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# DO COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE DIFFER BY EDUCATION LEVEL AND MAJOR?

LASHANTI W. BROWN

88 Pages

Little is known about the impact that higher education has on students' perceptions of the police, especially with respect to justice education. This study examines perceptions of the police among college students at Illinois State University. It questions how differences in education levels, major, race, age, and gender affect student perceptions about the police. A 55-question online survey was administered to 451 students at Illinois State University.

Results revealed that those with more education did not have significantly different contact with police officers than those with less education however; they were significantly more likely to report negative attitudes towards the police. Significant differences were also noted across both race and gender. No significant differences were noted between criminal justice and non-criminal justice majors when examining contact with and attitudes towards the police.

Qualitative data was also gathered and supported the quantitative results finding that those with higher education levels displayed a more positive view and outlook of the police. Freshman expressed the most frustration when describing their opinions about the police and their encounters with the police. Criminal justice major participants expressed more favorable views of police than other majors. Future researchers should include a wider representation of respondents by gender, race, and academic level.

**KEYWORDS:** College students' perceptions; Justice Education; Public Perceptions; Police Legitimacy; Procedural Justice; Race

DO COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE DIFFER BY EDUCATION  
LEVEL AND MAJOR?

LASHANTI W. BROWN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Criminal Justice Sciences

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2019

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DO COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE DIFFER BY EDUCATION  
LEVEL AND MAJOR?

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### **Introduction and Background**

Today, crime has become a very common part of life, and it is likely that negative perceptions of the police can lead to ineffective communication between the police and the public. Effective/Ineffective communication plays a crucial role in crime solving and neighborhood police relations. Public perception influences public support, which is fundamental to the legitimacy of the police and their efforts to reduce crime (Tankebe, 2013). Successful communication between the public and the police is essential to effective policing and is important in influencing the public's perceptions of the police. Positive attitudes and successful communication from the community toward policing overall, may lead to a fruitful decrease in wrongdoing among the public and police alike (Ho, A. T. K., & Cho, W., 2017).

Tsoudis (2000) explains, “[r]esearch continues to show that the public holds misperceptions about crime and criminal justice. The media influences the public in many of these misperceptions, often shaping their beliefs and ideologies. Past research has shown that public perception plays a vital role in the criminal justice system. Nonetheless, it is the public that heavily influences the development of the criminal justice system” (p. 225). Researchers have pointed out several factors in the literature that predict the public's attitudes toward police. However, there is not much literature analyzing whether attaining a college education influences the different perceptions of police displayed among social and ethnic groups (Mbuba, 2010). Research also reveals that education may influence how citizens form attitudes and interpretations of the police, either by allowing them to reinterpret their past experiences or the experiences of others, or by guiding their evaluations of future direct and/or indirect experiences (Gallagher, C., Maguire, R. E., Mastrofski, D. S., & Reisig, D. M., 2001).

Higher education, specifically in the realm of criminal justice, gives criminal justice majors the opportunity to gain much more accurate knowledge about law enforcement than the general public (Tsoudis, 2000). Course materials, lectures, and/or discussions often include such topics as research on police conduct, citizens' satisfaction and beliefs regarding law enforcement, portrayals of police in the media and popular culture, and/or case studies of particularly heinous events, such as the beating of Rodney King (Gallagher et al., 2001). Historical accounts and personal experiences shared by other students during classroom discussions may facilitate indirect experiences and may act as second-hand knowledge for students (Gallagher et al., 2001). Students who hear accounts of personal experiences with the police by other classmates in the classroom setting can influence and shape student's perceptions of the police.

A review of the literature also indicates that race, age, and gender among other variables, have consistently been shown to affect attitudes toward the police. "Research has demonstrated the salience of minority status in understanding racial and ethnic differences in perceptions of the police. This research has overwhelmingly shown that Blacks and Latinos hold lower levels of trust and confidence in the police than do Whites and other racial minorities. The increased skepticism of the police expressed by minority citizens is commonly associated with racial profiling and documented racial disparities in police behavior" (Cochran & Warren, 2012; p. 206).

Trust and confidence in the police has been found in the literature to be more fragile among young people than adults. Young people tend to engage in outdoor activities, socialize with their peers outdoors and engage in risky behaviors more frequently than adults. This increases their chances of coming into contact with the police and having conflict with the police, which puts them at a greater risk for negative experiences of policing (Sindall, K.,

McCarthy, D. J., & Brunton-Smith, I., 2017) However, in today's society it is illegal for police officers to blatantly discriminate based on race, age, gender or any other characteristic of an individual. Despite this, discrimination still occurs in many indirect and direct ways primarily towards minorities who are at a disadvantage in society due to the inequality they continue to experience (Feinstein, 2015).

Although research has observationally shown the impact of race, age, and gender on the general population's impression of the police, few examinations have investigated the crossing point of higher education attainment, and more importantly, type of higher education in shaping students' perceptions and evaluations of police encounters (Cochran & Warren, 2012). Student perceptions are important in social science research for two reasons. First, college students who study criminal justice will be future leaders and practitioners within the criminal justice field. The knowledge and training that criminal justice students obtain from universities can give justice educators a better understanding of what students' point of view will be and the decisions they will likely make once employed in the criminal justice field (Miller, A. J., Tewksbury, R., & Hensley, C., 2004; Miller, 2001). Second, learning more about the differences in police perceptions among college students who also play a vital role in public support, can potentially aid in public trust and effective policing. Trust and confidence in the police is more fragile among young people than older citizens (Sindall et al., 2017).

Building trust among college students may produce positive attitudes about the police, which can potentially lead to increased public confidence. Confidence in the police can produce positive perceptions of the police and essentially lead to better community and police relations. Research reveals that public trust can lead to the police and the public working together. When the public believes and has faith in the police, they can effectively do their job policing

communities and are respected as authority figures. When the public does not view the police as legitimate, communities are non-cooperative and unwilling to help or work with the police (Lunney, 2015).

Public cooperation is a fundamental element police depend on to successfully police communities. Gaining the public's confidence is crucial in order for police officers to achieve public safety. "The fate of millions of people, indeed the future of the Black community itself, may depend on the willingness of those who care about racial justice to re-examine their basic assumptions about the role of the criminal justice system in our society" (Alexander, 2012, p. 16). Thus, if students are going to become educated in criminal justice and seek justice related courses as a viable option in their desires to enter a law enforcement career, there must be extensive research examining criminal justice students in comparison to non-criminal justice students' perceptions of policing. This study will help educators and scholars at Illinois State University, as well as similar universities, gain a better understanding of the potential effects these perceptions may have on policing and students' decisions once employed in the criminal justice field. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact that higher education, specifically justice education, has on students' perceptions of the police, focusing on amount of education and type of education as well as race, age, and gender.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the research literature on public opinion of the police and the role of procedural justice in contemporary America. This section will then be followed by an examination of justice education and the impact it has on students' perceptions of the police. Next, race, age, and gender are discussed in relation to the impact they have on public perception of policing. Thereafter, the methodology of this study is discussed.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Review of the Literature

#### *Perception and the Police*

Perception is an interpretation of a specific topic or phenomenon that is deemed reality. Perception is the ability for individuals to relate to everything around them and see the world by internalizing and understanding everything they have experienced. According to Hoffman (2018), perception is the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through information produced by the human mind and senses. It is a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting things and situations from the outside world through mental interpretation. This interpretation is deemed reality and guides human behavior that is necessary for survival.

Perceptions vary from person to person. Similar situations may have different meaning to different people. What may mean one thing to one person may mean something entirely different to another person. Perceptions generally change with time, age, experience, and sometimes education (Furberg, 2010; Marshall, 2014). Perceptions are important because people's behaviors are based on their perception of reality.

Perceptions play a major role in policing. The public's perceptions of the police can sometimes influence how people are policed, how people respond to the police, and how people feel about the police. "Personal interactions with the police have the strongest impact on the public's perceptions about the police. People form opinions of the police based on their own interactions with them or the experiences they hear from trusted friends and family, which as a result leads to these perceptions" (Philpott, 2016, p. 107). Society is more concerned with how the police treat and interact with people than the overall outcome of the interaction. Research shows that even when given a speeding ticket, people are more likely to see the police in a

positive light if the officer they have encountered shows them respect and treats them fairly. Research also shows that the demeanor and actions of an officer during these encounters influences the public's perceptions of police legitimacy. Citizens are more likely to respond to officers in a respectful manner if officers show them respect (Philpott, 2016).

When individuals feel as though they have been wronged or treated inadequately by the police they tend to react and act negatively towards the police. For instance, when discipline is conveyed unreasonably, shamefully or potentially excessively, it prompts pessimism about the law, and can add to outrage and non-compliance (Desmond, M., Papachristos, A. V., & Kirk, D. S., 2016). When officers are disrespectful toward citizens, citizens become more disrespectful and less likely to follow officers' orders (Papachristos, A. V., Meares, T. L., & Fagan, J., 2012).

Several predictors of public confidence in the police have been introduced in the literature, with race emerging as a prominent factor (Lee & Gibbs, 2015). Research has demonstrated that minorities are more likely than whites to see police with suspicion, doubt, and distrust. Minorities report that the police unfairly single them out due to their race or ethnicity. Furthermore, studies about public confidence and trust in the police find a gap between levels of trust among minorities and the majority population (Horowitz, 2007). Fratello, J., Rengifo, A. F., and Trone, J., (2013), using surveys of adolescents, found that 50% of the sample believed that the police are not trusted by most people in their neighborhoods, and only 40% of participants revealed that as a victim they would be open to reporting the crime to the police. Brown and Benedict (2003), in a meta-analysis of 100 prior studies conducted on the public's attitudes toward police, found that race, age, contact with police, and neighborhood were significant predictors of the public's attitudes toward police.

Minorities frequently have been found to display negative perceptions and feelings about the police in comparison to other groups. As a result, these perceptions have created low public trust and confidence in law enforcement officials. In particular, members of minority groups have lower confidence in the police than Whites, even in cities where the police are predominantly minorities (Weitzer, R., Tuch, S. A., & Skogan, W. G., 2008). Research has consistently shown that African Americans are less satisfied with the police than Whites (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Huebner, B. M., Schafer, J. A., & Bynum, T. S., 2004). Huggins (2012) found that African Americans and Latinos have lower levels of confidence and trust in the police compared to Whites. Racial profiling and racial disparities in police behavior may cause minorities to be less trusting of the police (Cochran & Warren, 2012). Huggins (2012) also noted that Whites in comparison to African Americans are more likely to report appropriate police conduct. Individuals who have low confidence and trust in the police are much more likely to avoid and or distance themselves from law enforcement officials by all means necessary, particularly African Americans who are especially mistrustful of the police.

Hooks (1993; p1) stated, “There is a sour relationship between the police and the African-American community, the best interests of the two are jeopardized, from the perspective of officers sworn duty to uphold the law and to keep the peace, and from the standpoint of the community’s desire for safety and freedom from fear. The two need to work together”. A report about police and minorities prepared for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) also contends that a wall of mistrust exists between the police and the African American community with each party holding such negative perceptions of the other that the relationship between the two has been seriously eroded (NAACP, 2018).



With the police, there is an attitude of us versus them, which parallels a growing feeling in the Black community that the police regard all community members as either criminals or potential criminals (Rome, D. M., In Soo, S., & Davis, M. S., 1995). For example, in an early study conducted by Black and Reiss (1967), they maintained that police frequently have prejudiced or stereotypical attitudes and beliefs toward minority group members. Unfortunately, racial, ethnic, and class factors can influence the ways in which both police and citizens perceive one another. The crimes they can most readily detect and are expected to detect are mainly street crimes, which are disproportionately committed by the poor and by members of racial and ethnic minority groups. This may lead to a situation in which criminal stereotypes of certain class and ethnic groups easily develop (Rome et al., 1995).

In essence, negative experiences with police officials are more likely to have a negative impact on any individual regardless of color, race, class, or ethnicity and can possibly shape an individual's overall perception of the police in general. These perceptions can potentially create biases that may be intentional or unintentional toward law enforcement officials and citizens alike. These biases can also affect how the police and the public interact with one another. It is important to learn more about the differences in police perceptions among college students who also play a vital role in public support, which can potentially aid in public safety and effective policing. Maintaining strong and healthy relationships between the public and the police can lead to public trust and confidence. Public perception is a crucial element in the world of policing and in the area of criminal justice in general. Essentially, it can either create tension or produce harmony within police interactions (Nalla & Madan, 2012; Tyler, 2005; Brown & Benedict, 2002).

### *Procedural Justice, Police Legitimacy, and Public Trust*

Police officials have realized that to be effective in their policing duties, in the communities they serve they must first gain the public's trust and confidence. Over the years, there has been conflict and tension between police officers and the communities they serve. Reformers have tried different approaches to strengthen and rebuild police and community relations (Rosenbaum, D. P., Schuck, A. M., Costello, S. K., Hawkins, D. F., & Ring, M. K., 2005). Philpott (2016), states that, "Procedural justice is the idea of fairness in the processes that resolve disputes and allocate resources. It focuses on respect, legitimacy, and the concept of fairness in interactions between law enforcement and the community. Procedural justice is the notion that a process is fair and that people have the opportunity to be heard, are treated politely and respectfully, and are judged by a neutral system free of bias" (p. 107).

To explain further, procedural justice is guided by how police and other law enforcement officials treat people. Police interactions with the public can shape their perceptions of the police and their willingness to comply with the law, which can have a significant impact on public safety (Procedural Justice, 2018). Procedural justice plays an important role in whether or not citizens will comply with the police (Haas, N. E., Van Craen, M., Skogan, W. G., & Fleitas, D. M., 2015). "People who perceive that they received "procedural justice" are also likely to perceive the police as legitimate and trustworthy and are likely to comply in the future" (Philpott, 2016; p. 107). People are more likely to accept penalties and sanctions given by the police against their own judgment if they believe that the officer was legitimate and fair (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). The police's ability to control crime efficiently is deeply connected to the public's trust and confidence in the police (Saarikkomäki, 2017). Procedurally just behavior produces

cooperation and trust in the police. The public's willingness to comply with the police and obey the law is rooted around if they believe the police have good intentions (Van Craen, 2016).

Rosenbaum et al., (2015), conducted a randomized control trial (RCT) in three cities of different size and diversity, measuring public satisfaction and procedural justice during police citizen encounters as well as police effectiveness and legitimacy. The population size varied from less than 20,000 to more than 500,000, with the percent minority ranging from less than 20% to more than 50%. Results indicated that racial/ethnic minorities and younger individuals were less happy with their police contact and that procedural justice was a positive indicator of public satisfaction with the contact experience (Rosenbaum et al., 2015). Fair treatment and fair decision making from police officials promotes public cooperation (Bradford, B., Quinton, P., Myhill, A., & Porter, G., 2014; Roberts & Herrington, 2013). When people perceive that they have been treated fairly by the police they are more likely to comply with police officials' commands and obey the law (Hough, M., Jackson, J., Bradford, B., Myhill, A., & Quinton, P., 2010). Procedurally just policing is important to the progress of positive attitudes among police and the community and is firmly connected to the public's perceptions of policing (Procedural Justice, 2018).

### *Police Legitimacy, and Public Compliance*

The public's perceptions about the lawfulness and legitimacy of the police are an imperative model for judging policing in a fair society. Legality implies that police consent to established, statutory and proficient standards. Legitimacy is connected to the public's conviction about the police and its readiness to acknowledge police authority (Procedural Justice, 2018).

Police work relies on the public's support and cooperation, particularly in democratic societies

where officers must 'earn' legitimacy and trust for their actions from citizens (Kaarianien, 2007). Public distrust of the police can hinder the police capacity to control wrongdoing, decrease police adequacy and, therefore, increase public doubt of the police, which is extremely important on a college campus (Lovell, 2003). Research studies have suggested that legitimacy influences compliance with the law, the willingness to cooperate with legal authorities, such as police officers and judges, and the willingness to accept the decisions made by legal authorities (Tyler & Huo, 2001). Research reveals that when people have experiences with the police that are led in a way in which police officers are seen as reasonable, just and proportionate, these encounters tend to fortify the legitimacy of the law, and can add to consistence and desistance (Tyler, T. R., Fagan, J., & Geller, A., 2014).

Legitimacy is the divider between police officer's ability to enforce the law and the public's willingness to comply with the law. Research has also shown that people who see the police as fair are more likely to perceive them as legitimate (Gau & Brunson, 2015). To explain further, when communities see police as legitimate, they are more likely to comply with the law and work with the police to fight crime (Procedural Justice, 2018). However, weak legitimacy encourages defiance and resistance and can also increase the risk of violence between citizens and the police in both directions (Rosenbaum et al., 2015). Low legitimacy can contribute to high violent crime rates due to public doubt of the police. Negative attitudes towards law enforcement may create an environment supportive of seeking street justice opposed to getting help from the police. Failed legitimacy causes people to handle their problems privately instead of relying on the police to solve it for them (Gau & Brunson, 2015).

To police officer's, police legitimacy may seem less relevant in the line of police duties and more relevant in the area of academics. However, research shows that when the police lack

legitimacy, citizens are more willing to file complaints and less willing to comply with and obey officers' commands (Rosenbaum et al., 2015).

Public cooperation and procedural justice with law enforcement officials have also been found to be beneficial in other countries. Experimental work in Australia has demonstrated that incorporating procedural justice in officer training can significantly improve citizens' views of their encounters with the police and can increase their trust in the police (Mazerolle, L., Bennett, S., Davis, J., Sargeant, E., & Manning, M., 2013). In an exploratory study examining citizens' perceptions of police community relationships in India, Nalla and Madan (2012) found that citizens who are generally satisfied with police like to work with police and view police community relationships positively. Additionally, it was also revealed that those who feel police are fair in dealing with citizens, irrespective of social status, and those who feel safer in their communities are those who are most willing to work with police. In another study conducted in New York, looking at public trust and its relation to the public's willingness to cooperate with the police, Tyler (2005) revealed that trust impacts whether or not the public willingly cooperates with the police.

In essence, public mistrust of the police has severe consequences and police can potentially lose their capability to effectively police the communities they work in. Building strong and healthy relationships among the police and students who are a part of the public can build public confidence and trust. These factors can enhance police effectiveness and the legitimacy of the police making for police policy that is fair and unbiased.

### *The Role of Justice Education on Public Perception of the Police*

In a “rule of law” society, it has been suggested that justice education has become quite popular and as a result has increased the public’s perceptions on the legitimacy of criminal justice (Hawk-Tourtlot, S. R., & Bradley-Engen, M. S., 2012). In higher education institutions, students learn from the formal education system but can also learn about the criminal justice system through their own personal experiences, other experiences, and/or coverage in the media (Miller, et al., 2004). It has been revealed in the literature that justice related education has consistently been a significant predictor of positive perceptions of police (Hawk et al., 2012). Students majoring in criminal justice in comparison to non-criminal justice majors have been found to display significantly higher levels of positive attitudes toward accepting authority, (Berenger & Lord, 2004) valuing rules, and sanctions given by police (Mackey & Courtright, 2000). Conser and Russell (2000) found that students who have an interest in law enforcement and desire a career in the criminal justice field highly value integrity and trustworthiness.

However, despite these findings the majority of justice education studies have focused exclusively on justice professionals’ education and their job satisfaction (Hawk et al., 2012). Only recently has research begun to examine the potential impact of justice education on college students’ perceptions of the police (Sethuraju, R., Sole, J., Oliver, B. E., & Prew, P., 2017). Another gap in the literature is the lack of research on what impact, if any, academic major has on college students’ perceptions of the police. More specifically, whether differences in perceptions exist among students majoring in law enforcement, criminal justice, and other disciplines (Sethuraju et al., 2017). While we are aware of the benefit that justice education may have for those who work in the justice system, studies have yet to examine the potential impact of justice education on the public’s perceptions of the police, specifically amongst college

students, who differ in major and levels of education (Hawk et al., 2012).

In higher education institutions, a great emphasis is placed on preparing students for their chosen career paths. Justice educators expect that students who become educated in criminal justice will have a more knowledge on the issues, challenges, strengths, and limitations of policing and police-related research than the general public, who typically do not possess such knowledge (Miller et al., 2004; Hawk et al., 2012). As professionals, and educators of criminal justice, instructors are responsible for providing students with the knowledge to understand crime and the criminals who commit them (Miller et al., 2004). It is implied that students will use the information that they obtain from justice related courses as a guide when they are forming general perceptions about procedural justice. Students' criminal justice education may be a source of reference in their encounters with the police and their evaluations of procedural justice (Hawk et al., 2012).

In a study conducted by Wu, (2010) using survey data from over 800 college students in China and the U.S., Chinese and American college students were compared and contrasted in regard to their global satisfaction with the police and specific evaluations of police demeanor, integrity, and effectiveness. Three groups of predictors, including demographic characteristics, crime and criminal justice experiences, and locality were used to explain these perceptions (Wu, 2010). Chinese undergraduates majoring in liberal arts or social sciences viewed the police to be less empathetic and displayed more favorable attitudes towards officer demeanor and police integrity than American undergrads majoring in science, engineering, or business. When comparing the two countries, media consumption and school major had significant impact on crime and students' perception of the police (Wu, 2010).

Bias, or inaccurate media coverage on justice related issues, has been found in the

literature to lead to misperceptions about crime and law enforcement (Miller et al., 2004). Excessive exposure to media content covering police misconduct can have a negative impact on students' satisfaction with the police and perceptions of the police (Wu, 2010). Thus, it is important to educate students majoring in criminal justice on all facets of criminal justice issues as they will likely go on to become future practitioners and leaders in the criminal justice field (Miller et al., 2004).

### *The Effects of Media on College Students Perceptions*

University students, regardless of major or education level (i.e. freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors), generally have major misconceptions about crime and law enforcement. Class material and structure in higher education criminal justice/criminology programs has not been found to lead to increased levels of knowledge about crime and criminal justice among college students (Miller et al., 2004). Misconceptions about crime and law enforcement often times are formed by the public's mass consumption of media. Print media such as crime books, newspapers, magazines, online media (e.g., Facebook), and mass media such as crime themed movies, crime themed reality shows (e.g., COPS) and local news coverage channels, saturates the public with information about crime and justice (Miller et al., 2004).

Media saturation of crime and justice can sometimes lead to exaggerated coverage of crime and make it hard for the public to differentiate between myths and reality. Misunderstanding about criminal justice agencies as it relates to the culture, structure, activities and interactions further exacerbate the public's misconceptions about crime and law enforcement (Miller et al., 2004). Researchers have found that excessive media coverage and misinformation on correctional institutions have contributed to the public's misunderstandings of this system.



The media tends to portray these institutions in a negative light by over dramatizing the violence, corruption and severe levels of disorganization within these institutions (O'Sullivan, 2001; Rafter, 2000).

Negative depictions of crime and law enforcement in the media can cause the public, specifically college students, to lack accurate knowledge about the prevalence of criminal justice issues and the rate in which they occur. Actual knowledge is lost and in turn, myths, misunderstandings and negative perceptions about the structure and functioning of the criminal justice system are perpetuated (Miller et al., 2004). It is important to know whether college students, especially students majoring in criminal justice, have an accurate understanding of law enforcement, crime, and the criminal justice system (Miller et al., 2004). As educated individuals in the area of criminal justice, many of these students will go on to be future leaders and have careers as practitioners in the criminal justice field. In light of this fact, it is important that students' understanding on the realities of the justice system's structure and operations reflect the true scope of police and crime and are not based on myths or misinformation (Miller et al., 2004).

#### *Indirect Educational Experiences and Its Relation to College Students' Perceptions of Police*

Criminal justice programs equip students entering the field of law enforcement with the proper training and education (Miller et al., 2004). Criminal justice programs prepare students for various career options within the criminal justice field. The mission is to equip students with critical thinking skills and knowledge to become successful in this field (Miller et al., 2004). Higher education often looks at the number of years it takes students to obtain a college degree, while disregarding inconsistencies that may appear within the type of education that students

pursue and whether education is relevant to police interactions (Hawk et al., 2012). Studies currently do not differentiate among types of college courses taken, specifically whether classes completed involve issues related to policing, or examine the potential effects that justice related courses may have on college students' perceptions of policing (Hawk et al., 2012).

In contrast, Sethuraju et al., (2017), found that academic major has a substantial impact on college students' perceptions about police misconduct. Furthermore, students majoring and double majoring in law enforcement and criminal justice are significantly less likely to perceive that officers engage in police misconduct than students majoring outside of law enforcement and criminal justice (Sethuraju et al., 2017). Rossler, Scheer, and Suttmoeller also found that CJ majors have greater overall respect for the police (Rossler et al., 2018). This study evaluated black and African-American criminal justice students to see if their perceptions of barriers to a police patrol career differ from white students, in addition to seeing if their perceptions of these barriers impact their desire to enter a police patrol career. A self-administered survey was given to over 630 undergraduate students enrolled in criminal justice classes across five different public universities. The findings of this study revealed that African-American students differ significantly from white students in their perceptions of patrol careers, respect for police and perceptions of whether the police engage in racial profiling. African American students' perceptions displayed a significant indirect relationship, which indicated that black and African-American students have lower interests for a patrol career than all other races.

However, researchers have yet to fully examine whether police-related education has an influence on college students' perceptions of policing. Negative or positive perceptions can severely impact students' educational experience and their satisfaction with the police (Hawk et

al., 2012). Information revealed to students in their criminal justice/policing courses may affect students' satisfaction with the police and alter their perceptions on procedural justice related issues. Individuals who obtain a college degree may have a different understanding of the justice system and policing related issues (Hawk et al., 2012). Miller (2001) contends that students who receive inaccurate information from criminal justice faculty members and textbook authors on students' perception of crime are more likely to take these misconceptions into the criminal justice field.

It is expected that criminal justice educators (hopefully) increase students' knowledge about the justice system (and more specifically in this case, law enforcement). What students learn about policing and the justice system during their time frame in college may cause them to think differently about the police (Hawk et al., 2012). Readings and lectures can provide indirect experience for students who have not had any direct experiences with the police. Public perception of the police is influenced by personal and indirect experiences such as encounters with the police experienced by others (Hawk et al., 2012). When criminal justice majors are misinformed and have misconceptions about crime and law enforcement in the United States, students are more likely to disregard facts and believe myths broadcasted in the media. These misconceptions can affect students' choices and decisions once employed in the criminal justice field (Miller, 2001).

Research finds that encounters with the police experienced by other individuals whether it is a family member, friend, or stranger increases negative perceptions of the police among the public as it relates to improper police behavior. These negative perceptions can cause individuals to exhibit hostile behavior and lack trust in the police (Browning, S. L., Cullen, F. T., Cao, L., & Kopache, R., 1994, Brunson, 2007, Warren, 2010). Weitzer & Tuch (2005, 2006) found that

content displayed on social media as it relates to personal and indirect experiences of police misconduct can influence the public's attitudes toward police racial bias (Hawk et al., 2012).

Obtaining higher education can potentially influence the public and students' perceptions of the police. Justice related content covered in policing/criminal justice related courses may cause students to relive police encounters experienced by others or personal experiences of their own. College education may be a source of reference for students when judging indirect and/or future direct experiences (Hawk et al., 2012). Higher education attainment in criminal justice and policing can alter students' perceptions about policing and cause them to reinterpret previous encounters with the police based on the information provided in class. Knowledge about policing, and the justice system in general, can influence how students interpret police behavior in the future and whether individuals received appropriate and legitimate treatment (Hawk et al., 2012).

Rosenbaum, Schuck, Costello, Hawkins, and Ring (2005) held that indirect negative experiences are connected with more negative perceptions of the police. Schuck, Rosenbaum, and Hawkins (2008) had similar findings reporting that a significant relationship exists between indirect negative experiences and negative attitudes towards the police. Furthermore, Wu et al. (2009) found that individuals, who had an indirect negative experience with the police involving harassment, displayed significantly lower levels of police satisfaction. When students are confident in the police they are less likely to feel unsafe and the need to protect themselves is lessened. When perceptions of the police are questionable, students are more likely to take action, including obtaining a weapon, and less likely to support the police and their initiatives to improve safety (Schafer, J. A., Lee, C., Burruss, G. W., & Giblin, M. J., 2018).

Overall, policing education can affect students' perceptions of the police and influence

their judgments on procedural justice related encounters. The more justice education students have the more likely it may affect their perceptions of the police. This in turn, can have a significant impact on community and police relations, leading to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with police (Hawk et al., 2012).

### *Race and Age as Mitigating Factors*

Police officers are generally the first individuals people encounter when coming into contact with the criminal justice system. The decisions made at this initial point are crucial to the experiences of the public, for both adolescents and adults. Not only do police interactions determine whether individuals will be processed further through the criminal justice system, but they also shape the public's perceptions of police and their own relationship to society (Feinstein, 2015). Feinstein (2015) points out, "the frequency of police interactions alone influences perceptions of the police force. Furthermore, the substantial amount of discretion police officers possess greatly influences these interactions and creates an opportunity for discrimination to occur at this critical point of contact, which could be even more detrimental to the outcomes and perceptions of the public" (p. 160).

Research has consistently shown that race, and personal experiences with racial profiling, has long been a strong and consistent predictor of attitude toward the police (Weitzer, 1999, Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). Lewis (2016) examined differences between Black and White college students' attitudes towards the police, reporting disparities between Black college students and White college students' attitudes toward the police. Results indicated that community and police relations' need improvement, specifically as it relates to officers' interactions and conduct with the minority population (Lewis, 2016). Racial discrimination and personal experiences "can have

lasting, adverse effects on individuals' perceptions of the police" (Sweitzer & Touch, 2002, p. 452). Historically, the relationship between minorities and the police has been challenging, as Howell, S. E., Perry, H. L., and Vile, M., (2004) explain: "Fluctuating from being mildly strained to openly confrontational" (p. 45). In a meta-analysis of 92 studies looking at minorities' perceptions of police, researchers found that minorities were more likely than whites to hold negative perceptions and attitudes toward the police. Hispanics were more likely to have more positive views of the police than blacks but when compared to whites they had more negative views (Peck, 2015). In another study utilizing a survey of 1,480 ethnic minority group members testing to see if detachment from the police affects procedural justice and minorities' perceptions of police legitimacy, researchers found that minority groups express detachment from the police and are less likely to perceive the police as legitimate (Madan, N. S., Murphy, K., & Sargeant, E., 2017).

Furthermore, police officers have been found to patrol in areas that primarily consist of minorities creating a higher chance of police interaction (Mbuba, 2010). In a study looking at the differences in arrests during adolescence and young adulthood among Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics in the United States, the findings revealed that blacks had a significantly higher likelihood of being arrested compared to whites. Neighborhood composition (the percent of white residents in the neighborhood) was the primary driver of racial/ethnic differences in arrests (Gase, L. N., Glenn, B. A., Gomez, L. M., Kuo, T., Inkelas, M., & Ponce, N. A., 2016). Indirect experiences with police can also play a role in how certain races view the police.

Rosenbaum et al. (2005) conducted a survey that was distributed to African American, Hispanic, and White adults residing in Chicago. This survey looked at their attitudes toward police both before and after their personal and indirect experiences with the police. The goal of

this study was to determine if a correlation existed between participants' direct and indirect experiences with the police and their perceptions of the police (Rosenbaum et al., 2005). The results of this study revealed that over the time frame of a year, participants' direct experiences with the police did not have an impact on their perceptions of the police. However, indirect experiences such as incidents experienced by a family or friend or incidents broadcasted in the media, did have an impact on participants' perceptions of the police. African Americans displayed the greatest results for negative indirect experiences (Rosenbaum et al., 2005). Race is thought to define the nature of the relationship between the police and the African American community. Specifically, this relationship is often characterized by a constant pattern of verbal abuse and harassment, often escalating to physical abuse (Rome et al., 1995).

In an empirical analysis exploring the racial differences in police use of force, the data revealed that Blacks had a higher likelihood of force being used on them compared to whites. When compared to Whites, Blacks were three times more likely to report use of force by police compared to Hispanics who were 2.6 times more likely to report use of force by an officer. The results of this analysis further revealed that blacks were 53% more likely to experience any type of force used by police compared to whites who were 15.3% to experience any use of force (Fryer, 2016). Likewise, ethnicity, with reference to subgroups that have common cultural heritage, customs, and in some instances language, also plays an important role in how the police are viewed in the eyes of the public (Chow, 2002). For example, a spate of police shootings and brutal beatings of Latinos over the past few years, have triggered major unrest in America's largest cities. Race and ethnicity play an important role in public perception of policing in the United States and the focus of race is not fading away. Nor does it only impact the African American community (Rome, et al., 1995).

Over a wide range, research demonstrates that minorities in general express negative views toward the police but within minority groups there are notable contradictions among these groups concerning the police (Avdija, 2010). That is, certain ethnic communities express more positive or negative states of mind toward the police (Madon, et al., 2017). For instance, Hispanics, Asians, and African Americans all show inconsistencies with respect to their demeanors toward the police (Avdija, 2010). In this context, research shows that Hispanics and Asians tend to have positive attitudes toward the police when compared to African Americans (Chow, 2002). Differences in perceptions among college students have also been noted to differ by race. Mbuba (2010) revealed that race had a major influence on four-year university students' attitudes toward the police reporting that minority students showed less positive attitudes toward the police in comparison to white college students. Belonging to a specific ethnicity or race has an effect on the characteristics of an individual (Sidanius, J., Sinclair, S., & Pratto, F. 2006). White Americans see retribution and policing strategies as a tool in the enactment of justice, however, for Black Americans these strategies and tactics are simply another example of the state's attempts to discriminate against and control members of their community (Mallicoat & Brown, 2008).

Scholars researching the group dominance perspective have suggested that officers who distribute severe penalties for disobeying the law may have an intense desire to maintain dominance and control over certain social groups through the use of unequal treatment (Sidanius et al., 2006). Differences in social histories and contemporary circumstances of Black and White Americans sheds light on the reason these two groups differ not only in their attitudes toward police but also in their perceptions of the criminal justice system as a whole (Mallicoat & Brown, 2008). Whites are more inclined to focus their attention on the actions of individual criminals



and to support or oppose retribution based on whether the individual engages or has engaged in criminal behavior. Whites also tend to have a heightened belief that African Americans are lazy, irresponsible, devoid of culture, and, ultimately, criminally dangerous which increases their support for retribution (Mallicoat & Brown, 2008). In a study conducted by Baker et al. (2005) the researchers found that White college students believed that revenge was a 'right' given to society for wrongdoings committed by criminals and that society has a right to seek revenge.

White students also believed that capital punishment was a justified method for making society whole again because it is a life for a life and they also believed capital punishment maintains the law and order in society. Black college students on the other hand, felt that capital punishment was cruel, led to more violence (i.e., the brutalization effect), and believed that those selected are likely to be an innocent person who was mistakenly executed (Baker, D. N., Lambert, E. G., & Jenkins, M., 2005). In summary, race can influence the public's perception of the police. The public's perception is important to policing, as mentioned earlier public perception of the police can often times influence how individuals respond to the police, how they feel about the police, and how they are policed. Diversity within different races and ethnic groups can lead to diversity in public opinions and public support.

### *Youth, Gender, and Policing*

Like race, age and gender can also influence the public's perceptions of the police. "It has been widely recognized that trust and confidence in the police is more fragile among young people than adults. This has been explained with reference to young people's greater use of public space and heightened contact and conflict with the police, including negative experiences of policing" (Sindall, et al., 2017, p. 1). Most recent statistics have revealed that males come in

contact with the police at a much higher rate than females. Males are also more likely to be searched when stopped by an officer than females. Young black males, in particular between the ages 16 and 29, are more likely to experience contact with a police officer that results in use of force or the threat of use of force (Eith & Durose, 2011). “Today, it is no longer acceptable to blatantly discriminate based on race in any sector of society, including the criminal and juvenile justice systems, however, discrimination still occurs in many subtle and sometimes overt ways, which reinforces the disadvantaged status of minorities by perpetuating the inequality they experience” (Feinstein, 2015; p. 160). However, when compared with adults, young people’s attitudes towards the police tend to be more negative with the levels of negativity increasing during the latter teenage years (Fagan & Piquero, 2007).

Fagan and Piquero (2007) find that the quality of youths’ interactions with the police influences their legitimacy. Young people are more likely to trust the police if they have a positive experience with the police. Research suggests that teenagers have less-favorable attitudes towards the police and African-American youths have more negative attitudes than white youths (Flexon, J. L., Lurigio, A. J., & Greenleaf, R. G., 2009; Hurst, Y. G., Frank, J., & Lee Browning, S., 2000; Skogan, 2006). Teenagers are more likely to come into contact with the police than adults. These encounters can influence teenagers’ beliefs about the police (Brunson, 2007).

Using survey data collected from 513 adolescents and 2611 adults, Murphy (2015) found that procedural justice is more important to youth than adults. He argued that young people have a higher chance of encountering the police than adults, are more suspicious of police than adults and perceive police as a threat to their independence, all of which makes young people more sensitive to policing than adults. Dirikx, A., Gelders, D., & Parmentier, S., (2012) used focus

group interviews to study young people's attitudes towards the police and the findings revealed that young people's perceptions of the police are centered around the fair treatment of citizens and police officers' behaviors. One bad experience can influence how young people view the police. Contact is again important, Black and other minority youth have been found to have frequent contact with the police, causing them to distrust the police (Crutchfield, R. D., Skinner, M. L., Haggerty, K. P., McGlynn, A., & Catalano, R. F., 2012).

Disparities in stop and search procedures among young male minorities have been documented in the literature and have resulted in broken trust between some communities and the police (Bowling & Phillips, 2007). In a study examining the differences in police perceptions among African American and Latino students it was revealed that African Americans and Latinos who had been stopped and disrespected by the police were less willing to assist police and less likely to respect them (Lurigio, A. J., Greenleaf, R. G., & Flexon, J. L., 2009). Indirect contact with the police also has an impact on teenagers' perceptions of the police. In a school survey conducted on teenagers Hurst et al. (2000) found that "hearing and seeing police misconduct exerted the greatest effect on perceptions of policing" (p. 49). A survey examining citizens' satisfaction with local police in the post Ferguson Era suggested that overall satisfaction with the police and perceptions about police shape's an individual's attitudes towards the American police. Individual attitudes were the strongest predictor of satisfaction with the local police (Hendricks, A., Kelley, J., Gordon, P., & Foley, A., 2015). As adolescents begin to mingle more with their friends outdoors and out of reach of their parent's authority, the likelihood of adolescents experiencing negative contact with the police increases. Both negative and positive experiences with the police can influence young adults' perceptions of the police (McAra & McVie, 2005). The objective of this research is to examine the impact that higher education,

specifically justice education, has on students' perceptions of the police. This research aims to see if students with justice education will view police more favorably than students without justice education and to see if students with more years of higher education will view police more favorably than students with fewer years of higher education. This research will also analyze the effect that race, age, and gender have in influencing students' perceptions of the police.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### **Method/Design**

The present study examines the role education level and major plays in college students' perceptions of policing by using survey methodology, a descriptive research methods approach utilizing quantitative data. The survey method involves "questioning individuals on a topic or topics and then describing their responses" (Jackson, 2011; p.17). A cross-sectional design was used in which participants were asked a series of questions about the topic of policing at one point in time (Levin, 2006). The study includes a 55-item survey on student attitudes and encounters with the police. This study used a convenience sampling method with a primary focus on college students of all education levels and majors attending Illinois State University as the target population. The online survey instrument can be found in Appendix 1.

### *Participants/Procedure*

To answer the proposed research question, "Do college students' perceptions of the police differ by education level and major?" The researcher employed a self-administered online survey. The researcher sent an email, and three subsequent reminders, to all students that opt in to accept research invitations from the university. The survey was emailed to students of all majors, both undergraduate and graduate students, at Illinois State University. The survey instrument included a total of 55 questions. Students interested in participating clicked on a link that took them to an informed consent document. The consent explained the study in detail and advised students of their right to opt out of the study at any given time. The study was approved by Illinois State University's Institutional Review Board.

Quantitative data was gathered using a combination of Likert scale questions followed by a series of both open and close-ended questions. The open-ended questions allowed the researcher to collect more detailed information by providing research participants an opportunity to respond to these questions in their own words. Narrative questions enable the generation of in-depth responses (Kay & Jeffries, 2010) by exploring students' experiences with, and observations of, the police. Reliability was assessed by crosschecking students' close-ended responses with their open-ended responses.

### *Measures/Analysis*

The first section of the survey consisted of standard demographic questions, including students' race, age, major, and education level. The next section asked students several multiple-choice questions regarding their most recent incident(s) with the police, then students were given a list of attitudinal statements, followed by a section asking about their encounters with the police, and the final section of the survey included short answer questions regarding students' beliefs and feelings toward the police. Two scales, a 17 item attitudes toward police scale and a 14-item contact with police scale, were created. For confidentiality purposes, identifiers were not collected.

To assess the students' responses to open ended questions, a content analysis was conducted. A coding scheme was developed based on positive and negative responses/perceptions about the police. Codes included basic themes that were identified by the researcher, in addition to emergent themes that were identified through the coding process. Codes are presented in Appendix 2.

To understand the role students' perception plays in policing, basic frequencies and descriptives of the dataset were run using SPSS. Next, T-tests were run to compare the means of both the contact scale and the attitude scale across several demographic variables.

## CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### **Analysis and Results**

In this chapter, the results of the present study are laid out in a logical statistical progression, beginning with the descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics provide a general summary of the data collected including measures of student demographics. Table 1 reports simple statistical frequencies of the sample demographics to provide the readers with a general overview of the population. These statistics provide the foundation for inferential statistical analyses and help develop a better understanding of the composition of the data that was used.

Next, a scale analysis for the contact and attitude scales was conducted in Tables 2 and 3. Following the descriptive analysis, bivariate analysis was conducted. Bivariate analyses are the first of the inferential statistics. This type of analysis helps the researcher explain the relationship or association between two variables, contact and attitude as it relates to the students' demographics. The bivariate analyses, located in Tables 4 and 5, consisted of a series of 4 t-tests, performed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the means of each of the two groups. In the analyses, undergraduate students were compared to graduate students (academic level), CJS majors to non-CJS majors (major), minority students to Caucasian students (race), female students to male students (gender), on their contact with, and attitudes toward the police.

Lastly, a coding scheme was developed for the 11 open-ended questions. This type of analysis is a thematic process that identifies patterns in core concepts. It allows the researcher to provide context to the numerical data as it relates to perceptions of police.



### *Descriptive Statistics*

As noted in Table 1, there were a total of 451 students enrolled or attending Illinois State University that responded to the survey questionnaire. There was no way for the researcher to know how many students received the survey because Illinois State University does not provide rosters to their researchers. This survey instrument contained a total of 55 questions. In social science shorter instruments are preferred to prevent response burden and increase the chances of a higher response rate. The goal of this research was to conduct a preliminary examination of the relationship between education and police perception, response rates were not crucial to the quality of the data (Fosnacht et al., 2017).

The gender of the students in this study was mostly females (68%) whereas males accounted for roughly (32%) of the dataset. The remaining <1% of students identified as other. The majority of students who participated in this study (92%) were between the ages of 18-26, making the composition of the data primarily young adults. The vast majority of students who responded to the survey were Caucasian (78%), with only 9% African American, 9% Hispanic, and the remaining 4.4% identified as other. Undergraduate students made up most of the sample (84.7%), 24.2% of respondents were Freshman, 14.4% were Sophomores, 19.1% were Juniors, roughly 27% were Seniors, and 15.3% were Graduate students. The most common major reported was Education (15%). Other prevalent majors that were reported in the dataset included Communication (9.4%), Psychology (8%), and Criminal Justice/Law majors (7.4%).

Table 1

*Illinois State University student demographics, 2018, N= 451*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Student Gender</b>		
Male	143	31.8
Female	306	67.8
Other	2	0.4
<b>Student Age</b>		
18-26	409	92.0
27-37	27	5.6
38-53	15	2.4
<b>Student Race</b>		
Black/African American	42	9.3
Hispanic/Latino	39	8.7
White/Caucasian	350	77.6
Other	20	4.4
<b>Student Academic Level</b>		
Freshman	109	24.2
Sophomore	65	14.4
Junior	86	19.1
Senior	121	26.9
Graduate Student	70	15.4
<b>Student Major/Area of Study</b>		
Accounting/Finance	16	3.4
Acting/Theatre	6	1.2
Administration	8	1.6
History	13	2.7
Art	8	1.6
Athletic Training/Kinesiology	10	2
Agriculture	5	1
Audiology/Speech	4	0.8
Business/Marketing	25	5.2
Communication	44	9.4
Criminal Justice (CJS)/Law	34	7.4
Construction Management	3	0.6
Cyber Security/Technology	26	5.6
Education	75	21.6
Engineering	7	1.4
Graphic Design	3	0.6
Healthcare/Nursing	27	5.9
Math	9	1.8
Music	13	2.7

*(Table Continues)*

Categories	Number	Percent
Psychology	36	7.9
Politics & Government/Legal Studies	12	2.5
Science/Animal Science	27	5.5
Social Work	10	2.2
Sociology	12	2.6
University Studies/General Studies	10	0.2
Undeclared/Undecided	8	2.6

To assess attitudes toward police, 17 statements using 4-point Likert agreement responses were combined into an attitude scale. As noted in Table 2, the attitude scale has an alpha of .95.

Table 2

*Scale Analysis, Attitudes Toward Police*

Categories	Mean	Standard Deviation
I am satisfied with the current state of policing	2.53	.884
I trust the police	2.25	.845
Police officers are dependable	2.16	.775
Police officers try to do the right thing	1.99	.692
Police officers are effective at their job	2.27	.749
Police officers are professional/courteous when interacting/talking to people	2.30	.780
Police officers are fair in their decision-making	2.49	.778
I support the police	2.08	.818
It should be mandatory for police to wear body cameras on while on duty	3.51	.696
Police officers are well trained	2.44	.805
Police officers are accountable for their actions.	2.13	1.036
Police officers are fundamentally honest.	2.45	.797
If I have a complaint against the police department or an officer, I know it will be heard and analyzed objectively by the appropriate supervisor.	2.68	.858
*Police officers often lie in order to win cases	2.38	.759
*There is police corruption in my community	2.29	.809
Race factors into how police officers interact with people.	3.14	.869
Officers have a financial quota that they are expected to meet through issuing citations.	2.94	.868

\*Reverse Coded

Cronbach's Alpha = .95

To assess contact with police, 14 questions, with responses from 0 – 10, were combined into a contact scale. As noted in Table 3, the contact scale has an alpha of .94.

Table 3

*Scale Reliability for Contact with Police*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Had contact with an officer (positive or negative)	2.95	2.861
Been stopped by an officer	1.54	2.12
Been issued a ticket	.86	1.684
Been arrested	.16	.940
Been physically restrained by police	.16	.977
Been detained in the back of a police vehicle or holding cell	.19	1.015
Been yelled at by police	.47	1.447
Been given a verbal or written warning by police	.95	1.660
Evaded (ran from) a police officer	.23	1.053
Disobeyed an officer's orders	.18	.979
Filed a complaint about an officer or police department	.12	.769
Phoned police for assistance	.76	1.602
Become argumentative with an officer	.21	1.086
Resisted arrest	.09	.740
Cronbach's Alpha = .94		

*Bivariate Statistics- T-test Analysis*

Tables 4 and 5 compare contact and attitude across several demographic variables. Several significant differences are noted when examining both police contact and attitudes toward police. When examining level of education, graduate students did not have significantly more contact with police officers ( $X = 10.02$ ) than undergraduate students ( $X = 8.64$ ). However, they reported significantly higher negative attitudes towards the police ( $X = 45.18$ ) than undergraduate students ( $X = 41.48$ ).

When examining major in relation to contact with the police and attitude towards the police, no significant differences were noted between criminal justice and non-criminal justice majors. When examining race (Minority vs. Caucasian) in comparison to reported police contact

and attitudes, significant differences were noted across contact and attitude. Minorities ( $X = 47.12$ ) had significantly more negative attitudes toward police than their Caucasian counterparts ( $X = 40.53$ ), and also reported significantly higher levels of contact (10.11 compared to 8.52). Significant differences were also noted by gender in amount of police contact, with males ( $X = 12.59$ ) reporting higher levels of contact with the police than females ( $X = 7.07$ ). No significant differences were found by gender and attitudes toward the police.

Table 4

*Comparison of Academic Level, Major, Race and Gender by Police Contact*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Academic Level</b>				-.741	.852
Undergraduate	305	8.64	14.34		
Graduate	65	10.02	9.01		
<b>Major</b>				-1.367	.172
Non-CJS Major	338	8.59	13.59		
CJS Major	28	12.25	13.78		
<b>*Race</b>				.344	.042
Caucasian	285	8.52	11.51		
Minority	85	10.11	18.91		

(Table Continues)

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>*Gender</b>				3.744	.000
Male	122	12.59	18.39		
Female	247	7.07	9.95		

\*p≤.05

Table 5

*Comparison of Academic Level, Major, Race and Gender by Attitudes Toward Police*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>*Academic Level</b>				-2.693	.007
Undergraduate	357	41.48	9.96		
Graduate	62	45.18	10.15		
<b>Major</b>				1.373	.171
Non-CJS Major	388	42.12	10.04		
CJS Major	31	39.55	9.93		
<b>*Race</b>				-5.824	.000
Caucasian	324	40.53	9.83		
Minority	95	47.12	9.18		

(Table Continues)

Variables	N	Mean	SD	T	P
<b>Gender</b>				-.589	.556
Male	132	41.60	11.92		
Female	285	42.22	9.04		

\*p $\leq$ .05

### Qualitative Analysis

#### *Summary of the Findings*

A coding scheme was developed for the 11 open-ended questions that were included in the survey to gain a better understanding of students' perceptions of the police. As mentioned earlier, it is important to examine *how* youths describe and make sense of their experiences, perceptions, and observations of the police. After a complete analysis of the open-ended questions, the data revealed that graduate students and senior undergraduate students displayed a more positive view and outlook of the police than their younger undergraduate (Freshman, Sophomore, and Junior) counterparts. The researcher found that Freshman undergraduates expressed the most frustration when describing their opinions about the police and their encounters with the police. The researcher also found that criminal justice majors expressed more favorable views of police than other majors.

Altogether, 315 students responded to the qualitative portion of the survey. Responses to each question were classified into three categories, positive, negative, and neutral (neutral responses were responses in which students were unsure or both positive and negative). There were a total of 1,388 positive responses, 1,340 negative responses, and 2,233 neutral/incomplete responses across the 11 questions. The first question students were asked is, "When you hear the

word “police” or “police officer” what three words come to mind?” Students’ responses varied significantly. The researcher found that overall undergraduate and graduate students saw the police as both a positive and negative figure. With regards to the positive aspect of the students’ responses they described the police using words such as “Respect, Authority, Order, Protection, Security, Safety, and Helpful.” Negative phrases included, “Arrest, Violence, Drugs, Inequality, Discrimination, Nervous, and Untrustworthy.” Students that were “neutral or unsure” about this topic used phrases such as “Supportive of the police, Respects the police, Fears the police, and Intimidated by the police. These comments were also followed by negative comments such as “Brutality, Tickets, White (men), Law, Corruption, Unjust, and Uncertainty” to describe the police.

Scholars have long revealed that the media plays a significant role in shaping public perception of the police (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011). The public’s perception often depends on how the mass media portrays victims, criminals, deviants, and law enforcement officials (Dowler, 2003). If officers are portrayed in a negative light this can increase public doubt of the police (Lovell, 2003) and decrease officer legitimacy (Gau & Brunson, 2015). Public doubt and low legitimacy can have a significant impact on the public’s perception of the police and their willingness to comply with the police (Rosenbaum et al., 2015). The researcher found that students in this study felt that the media often tends to glorify police work and exaggerate/dramatize crime rates and killings.

When students were asked the question, “In your opinion, what do movies get wrong about police work?” The top code for this category was that police work is often portrayed to be easy. A total of 315 students both undergraduate and graduate, responded to this question. Data suggest that movies often tend to portray police as bad, corrupt, violent, and aggressive, with 215



students including such responses. As one student explained, “They tend to paint most cops as corrupt when it is a small percentage of corrupt cops.” Another student expressed, “They portray them as very unapproachable, when actually police have a job that allows them to help people, and they can be very trusted individuals.” Similarly, another student elaborates in depth by pointing out, “Movies tend to make police work look either glamorous, or inherently corrupted. Honestly, it's neither. It's not glamorous, and it's not all evil and corrupted. Officers are humans too, just like the rest of us. Their job is to protect us from crime and danger, and that means they have to deal with the horrible parts of society every day.” The remaining 100 students suggested that movies tend to make police work appear to be easy. One student stated, “They are on the street a lot; there is a lot of paper work behind it all that they don't show.” Another student stated, “Police are probably a lot busier than they are made out to be.”

Moving to the question, “In your opinion, what do movies get right about police work?” The top code for this category was that police work is dangerous. Out of the 315 undergraduate and graduate students who responded to this question 289 students stated that movies depict police work as risky, difficult, and stressful. As one student stated, “It's difficult and labor intensive and can be extremely dangerous.” Implying that police work is hard work and a demanding position. Another student further explained, “They do show the risks and stress attached to the work.” Similarly, another in agreement expressed, “Stressful situations can occur frequently depending on where they are,” indicating that police officers are not always certain of the type of incident they may need to respond to. One student went on to state, “The stress can affect you and the people you are close to.”

When asked, “In your opinion, what does TV get wrong about police work?” both undergraduate and graduate students combined indicated that television shows characterize

police officers as bad, solely making arrests, frequently catching criminals, and involved in high speed chases. One student explained, “Police work is portrayed very dramatically, I think day-to-day responsibilities are often overlooked and the emotional and cognitive toll this kind of job has on police officers is often forgotten about.” Another student described, “Everything is drama, car chases, and shoot outs.” While a third student maintained that, “Media outlets twist scenarios to only show officers in a bad light without giving a full contextual framework to the story.” A final student went on to state, “You only hear about the police when things go wrong, it’s rare to hear anything go well, even if it’s the vast majority.” These statements highlight the significant role the media plays in influencing the public’s perception of the police (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011).

When asked the question, “In your opinion, what does TV get right about police work?” Undergraduate and graduate students expressed that television gets right the issues concerning racial prejudice, explaining that there are good officers and bad officers who make the good ones look bad, and showing that police officers care about the safety of people. One respondent stated, “There is a problem with racial prejudice” while another went on to say, “There are lots of dirty officers who make the good ones look bad.” A student maintained, “There are good officers, who want to serve the people not their egos.” Another student went on to further explain, “I think Cops and similar shows capture the general attitude of most officers, people just trying to make their community a better place. I think there are a lot of cops that are in it for the wrong reasons, but the majority are just trying to help. They care about others in the community.”

The literature has revealed that race along with racial profiling is a strong and consistent predictor of attitude toward the police (Weitzer, 1999, Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). When students were asked the question, “Do you think officers tend to make generalities about minorities? Why

or Why not?” The top code for this category was that police officers stereotype. Out of the 315 undergraduate and graduate students who responded to the question 284 students believed that police officers are led by stereotypes that are perpetrated by society and that these stereotypes are reinforced by the media. As one student explained, “I think that they do. We are culturally trained and reinforced through our media and entertainment about harmful stereotypes about minority groups and that bias doesn't just go away. It's something that is grown and nurtured in us until we recognize it as a bias and actively try to grapple with it and its misconceptions.” Another student echoed this statement by stating, “I think most people make generalities about minorities whether they mean to or not. We as humans tend to make unconscious generalities about minorities be it positive or negative. Everyone makes generalizations about every race and religion, minority or otherwise.”

Similarly, another student explained, “Besides individual prejudice, we live in a very stereotyped society. Meaning assumptions about different races will always be made, whether one person agrees with them or not. Police are not immune to this. Generalities are often made, even if unintentionally.” Alternately, one student argued, “I think it definitely depends on the officer and what their background is. Ultimately, I believe they do, as every single person I know will make a generality about minorities, regardless of their background. It is simply in our nature. Not all generalities are implying something negative, either.” Results indicate that students believed the training that officers receive is part to blame for the generalities that some police officers tend to make about minorities. One student stated, “I think that within communities, officers, just as non-law enforcement individuals do, create profiles of individuals that they apply inappropriately both consciously and unconsciously. I think part of this is a drastic lack of training on diversity concerns within police academy training.” One student who had a personal

relationship with two police officers stated, “Yes. My father and my uncle are both cops, and they see minorities only in generalized terms. The generalizations they have are largely negative stereotypes.” Another student stated, “Although they might not be purposely and actively doing this it happens because of the stereotypes that have been portrayed and quite possibly their training, they generalize.”

A total of 128 students suggested that minorities are viewed as more problematic, violent, aggressive and dangerous than other races, which is what causes generalizations to be made. One student pointed out, “Stuff largely propagated by the media so as a society we grow up to expect minorities to be dangerous.” Another argued, “Officers tend to view minorities specifically African Americans as more aggressive and violent, even when dealing with children which is what leads to disproportionate police brutality toward people of color.” Similarly, a student indicated, “I believe they (officers) would be more threatened by a black male rather than a white male.”

Results indicated that most of the students in this dataset believed that police officers target minorities based off their appearance and the communities they live in or come from. A total of 37 (11.8%) graduate students out of 314 undergraduate students went on to argue that these communities primarily consist of low income neighborhoods that are prone to have more crime which is where minorities mainly reside and is a contributing factor as to why police officers generalize about minorities. One student stated, “I think they (police officers) generalize some minorities depending on their appearance and where they're from/what community their own.” Another student went on to explain, “From what I have seen in the news, yes. It is known that officers in bigger communities’ arrest more black Americans, but this usually in communities where black crime rates are up. It is racial profiling, but most of the times it is

because there is a common track.” A final student suggested, “It also has to do with the area the officer is patrolling. If the area is known to have a higher incidence rate and has more minorities, there will appear to be a correlative relationship between police attitudes and minorities.”

Students were asked how they felt about the phrase “Black Lives Matter”, a relatively new movement that has received mixed emotions from the public, some controversial. Like Lewis (2016), a total of 160 Caucasian and minority students expressed that police relations’ needs improvement specifically as it relates to officers’ interactions and conduct with the minority population which the researcher found had a significant impact on college students’ perceptions about police misconduct. As many as 130 students both undergraduates and graduates liked the concept but didn’t agree with the phrase. Students believed the phrase itself can be misleading in making others who belong to a different race feel ostracized. One student stated, “I definitely think that the Black community has been discriminated against for a long time but there is a lot of negative connotation behind the word (Black Lives Matter). I feel that we all need to be equal and lift each other up without bringing others down.” Another went on to say, “I agree, but I also agree everyone’s lives matter. Why is it so specific to blacks (other than the fact of all the past shootings)? The phrase does not solve the issue but instead increases division between White and African Americans. Everyone’s lives matter and should be important.”

In opposition, one student explained, “I think that it is a very important phrase that many people misunderstand. It's not saying that only Black lives matter but it's saying that black lives are the ones that are being taken the most and we need to focus on rectifying the situation.”

Another stated, “I believe that black lives matter, but I don't like that phrase because I think ALL lives matter.” However, one student stated, “I think it's a valid political cause. Black Lives

Matter isn't trying to say, "Black Lives Matter more than any other lives, they're just saying that "Black Lives Matter also." In agreement, another student argued, "I think that it is a very important phrase that many people misunderstand. It's not saying that only Black lives matter but it's saying that black lives are the ones that are being taken the most and we need to focus on rectifying the situation." Similarly, a student added, "I feel that it is a good phrase in general but for the movement I don't think the phrase should be used because to certain people it could be something that shows that "only" black lives matter which is not what the phrase/movement is about."

The top code for that appeared for this category was that the movement incites violence. Out of the 315 undergraduate and graduate students who responded to this question 261 (82.9%) students felt that the movement incites violence amongst some individuals that are a part of this organization and these individuals use the movement to promote violence for personal gratification, which can give the public a negative perception about the phrase and the movement altogether.

A total of 261 students in this study disagreed with the phrase "Black Lives Matter" more so than the movement itself. Specifically, a total of 64 students, 7 black, 3 Hispanic and 54 Caucasian students believed that the phrase itself excludes other races. Another interesting component that the researcher found in this study is that students who expressed positive opinions about the police also expressed negative opinions/uncomfortable feelings towards the "Black Lives Matter" movement. Additionally, students who expressed negative opinions about the police often expressed positive opinions about the "Black Lives Matter" movement. Rarely did students express positive opinions about the police and positive opinions about the "Black

Lives Matter” movement. However, collectively most of the students in the data set believed that minorities are treated differently by the police than whites.

One student explained, “I think it is very important that we stress that people are equal, regardless of something as silly as skin color. I think "Black Lives Matter" is opening a discussion about black people not being treated equally and is bringing this to light. For this reason, I support the goal of the Black Lives Matter movement and phrase, although some actions that have been attached to the movement I do not condone.” Another stated, “I believe it is a good concept, but has been executed in the wrong way. Violence should not be justified using the "Black Lives Matter" phrase.” Similarly, one respondent concluded, “I believe it is a very vital cause and designed to try to wrestle the Black experience out of the background and make people aware of the pervading racism to this day. Black Lives Matter specifically focuses on the injustice and murders committed by police unto African Americans.”

The literature has consistently revealed that Blacks have a higher chance of being arrested and cited in traffic stops than any other race (Brown & Frank, 2006). Blacks and Hispanics combined are more likely than Whites to be stopped, ticketed, and searched at higher rates even when they are not at risk for carrying contraband (Gaines, 2006; Engel, 2004). These factors can influence the public’s perception of the police. The analysis examined this concept in depth among the students participating in this study to see if students held a perception that corroborates the literature.

Both Caucasian and minority students at both graduate and undergraduate levels believed that minorities are treated differently than whites by the police. When asked the question, “Do you think police officers have a choice in what laws they will or will not enforce? Why or Why not?” The responses revealed that a total of 268 students both undergraduate and graduate

believed that officers give warnings to those they believe are “non-threatening” but are less likely to give the benefit of the doubt to racial minorities. As one student described, “It seems like they enforce the same laws more for certain people than others. An example that comes to mind is the number of arrests for minor drug charges made against people of color that may lead to incarceration. I have friends, who are white, who have been pulled over with marijuana on them, have had it confiscated, but faced no arrest, ticket, or charges. I feel like police officers should make decisions about enforcing laws and how to enforce them based on whether people are putting others or themselves in danger.” Another student argued, “Officers give warnings to those they believe are “unthreatening” but are less likely to give the benefit of the doubt to racial minorities.”

One respondent explained, “They can choose what to focus on and who they want to catch at times, if it’s a wealthy white male with x amount of drugs they aren't going to arrest and put them in prison opposed to an African American male with the same x amount of drugs.” Another student added, “I believe a black man in possession of marijuana will be treated differently than a white man with the same amount.” Similarly, a student pointed out, “Officers don't give black people as many warnings like the do other people especially whites.” One student argued, “They (officers) decide who they will enforce the law on. For example, if they know someone, they will let them go. If they have predispositions about certain races, they will strictly enforce the law on them.”

Students also expressed that there are bad and good officers, some officers follow the rules while other officers may make up their own rules. One student explained, “As officers of the law they can surely pick and choose what laws they want to enforce or not enforce. This can be both a good thing and a bad thing. For example, minor offenses such as speeding 5 miles over



the speed limit could be more loosely enforced (verbal/written warning on the first offense) than something such as reckless driving of 20 miles over the speed limit which would require a ticket and a day in court. One way this could be bad is when you get into something such as the corruption side of things. For example, if an officer knows of something illegal going on but chooses not to enforce the law, that could quickly get out of hand and possibly cause harm.” One respondent added, “To an extent, some officers are "bad people" and will pick and choose what they want to enforce. Some are corrupt police officers and will try to bend the rules or break them and try and hide it.” Another student concluded, “Some officers are stricter and follow the law to a “T.” Some bend the law to make them look innocent or lie in their reports to make it look like the victim did more harm than actually happened. Some officers see crime and think of it as a minor offense and let the individual go or fine them.”

Most of the students in this study explained that their indirect experiences with the police were mostly negative. A total of 277 (87.9%) out of 315 students described these experiences as being difficult, taunting, and harassing. Indirect and direct experiences usually included a partner, friend, or family member who most of the time was African American or a minority being stopped by an officer for petty offenses, petty reasons and sometime no reason at all. The following two students explained their encounters with the police in depth that were both direct and indirect experiences.

One student shared, “When I was in about 5th grade my dad and I were driving on the expressway and an 18-wheeler truck hit us on the driver's side. Thankfully I was sitting on the opposite side, however my dad's side was damaged. When the truck struck us, the driver kept going. The truck did not hit us in the capacity to make the car immovable. So, my dad began to follow the truck. The driver knew he was wrong so he exited the expressway and began

speeding. Mind you we're near the Sox Field area. At some point my dad sees a police officer and attempts to flag him down while also keeping up with the truck. The police officer ignores us. My dad keeps following the truck, at this point the truck is very far but still visible. We see another police officer who finally notices us. When the police officer sees us, my dad stops but he lets him know what happened and points to the truck down the road. My dad makes note that he had been following the truck. The police officer isn't listening and demands my dad to step out of the car. My dad confused asks why, the police officer proceeds to open the door and forcibly remove him. At this point I'm freaking out and screaming. My dad is asking "officer why are you doing this?" no answer he just restrains my dad. Another police officer pulls up and sees me screaming in the backseat. Long story short there was an id of a dark skinned black male who had just kidnapped a young black girl and my dad fit that id so the police officer immediately restrained him. This situation as a 10-year-old traumatized me and still does to this day. That was my dad, who had already gotten hurt on his entire left side from the accident, to then have a police officer restrain him causing more damage right in front of me."

Another student stated, "My boyfriend who is African American and I were stopped by an officer. My boyfriend did not speak to the officer because he had no reason to. When the police officer asked him "how are you today?" my boyfriend replied saying "I'm fine." The police officer then looked at me and said "what, is he scared of the police or something?" Which I found to be very rude and almost stereotypical to say because he is African American."

Another student explained, "I've had family members that had encounters with the police that were not positive and the outcomes were permanent. This gives sort of a negative look on them because now I feel as though they're here to put fear in me rather than to protect me."

When students were asked about their feelings toward victims of police violence, the researcher found that the top code for this category was remorse for victims. Of the 315 students who responded to this question 214 undergraduate students expressed a bit more remorse for victims of police violence, compared to 62 Graduate students believed that most of the time the victim was at fault. However, all 315 undergraduate and graduate students combined believed that police officers should be held accountable in situations where violence is not necessary. One student explained, “I think that police officers have the right to defend themselves just like everyone else does. However, in situations where their violence is not necessary, I think the officer should be held accountable. Another student added, “I think it is incredibly wrong when people are victims of police brutality or violence. At the same time, I understand (in some cases) how the police officer may feel as if they are in danger and have their judgment compromised. I believe this is a very tricky situation and is difficult to find the line between self-protection and flat out brutality. I do think that police need to be held responsible for their actions when they are not following laws themselves. One student stated, “I feel bad for them, for sure. Now, I draw the line at resisting and not following a police officer’s orders. If you choose to blatantly disregard what a police officer is telling you to do or are resisting arrest, I won’t feel sorry for you because had you have done what they told you, you wouldn’t be a victim of police violence. On the other hand, if you’re walking down the street and get shot 17 times for having a knife in your hand, I can see why an officer would be fearing for his life in this type of situation, however, shooting that person 17 times is a bit much!”

The researcher also found that both undergraduate and graduate students believed that victims of wrongful police violence should be compensated for their injuries and or loss. One student stated, “Victims of violence who survive deserve the best mental and physical health

care. The offenders should be prosecuted to the fullest extent possible.” In contrast, another student argued, “Some are victims but some are also painted as victims when they were putting the police or others in danger.” Likewise, another student held, “It is tragic when it occurs to someone who was innocent or when excessive force was used resulting in great harm to them. The victims of police violence who were committing violent crime or who were actively or violently resisting arrest however should not be able to claim to be a victim unless the force used was clearly excessive and resulted in permanent injury to them.”

Students also went on to suggest that encounters involving police violence should be accessed differently as either or both parties could be at fault for wrongdoing. One student stated, “Each encounter should be judged differently based on the actions of the police officer and “victim”. If a situation arises where I feel that the police officer did use excessive force then I would want some type of punishment for the officer. In this instance, I would feel sorry for the victim and hope they get some form of justice.” Another student argued, “I think that police violence is an individual case. It’s not fair to say that all officers are violent or racist or whatever it may be. Those specific officers are clearly in the wrong and the victims of those officers should be able to tell their story and have the right consequences occur for their assailant.” One respondent expressed, “I feel sympathy. While I do feel that not all police officers are bad, I also feel that there are those exceptions who are just jerks. As I stated earlier, my dad works for the state police merit board and part of the merit board's job is to hold hearings for police officers who have gone bad. And there have been quite a number of those hearings over the years.”

Another student added, “Considering what I see and hear in the media most often (white men and women shooting/using excessive force with black men), I think a lot of these issues really stem from underlying racism in police officers. While some of these issues may be

attributed to poor police training, at a certain point the issue has to be greater than that. Police officers need to know the limit of the force that is necessary in every situation they find themselves in. I understand that they are often in high stress situations and have to react quickly in a lot of situations. However, if the situation itself (excluding the race/gender of the individual) does not warrant these quick or severe reactions, then they need to take a step back and really take a second to think about how they should respond. These responses need to be as objective as possible (while understanding that some subjectivity is necessary) because most of these victims were not acting or behaving in a way that warrant the response they received.” A student concluded, “I feel that there have been more instances than not that the police violence was not needed. This goes back to the police making generalizations about minorities. I believe police violence should never be a problem. Our law enforcement should protect citizens not provoke or engage in violence. Any office that mistreats the people they are trying to protect should be subject to punishment.”

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Discussion and Conclusion

Prior literature reveals a lack of knowledge regarding the impact that higher education has on students' perceptions of the police (Mbuba, 2010). This research examined college students at Illinois State University perceptions of the police and how differences in education levels, major, race, age, and gender can affect students' perceptions about the police. More specifically, it focused on the following question: "Do college students' perceptions of the police differ by education level and major?" The quantitative results of this study revealed that college students at Illinois State University differ in their attitudes towards the police but report little difference in their contact with the police.

Analysis showed that students with higher levels of education displayed significant differences in their attitudes toward the police when compared to those with less education. Graduate students were more likely to report negative attitudes towards the police than undergraduate students, but did not have differences in levels of contact with police officers. A plausible explanation for this finding is that Graduate students have received more education than undergraduate students. Greater education levels have been revealed in the literature to affect students' perceptions of the police. The more education a student has the more likely it will affect their judgments on procedural justice related encounters. These judgments can have a significant impact on community and police relations, which can lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with police (Hawk et al., 2012).

College students' perceptions of the police are an extremely important aspect in social science research and policing because college students, specifically young adults are the next generation and play a vital role in public support for the police. Police departments should

further examine officers' encounters and behaviors with young people to determine the likelihood of negative encounters occurring and to find better solutions in resolving college students' negative encounters with the police. Police officers should identify when negative encounters occur and implement better solutions for when they occur to increase the chances of more positive interactions between young people and the police. This strategy can potentially lead to young people and the police working together which can possibly build college students' trust in the police.

When examining major in relation to contact with the police and attitude towards the police, this study revealed no significant differences between criminal justice and non-criminal justice majors. A possible rationale for this is students' perceptions of the police may have more to do with their personal and indirect experiences with the police than their education and knowledge about the police. The dataset revealed that 26% of the samples have a close family member and or friend that are a police officer. The researcher found the dynamic of this response to be interesting as it pointed out a different perspective; working as a police officer can affect officers and those close to them. However, this viewpoint should be further researched in depth in the near future.

When analyzing the qualitative findings of the data the researcher found that students of all majors, perceptions of the police was significantly influenced by both their personal experiences and indirect experiences of a friend or family member encounters with the police. These experiences both personal and indirect were found to negatively impact students' trust in the police.

A rationale for this could be that students are affected by their own experiences with the police and experiences of people to whom they are closely connected, due to the concern and

care they have for themselves, their relatives, and their friends. Negative experiences with the police in general, whether personal or indirect have been found in the literature to have a negative impact on an individual's overall perception of the police. Negative perceptions can create intentional and unintentional biases that can affect public and police interactions with one another (Nalla & Madan, 2012; Tyler, 2005; Brown & Benedict, 2002). Specifically, negative indirect experiences with the police heighten an individual's negative perceptions of the police and can cause individuals to lose trust in the police (Browning, S. L., Cullen, F. T., Cao, L., & Kopache, R., 1994, Brunson, 2007, Warren, 2010). Lack of trust in the police has been found in the literature to hinder police officers' ability to control wrongdoing, decrease police adequacy and increase public doubt of the police (Lovell, 2003), all of which is extremely important on a college campus.

It is important to further analyze college students' negative perceptions about the police because negative perceptions can lead to low police legitimacy, low public trust, strengthen damaged communities, and police relations, all which police depend on to achieve public safety and to successfully and effectively police communities (Hinds, 2007). Police departments should implement and or increase community style policing methods in officers' daily patrol assignments on college campuses and in the neighborhoods from which college students derive from. The community style policing approach better known as "problem oriented policing" aims at improving social cohesion amongst the public and the police (Reisig, 2010). This concept of policing engages citizens and the police in resolving issues by using a proactive and service style policing approach (Ferreira, 1996). Thus, police officers' goal should be to build more personal relationships with college students to increase students' trust in the police and improve community-police relations.



The results of this research also provided in-depth insight into the nature of race, with regards to Minority students compared to Caucasian students' attitudes towards the police and contact with the police. This research revealed significant differences across contact and attitude amongst these two categories. Minority students had significantly more negative attitudes ( $X = 47.12$ ) toward the police than Caucasian students ( $X = 40.53$ ). Minority students also reported significantly higher levels of contact ( $X = 10.11$ ) compared to Caucasian students ( $X = 8.52$ ). These findings suggest that minority students experience more frequent encounters with the police, which may produce lower levels of confidence and trust in the police (Feinstein, 2015; Sindall et al., 2017).

Past research has shown that Blacks and Latinos hold lower levels of trust and confidence in the police than do Whites and other racial minorities (Avdija, 2010). Negative encounters and or experiences with the police increases negative perceptions about the police (Skinner & Haas, 2016). Minority students in this study expressed more frustration and negative feelings about the police than Caucasian students. Police departments need to transform how officers interact with minorities, specifically minority college students by incorporating community simulation based trainings such as multicultural training for law enforcement officers. This type of training should include a combination of video clips, lectures, and discussions in the police academy, as well as outdoor field trips to college campuses that contain minority students and visits to communities in which minority students belong to.

The purpose of this initiative should be to educate officers on how to better police minority students and eliminate any unconscious biases officers may hold. The goal should be for officers to be for minority students and the communities they derive from oppose to operating against minority students and their communities. In addition, policy makers should look at

revamping stop and frisk policies to ensure that these policies are free of bias and do not wrongfully target minorities. Policy makers should also implement larger reforms such as strictly enforcing the End Racial Profiling Act of 2017, to be certain that all jurisdictions federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies and agents are adhering to the guidelines of this act. This will ensure that law enforcement agencies and campus police departments are following legislative guidelines, to end to racial profiling and discrimination in minority communities and college campuses.

This study also revealed significant differences across students' gender. Female students in this study reported more positive attitudes toward police ( $X = 7.07$ ) than male students ( $X = 12.59$ ) in this study. However, no significant differences were found in the amount of police contact by gender. A possible explanation for this finding is that females are less likely to be searched or aggressively handled by an officer when stopped (Eith & Durose, 2002). Research shows that officers are less likely to target women in stop and frisk or profiling studies (Skogan, 2018; Hester & Gray, 2018), as women commit less crime (Fox & Fridel, 2017; Lauritsen et al., 2009). The research also reveals that women have a more positive demeanor with officers and are less likely to be combative or disrespectful with the police (O'connor, 2008; Taylor et al., 2001; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002).

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the reasons females students in this study reported more positive attitudes towards the police than male students could be that women are less likely to be profiled and targeted by officers in stop and frisk searches, less likely to commit crime, less likely to be combative or disrespectful, and naturally have a more positive demeanor with officers. Another possible explanation for female students reporting more positive attitudes toward the police than male students in this study could be due to the over-representation of

females as victims and males as suspects in violent crimes portrayed in the media (Schwark, 2017). Like the qualitative findings of this study, students felt that the media often tends to exaggerate police work, and over dramatize crime rates and killings, which plays a significant role in shaping public perception (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011). Police officers should consider building more positive relationships with males, specifically male college students. Furthermore, police departments should consider including a larger number of female officers to their police forces to increase the chances of positive police contacts as well as strengthen police relations amongst male college students. Male officers more often than female officers experience more negative encounters with citizens (Morin et al., 2017). These encounters frequently include physically struggling and or fighting suspects who resist arrest. On average as many as 35% of male officers compared to 22% of female officers' report having this type of encounter within a given month (Morin et al., 2017). Therefore, hiring more female officers to police department forces increases the chances of positive police encounters which can strengthen the public's and the police relationship with one another, specifically male college students.

Overall, students' perceptions of the police are an important aspect in social science research and policing because students who account for a significant proportion of the population play a vital role in public cooperation with the police and public support for the police. Public cooperation is a fundamental element that police depend on to successfully police the communities they serve (Tyler, 2004). College students majoring in criminal justice and or obtaining a degree in criminal justice can shape the future of policing because these students will potentially become practitioners within the criminal justice field. Strengthening public cooperation and building trust among the police and college students who are the next generation

and future leaders of society, is extremely important because these students will eventually become employed in the criminal justice field and can potentially influence how the public views the police. Building college students trust in the police can essentially lead to positive perceptions of the police and better police-community relations.

Increased faith in the police increases the public's trust in the police, produces positive attitudes about the police and greater confidence in the police. Increased faith in the police can lead to better respect for the police as authority figures and effective policing in the community (Feinstein, 2015). Whereas, low levels of trust in the police can lead to the police being viewed as illegitimate and produce non-cooperation with the police (Lunney, 2015). Therefore, gaining college students' trust and confidence in the police is crucial if police officers want to achieve public safety on college campuses and in the community.

The results provided in this study will help researchers and educators at Illinois State University learn more about the differences in college students' perceptions about the police, which in turn, can help scholars, determine ways in which law enforcement officials can create healthy relationships among college students. This can potentially increase college students trust and confidence in the police and help educators, scholars, and police officials at Illinois State University gain a better understanding of the effects that students' perceptions have on policing. Understanding college students' perceptions of the police will aid in building students' confidence in the police and produce positive perceptions of the police. This will essentially lead to greater public trust, effective policing, and improved police relations amongst college students and the public in the future.

### *Limitations & Future Research*

The results of this analysis provided an in-depth insight into the nature of students' perceptions of the police and the variables that were contributing factors, which could potentially benefit future research in this area. However, one limitation in this study relates to the sample. There were too many undergraduates, females, and Caucasian students and too few criminal justice majors in this study, with education majors accounting for most of the sample. This limitation impacts the results in this study as well as questions the researcher's ability to make generalizations about this research. Given the implied importance of criminal justice education to perceptions of the police it would have been beneficial to have more criminal justice students in the sample for comparative purposes.

Future researchers should include a wider representation of respondents by incorporating an equal amount of two genders, academic levels, majors, and race of students. Due to the low number of CJS students (38) in this study, future research should oversample CJS majors as well as other majors to increase the number of majors in the sample relative to the number of education majors in this study. This will make it more likely that the findings from the research are a representative sample of the student population on college campuses and can be generalized to other college settings. The results obtained from this study are not a representative sample of the student population at Illinois State University and are not generalizable. A final limitation of this study was inter-rater reliability, which posed a threat to this study. Due to time constraints, the researcher was unable to have a second-rater code and analyze the data obtained from this study, which could introduce coding bias. Future research should ensure a third party is available and included in observing the data produced from the study. By doing so, it is likely that this area of research will produce more reliable and consistent results.

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## APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

### Introduction

This research study is being conducted by Lashanti Brown, under the direction of Jessie Krienert at Illinois State University to gain a better understanding of college students' perceptions of policing. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

### Procedures

If you choose to take part in this research study you will be asked to complete a survey with 55 questions. This survey will take approximately 20 minutes.

### Risks/Discomforts

The risks associated with this research are no greater than those encountered in everyday life. It is possible that you may feel uncomfortable or anxious if you have had negative encounters with law enforcement. Feel free to skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

### Benefits

There are no direct benefits to participants. However, your participation will help us gain useful knowledge about police perception.

### Confidentiality

All information provided will remain confidential and will only be reported as group data with no identifying information. All reasonable efforts have been undertaken to minimize any potential risks to confidentiality, but you should know that any form of communication over the Internet carries a minimal risk of loss of confidentiality. If other individuals (e.g. partner, roommate) have access to your computer, they might be able to view your web browsing history, including a link to this survey. For information on how to delete your web browsing history, you can visit <http://www.computerhope.com/issues/ch000510.htm>. Additionally, depending on the combination of demographic information you provide, there is a slight chance of reidentification. Should reidentification breach confidentiality, there is a potential risk to your reputation or employability. We will not report any information that could potentially reidentify you. If you feel uncomfortable with this potential risk, you may skip any questions that you feel could be risky.

### Participation

Participating in this study is voluntary. Not participating will not affect your current standing with Illinois State University. Refusal to participate involves no penalty or loss of benefits. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. You can also skip questions you do not feel like answering.

## Questions about the Research

For questions about this research please contact Jessie Krienert at [jlkrien@ilstu.edu](mailto:jlkrien@ilstu.edu), or Lashanti Brown ([lwbrown@ilstu.edu](mailto:lwbrown@ilstu.edu)).

Please print a copy of this consent form for your records.

By clicking next, I consent to participating in the above study.

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Research Ethics & Compliance Office at Illinois State University at (309) 438-5527 or via email at [rec@ilstu.edu](mailto:rec@ilstu.edu).

### **Demographic Questions:**

1. What is your identified gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

2. What is your current age?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your race/ethnicity?

- Black/African American
- Hispanic/Latino
- White/Caucasian
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your academic level in college?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Graduate Student

5. Are you a transfer student?

Yes

No

5a.) If yes, did you obtain an Associate's degree?

Yes

No

5b.) If yes, what was your major? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What is your current Major?

7. Have you taken any Criminal Justice courses?

Yes

No

8. Have you taken any courses specifically related to the criminal justice system, (police, lawyers, courts, or corrections)?

Yes

No

**Survey Questions:**

9. Have you had any contact (positive or negative) with law enforcement while in college?

Yes

No

**10.** Are you currently employed or interning with a police department?

- Yes
- No

**11.** Have you ever been employed as a police officer?

- Yes
- No

**12.** Do you plan to go into law enforcement in the future?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

**13.** Do you have any close family members that are members of law enforcement?

- Yes
- No

**This section will continue to ask questions about your perceptions of the police. Use the scale 1-7 with 7 being the highest and 1 being the lowest to answer the questions.**

**Instructions:** Please answer the following questions:

**14.** I am satisfied with the current state of policing.

Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely 7

**15.** I trust the police.

Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely 7

**16.** Police officers are dependable.

Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely 7

**17.** Police officers try to do the right thing.

Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely 7

**18.** Police officers effective at their job.

Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely 7

**19.** Police officers' are professional/courteous when interacting/talking to people.

Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely 7

**20.** Police officers are fair in their decision-making.

Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely 7

**21.** I support the police.

Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely 7

**Instructions: Please answer the following questions.**

During your college career (including summer and holiday breaks) how many times have you:

**On or Off-Campus:**

**1.** Had contact with an officer? **(Positive or Negative)**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

**2.** Been stopped by an officer?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

**3.** Been issued a ticket?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

**4. Been arrested?**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

**5. Been restrained (grabbed, shoved, pinned down etc.) by police?**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

**6. Been detained in the back of a police vehicle or holding cell in jail?**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

**7. Been yelled at by police?**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

**8. Been given a verbal or written warning by police?**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

**9. Evade a police officer?**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

**10. Disobeyed an officer's order?**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+



**11. Filed a complaint about an officer or police department?**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

**12. Phoned police for assistance?**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

**13. Become argumentative with an officer?**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

**14. Resisted arrest?**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+

**Items 15-23: The following questions are attitudinal questions please mark whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:**

**15. It should be mandatory for police to wear body cameras on police officers while on duty?**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**16.** Police officers are well trained.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**17.** Police officers are accountable for their actions.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**18.** Police officers are fundamentally honest.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**19.** If I have a complaint against the police department or an officer, I know it will be heard and analyzed objectively by the appropriate supervisor.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**20.** Police officers often lie in order to win cases.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**21.** There is police corruption in my community.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**22.** Race factors into how police officers interact with people.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**23.** Officers have a financial quota that they are expected to meet through issuing citations.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**Directions for items 1-11: The following questions require a short answer. Answer each question with complete sentences and to the best of your ability in the space provided.**

1. How do you feel about the phrase "**black lives matter**?" Please Explain.
2. In your opinion, what do **movies** get **wrong** about police work?
3. In your opinion, what do **movies** get **right** about police work?
4. In your opinion, what does **TV** get **wrong** about police work?
5. In your opinion, what does **TV** get **right** about police work?
6. Do you think officers tend to make **generalities** about **minorities**? Why or Why not?
7. When you hear the word "**police**" or "**police officer**" what **three words** come to mind?
8. Do you think police officers have a **choice** in what **laws** they will or will not **enforce**? Why or Why not?

9. How do you **feel** about the police in **today's society**? Please Explain.

10. Have you ever had an **incident** with the police that changed how you **view the police**? Please Explain.

11. What is your **attitude** about **victims** of **police violence**? Please Explain.

**End of survey**

**THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!**

## APPENDIX B: CODING ANALYSIS

### (Codes, Themes, & Emergent Themes)

1. When you hear the word “police” or “police officer” what three words come to mind?
2. How do you feel about the police in today’s society? Please Explain.

- Police Officers Are a Positive Figure

The nature of the comments regarding police was:

**Respects the police/Supportive of the police/Takes pride in the police/Loves the police/Cares for the police/**

- Police Officers Are a Negative Figure

The nature of the comments regarding police was:

**Fears the police/Disgusted in the police/Angry with the police/Ashamed of the police/Dislikes the police/Intimidated by the police/Hates the police/Avoids the police/Police tend to prioritize their job over people’s lives/Police prey on minorities**

- Police Officers Are Good and Bad-Neutral

The nature of the comments regarding police was:

**Supportive of the police/Respects the police/Angry with the police/Ashamed of the police/Fears the police/Intimidated by the police**

3. In your opinion, what do movies get wrong about police work?
  - Police work is easy
  - Action driven and overdramatized
  - Police officers are lazy
  - Police officers are honest

- Police officers are bad/corrupt
- Police officers are violent/aggressive

**4. In your opinion, what do movies get right about police work?**

- Police work appears professional
- Police work can be extremely dangerous and risky
- The job appears very difficult and stressful
- Police officers can be strict

**5. In your opinion, what does TV get wrong about police work?**

- All police officers are good
- Police officers are solely out to make arrests
- Police officers always catch criminals
- Police work mainly consist of high speed chases

**6. In your opinion, what does TV get right about police work?**

- Police work is dangerous
- Police officers care about the safety of people
- Issues with racial prejudice
- Working as a police officer is a stressful job
- There are good officers and bad officers who make the good ones look bad

**7. Do you think officers tend to make generalities about minorities? Why or Why not?**

- Police officers believe and go off stereotypes perpetrated by society
- Police racial profile
- Police target minorities based off their appearance and the communities they live in or come from
- The media reinforces stereotypes which causes police officers to generalize
- Minorities are seen as more problematic, violent, aggressive and dangerous
- Unconscious bias during interactions and personal experiences with minorities play a role in generalizations made by police officers
- Low income neighborhoods have more crime which is where minorities mostly live and is what cause generalizations to be made

**8. How do you feel about the phrase "black lives matter?" Please Explain.**

- The movement highlights important issues with African Americans and police officers and is necessary
- The movement is good when positivity is being spread and not negativity
- It shouldn't only highlight black live matter because all lives matter
- The media over exaggerates the violence, shootings and the issues surrounding racism amongst police and Blacks which has fueled this movement

**9. Do you think police officers have a choice in what laws they will or will not enforce? Why or Why not?**

- Officers give warnings to those they believe are "unthreatening" but are less likely to give the benefit of the doubt to racial minorities
- Black men are often ticketed for marijuana possession than white men
- Laws are created by elected officials which is then passed down to police officers to enforce
- There are bad cops and there are good cops. Some follow the rules and some make up their own rules.

**10. Have you ever had an incident with the police that changed how you view the police? Please Explain.**

- Negative outlook on police due to negative incidents
- Police have been very helpful in life threatening and emergency situations
- In speeding situations if the officer is understanding they will let you off with a warning
- Negative encounters with the police in every situation where an officer suspected drinking or drinking was involved
- Having a family member or friend as an officer has allowed for discretion in situations that should have resulted in a sanction
- Demeanor upon encountering an officer truly matters if you are respectful the officer will respect you



**11. What is your attitude about victims of police violence? Please Explain.**

- Have empathy for victims of police violence
- If the victim caused the violence to occur then it is their fault for any violence that occurs against them by the police
- Police officers should be held accountable in situations where violence is not necessary
- Victims should be compensated for their injuries and or loss
- Each encounter should be judged differently based on the actions of the police officer and the victim
- Victims of police violence are always framed as deserving of victimization and being liar