also Smith & Anderson, 2018). Also, the sample size may be considered small, raising concerns of generalizability. However, the smaller sample size allowed for a more nuanced inquiry which can enhance the validity of in-depth investigations (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Finally, the research is based on US-centric data where police and populations of color, of whom are ethnic minorities, have a unique history of tension and violence. As such, the findings may not be applicable to other nations that do not share similar historical challenges. Despite these limitations, the impact of abhorrent violent police behavior was discussed repeatedly by participants, often without prompting, providing a rich qualitative data source for this investigation.

Findings

Attitudes toward the Police: The Racial Divide

Opinions about police are complicated and formed as a result of many factors (see Brown & Benedict, 2002). As one Latina aptly noted, "I would say [my attitude toward police] is a sum of a lot of things." Attitudes toward police can be shaped by face-to-face interactions (Tyler, 2002), television and fictional media (Donovan & Klahm, 2015), opinions from family and friends, and vicarious experiences of police behavior, including stories shared between friends and family and videos of police transmitted through news and social media (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Reisig & Correia, 1997; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999). However, the relative influence of each factor is not wholly understood and may impact individuals differently. This may be especially so with regard to people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

As consistent with previous research, the majority of the participants of color expressed negative opinions about police compared to their white counterparts (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999). In all, 9

of 12 participants of color described the police in an unfavorable way. One Latino male student stated, "I don't like the cops." The majority (6 of 9) of participants that expressed negative opinions of the police indicated they distrusted the police and/or viewed police as criminal justice actors who abused their authority and harmed civilians. One Latino male stated, "I don't agree with how the police abuse their power and treat people." The issue of power surfaced among several participants. For example, one Latino male believed the asymmetrical power dynamic between officers and citizens gave police the right to be disrespectful and harmful, a conclusion based on a personal experience:

> I'm not the biggest fan of the police...they let their power get to their head...when they put that uniform on, they are a different person. I feel like it gives them too much power and authority…it gives them the right to disrespect us…. I've had times where I would hop the train and one of 'em handcuffed me so bad I had a mark on my wrist all day.

For three participants, negative opinions about law enforcement stemmed from the belief that the police were "racist." A Black female, for instance, described the police as "prejudiced," basing her opinion on racially motivated incidents she witnessed. While her attitude toward police was premised on vicarious experiences, two participants indicated their opinion was shaped by first-hand encounters with police. One Latino male, for example, lamented that he "never had a positive experience" with police and described feeling "uncomfortable" around law enforcement, especially "white officers."

While these narratives reflect the majority of the participants of color, three participants of color expressed positive opinions about the police. One explained he was former military and had a positive encounter with the military police. Two others indicated that they had family members who were in law enforcement. One Latina woman succinctly explained, "I come from a family of … cops so I like them." Despite these outliers, the findings reflect extensive research that populations of color have negative attitudes toward police, especially when compared with their white counterparts.

Consistent with previous research, the white participants had generally more favorable attitudes toward the police. Overall, four of the seven[1] white participants described law enforcement favorably, indicating they trusted them, "appreciate what they do," and generally felt they were "good" people who did their job well. One white female stated, "I like the police… I trust them to do their job and to protect the citizens of this country. To be unbiased members of the community." Similarly, a white male noted, "I believe most police officers are good and do their job the way they should." Like the two participants of color with relatives in law enforcement, one white female explained that she had family members that were officers and expressed that she had "a strong personal connection to law enforcement."

There were two outliers who expressed negative attitudes toward the police. These cases appeared to have serious extenuating circumstances of experiencing

or witnessing extreme violence. One white female, for example, indicated she had multiple negative encounters including one where she was sexually assaulted by an officer. Aside from these two, the attitudes toward the police were clearly delineated along racial lines where white participants' perceptions were more favorable than the participants of color.

The Impact of Videos Seen on Social Media

Social media for many is a source of news and a means to transmit popular culture, social justice content, and information on trending topics between friends, family, and trusted networks. This includes viral videos of police misconduct. Indeed, every participant confirmed they used social media (19 of 19), and most (18 of 19) reported seeing videos of police through their various social networks. This included positive videos, where police were described as doing something kind or helpful, and negative videos, where police were described as doing something harmful against civilians. The slight majority ($n = 11^2$ of 19) of participants described only having seen negative videos of police. The remaining participants (7 of 19) described viewing both types of videos.

Limited Impact: Videos Focus on "Bad Apples"
For 10 of the 19 participants, social media was described as having a minimal impact on their opinions about police. This was true for five of the seven white participants as they indicated that content shared on social media did not significantly contribute to their attitudes toward law enforcement. This sentiment was also expressed by six of the seven participants who held favorable opinions toward law enforcement. Nearly all (six of the seven) of the study participants who held positive opinions about police indicated that social media and videos of police misconduct did not factor into their opinion. This was also true for the two participants who held a neutral opinion of the police.[3] Instead, most maintained their positive perspective and seemingly believed that the video displays of poor police behavior were misrepresentative or a result of the media's inappropriate focus on "bad apples." "Bad apples" are defined as the few officers that are problematic, prone to racism, and/or abuse their authority (Nhan, 2019). The officers featured in these videos are viewed as being an inaccurate depiction of police and therefore not a valid reason to change one's opinion. As one white student explained, "[Social media] won't have an effect on my opinion. Cops in general are good people but when they get reported on in the media, it focuses on one 'bad apple,' which exist, but there are way more good cops." Another white male stated the same, despite witnessing extreme violence:

> You can [see videos of] police officers giving CPR to little kids, to a police officer shooting a guy who turns out to be unarmed. Anytime somebody loses their life regardless of what the reason

> is, it's always unfortunate because that's someone son or
> daughter…[but] I try not to be too reactionary because one
> video can't change your whole mindset, it's sort of like the
> "bad apple" analogy.

These narratives indicate that videos shared on social media, even ones of intense violence, may not shift an individual's orientation toward police.

Instead, the participants that were minimally impacted by social media often described seeing social media that reflected or validated current attitudes toward police. This was found to be the case for participants who held positive and neutral opinions toward the police and also applied to a small number of cases of negative attitudes toward the police. This finding suggests that social media may be a mechanism for reinforcing attitudes already formed, especially among those who are more favorable toward police. As one white male who described himself as having neutral feelings toward the police stated, "I think [social media] does validate what I have to say because I see good videos of police, I also see police officers shooting unarmed individuals. I think that it validates how I already feel about police officers most of the time." Likewise, a white woman, who was generally supportive of the police, reflected on the impact of social media. While she admitted it expanded on her knowledge about police misconduct, it primarily reinforced her previously held opinions:

> I never thought about the possibility of there being a bad police
> officer until I saw it on social media, but I know that they are not
> all like that... [Social media] reaffirmed what I already knew. But
> after seeing all those brutal videos…I know there are "bad apples."

These findings suggest that social media may not have the ability to change opinions among some populations, including white individuals who are supportive of law enforcement. Given this is in opposition to what was the participants of color reported, this finding indicates that the impact of social media may be less impactful and less harmful for white youth when compared with young people of color.

Videos Can Shape Opinions: "Videos Impacted the Way I Think About Police"
For 8 of the 19 participants, videos of violent police behavior were described as contributing to their opinions of police and causing feelings of fear and distress. Among these eight, seven held unfavorable attitudes about police and all were participants of color. While not described as being the sole determinant for their attitudes, social media, and specifically videos of police violence, was explicitly mentioned as a contributing factor in how their perspectives and reactions toward police were formed.

For seven of these eight participants,[4] seeing negative videos, such as shootings and wrongful deaths, raised concerns of serious police misconduct, corruption, and racism, a lack of trust, and fear of victimization. One Latina believed that

officers have excessive power and when combined with racism can lead to "murder" or the unjustified killing of innocents:

> There was a video of a man that got shot at a gas station…he wasn't doing anything, he was just getting gas, when this cop came over, and…the guy in the driver's seat went into the glove department to get his driver's license, [and] when he reached down, the cop just shot him. [The officer] said that he thought [the victim] was getting a gun…even though he had asked him for the insurance stuff. It seemed senseless, and like he had no reason to even touch his gun. The guy had his hands up, it wasn't like he was rushing to get into the glove compartment. That just seemed completely harmless and straight up murder…. It's a system that's corrupt.

Likewise, one Latino male noted, "You don't ever see anything positive about the police on social media. Like what I see is always people like bashing them or videos of cops like over exercising their power." He specifically recalled one video that stood out most in his memory, commonly known as the "2015 Texas Pool Party" where Dajerria Becton, a 15-year-old Black female who was wearing a swimsuit, was violently restrained by a white police officer, corporal Eric Casebolt. This video contributed to his lack of trust in police, especially for white officers:

> I saw this video of these girls from Texas…they went to some pool party…it got shut down…and one of the cops put every single [youth of color] on the ground and he was on top of some girl and she was Black. For like five minutes with his knee on her neck and she wasn't even doing anything. She was just trying to have a conversation and ask him why he was doing what he was doing and he was going crazy on her…. I draw a difference between White police officers and minority police officers…. I just don't trust [White officers].

The Asian female in the study also referenced this video. She described how the graphic, racially motivated and disproportionate use of force on the frightened Black teenager caused her emotional distress:

> We watched this video…. It was like a pool party and Black people were invited to [the] party…. Someone called the cops [and] basically the cops came and made the Black people leave. This cop who was White, he was like middle aged, he was sitting on a young girl in her bikini restraining her. She was like half naked and scared. I started tearing up because she wasn't doing anything, she was just asking him to get off and he was just on her.

These negative videos highlighted, according to her, that officers "are not doing what they are supposed to be doing," and this was impactful because "you can see racism is real." Similarly, one Latino male felt these videos of extreme violence were so disturbing that they made him nauseous and influenced how he felt about the police:

> There was this one video where there was this White cop basically sitting on top of this Black guy…. [The officer] thought the Black guy was gonna take something out his pockets and [the officer] just started shooting him point blank in the chest. It's the most gruesome thing I've seen really. It's sick to me and I hate even thinking about it…. I see things on social media everyday really that's related to police and most of it is in a negative way.... These videos are important. We see 'em every day and they kind of shape our thinking.

Furthermore, several participants of color indicated that the videos resulted in fear of victimization. Three participants described witnessing videos of police misconduct against people of color and being afraid of the police for themselves or their relatives. For example, one Latina woman raised concerns of personal sexual victimization after learning about an officer allegedly targeting and raping women of color in her city:

> I think [news of police misconduct] does impact me when it is relative to my location. Like when I see stories or videos of cop interactions in [home state] or New York…. It is scary to me because it could potentially happen to me. There was this police officer in New York last year that was going around and raping women.... This was really frightening to me because he was targeting women of color.

Along similar lines, the Black woman, who noted that she had "seen a lot of [videos on] police brutality on minorities, specifically African Americans," stated that she was frightened on behalf of her male relatives after witnessing the footage of Eric Garner's arrest. In 2014, Eric Garner died when a New York Police Department officer, Daniel Panteleo, placed him in a chokehold during arrest despite Garner stating, "I can't breathe" 11 times. Garner died shortly thereafter as a result of the chokehold and his positioning during the altercation. The video of his detainment went viral and sparked protests, demonstrations, and "die-ins," where protestors simulate being dead, all over America. The Black female described the video:

> The police accused Eric Garner of selling cigarettes…he said he was not, and the police continued to arrest him anyway, even putting him in a chokehold, and he was not struggling or resisting at all until the police did that, and Eric Garner even

said to the police that he couldn't breathe while he was being held in a chokehold but the police still continued…. He started coughing and suffocating because of that.

She explained that it was profound because she could envision something like that happening to her family members, especially if they left the safety of their neighborhood:

[The] Eric Garner video... made me...feel unsafe. Not me specifically, but for my male relatives... God forbid my Dad or Grandpa goes outside of [urban hometown]. I would fear for their safety more than if they were [in urban hometown].

The Black male in the study echoed a similar concern after seeing the Sandra Bland video. Sandra Bland, a 28-year-old African American, was arrested during a pretext traffic stop. The arrest showed the officer threatening her with a taser and forcing her to the ground while she screamed. Sandra Bland died in custody by suicide via hanging. However, her cause of death was disputed and sparked nationwide protests. The young man noted that the video of her arrest made him scared that he would become a victim due to his race and the long history of tension between people of color and law enforcement:

It was a video on Sandra Bland [that had the biggest impression on me] and how she was a black teacher that got pulled over by a police officer and it got a little out of hand and she got arrested. While in jail for three days, she was found dead and it was so-called suicide…. This video made me feel fearful because it was someone of my own race that it happened to and with past history, people from my racial background don't have the best relationships with authorities.

These findings suggest that videos can not only impact perceptions of police but also cause negative emotional, physical, and mental reactions from viewers. Videos of police misconduct may be especially important among populations of color who may become fearful of being personally subjected to racially motivated police violence.

While videos of police behavior can contribute to one's holistic perception of police, it is important to note that there was a range of relative impacts. For some, the videos were deeply profound, like the Black female who found the negative videos so powerful she changed her previously held positive opinions about police:

I always had that positive image [of] and encounters with police officers, but knowing how history goes and what has been happening lately in the news, my opinion of the police has begun to lean more toward a negative light…. The more

negative encounters, like the ones I've seen on social media and the news have more of an impact on me and my opinion.

For others, although videos were important, the relative impact was described as less impactful than face-to-face encounters. Several participants (5 of the 19) directly indicated that their in-person interactions with police were more meaningful in shaping their opinions than what they witnessed on social media. This was especially so if the face-to-face encounters were negative, as was the case with four of the five participants. One Latino male stated, "We are always on social media so that's maybe where I get my feelings but most of it comes from my face-to-face encounters." This sentiment was echoed by several others as well, including another Latino male who stated, "I feel that my personal experiences are stronger influences, but social media does give you more information and brings awareness to issues around the world." Despite this, however, these findings suggest that videos of police behavior can shape opinions about law enforcement, although the relative impact may range from profoundly influential to somewhat influential. Further, the videos may be especially meaningful for individuals of color because they can raise concerns of police brutality, abuse of authority, racism, distrust, trauma, and fear of victimization.

Discussion

Reactions toward police derive from a complex mixture of identity, experience, and socialization. Consistent with extensive literature, the research conducted in this study shows that the influence of parents, friends, face-to-face encounters, vicarious experiences, and social media contributes to the development of young people's perspectives of law enforcement (see Brown & Benedict, 2002). In line with previous American studies, evidence shows that perspectives of police differ among racial and ethnic identities. The participants of color in this study, except those who had family in law enforcement, generally held negative views of police (Brunson, 2007; Gau & Brunson, 2007). These participants described disliking the police due to perceptions of them being racist, untrustworthy, and abusing their power (Fratello et al., 2013). On the contrary, white participants, except for the two that had particularly egregious face-to-face encounters, expressed more favorable opinions of law enforcement (Brown & Benedict, 2002). The white participants were generally appreciative of police officers' work and perceived them as good, hard working people. This research shows that race and ethnicity can impact perceptions of law enforcement (Brunson, 2007; Fiske, 1986; Gau & Brunson, 2007; Novich & Hunt, 2016), with Black participants more likely to have the most negative views, their white counterparts the most positive, and other ethnic identities falling in the middle (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Rosenbaum et al., 2005). While these findings support previous work, the examination of social media offers innovative evidence on how different populations synthesize police content shared through their social networks.

Although the research yielded limited gender discrepancies, possibly due to sample limitations, clear racial differences surfaced. Participants of all ethnoracial identities in the study referred to viral videos that they remembered seeing, indicating the ability of this content to reach different populations. However, a majority of the white participants indicated that social media had a limited impact on their perceptions of police and tended to rationalize videos of police misconduct by isolating these incidents to a few "bad apples" that do not represent the whole. Many white participants appeared to use positive social media to validate preexisting positive opinions, while dismissing negative content as biased or out of context. The content shared on social media did not seem to have a significant impact on the formation of white participants' attitudes toward police.

This was a stark contrast to the participants of color (Weitzer, 2002) who "decoded" trending police violence differently than their white counterparts (Fiske, 1986; Hall, 1980). The witnessing of AVB and/or TEO directly contributed to negative attitudes toward police and raised concerns of abuse of authority, distrust, and excessive use of power. These data suggest that negative videos can have detrimental consequences on perceived police legitimacy (Novich & Hunt, 2016; Tyler, 2006). This was the case even among those who had positive face-to-face encounters with police. This is significant because previous research has suggested that face-to-face encounters are most important when forming opinions of police (see Tyler, 2006). The research suggests that this may not always be the case among young people of color.

Moreover, the witnessing of AVB and TEO had serious negative consequences for participants of color. The findings suggest that the AVB and TEO may be a form of tech-facilitated abuse due to the emotional manipulation of viewers. Not only did several study participants easily recall memories of AVB and TEO, which is linked to acute stress (Clark et al., 2016), but also AVB and TEO engendered extreme distress (i.e., the viewer started crying), feelings of nauseated disgust, and anxiety – reactions associated with poor mental health (Feinstein et al., 2014; Holman et al., 2013). Further, the racially motivated police violence witnessed by participants was applied to real-world expectations whereby they personally identified with the victims and raised concerns of fear of victimization for themselves, family members, and/or friends (see Tynes et al., 2019). This contributed to heightened levels of stress and trauma (see Bryant-Davis et al., 2017; Tynes et al., 2019). These reactions may be further exacerbated given the "daily" frequency in which participants reported seeing AVB and TEO in their feeds (see Feinstein et al., 2014; Holman et al., 2013). Of additional concern is the widespread community consequences (Tynes et al., 2019). Given how readily shared AVB is among family and friends, which may be rationalized as a way of inspiring social awareness and a desire for justice, whenever it is forwarded the harm spreads and makes each person unknowingly complicit in disseminating technology-facilitated abuse.

The evidence in the present study indicates young people of color interpret shared content differently than their white counterparts. Young people of color are not only more sensitive to the material (Lim, 2015) but also raise more concerns of police legitimacy (Novich & Hunt, 2016) and experience greater levels

of trauma, fear, concerns of victimization, and anger (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017; Tynes et al., 2019). As such, this study highlights the need for police departments, especially those working with diverse populations, to implement workshops like procedural justice training which focus on establishing respect through courteous interpersonal treatment (Tyler, 2006). These practices may help reduce violent police behavior while simultaneously improving perceptions of legitimacy and relationships with young communities of color (Novich & Hunt, 2016).

Second, this research also demonstrates the need for police departments to take immediate action following the circulation of AVB videos in order to mitigate trauma, emotional distress, and concerns of victimization. This may come in the form of providing mental health support to the communities directly impacted and police leadership taking accountability for officer misconduct. This may be a critical way in which police can improve public support and acknowledge harm caused. Ultimately, this research has shown the disproportionate emotional and psychological impact of AVB showcasing police violence on young people of color. For a world constantly "logged on," therein lies a responsibility to recognize social media's influence on police-community relationships and its ability to enable widespread technologically facilitated abuse. Recognizing this responsibility is especially necessary in order to understand those who are inordinately impacted by viral content and calls to attention the critical need to put practices into place that mitigate the subsequent harm.

Notes

1. One white male described himself as "neutral" regarding his opinion about police and was not placed in either the positive or negative category.
2. One student reported seeing a video where the police were being disrespected. This was considered a negative police video. The other 10 described negative videos as police misconduct.
3. Two students of color who held negative opinions about police also indicated that social media had a limited impact on their perceptions of police. For one, as will be further discussed in detail, face-to-face encounters were more impactful than social media.
4. One Latino male noted how his opinion of police changed to be less negative and more neutral as a result of witnessing videos of officers engaging in positive and helpful behavior.

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