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# Police and their Relationship with the Public

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**Abstract**

This research essay aims to understand some of the social themes relevant to issues
present between the public and the police institutions of the United States. Existing literature
about this topic has noted the decentralized nature of law enforcement in the United States and
the differences in policies and procedures used by different police departments and agencies. The
existing literature has also cited the importance of police officer discretion and the situational
factors that contribute to their decision-making. Occupational stress, and characteristics of a
civilian involved in a police interaction, influence the decision-making process for police
officers. This research is designed to provide introductory-level information pertaining to this
topic for readers that wish to expand their understanding of the police and public dynamic. The
research conducted for this research essay was designed to study qualitative literature and to
present the relative and most common themes examined across the research process. This
research's findings have shown numerous themes related to this issue and topic as a whole.
Studying and understanding law enforcement's relationship with the public is essential because
of the authority given to police officers and how this power can be influenced. The powers of the
police are that they can protect the public and control crime. The public's assistance and trust are
needed so the police can carry out their duties effectively and preserve safety and security across
the US.

## Introduction

In 2020, law enforcement and public relations in the United States reached a new level of friction and conflict that had remained relatively stagnant for several years. Unjust lethal and non-lethal injuries caused by law enforcement were a social and systemic issue relevant for years before 2020. The Rodney King riots in LA represented a period of the most intense social unrest up until 2020. However, widespread protests and social unrest intensified in the United States due to the building stress the COVID-19 pandemic had created after its arrival.

Most Americans were forced to shelter at home and live under socially restrictive policies that disrupted daily life and the ability to survive. All the while, the political climate of the United States at the time began to take hold of a distressed population. The presidential race between Joe Biden and Donald Trump also increased Americans' tension, worry, and panic. A nation suffering from unprecedented living conditions and living under a government mishandling the Covid-19 pandemic made Americans feel this would be the election that dictated the fate of our country.

The pressurized feelings of anger and stress among a scared population finally reached a tipping point when the video of George Floyd surfaced on social media. The horrifying video displayed across the internet showed George Floyd being suffocated to death for nine minutes by a police officer while onlookers and other officers watched. While Floyd's video surfaced, the story of Breonna Taylor's wrongful death also resurfaced and rallied support across America. An influx of nationwide protests began to form as many Americans' pent-up rage and frustration could no longer be contained. Justice for Breonna Taylor and George Floyd was being demanded, alongside social movements that pushed forth for defunding American police and increased support for the Black Lives Matter movement.

In 2022, the officers involved with the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor were arrested, and justice was delivered. Police departments across the US, most notably LAPD and SFPD, had laid off police officers and created mental health units in response to the protests calling for police defunding. However, police misuse of force and police brutality have not ceased. Almost every day, new videos, articles, and news reports showcase new victims of police misuse of force.

Becoming a police officer has always been my dream career, guiding my education path after high school. Being able to help members of my community and being actively involved in the lives of others is a goal I have always strived to reach. As someone who plans on applying to a police department after completing my undergraduate tenure, I could not help but notice how public feelings toward police and law enforcement have changed. Or that underlying anger and distrust among the public had always been there, and I have been naive to the issue. This topic has become more personal because of the increasing distrust and disdain for law enforcement I have seen among colleagues, friends, and family.

During the pandemic years, especially in 2020, I considered whether to be a police officer or seek another line of work after receiving a bachelor's degree. Would I want to be a part of an occupation that most people in the United States relatively distrust? Learning about American policing began during my time at Junior College. However, analyzing data and scholarly literature about law enforcement in the United States started with this capstone research project. The primary purpose of this research essay was to help me better understand law enforcement in America and understand the history, judicial considerations, and contributing factors of mistrust between the public and the police. The secondary goal of this literature review is to help readers

better understand what the scholarly literature has to say about the police and the public's relationship.

## Literature Review

This research essay examines the relationship between American law enforcement officials and members of the general public. The general public refers to anyone living in the United States and not currently occupied in a law enforcement profession. Law enforcement in this essay refers to the agencies that make up the entirety of US police that interact with members of the general public. These law enforcement branches include local, state, federal, and tribal law enforcement departments. This literature review aims to understand the critical social aspects of the police and their relationship with the community. As further research was conducted for this project, the scope of understanding has influenced the change of research questions over time. The research questions for this topic are:

1) How does the United States use and define police power?

2) How much authority is given to police officers, and who regulates this authority?

3) How does race affect policing methods and the use of force by law enforcement?

Understanding social complexities around the relationship between police officers and the general public is vital to repair the trust between these groups. This issue is important because the police are meant to ensure the safety and security of the American people and are not meant to undermine and abuse the authority entrusted to them. The police rely on law enforcement for information that helps the police stop crime, and we, the public, rely on the police to protect our communities.

**Police Power: Tool of the Court**

In the United States, the police are considered to be an institutionalized system of law enforcement, according to judicial scholars and researchers. This system comprises law enforcement agencies and personnel operating at different government jurisdictions, including federal, state, and local levels (Worden & McLean, 2017). One distinctive aspect of policing in the U.S. is the separation of authority among states, which sets it apart from the law enforcement practices of many other modern countries. An American law historian Brian W. Ohm said, "The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution acknowledges that the authority of the national government is limited to powers enumerated in the Constitution, and states retain authority over other matters" (Ohm, 2015, p. 629). This includes how states manage and utilize law enforcement at the different levels of government. The "other matters" Ohm refers to is everything that states have authority to make decisions about that does need strict regulation by the federal government. One such institution that is presided over by the states is law enforcement.

The decentralized nature of law enforcement in the United States allows all fifty states to maintain and shape their laws, regulations, and policing methods. As a result, law enforcement practices can vastly differ from state to state, as well as the local jurisdictions and the methods of policing they implement within their communities. However, this also means that there can be significant disparities in law enforcement practices, policies, training, officer diversity, and accountability measures across different states. It is critical to comprehend the complex institutional framework of law enforcement in the United States (Ohm, 2015). To fully understand the scope of US law enforcement would require understanding all fifty of the state government's policies, regulations, and rules about policing.

After World War Two, state courts in the United States began to further clarify the concept of police power and the scope of authority held by law enforcement agencies. Landmark cases in the Wisconsin and Minnesota State Supreme Courts openly acknowledged that the level of powers the police possess could be interpreted and subjected to change at the state and federal levels (Ohm, 2015). These state court decisions set a precedent that would influence future rulings by the Supreme Court, shaping how law enforcement operates in accordance with federal and state laws.

Law Enforcement in the United States has an obligatory role in which they are committed to protecting and serving the citizens and general public. However, this commitment to serving the people also means they are meant to serve the courts and adhere to the laws and regulations developed by the government. To regulate the laws of the land that state and federal courts sanction, they need the police to enforce these laws and regulations to protect the public from criminals and control crime from spreading (Hart, 1954). However, Nirej Sekhon, an Associate Professor of Law at Georgia State University, argues, "Courts then must balance the harm of such intrusions against the value of crime control. Our traditional legality-based paradigm assumes that there is a system of criminal justice that police and courts co-inhabit that allows the latter to speak authoritatively to the former" (Sekhon, 2019, p. 1721). Essentially, at what point do our courts hold the police responsible for instances of illegal uses of force at the expense of controlling crime and regulating laws? Furthermore, if the courts do turn a blind eye to instances of illegal procedures and use of force committed by police, at what point do they hold law enforcement responsible? At this point, the lines of what discretionary authority is held by police officers become blurred.

**Discretion While Policing**

It has been established that the police maintain and exercise authority to enforce laws and control crime in the general public because the government and courts allow them to do so. Daniel Mears and fellow criminologist researchers from Florida State University discuss discretion in policing and challenging aspects of this freedom to make decisions. It is not explicitly stated how every instance of police work should be handled in accordance with local, state, and federal laws (Mears et al., 2017). Police officers often face a multitude of choices and decisions in the field as events unfold. These choices require the practice of discretion, which is most prominently exercised by officers dealing with the public at the street level and police organizations responsible for enforcing these laws (Worden & McLean, 2017).

Discretion in policing involves making judgments and decisions based on situational factors like context, available resources, characteristics of an individual, and severity of a situation. The decisions made by officers on the scene carry considerable weight and have consequences for the people and communities involved. If a situation results in an officer taking someone's life, the social ramifications could end up being disastrous. As seen during the pandemic-era protests after George Floyd was killed. At the street level, where officers interact directly with the public, that discretion is most palpable and has the most immediate impact. Fellow criminologists Robert Worden and Sarah McLean describe police officers as "street-level bureaucrats, and they must cope with some common conditions of work: chronically inadequate resources, including time and information; vague, ambiguous, and sometimes conflicting organizational goals; and an inability to control the pace or outcomes of their work" (Worden & McLean, 2017, p. 15).

The legal basis for officer discretion in use-of-force situations has developed a more concrete definition for using force and how it should be regulated. The United States Supreme Court ruled in the landmark case Graham v. Connor (1989). In which the Court recognized the need to grant deference to police officers when determining the appropriate level of force to use in a given situation. (Mears et al., 2017). The Court acknowledged that the inherent danger of police-citizen encounters could not be fully predicted or anticipated.

Therefore, individual officers must have the ability and legal authorization to make case-by-case judgments and enact reasonable amounts of force. The Court's rationale for granting discretionary powers to police officers and the ability to use reasonable force is a hyper-critical facet of policing. Police officers are often challenged with unpredictable and rapidly changing situations. Split-second decisions must be made to protect themselves and the public. The Court acknowledged that officers are in the best position to assess the threat posed by a particular encounter and determine the appropriate level of force needed to reduce or eliminate that threat (Mears et al., 2017).

As a result of the Graham v. Connor ruling, individual officers became further responsible for exercising their discretion in determining the level of force needed in each situation. This decision emphasized the importance of situational assessments and the totality of the circumstances of a situation by recognizing that police encounters can vary greatly and require different responses. The need for officers to make independent judgments based on their circumstances while adhering to the powers and authority given to them was seen as a necessary function for police officers to protect the public and themselves.

**General Strain Theory & Occupational Stress**

Throughout the research process for this capstone project, several pieces of criminology literature cited different theories related to this topic. The most essential and relevant theory is Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) which was published in 1985 and has been revised in new journals published by Agnew. GST, as defined by Agnew, is how the negative emotions experienced by an individual can turn into criminal behavior as a source of self-help or stress-relieving behavior (Agnew, 1985; 2012). GST theorizes that an aversive environment can lead to an increase in anger and stress. An aversive environment is where an individual is placed in situations that involve physical or verbal confrontation (Agnew, 1985).

Traditionally, it was a common belief and accepted phenomenon among criminologists and legal scholars that economic and social issues drove people to deviance and criminal behavior. However, Agnew changed this paradigm of criminology by proposing that negative emotions, or the presence of negative stimuli caused by goal prevention and the loss of something or someone valuable, can lead individuals to behave criminally (Agnew 1985; 2012). Agnew did not specifically discuss what causes negative stimulation, as anything that prevents someone from achieving their goal or losing something important can create these negative stimuli needed to generate stress and tension. Agnew's basis for strain and criminality is not isolated to only one faction of American society. People of all cultures and occupations are susceptible to stress and strain and may seek criminal or violent behavior to mitigate and alleviate these feelings. Agnew's strain theory has presented itself as a relevant part of understanding police and their relationship with the public because it presents the notion of occupational stress among police officers.

Occupational stress is a common side effect present in most workplaces and jobs in everyday society. Daily negative micro-level interactions while working can build up

occupational stress and affect an individual's behavior in and out of the workplace. Terry A

Beehr, a social psychologist at Central Michigan University, defines occupational stress as

"situations (...) in which events related to the workplace lead to individuals' ill health or welfare.

These environmental job situations are often labeled stressors, and the employees' reactions have

been labeled strains" (Beehr et al., 1995, p.3). Occupations in the American workplace maintain

an emphasis on suppressing feelings and a "Leave your problems at the door" mentality. This

mentality is typical for workplaces to have their employees reach a maximum output level and

focus on their tasks in the workplace.

However, this mentality of not letting personal problems and struggles affect workplace

performance is destructive. When people lack the social support needed to help cope with

workplace stress, individuals will start becoming vulnerable to physical and mental health

effects. These mental and physical health responses to stress are called strain (Beehr et al., 2010).

Not only does strain have an enormous impact on an individual's health, but it will also affect

how a person interacts with people on a daily basis.

The daily interactions aspect of occupational stress is one of the more critical variables

concerning the police and their interactions with the public (Beehr et al., 2010). Law

enforcement and police work are particularly stressful compared to other occupations in the US.

Being involved in physical confrontations, high-speed car chases, and saving people from

life-threatening events introduces significant levels of occupational stress for the officers

involved. There is a high risk of injury and the potential of being killed while on duty. These

risks and workplace stresses are absent from almost every other job in American society. The

significance of law enforcement officers' stress levels to be adequately dealt with requires proper

coping management (Beehr et al., 1995). If police officers do not receive proper support in

coping with the stress they experience, it is more likely that they may resort to self-help

mechanisms that can include but are not limited to improper use of force. Police officers are

often placed into aversive situations and environments, meaning there is always a heightened

level of stress that can manifest into negative behavior.

**Use of Force**

Use of force use-of-force is a critical component of law enforcement research and is often

looked at when discussing policing and public interactions. Use-of-force refers to the usage of

physical or tactical measures by law enforcement and police officers to gain control of a situation

or overcome resistance from an individual. Use of force is one of the main aspects and arguably

the most essential part of police officers' discretion and decision-making abilities. It is a

necessary tool that police officers may use to maintain public safety, enforce laws, protect

themselves or others from harm, and achieve lawful objectives. However, the usage of force by

police officers must fall under legal guidelines and regulations set in place by the courts. It

should be reasonable, necessary, and proportionate to the threat posed. Understanding

use-of-force is a topic that is still under contention and cannot be accurately regulated. Legal

scholars and professionals in the justice system are still researching and developing better

insights into what affects use-of-force situations during police and public interactions (Mears et

al., 2017).

Although use-of-force is still a contentious topic often debated, legal scholars have

concluded that the characteristics and behavior of individuals involved in a police interaction can

determine how much force will be used. The characteristics that have been recognized and

factors into use-of-force, include (Harris, 2009; Mears et al., 2017; Motley Jr & Joe, 2018):

- Race

- Gender

- The Seriousness of the Crime

- Sobriety level

- The number of people watching the interaction

- The number of police officers involved in the interaction

-  The location of the interaction

- Contempt of cop

- The number of complaints made against the officer(s) involved.

Although these are not the only factors that affect use-of-force, they are the most

measurable and have the ability to be researched more thoroughly. Criminal Justice scholar Dr.

Christopher J. Harris has researched use-of-force and collected data showing how different

interaction characteristics affect use-of-force. In his research, Harris found social class to be

more important than any other contributing factor to use-of-force. "Surprisingly, the rate of

improper force for whites was twice that of blacks—so while race played a role, it was not in the

expected direction. Class and gender, however, appeared to matter more so than race. All the

victims of improper force were males from the lower class" (Harris, 2009, pp. 33-34). However,

the data provided by Harris did not discount race and gender from being baseline characteristics

for determining use-of-force.

**Race and Policing**

The most significant recurring theme that has come about from the reports, articles, and

journals reviewed for this paper is how race is involved when it comes to police and public

relations. Race is often used to examine police practices and measure different levels of

inequality across the United States. The accepted history of most legal scholars and historians in

the United States is that the police were used to keep minority populations in check and to keep these communities disadvantaged. Racism in police practices and profiling of minorities is a social paradigm that has been ingrained into American culture.

The culture of unjust use of force, both lethal and non-lethal, by American police, is a factor of life people of color have been conditioned to live within the United States. Researchers Robert Motley Jr and Sean Joe provide a fascinating article briefly discussing recent historical methods of policing that targeted minorities. Although there is a more profound and in-depth history between people of color and American law enforcement, "Scholars suggest that the war on crime and the war on drugs in the U.S. have produced unnecessary violence and antagonism—particularly in predominantly Black disadvantaged urban communities—than effective policing because 'these initiatives have put police on the front lines of wars they cannot win'" (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993, p. 114, as cited in Motley Jr & Joe, 2018, p.2). American policing had been instructed and authorized to implement policies that targeted areas and people they believed to have crime and criminals. This meant that lower socioeconomic and usually colored cities and communities nationwide were targeted by law enforcement.

The war on crime began in the 60s when Lyndon B. Johnson declared war between the criminals in the United States and the US government. All the while, another disastrous and casualty-heavy war was being waged in Southeast Asia. America was waging war on two fronts: at home and halfway across the globe in Vietnam. Hindsight affords us the ability to say that we were losing in both of these wars. However, when the Vietnam War ended in the 70s, the war on crime was still being fought. Contemporary literature about law enforcement and policing argues that the war on crime has never ended; rather, it just toned down. The war on crime was not a war between criminals and law enforcement. It was an excuse for the US government to target

minority communities and allow police presence to maintain a tight leash over these communities.

The methods used to target colored communities were disguised as proactive policing and enabled police to make "preemptive stops, searches, and arrests as a primary tactic to disrupt criminal activity" (Webb et al., 2022, p.1). Battling the unlawful nature of these stops was fruitless because law enforcement is supported by the courts and backed by the US government, all in the name of maintaining crime control and social order. Most interactions between the police and members of colored communities were negatively received and resulted in further frustration and distrust. Over time, the continual presence of harassment by the police begins to negatively affect not just the people involved in a police interaction but their family, friends, and other community members as well. (Motley Jr & Joe, 2018, Webb et al., 2022). Symptoms of stress, anxiety, PTSD, and depression are heavy in people and communities constantly experiencing negative interactions with the police. Due to the increased rate at which communities of color are disproportionately policed as opposed to white communities.

Lindsey Webb and fellow researchers reported, "By age 15, over 70% of urban Black youth have witnessed police stops, and police have directly stopped 40% of urban Black boys" (Webb et al., 2022, p. 2). Webb claims that exposure to police misuse of force in their personal lives before age 16 creates mistrust and anger between communities of color and law enforcement. This mistrust creates long-lasting effects of mistrust between communities and the police.

Race, gender, and social class were all explored in the research report titled Motley Jr & Joe's *Police Use of Force by Ethnicity, Sex, and Socioeconomic Class*. Overuse of force in their article included "exposure to police shouting, cursing, threatening arrest(...)pushing/grabbing and

handcuffing" (Motley Jr & Joe, 2018, p.5). According to Motley Jr and Joe, their findings about

perceptions of excessive use of force showed that black and white men who make less than

$20,000 a year were more likely to be involved in a situation of overuse of force by the

responding officers. (Motley Jr & Joe, 2018). Their findings have also concluded that black and

white women were far more unlikely to receive police use-of-force despite making less than

$20,000. However, the results provided in this report showed that black residents, regardless of

how much money they made, were more likely than white residents to experience police misuse

of force (Motley Jr & Joe, 2018). Although gender and social class provided a more prominent

role in perceptions of police use of force than initially thought, the researchers maintained an

emphasis on race's overbearing effect on policing and their interactions with the public.

**Method**

This research essay reviews existing literature that discusses law enforcement and police

in the United States. The research questions developed throughout this capstone project were:

How does the United States use and define police power? How much authority is given to police

officers, and who regulates this authority? How does race affect policing methods and the use of

force by law enforcement? However, these questions differed from the original research

questions at the start of this capstone project. The research questions changed over time based on

the researcher's understanding of the overarching topic and how the literature defined the

different themes.

Qualitative data-focused literature examined aspects of law enforcement and public

relations that quantitative data could not adequately address. The scholarly literature collected

for this capstone project came through the databases provided by the CSUMB Library. The

keywords used to find qualitative literature included; *Police, Public, Law Enforcement, Abuse,*

*Police Brutality, stress, strain, occupational stress,* and *strain theory.* The databases that

provided access to most of the sources were JSTOR and the Journal of Criminal Justice.

However, other databases the school provided access to allow for a greater variety of literature to

examine. Over twenty sources that fit the inclusion criteria were selected to be used, while three

government-provided sources examined a Supreme Court case and official use-of-force statistics

provided by the FBI. The criterion was flexible, but it required the literature to focus on

American police and how they impact members of the general public. These effects need to

examine or discuss use-of-force, public perception, and American history pertaining to law

enforcement as well as explain what law enforcement variables negatively affect members of the

general public. The most important recurring themes analyzed throughout the research process

were:

- The origin of police power and how it is utilized.

- Understanding the changing dynamics of policing in the US.

- Occupational stress in policing.

- Unjust policing against minorities.

From here, the sources were divided into four different themes/sections. These sections

were labeled as; Police as an Institution, Occupational Stress and General Strain Theory, Race

and Police, and Use-of-Force.

## Discussion

**Interpretations in Context of the Literature**

After analyzing the literature, the findings differed from what was expected to be seen

when discussing the police and the public relationship. However, there is much more literary

information, and subtopics focused on this relationship. The themes were presented in a macro, meso, and micro level fashion, meaning the broader scope of policing became narrowed down the further the paper continued. The findings presented in this research paper have discussed the decentralization of law enforcement in the US. Different levels of government in the US have different laws and policies regarding regulating and using law enforcement. Local, state, and federal laws and regulations are ever-changing based on how the Constitution of the United States was developed and what powers are granted to the states. The ability to enact changes within law enforcement can come from the state and federal Supreme Court rulings, allowing for the ever-changing capacity for policing and law enforcement to be subject to change.

It has also been discussed that law enforcement is a tool of our court systems in the United States and is the frontline force that combats crime and maintains crime control. Officers on the frontline of crime control have discretionary capabilities regulated by law and jurisdiction. However, this may present a conflict of interest when the courts handle misuse of force cases involving police officers. General strain theory suggests that extreme stress can create strain or affect behavior reactionary to negative stimuli. Police officers are highly susceptible to stress and anger, which can result in dramatic instances of strain.

Policing in the United States is stressful, so these officers must be able to cope with their occupational stress. Police officers, given the nature of their occupation, require the ability to use force when necessary. This force, however, is not strictly regulated under the laws that govern how police officers should operate. This means that situations of unjust use of force or misuse of force can affect different groups of people at different levels than others. One such instance of improper or overuse of force occurs when police interact with people of color. Numerous criminology articles and journals often cite the differences in statistics between how encounters

with the police differ depending on an individual's race. Although street-level characteristics can determine how a situation will be dealt with, race continues to be one of the most important factors when using force.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this research project were mainly based on the nature of this topic as a whole. Numerous changing variables are involved with policing as an occupation, a judicial tool, and its history in the US. The scale and history of policing in the United States as a social institution are too broad to adequately address in this capstone essay. The broad nature of US law enforcement and public interactions changed the research questions twice throughout the research process. It resulted in the shifting priority of the themes relevant to the literature.

Regarding the acquisition of statistical data about policing and the public, use-of-force data would have been the most optimal. However, the United States has no official database for law enforcement use-of-force data. The FBI has a database on its official website comprising voluntarily submitted data from Police departments nationwide. This data contained police officer-involved shootings, use-of-force instances, and the results of the confrontations. However, only 40% of police departments and agencies had submitted their data which inhibited the FBI from publishing it. 40% of police agencies in the United States only make up 7,200 agencies out of the 18,000 scattered across the country. Organizations like The Washington Post and smaller grassroots organizations created use-of-force data collections. However, the statistical discrepancies between their collections made using quantitative data about this topic challenging.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

For researchers and any undergraduate students interested in studying this topic and conducting research to explore law enforcement further, it is essential to have a precisely defined topic to study within this field. The topic being studied should have statistics regarding the issue and be able to be found through corroborating databases. However, some statistics regarding the police may be absent in official government databases, as discovered during the research process for this capstone essay. Many criminology scholars and researchers have covered law enforcement in the United States, so there is a significant possibility that future researchers may cover material already discussed or present in the scholarly literature.

**Conclusion**

After reviewing the relevant literature on the police and the public's relationship, three research questions were developed in light of what scholars had to say about this issue. How does the United States use and define police power? How much authority is given to police officers, and who regulates this authority? How does race affect policing methods and the use of force by law enforcement? This research essay aims to provide the relative themes associated with the police and the public's relationship with the police and provide an introductory level of knowledge about this topic to readers or undergraduate students studying this issue. The findings gathered from the research process are interesting because many different parts of the judicial system affect policing, therefore affecting police and their interactions with the public.

Understanding this topic requires knowledge about the history of law enforcement in the United States; this includes the laws, supreme court rulings, and the methods of policing that are allowed to be practiced. The duties and stress that are associated with policing as an occupation affect the officers that are constantly interacting and making decisions involving members of the

public. The actions of these officers fall under discretionary laws that try to regulate better how police should go about their work. Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory helps explain that the negative experiences and goal prevention experienced in an individual's life can create harmful behaviors to handle anger and stress. This theory, generally applied to criminals, can also be applied to police officers and how they interact with the public on the street level.

Many factors influence law enforcement officer's ability to make on-the-spot decisions. Some of these decisions require the need for use-of-force, one of the most influential factors affecting public perception of the police. Use-of-force and policing policies have been shown to target minority communities more often and harshly than white communities. This discrepancy in policing creates distrust and feelings of fear geared toward the police officers that patrol the community. Although the themes found in this essay do not provide solutions for creating stronger relationships between police officers and local communities. They do provide insight into some of the more critical issues, such as biased policing, a vague understanding of police power, and officers' ability to manage stress experienced while on the job. This research is invaluable to up-and-coming police officers. The way to bring about social change is through the people actively involved in the policing community. The answers lay in the changes that can be made inside out. Working with the public, especially at their most vulnerable moments, is a very difficult space to be in. The public is not universally trustful of law enforcement stemming from the current climate in which the United States has now found itself. The only way forward is to make positive changes from legislation down to day-to-day police work.

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