NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Going Unseen: How Perceptions of Police and Police Fatal Shootings are Influenced

A Thesis Submitted to the
University Honors Program
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree
With Upper Division Honors

Department Of
Sociology

By

Justin Surell

DeKalb, Illinois

May 12, 2018
University Honors Program

Capstone Approval Page

Capstone Title (print or type)

Going Unseen: How Perceptions of Police and Police Fatal Shootings are Influenced

Student Name (print or type) __Justin Surell______________________

Faculty Supervisor (print or type) __Kirk Miller____________________

Faculty Approval Signature ______________

Department of (print or type) __Sociology___________________

Date of Approval (print or type) __5/4/18_____________________
ABSTRACT (100-200 WORDS): Perceptions of policing are of critical importance to the relationship between citizens and police. The influences behind those perceptions are what have built the circumstances seen today. How citizens view police fatal shootings has implications for the trends and attitudes witnessed in society. Both body-worn cameras (BWCs) and bystander recordings are indicative of the different viewpoints that people have of any necessary and unnecessary actions taken in citizen-police confrontations. YouTube is the platform where these vantage points are viewed many times over by people intrigued for a multitude of reasons. Only 8 of the sample of 100 fatal shootings – from the population of 987 fatal shootings – in 2017 had YouTube postings, either of BWCs or from bystanders. While BWCs gathered most of the
attention from the public, it was the incidents without YouTube postings that failed to influence national perceptions.
Introduction

Citizens and U.S. governmental agencies are well aware of the importance of perceptions. As the current Trump administration is finding out, when it appears that federal workers and programs are out to get the common man it is hard to accomplish the goals and objectives that are initially set. There is immediate backlash and push for reform or abolition of some laws and policies for good. This foundation-building is just as, if not more, apparent between residents and police departments. While it can be built up in the interest of cooperation and respect, it can crumble even faster with mistrust. This is precisely why perceptions are so key to the well-being of what is hardly a straightforward complex. In order to understand the perceptions that establish the relationship between citizens and police, the influences behind the perceptions of police and their involvement in fatal shootings must be understood.

There has been a dearth of accounts of racial bias in the criminal justice system, and police are no stranger to headlining that discussion. Story after story of overreach and breach of power has been released since the turn of the century. Presumptively, these actions have consistently occurred in neighborhoods across the U.S., but it has taken until now to shed more than a glimmer of light on the subject. Citizens are taking a more thorough look into police practices and judging for themselves the legality of citizen-police interactions. Whether a person is white, black, or anywhere in between, the objective truth is readily available. Police departments, knowing this, are quick to justify any actions that are deemed suspect. They are the officials who represent distinct communities, so their activities are crucial to keeping the peace. Residents are in the especially powerful positions of judge and jury of accountability. Just as injustices happen across cities around the U.S. between citizens, so too do they occur between citizens and police. The perceptions of injustices, or lack thereof, are of the utmost importance in distinguishing the sentiments of police departments. That is precisely where what is influencing
the perceptions must be determined in the best interests of communities and their police. The ability to have a national debate is dependent on the findings.

There is an expansive volume of work done on the topic of perceptions of police both positive and negative. All sides to the issue, including race, bias, and methods of surveillance are considered. YouTube was crucial to responding to the matter at hand and being a tool to be used in the methodological design. Four individual groups were devised in the interest of observing the phenomenon. Although the results of the study were amassed around more recent data, conclusions were a bit difficult to come by. Patterns in the data did leave traces of hope, but the sample size of cases was too narrow. Limitations were the Achilles’ heel to profound knowledge, but a step in the right direction was made. What could be done in the future to mobilize communities and their police forces of significant interest.

Literature Review

A series of academic journals and even governmental data sources were stock full of knowledge of the topic. The many paths of possible influences on perceptions were brought to the forefront thanks to information on several methods of surveillance and technological resources. A historical background as well as present means of interacting among ourselves and with state officials provide extensive evidence of ways that citizens have and have not evolved in the 21st century.

Surveillance of Interest

Surveillance has always been a method used by all people for matters involving making sure no illegal activity is occurring, such as harboring fugitives, consuming illegal products, and planning an act of terrorism. It was never just police officers having a watchful eye on citizens but citizens monitoring citizens, too. In an article by Headley, Guerette, and Shariati (2017:102),
efforts in Community- and Problem-oriented Policing were used to address police-citizen issues. The more modest home remedy to the national problem was an attempt at allowing citizens to be a part of the solution rather than questioning the integrity of police. However, police body-worn cameras (BWCs) were the most direct response to the issue of civility. A more thorough explanation about the impact of BWCs will come shortly. Andrejevic (2005:485) described the Community Policing attempts as a form of the Panopticon. The Panopticon acts as the all-knowing, where citizens notice they are being watched by police and vice versa. In addition, citizens are aware of the actions and behaviors of their neighbors and friends, too. Every individual is under the spotlight, or can be under the spotlight, in the Panopticon. After the 9/11 attacks (486), this method of lateral surveillance was used to encourage citizens to be unofficial undercover spies of suspicious activity. The federal government could then be contacted and told of information about so-and-so without the police or FBI being required to get involved from the initial discovery of questionable behavior. Outside of bystander footage (489-92), background checks, do-it-yourself surveillance technologies, and technology made to assess truth based on the physical body of others or oneself are all options for the general populace to use as devices of lateral surveillance.

Use of Technology

If one word could describe the beginning of the 21st century, it would be technology. The level of technological advancement has been absurd as compared to any previous time in history. Police have been a part of this upgrade thanks to the videotaping that is now executed from their car and their person. Prior to this golden era in technology, police officers could not face any media or citizen scrutiny of their actions because recording did not exist. However, police officers are under a more watchful eye nowadays, as video can be pulled for evidence and the like. From
2007 to 2013 (Reaves 2015:3), a spike from 61% to 68% of police departments had in-car video cameras. The 2013 rate is almost double that of what it was in 2000. This is significant because police activity can be monitored after the fact if necessary. The jump is a large expansion in a relatively short amount of time. Clearly, police departments and the government are taking the initiative to bring the institution of policing to the next level of technology. An additional 32% of police departments in 2013 had the privilege of BWCs for some of their officers. Overall, 76% of police departments had in-car, body-worn, or weapon-attached cameras. These high rates of police use of technology would be thought to be indicative of footage everywhere. On the other hand, there is a difference between using the technological capabilities presented and enabling the produced footage to be seen by citizens everywhere.

In an even more recent study in 2015-16 (Headley, Guerette, and Shariati 2017:105), the implementation of BWCs was found to have decreased the use of arrests to resolve citizen-police interactions by almost half when compared to non-BWC officers. Whereas being a mean and tough police officer prior to this technology would have been advantageous in strictly applying the law, the enhanced awareness offered by the BWCs may have forced officers to be more mindful and considerate of their behavior with citizens. In this instance, BWCs acted like deterrents to punitive reinforcement. Other aspects of interest (104-05), including the use of force by police officers and complaints by citizens, did not show any statistically significant changes after the implementation of BWCs. Even with the presence of BWCs, police are willing to go the extra mile in their response to citizen-police interactions without any fear of repercussions. This contradicts the findings related to arrest rates. Clearly, police officers are not doing enough to fix the relationships with their communities in the interest of minimizing citizen complaints. BWCs are not the only form of capturing police-citizen interactions.
In an article by Brown (2016:298), the power of bystander footage and YouTube was challenged after a shooting in Canada. In the midst of a police-citizen interaction in 2013, bystanders were able to record the transpiring events that took place before them by taking out their cellphones. Citizens were able to capture the tense situation unfold and deadly police gunshots fire and kill the victim. The video was quickly posted to YouTube and racked up over a million views in a day’s time. Not only did citizens watch the scene unfold online but the Toronto Police Chief did as well. Through the power of video footage, the officer was charged with murder. It is worth pondering whether this same series of events taken happens in the U.S. in any shape or form. There may be an inadequacy with the knowledge provided by this account in Canada against U.S. police and citizen response to similar circumstances.

Public Opinion

Perceptions play a role in every aspect of the lives of people on a regular basis. Whether those perceptions are valid is a whole other story. The truth behind the perceptions is inconsequential, as any communication is led by the understanding or misunderstanding between two parties regarding the same situation. Though some perceptions are of varying degrees of importance, those represented in the state of affairs between citizens and police are critical. In an article by Ekins (2014), even if perceptions are misconstrued, “The perception of a biased justice system may lead one to be less willing to give benefit of the doubt and to feel that self-determination is out of their grasp.” There is the inability to face police officers and mend the circumstances that define the unstable situation. If the realization is that police officers are out to get citizens, they won’t carefully toe the line between respect and insubordination. This line of thought gives way to certain kinds of patterns: “Minorities tend to view lack of police accountability as the rule, not the exception.” Like most social matters in the U.S., the situation relies on the majority ruling
and minority in a helpless position. With the police holding the power in police-citizen interactions, the majority-minority mindset establishes the police as a tool of unlimited authority. The relationship is easily able to become cyclical without interference from other social forces. A lack of accountability can lend itself to mistrust, and mistrust can lend itself to a lack of accountability in return.

Accordingly, in a Gallup poll administered in 2015 (Jones 2015), the confidence level of citizens in the police is at its lowest percent since 1993 at 52%. Less than 50% of U.S. citizens claim they have a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the police. With the rampant number of police fatal shootings that have made national headlines since the start of the decade, citizens are unable to bring themselves to a comfortability level that police would expect. Police are grounded in the idea that they are the means of safety and defenders of all people, yet they continuously fail to prove that. While Democrats have seen the most significant drop in their confidence from 2012-2013 to 2014-2015, whites and black remain in two different worlds when it comes to the reality of police. Whites’ confidence in police is still almost double that of blacks. Similar to other social realities, whites fail to garner the comprehension of what blacks endure or are much more likely to endure every day. In a study conducted from 1991 through 2000 (Weitzer 2002:400-01), a series of beatings from the LAPD against citizens led black respondents, more than whites, to believe that police brutality and racism were common in the police department. Similarly, in New York (402), a collection of corruption, beatings, and killings between 1994 and 2000 led black respondents, more than whites, to claim New York City police were doing a poor job. In addition, between 1985 and 1999 (403-04), an instance of a beating and a killing led black respondents, more than whites, to be agree about the New York City police using excessive force and brutality against blacks. There is an apparent lack of
understanding that does not allow for equality of treatment in the criminal justice system. This is significant for race relations between citizens and police, because a more damaged relationship between blacks and police than whites and police will lead blacks to be tenser around police and police less comfortable around blacks. The appropriate response to rectify the apparent dividing line between blacks and police was provided in another survey a year later.

In a 2016 Gallup poll (Newport 2016), adults were asked what could be done to limit the high-profile encounters between black men and police. Most respondents, 36%, said that societal changes were necessary, specifically a focus on a better relationship with increased communication and understanding. Oddly enough, only 1% of respondents said that technological improvements, including cameras, were needed to stitch up the relationship. A possible inadequacy of this knowledge is that there were 23 other options to choose from within the survey. If there were many people that wanted to put a multitude of choices at number one in terms of importance, the research would not reveal such information. A prioritized list would give the reader a better clue as to the feeling of necessity for BWCs. Either way, the racial divide is a significant blockade to any progress in the community relationship of police and citizens.

Based upon all of the literature on the topic of police perceptions, the research question that will be assessed correspondingly pertains to the influences that allow citizens to arrive at conclusions about police and police fatal shootings. What is it that citizens view and find most interesting when it comes to police fatal shootings? The research expectation that is tested in the process of producing findings is that most videos of police fatal shootings will be those from bystanders and residents who happen to be in the area of the citizen-police situation. While videos coming from police body-worn cameras (BWCs) will be front and center in their attention, they will not be as viewed, and thus as influencing, as bystander footage.
Methodology

In the process of responding to what influences the perceptions of police and police fatal shootings, the sweeping use of technology was the focus. With the rise of the computer and its advancements through the years, citizens have been able to take full advantage of the world wide web at their fingertips. Numerous platforms of social media have enveloped the internet, creating waves of human interaction and serving as a base for knowledge and learning. The easy access especially applies to YouTube, an online platform where a whole library of videos from professional news outlets, average citizens, and anyone in between are uploaded. The social nature of YouTube is precisely the reason for observation. With YouTube and a large cache of videos at the fingertips, certain videos were searched and viewed for their details. What was typed into the search engine was determined by the governmental data source provided by the Washington Post on police fatal shootings in 2017. In total, there were 987 police fatal shootings in that year. The sample design included taking a representative sample of 100 of these shootings. The 100 cases were chosen by a random number generator numbered from one to 987, representing the 987 total shootings. Each of the fatal shootings and its victims were numbered in a reverse sequential order starting at one (died on December 31) and continuing through 987 (died on January 1). In the table of data that was provided by the Washington Post, some of the identified fatalities included unidentified persons. With the purpose of having a satisfactory list of victims that could all be searched on YouTube, these names were replaced, and a new number was drawn. In addition, repeating numbers that were drawn by the random number generator were discarded and replaced with brand new numbers.

Upon the random selection of the 100 cases, which ensured the accurate representation of the entire 2017 sample, four distinct groups of comparison were devised. These were
implemented in order to distinguish between incidents of police fatal shootings that were and were not found on YouTube and the number of videos among BWCs and bystander accounts. The first group was defined as having the video present on YouTube and counted the postings and views of both police BWCs and bystander footage. Postings represent the number of videos containing one of the two types of footage. The second group was labeled as having the video present on YouTube and added the postings and views of police BWCs but not bystander footage. The third group was categorized as having the video present on YouTube and contained the postings and views of bystander footage but not police BWCs. The fourth group was characterized as having no video footprint on YouTube and no postings or views of the incident within the mediums of police BWCs and bystander footage.

Prior to beginning the search for incidents, a multitude of data regarding the victim of the fatal shooting was copied from the Washington Post data set into a spreadsheet. Number of the incident, name of the victim, location of the shooting, gender, race, age, presence of mental illness or a weapon, and whether the victim was caught fleeing the scene were all variables in play within each shooting. These variables are all responsible for partaking in shaping the perceptions of citizens about police and police fatal shootings. This data was kept alongside the details about the YouTube videos and their views.

With the intention to measure and weigh the perceptions harbored in society, a systematic approach to collecting the data was taken. After arriving at YouTube’s website, cases of fatal shootings were placed in the search engine one by one. The name of the victim followed by the location of the shooting and the words “fatal shooting” were entered in. Once the results populated, certain videos were filtered out by selecting “video” under the “type” category in the tab “filter.” This method eliminated a number of videos that were irrelevant to the topic at hand.
and limited search results to a more manageable number of videos. The videos presented in the filtered results were scoured not only looked at for their details before watching them. The year that the video was uploaded was critical in determining if it was worth watching to see what kind of footage there was. The name of the video carried some importance in its ability to centralize attention to the victim’s name or location of the shooting. However, it was the timeframe of the video that was highlighted to settle whether or not it was a match with the fatal shooting. If the video seemed appropriate to the timeframe, it was viewed to see if there were accounts from BWCs or bystanders. The subsequent watching of the video revealed or failed to reveal postings of BWCs or bystander footage and was marked in the spreadsheet. The amount of views was tallied, too.

In Table 1 below, the data of the population of the 987 police fatal shootings in 2017 compared to the sample of 100 fatal shootings is shown. The regions were compiled as such according to the National Geographic: the West (W) represented the abbreviated states of WA, OR, CA, NV, ID, MT, WY, UT, CO, AK, and HI; the Southeast (SE) represented the states of AR, LA, KY, TN, MS, AL, WV, MD, D.C., DE, VA, NC, SC, GA, and FL; the Midwest (MW) represented the states of ND, SD, NE, KS, MN, IA, MO, WI, IL, MI, IN, and OH; the Southwest (SW) represented the states of AZ, NM, OK, and TX; the Northeast (NE) represented the states of ME, NH, VT, MA, NY, RI, CT, PA, and NJ. Overall, the divided percentages in each variable category are similar between the population and the sample. Only the Southwest region, which was overrepresented in the sample by almost 6%, males, which were underrepresented in the sample by more than 6%, and whites, which were overrepresented in the sample by more than 7%, were misrepresented in the sample by more than 5%. Generally, the similarities between the
population and sample means the sample is accurately representative of the population and has
good external validity.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Mental Illness?</th>
<th>Weapon</th>
<th>Fleeing the scene?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td></td>
<td>29.9% SE, 29.4% W, 17.6% MW, 16.2% SW, 7.5% NE</td>
<td>46.3% White, 22.6% Black, 18.1% Hispanic</td>
<td>37.6% 30-44, 30.2% 18-29, 26.0% 45+</td>
<td>76.1% No/Unknown</td>
<td>58.7% Gun, 15.8% Knife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td></td>
<td>28% W, 26% SE, 22% SW, 16% MW, 8% NE</td>
<td>53% White, 21% Black, 19% Hispanic</td>
<td>35% 30-44, 35% 18-29, 29% 45+</td>
<td>76% No/Unknown</td>
<td>62% Gun, 15% Knife</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If totals add up to more than 100, rounded up to the nearest tenth of a percent

** Minimal percentages were not included in the table

Data Analysis

The findings contained an entirely mixed bag of conclusions. In Table 2 below, the data from the
four groups is presented. The number of cases refers to the amount of police fatal shootings that
were represented in each group. It was found that most police fatal shootings can be placed in
Group 1, where the video was present on YouTube and had both BWCs and bystander footage.
The more than 3 million total views of the single case were more than 20 times as many views
that Group 2 and Group 3 had combined. However, 293,000 views were double-counted because
the same video contained footage first from the police officer’s perspective (BWC) and then
went on to include a video account from an average citizen. Group 2, over the course of three different police fatal shootings, had nearly 146,000 views in half of the number of postings as Group 1. This was the result even after failing to filter for “videos” in the interest of collecting the most data. Group 3, in just 2 cases, recorded almost the same number of postings as Group 1 but had substantially less views. In total, there were 2,814,777 views of police BWC video, 443,493 views from bystander footage, 1,284 views from a store hidden camera, and 436 views from a helicopter vantage point. Thus, views of police fatal shootings most directly came from police BWCs. Along the same lines, while Group 2 and Group 3 averaged less than 50,000 views in both views per posting and views per case, Group 1 was significantly higher where both BWCs and bystander footage were recognized. Group 1 averaged 217,345 views per posting and more than 3 million views per case even though there was just one. The hindsight to this finding is that one individual posting was responsible for more than 2.5 million views. On the other hand, Group 4 and its lack of a video footprint contained 92 police fatal shootings. More than 92% of my sample of police shootings in 2017 had no videos uploaded to YouTube both from the professional, police end and the common man, bystander side.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total # of Cases</th>
<th>Total # of Postings</th>
<th>Total # of Views</th>
<th>Views/Posting</th>
<th>Views/Case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 1 (yes video/both BWCs and bystander footage)</strong></td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>14*</td>
<td>3,042,828*</td>
<td>Approx. 217,345</td>
<td>3,042,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 2 (yes video/BWCs but no bystander footage)</strong></td>
<td>3**</td>
<td>7**</td>
<td>145,938**</td>
<td>Approx. 20,848</td>
<td>48,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 3 (yes video/bystander)</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>69,504</td>
<td>Approx. 5,346</td>
<td>34,752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>footage but no BWCs)</td>
<td>92 police fatal shootings with no BWCs or bystander footage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Group 4 (no video/neither BWCs or bystander footage) | **One video included both BWCs and bystander footage; around 293,000 views double-counted**  
**For 2 of the cases, 5 of the postings, and 144,232 of the views, did not filter for “Video” in the search process**  
***2 helicopter postings (1 case) with a total of 436 views were left uncategorized***  
****1 store posting (1 case) with a total of 1284 views was left uncategorized*** |

The eight fatal shootings that did have video representation on YouTube are of significant interest and are shown in Table 3. In the case of Ashley Jenkins, there was a single video containing footage from a bystander’s cellphone. Though the video was not crystal clear, you could hear the repeating sound of gunfire. Unlike the majority of the sample of 100 police fatal shootings, she was female, between 18 and 29 years old, unarmed, and fleeing by car.

Cariann Hithon was shown in 12 different postings through cellphone video running over a police officer after her car was stopped. Some postings continued to show the footage on a continuous cycle. The circumstances of the situation that the victim was female, black, between 18 and 29 years old, used her vehicle as a weapon, and fled by car were different than most of the sample. Isaac Padilla was recorded on 2 different postings in helicopter footage escaping in a truck from police before being shot and killed. Infrared technology was able to identify and track the victim. His identifiable variables including the location of the shooting in the Southwest and being Hispanic, between 18 and 29 years old, unarmed, and fleeing by car were diverse compared to the sample. Jamie Huskey was caught on a McDonald’s video camera being confronted and killed by police inside the store. The lengthy video displayed the before, during, and after the shooting when he was being attended to for his injuries. The victim largely fit the profile of the sample except for the shooting taking place in the Southwest and Jamie being 45
years old and up. Michael Bruce Peterson was part of the most watched footage in any YouTube posting in the sample. The victim charged and injured a police officer with his own baton prior to being shot and killed by other officers responding to the scene. The victim was almost directly along the same lines in terms of variables but for his use of weapon being a baton. As shown in the 4 postings of the police BWC footage, Tiffany Lynn Potter attempted to evade police on foot but was run down by the chasing police officer. In addition to being one of the reasons for chasing her, the gun was found on her person after she was shot. The location of the shooting being in the Midwest and the victim being white, between 18 and 29 years old, and fleeing the scene by foot were the variables that did not fit the pattern of the sample. Robert Savelli was revealed in 2 BWC postings to be evading police on a sort of scooter before getting off and running. The running was short-lived, as the officer ran him down and shot him after exiting the police car. The shooting fit most of the sample except for it taking place in the Southwest. In 1 posting from police BWC, Francisco Suarez-Madonado was shot and killed after firing shots at officers. This was prefaced by an argument between the victim and his girlfriend before he took off in a truck. The shooting and victim did not fit the sample profile well, as the shooting took place in the Southwest and the victim was Hispanic, between 18 and 29 years old, and had a mental illness. All of these cases were unique in their attributes but were still able to provide insights for the topic at hand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Mental Illness?</th>
<th>Weapon</th>
<th>Fleeing the scene?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley Jenkins</td>
<td>Flatwoods, KY</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Unarmed</td>
<td>Fleeing by car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cariann Hithon</td>
<td>Miami, FL</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>Fleeing by car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac Padilla</td>
<td>Albuquerque, NM</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Unarmed</td>
<td>Fleeing by car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie Huskey</td>
<td>Sallisaw, OK</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Gun</td>
<td>Not fleeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Bruce Peterson</td>
<td>Salt Lake City, UT</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Not fleeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany Lynn Potter</td>
<td>Des Moines, IA</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Gun</td>
<td>Fleeing by foot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Savelli</td>
<td>Albuquerque, NM</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Gun</td>
<td>Not fleeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco Suarez-Madonado</td>
<td>Las Vegas, NV</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M.I.</td>
<td>Gun</td>
<td>Not fleeing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Ultimately, my findings allowed me to understand the most influential videos of perceptions of police and police fatal shootings. The sample had the external validity necessary to be representative of the population of shootings, and this allowed me to draw conclusions from the data. Although my hypothesis was that bystander footage would have the most views for videos of police fatal shootings on YouTube, this found not to be the case. In overwhelming fashion, most views came from police BWCs. Even without the one BWC video that had more than 2 million views, most views would have still come from BWCs. However, it was the combination of BWCs and bystander footage represented in Group 1 of my data that had the most views per posting and the most views per case. In the previous studies done, BWCs have shown the ability to decrease use-of-force and citizen complaints against police. This is largely because they know they’re being surveilled and must keep their composure. In comparison, the current study would have mixed results about that. Although it was proven that people watched videos of police BWCs the most, there were many videos not uploaded to YouTube at all. Therefore, the sense of accountability only goes as so far as the number of videos that are available to be viewed.
The 92 cases unaccounted for are of no small value, as the lack of transparency cannot sway the conversation of perceptions of police fatal shootings. Besides that, this study was exclusive and did not compare to any existing studies done on the perceptions of police and police fatal shootings. My findings were unique in that they relied on technology and the social media platform of YouTube. YouTube has yet to be delved into in terms of its available data to the public. As proven in this study, the platform could be put to good use by allowing researchers to draw conclusions about society and make policy decisions in response to what they find. I could improve upon the research in this study to better answer the research question by delving through all of the 987 police fatal shootings in 2017. While the sample of 100 used in this study was representative of the population, if the ability to go through the entire population exists and can be accomplished it must be done. The best picture of the year 2017 and the most accurate data of views and postings would be a welcome addition to the conversation of police perceptions.

Future research on this topic should seek to discover whether there is a pattern or a trend in the data. The same research could be done with other years prior to 2017 in order to fully understand the impact of BWCs. The years 2015 and 2016 are available on the Washington Post’s website like 2017, so the data is readily available. The expectation would be that as society becomes increasingly technology savvy, more BWCs and bystander footage will be accessible on YouTube. Any possible trends would be verified by building the profile of the perceptions of police fatal shootings from a couple of years ago until now. What was noticeable across the fatal shootings in this study was that there was a reliance on videos of news stories and breaking news to reveal the circumstances of each one. Without direct access to citizen-police interactions, citizens cannot entirely decide for themselves whether the police officer was in the
right or wrong in fatally shooting the victim. Even when the fatal shooting included postings of BWC or bystander footage, there was rarely the case where just the audio and video of the shooting was supplied rather than the reporters’ comments, too. This might aid in the effect of transparency.

A limitation of my findings is that the names of videos were varied and understanding them is subjective. Although the same process was used in entering in the data in the search engine on YouTube, miscellaneous postings without any connection to the fatal shooting populated. Also, even when the postings were in the same time period as the shooting and had relevant details below the title, many titles were misleading or not descriptive enough. There was subjectivity used in looking at all the postings that seemed to represent the fatal shooting no matter what the title read. The straightforward nature of the search did not lead to a simple choosing of the appropriate postings. An implication for policy is that, according to previous studies and the current study, investing in police BWCs across the country would be most valuable. As the data showed, the vast majority of police fatal shootings are not readily available to the public on YouTube. Whether police departments simply don’t have the technology yet or won’t post the videos to social media is up for debate and worthy of research. Without a doubt, in the interest of continuing the trend of transparency, BWCs must be advocated for and brought to police departments in every state in the U.S. The police departments must then take the further step of providing easy access to the fatal shootings on expansive online platforms.

Conclusion
Perceptions are an important part of life for every member of society, as it impacts the relationships and efforts at communication that are forged and welcomed daily. The association between police and citizens is especially vital to community relations across the country. Over
the course of this study, what influences the perceptions of police and police fatal shootings was determined empirically. With the power of social media platforms like YouTube, the views and postings of a sample of 100 different police fatal shootings from the population of 987 fatal shootings in 2017 were researched. In order to discover the influences behind the perceptions, police body-worn cameras (BWCs) and bystander footage were compared. Four groups were established that differentiated between one, if there was a video of the fatal shooting on YouTube, and two, if there was BWC footage, bystander footage, both, or neither.

The findings clearly found that Group 1 was where most fatal shootings were placed, as the most views per posting and most views per case qualified in this group. Overall, the most views overwhelmingly came from police BWCs and, therefore, carried the most influence on perceptions. Bystander footage was far from nonexistent, but no data substantiated their prolific use. While the implications of this study and previous studies are clear in pointing out the importance of BWCs for transparency and accountability, more than data must be collected and delivered to citizens. Police departments across the nation must provide all officers BWCs with the proper governmental investment in the technology itself. In addition, the videos that would capture the fatal shootings must be made available to the public in one form or another, such as YouTube. Also, YouTube and all other social media platforms should be used increasingly in obtaining large quantities of data. With all the power that the platforms have in bringing together masses of people around the world, a multitude of research and studies could be accomplished without in-person interviews and the like. In all likelihood, statements can be made about where society stands on certain matters and what necessary policy decisions could be made in response.

Appendixes
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Mental Illness?</th>
<th>Weapon</th>
<th>Fleeing the scene?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>29.4% W, 29.3% SE, 17.6% MW, 16.2% SW, 8.1% NE</td>
<td>95.2% Male</td>
<td>46.3% White, 22.6% Black, 18.1% Hispanic</td>
<td>37.6% 30-44, 30.2% 18-29, 26.0% 45+</td>
<td>76.1% No/Unknown</td>
<td>60.5% Not Fleeing, 18.4% Fleeing by Car, 12.6% Fleeing by Foot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>28% W, 26% SE, 22% SW, 16% MW, 8% NE</td>
<td>89% Male</td>
<td>53% White, 21% Black, 19% Hispanic</td>
<td>35% 30-44, 35% 18-29, 29% 45+</td>
<td>76% No/Unknown</td>
<td>62% Gun, 15% Knife</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If totals add up to more than 100, rounded up to the nearest tenth of a percent

** Minimal percentages were not included in the table

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1 (yes video/both BWCs and bystander footage)</th>
<th>Total # of Cases</th>
<th>Total # of Postings</th>
<th>Total # of Views</th>
<th>Views/Posting</th>
<th>Views/Case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>14*</td>
<td>3,042,828*</td>
<td>Approx. 217,345</td>
<td>3,042,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 (yes video/BWCs but no bystander footage)</td>
<td>3**</td>
<td>7**</td>
<td>145,938**</td>
<td>Approx. 20,848</td>
<td>48,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 (yes video/bystander footage but no BWCs)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>69,504</td>
<td>Approx. 5,346</td>
<td>34,752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4 (no video/neither BWCs or bystander footage)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>92 police fatal shootings with no BWCs or bystander footage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* One video included both BWCS and bystander footage; around 293,000 views double-counted
** For 2 of the cases, 5 of the postings, and 144,232 of the views, did not filter for “Video” in
the search process
*** 2 helicopter postings (1 case) with a total of 436 views were left uncategorized
**** 1 store posting (1 case) with a total of 1284 views was left uncategorized

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Mental Illness?</th>
<th>Weapon</th>
<th>Fleeting the scene?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley Jenkins</td>
<td>Flatwoods, KY</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Unarmed</td>
<td>Fleeting by car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cariann Hinton</td>
<td>Miami, FL</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>Fleeting by car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac Padilla</td>
<td>Albuquerque, NM</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Unarmed</td>
<td>Fleeting by car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie Huskey</td>
<td>Sallisaw, OK</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Gun</td>
<td>Not fleeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Bruce Peterson</td>
<td>Salt Lake City, UT</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Not fleeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany Lynn Potter</td>
<td>Des Moines, IA</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Gun</td>
<td>Fleeting by foot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Savelli</td>
<td>Albuquerque, NM</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>No/Unknown M.I.</td>
<td>Gun</td>
<td>Not fleeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco Suarez-Madonado</td>
<td>Las Vegas, NV</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M.I.</td>
<td>Gun</td>
<td>Not fleeing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


Cameraphones and Youtube.” *British Journal of Criminology* 56:293-312.

Ekins, Emily. 2014. “Why We Should Care About the Racial Divide in Perceptions of Law
Enforcement.” Retrieved May 4, 2018(https://reason.com/blog/2014/11/26/why-we-
should-care-about-the-racial-divi#.uezdwr:bnQA).


YouTube. Retrieved May 1, 2018(https://www.youtube.com/).