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The Influence of Personality Traits and Officer Variables on Perception of Excessive Force

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The Influence of Personality Traits and Officer Variables on Perception of Excessive Force

by

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A Criminal Justice Policy Research Project

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Criminal Justice

Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at Kennesaw State University

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Abstract

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Supervising Professors: Dr. S. Cobkit, Dr. G. Lee, and Dr. J. Willard

Often there are reports of people being the victims of excessive force from law enforcement officers. Despite the occurrence of documented cases of excessive force, there is a possibility that accusations of excessive force are exaggerated. Personality and situational theories have been applied to the study of people's perceptions of excessive force. The purpose of this study is to replicate a study conducted by Perkins and Bourgeois (2006). This study will attempt to determine how situational factors and differing personalities can cause differences in society's perception of excessive force, similar to Perkins and Bourgeois (2006). This study has two purposes: to provide literature demonstrating the possible effects perception has on deadly force and to replicate a study conducted by Perkins' and Bourgeois'. Two hypotheses were proposed: (1) perception of excessive force increases when the amount of law enforcement officers and fired shots increase and (2) personality traits would be related to individual perception of excessive force. After surveying a sample of 205 participants, this study did not find strong support for the proposed hypotheses. However, there were slight relationships between constructive patriotism and the 1-officer/2-shots scenario. Excessive force, while not a recent phenomenon, has become a recent study; causing limited research and empirical information. Currently, the amount of literature and lack of empirical evidence are limitations to determining how excessive force is perceived. However, this study has the possibilities of

beginning extensive and future research to provide additional evidence on the controversial topic of deadly force. Validated evidence and support of current theories and literature will offer insight to society's perceived use of excessive force. This may, in turn, help law enforcement develop decision-making paradigms to determine whether or not excessive force is warranted in a given situation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This study attempted to determine how differing personality traits and increasing officer variables may have an effect on perception of excessive force. By providing information and statistics that may support the effect these variables have on excessive force, then a better understanding of perception and excessive force may be created. Essentially, the goal of this project is to provide background information regarding the use of deadly force and replicate Perkins' and Bourgeois' research. This study replicated the previous study by Perkins and Bourgeois (2006) by examining three specific situational factors and four personality factors that may influence society's opinions about when force is considered excessive. It was expected that if participants fall into one of the pre-defined categories of authoritarianism, social dominance, or blind patriotism, they would be more likely to accept the use of deadly force by law enforcement officers. Participants, who belonged to non-dominant social groups, were more egalitarian, or constructive patriots were expected to demonstrate a lower level of tolerance for the use of excessive force. Measuring stronger in a personality type means the participant will contain a certain perception of excessive force, in theory.

Questionable situations involving America's law enforcement officers have resulted in the media reporting officers engaging in excessive force. When these accusations occur, radio commentators and citizens begin discussing known instances of police using excessive force, creating widespread concern and negative police attention. There has been several scholarly articles written portraying law enforcement as a concern for human rights and public health (Cooper, Moore, Gruskin, & Krieger, 2004). There are documented cases of officers using excessive force, including deadly force, but are the numbers exaggerated? Also, do exaggerated assumptions come from biased feelings towards officers?

It is impossible to avoid individuals in society forming opinions, whether they are positive or negative, on police use of excessive force. When officers use higher levels of force, whether it was necessary or not, it is common for controversies to develop. “Attempts to lessen the severity of this community response through efforts to eliminate police discretion are foolhardy, as administrative policies and legislation cannot account for every situation that a police officer may encounter on the streets” (Geller & Scott, 1992, p. 170). Therefore, any use of police force must be justified; this includes deadly force. Law enforcement officers must use discretion to determine what level of force is necessary. Correct officer discretion considers the possible consequences of the actions of law enforcement officers and what consequences may occur from their violent encounters. Logical discretion in a situation that requires force involves the integration of the current situation factors with the available information. This is all the more crucial during situations that require deadly force. Essentially, an officers’ decision in a given situation will be influenced by both the situation and the officer’s thought process.

Frequently, media reports contain headlines that portray law enforcement as engaging in excessive force (Eschholz, Blackwell, Gertz, & Chiricos, 2002). In support of this argument, several scholars have documented instances in which law enforcement officers have engaged in excessive force. For example, Schatmeier (2012) conducted a study on the Cincinnati Police Department. His study demonstrated that approximately 1.5% of all public contact with law enforcement resulted in law enforcement officers using force. Additionally, 75% of the public deemed the force as excessive. Thus, the public tended to greatly overestimate the degree to which officers used force. Considering the inconsistencies in the statistical findings by Schatmeier, researchers still question whether the use of force is exaggerated by the media (Pinizzotto, Davis, Bohrer, & Infanti, 2012a). Instead of attempting to justify the use of force in

law enforcement, researchers focus on the situations law enforcement officers encounter regularly. Pinizzotto et al. (2012a) conducted a study in which discussions with law enforcement officers involved in shootings were documented. Interviews indicated that several instances involved officers using force, while other instances involved force being used against the officers. Not only did the researchers document the different situations, such as officers being killed during routine traffic stops or the offender being shot due to reaching for what appeared to be a weapon, that law enforcement officers encounter daily, but they were successful in demonstrating the number of times officers restrained from using the necessary level of force. After surveying 300 law enforcement officers, 70% were involved in situations where restraint was chosen over the use of deadly force (Pinizzotto et al, 2012a). Researchers have also reported the statistics of justified killings, 385, by law enforcement each year (US Department of Justice, 2010); however, the study conducted by the US Department of Justice cannot account for the amount of times officers restrained from legally and ethically engaging in deadly force. The restraint of force is more difficult to measure, as it depends on the officer's report.

According to Geller and Scott (1992), a large number of officers have experienced several situations where deadly force was necessary; however, officers were capable of solving the situation without resorting to the use of excessive force and causing injuries to the suspect. Research involving deadly force does not always account for this 'restraint' variable, the amount of times officers restrain from using force and/or using less force than necessary. However, researchers (Geller & Scott, 1992) attempted to account for social and environmental variables, for example the bond between the offender and his/her family or the neighborhood the offender was raised in, that can influence the use of deadly force. White (2002) outlined how social and environmental factors can have an effect on the use of deadly force. He proposed that by better

understanding the different environmental and situational factors that influence an officer's discretion to use deadly force, it is possible to better understand police discretion. His study examined the Philadelphia police shooting data from two time periods: 1970-1978 and 1987-1992. The first time period recorded 644 deadly force incidents while the second time period recorded 357 deadly force incidents. These incidents were then grouped based on the type of environmental and situational variables. These variables included race, age, weapon involved, neighborhood demographics, crime rate, etc. White (2002) found several consistencies between the use of deadly force and the effects of environmental and social variables. For example, intra-racial situations were found to be a significant predictor of deadly force occurrences (White, 2002). The lack of research on restraint is a result of researchers not studying the situations where officers have reason to use deadly force, but choose alternative methods. Because literature focuses on the most extreme cases, those using deadly force, there currently is not a clear understanding of the extent of use of deadly force in law enforcement.

In addition to research falling short in reporting the instances in which law enforcement officers restrained in using deadly force, the media also tends to focus on the use of force, rather than report or imply officer restraint (Pinizzotto, Davis, Bohrer, & Infanti, 2012b). The media may fuel public perception by failing to inform the public of the extensive training officers receive. Training for a potential law enforcement officer includes deadly force and the investigation of the use of deadly force. Extensive time and resources are utilized by law enforcement departments to properly inform and equip officers to use weapons. On average, potential recruits receive 12 weeks of training in the police academy, 2 weeks on the job training, and 1 year probation. Experienced officers are required to complete 40 hours of training per year and 52 hours of Emergency Response Team Training per year (Uniform Crime Report, 2013).

Officers are also trained to use proper discretion when using their weapons. Society demands this type of training in order to ensure law enforcement officers possess the proper skills and knowledge when involved in a violent incident. The proper use of force must become as much a part of an officer's decision-making as his training to use physical force or discharge a weapon.

What many people fail to realize is the extensive training law enforcement officers receive in the use of deadly force and what is considered by the criminal justice system to be a justified use of deadly force. "All law enforcement training is based on the two elements of criticality and frequency. Skills that officers need and are required to have to perform their duties fall into both: 1) how often they use them and 2) how crucial it is to have them" (Bohrer & Chaney, 2010, p. 1). This type of training is perceived to be essential when potentially lethal situations are encountered; however, deadly force even when justified still produces negative perceptions. The majority of departments occasionally investigate possible excessive force instances, but they spend more resources on developing and enhancing training programs (Bohrer & Chaney, 2010). Although law enforcement officers appear to be properly trained, the training and preparation does not account for the emotional reaction by the officer and the public that may occur after a violent situation. Despite the law enforcement officers' level of force being justified and deemed necessary, the right to shoot does not ensure society will perceive his/her actions as acceptable.

One means by which the perception of excessive force might be improved is by creating a better understanding of deadly force. A society that blames training and law enforcement policy will not likely move in the direction of positive change. The majority of society blames training and/or policy and assumes that improving these aspects will create a positive change (Schatmeier, 2012). By exploring the use and perceptions of excessive force more

comprehensively, society may alter its understanding and perhaps come to the realization that the law enforcement culture and attitude has to be examined and improved. Training programs and policies are not the final answer to the issue of excessive force. Frazier (2012, p. 1) proposes ten factors that affect excessive force by law enforcement officers, society's response to excessive force, and liability:

1. "The environment in which officers work and officers' perception of the environment in which they work,
2. Analysis and application of information,
3. Policy, procedure, law, and legal opinion,
4. Culture of the agency,
5. Leadership and supervision,
6. Selection and training of police officers,
7. Alternative responses, particularly the availability and use of less-than-lethal force,
8. Public trust, including assessing prior reaction to deadly force situations and media response,
9. Internal and external follow-up to deadly force incidents, and
10. Fear (Frazier, 2012, p. 1)."

These ten factors emphasize a department's ideal approach to understanding the use of excessive force. Additionally, by understanding these factors law enforcement agencies may be capable of improving and maintaining the proper response to excessive force.

It is believed that media reports affect public opinions of significant law enforcement occurrences in society. According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police/COPS Office (2012), four of 36 citizens are objective, meaning these citizens are impartial on law enforcement officer's use of deadly force, when assessing excessive force incidents. A poll of these citizens showed that one in 10 portrayed confidence that law enforcement officers would thoroughly examine the facts and circumstances in each situation. Once these citizens were divided based on their beliefs, it was determined that a three to one majority portrayed a bias against law enforcement officers (International Association of Chiefs of Police/COPS Officer, 2012). Additionally, the majority of citizens, three to one, claimed there was a bias against law enforcement officers due to media influences. It is, therefore, rational to assume that the media may also influence public perception on law enforcement officers' actions. Recently, there have been studies examining the effect of media on public perception of police officers, for example, the "CSI Effect." This concept states the public perception of forensic science has been influenced due to the exaggerated portrayal on television shows such as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (Shelton, 2008). It is no longer just news media that influences public perception, but also entertainment media's portrayal of law enforcement (Shelton, 2008). However, Shelton's study of the "CSI Effect" primarily examined the influence of media on jurors, not public perception of the use of force. Yet, a study conducted by Eschholz, Blackwell, Gertz, and Chiricos (2002) portrayed the effects "reality" television shows, for example *COPS*, has on public perception of the use of force. They concluded that reality shows normally depict law enforcement officers in a sympathetic way while engaging in excessive force that is portrayed as justified. The researchers concluded that because law enforcement can impact what is shown on such reality television shows there should be a more positive perception of law enforcement

officers. Although these reality shows may create more positive perceptions of law enforcement officers, news media coverage can have the opposite outcome because they most often report instances of brutality or corruption among law enforcers (Bohrer & Chaney, 2010). The more media coverage there is on law enforcement officers, the more affect there will be on public perception (Bohrer & Chaney, 2010).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Demographic Differences and Perceptions of Deadly Force

Perceptions of social institutions, especially law enforcement, vary based on racial background. “Indeed, race is one of the most salient predictors of attitudes toward the police and other criminal justice institutions: black are more likely than whites to express dissatisfaction with various aspects of policing” (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004, p. 306). In regards to the Hispanic community, there have been studies focusing on the Hispanic perception of law enforcement officers. Carter (1985) examined the relationship between law enforcement officers and Hispanics in Texas. A sample of 500 Hispanics was evaluated on their perception of police performance, expectations of police performance, and overall satisfaction. Carter (1985) found that any form of law enforcement contact results in negative perception. Additionally, this study found that Hispanics perceived there was increased discrimination among this social group. The majority of studies group several “minority” groups and compare this group to whites; therefore, it is difficult to determine how Hispanics actually perceive law enforcement officers (Carter, 1985).

Whites’ perception of law enforcement officers tended to be more approving and encouraging than that of blacks, such that excessive force was favored and any criticisms of officers were dismissed (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). Additionally, the majority of whites tended to perceive blacks and Hispanics as being the “minority” group and more inclined to be involved in criminal and/or violent behavior (Swigert & Farrell, 1976). Whites tended to believe that in order to control crime law enforcement must be strengthened against minority individuals and communities. Alternatively, African Americans and Hispanics perceived law enforcement officers as being “a visible sign of majority domination” (Bayley & Mendelsohn, 1969, p. 400).

It should be noted, however, that minorities are resistant towards law enforcement officers, but their racial position in society does create the perception that excessive force is a racial and general problem.

Interactions involving conflict between officers and society may result in negative perceptions of law enforcement officers and the use of excessive force. These negative interactions, involving excessive force, tend to have different effects based on race. African Americans and Hispanics tended to have stronger and more long-term negative perceptions of law enforcement officers (Swigert & Farrell, 1976). According to Weitzer and Tuch (2004), it is more likely for African Americans or Hispanic individuals to be angrier following an encounter with law enforcement officers, in addition to feeling they were treated unfairly. Their study surveyed 1,792 whites, Hispanics, and African Americans in the attempt to determine whether race affects perception of police misconduct. It was found that there was strong support for the hypothesis. Statistics report that only 16% of whites perceived law enforcement officers being involved in misconduct, but 34% of African Americans and 38% of Hispanics perceived police misconduct (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). Personal encounters, however, are not the sole reasons for the negative perception of law enforcement agencies. More Americans reported that officers verbally and physically abuse citizens than the number that have actually had an encounter with the police (US Department of Justice, 2010). This finding suggests that perceptions of law enforcement officers may be derived from sources other than direct contact.

There is limited literature on how socioeconomic conditions and racial composition influence individual perception and interactions with law enforcement officers. It is known that disadvantaged and minority communities experience more strained police-community relationships than middle-class and white communities (Sampson & Bartusch, 1998).

Brown and Benedict (2002) have concluded that individuals who perceive their neighborhoods as crime-ridden report negative perceptions of law enforcement officers. A twelve-city study demonstrated that fear of neighborhood crime was associated with community level displeasure towards law enforcement officers; however, the literature poses assorted results on the relationship between neighborhood crime and public perception of law enforcement officers (Brown & Benedict, 2002). The study fails to demonstrate the relationship between neighborhood crime that actually occurs and public perception of law enforcement officers.

Perceptions of Deadly Force

Every situation law enforcement officers' encounter is different, sometimes having lethal outcomes. The typical example of a situation involving lethal force occurs when officers are attempting to apprehend a felony suspect. Society perceives force as being necessary in these encounters because the officer's priority is arresting the suspect while ensuring the safety of society. However, when a situation results in the death of an unarmed suspect, this leads to more uncertain perceptions (Fyfe, 1988). Essentially, a law enforcement officer must use his or her discretion to determine if shooting an unarmed suspect is necessary to ensure the safety of him or her and the safety of the community.

Situations involving the shooting of an unarmed suspect may lead a portion of society to believe that deadly force was misused, while the other portion may believe deadly force was justified. The number of calls the police receive for service are far greater than the number of deaths that occur from officers using deadly force. According to Cullen, Cao, Frank, Langworthy, Browning, and Kapoche (1996) and Fyfe (1988), as cited in Perkins and Bourgeois (2006), deadly force is a rare occurrence and only accounts for 100 deaths per year in the United States. Another factor that needs to be considered is the amount of officer deaths that occurred

while attempting to apprehend a suspect. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report (2013), in 2012, 27 law enforcement officers were killed in the line of duty and 14,565 were injured. The given numbers provide justification for why officers should carry weapons while on duty. Not only do weapons provide protection for themselves and other law enforcement personnel, but they provide protection for the community the officers serve. "Considering that technological advances have not been realized that provide safe, reliable, portable, and effective means of subduing felons bent on aggressive intentions, the police sidearm remains the most effective means of self-defense available to the line officer" (Cullen, Cao, Frank, Langworthy, Browning, & Kapoche, 1996, & Fyfe, 1988, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006, p. 168).

Felter (1988, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006) identified statistics in support of the use of deadly force. While deadly force occurs in 80 percent of police-suspect situations, the incident usually ends within 3 seconds when there are only 7 yards between the suspect and the officer. Additionally, there is an average of 3 shots fired in these incidents; this statistic is the total of shots fired between the officer and the suspect (Felter, 1988). Despite the majority of situations being between one officer and one suspect, occasions do occur when there are multiple officers present with numerous fired shots. The majority of society accepts police shootings as a necessary occurrence, but when the occasional situation occurred where multiple officers are firing multiple shots, concerns and accusations begin. Society begins to perceive that the use of force became excessive and can no longer be justified as legal and necessary (Felter, 1988).

Public perceptions of excessive force by law enforcement officers are often influenced by the media and occasionally triggered by previous bias and mistrust of the government (U.S. Department of Justice, Community Relations Service as cited by Bohrer & Chaney, 2010). In

comparison are Fyfe (1988), Bohrer and Chaney (2010) proposing society's perception of excessive force alters according to the characteristics of the suspect. A report was created that outlined several factors, such as the media, witnesses, and involved officers that may alter perception of law enforcement officers. As stated in the report, "for example, a bank robber armed with a shotgun presents a different connotation than a 14-year-old thief wielding a knife" (Bohrer & Chaney, 2010, p. 2). The suspect may be the factor that influences society's perception despite the level of force being justified. Several occurrences of riots, vandalism, and violence have taken place in communities where force is perceived as excessive (Bohrer & Chaney, 2010). Whereas part of society perceives the law enforcement officer did engage in unjustifiable excessive force, others perceive the suspect posed a threat that forced officers to engage in excessive force.

The use of deadly force has been legalized at the federal, state, and local levels of law enforcement; however, agencies have additional rules and regulations. In *Tennessee v. Garner* (1985) the U.S. Supreme Court made significant decisions that would influence the use of deadly force, declaring instances in which deadly force is necessary. If law enforcement officers are in pursuit of a suspect in which that suspect is believed to be a threat to the officer or the community or the existence of probable cause depicts a crime that poses to involve injury or serious bodily harm is justified, then deadly force is deemed necessary. However, the Court also concluded that even if these conditions are present, law enforcement officers must provide warning in order for deadly force to be justified (*Tennessee v. Garner*, 1985).

Despite the court holding, there is still controversy surrounding what type of shootings is considered justifiable. Tennenbaum (1994) expressed agreement with law enforcement officers that shooting a fleeing suspect is unconstitutional. Additionally, there is controversy surrounding

what it means when the suspect poses increased levels of physical injury or death (Tennenbaum, 1994). Some researchers believe the *Garner* decision established the right for law enforcement to pursue felony suspects, others believe it gave law enforcement the right to protect life through the use of deadly force. Regardless of the Supreme Court decision, the use of deadly force was not limited to self-defense. Tennenbaum (1994) designed his study around the effect *Garner* would have on police misconduct, more specifically on police homicides. His most significant finding was that the *Garner* decision significantly affected justifiable police homicides. Police homicides were reduced by 60 per year (Tennenbaum, 1994). Additionally, the court decision reduced the amount of police shootings. Tennenbaum (1994), however, did state that this finding required additional empirical support.

The rise in police shootings in New York City and Denver has caused a negative shift in the public perception of deadly force (Chevigny, 1995, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006). Several situations have involved multiple officers firing their weapons at a single subject during the investigation of criminal activity. All suspects received multiple gunshot wounds that resulted in their death, leading to public disapproval and accusations of law enforcement using excessive force. Society perceived certain situational factors as excessive, such as the amount of gunshot wounds to each suspect or the amount of officers firing their weapons (Chevigny, 1995, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006). In turn, psychological theories have been applied to the study of societal perceptions of deadly force. These theories are believed to help explain the differences in perceptions of excessive force and how variables, such as the number of shots fired by law enforcement officers, can alter individual perceptions of excessive force.

Psychological Theories Affecting Perceptions

Social impact theory states that the influences of other people are the result of social forces influencing individuals. In social influence, the strength of the group's importance, its immediacy, and the amount of people in the group play a significant role (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2007, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006). Additionally, Aronson et al. (2007) believe once strength and immediacy increases, conformity will also increase. The more power and influence a social group holds in a community, the more likely the community is to conform to it (Aronson et al., 2007).

The strength of a group is associated to the intensity of each social force and can be portrayed by social status, power, and credibility; therefore, the increasing power differences and influences increase the likelihood to conform. Social impact theory suggests that if the subject perceives the physical and psychological factors, also referred to as the immediacy of each social force to the subject, to be a significant force in his or her life, then the probability of conformity to social influences increases (Latane, 1981). For example, Latane (1981, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006) showed that news stories with the most tragic outcomes and more victims were deemed more newsworthy than stories with better outcomes. Because people find tragic stories more newsworthy, individuals will be more likely to conform to others' impressions. Additionally, higher levels of immediacy make conformity more likely. Following this reasoning, it can be assumed that as the amount of police officers or fired shots increase, the perception of how their actions will affect the suspect also increases. Therefore, Perkins and Bourgeois (2006) proposed that society may interpret law enforcement officers' actions as more excessive; this concept being further supported by Heider's attribution theory.

Heider (1920, as cited in Malle, 2011) first described his theory of attribution in his dissertation by developing two models: object and person. He attempted to explain how humans interpret objects by proposing real objects shape “media” (Heider, 1920, as cited in Malle, 2011). Despite the inconsistencies between the media, real objects are related to characteristics effect on the media. Heider then referred to this relationship as attribution theory, the interpretation of life events by individuals and how this interpretation influences their subsequent thinking and behavior (Heider, 1944). Prior work on attribution theory was then related to social interactions in the attempt to answer why people do certain things. Depending on how the individual is attempting to explain behavior determines what type of attribution is assigned to behavior explanation. In the attempts to comprehend individual actions, Heider believes an individual can make two types of attributions: internal attribution, the belief a person is reacting a certain way due to attitude or personality, and external attribution, the belief a person is reacting due to the situation he or she is in (Heider, 1944). It is common for individuals to make external attributions when evaluating others’ behaviors; however, personal evaluation is based on whether the behavior was the result of a success or failure. Individual’s attributions are affected significantly as a result of emotional and motivational desires. For example, self-serving attributions derive from the attempt to avoid personal accusation; essentially, blaming others for the mistake (Heider, 1920, as cited in Malle, 2011). The most common attributions derive from an individual’s attempt to defend what he or she perceives as an attack. This results in victims and offenders being blamed for causing his or her outcomes; essentially it is his or her fault. An individual attempts to escape being at fault; therefore, blaming and assigning labels to others is the result. Additionally, the victim may perceive themselves as comprehensive and less

predictable. Heider believes this is because an individual is more willing to see what is inside ourselves than what may be inside others. (Heider, 1944).

Attribution theory is related to excessive force because people can interpret the use of force, whether it is justified, based on how emotionally involved they are, and/or how the outcome may influence society. When a situation occurs in which law enforcement officers are forced to engage force, members of society may attach differing causes to the event. Some individuals may have an emotional attachment to the situation, such as family members or friends of the victim, and may perceive the force differently. The family members or friends may make negative perceptions about law enforcement officers because they feel the force cannot be justified. In these situations, the self-serving bias may be extended to those each individual feels closest to. The stronger the emotional attachment, the more likely a negative perception will be placed on the situation; whether the excessive force was necessary or not. For those individuals in society who have no association with the situation, they may make internal attribution by blaming the victim. That is they may believe that victim's actions forced law enforcement officers to engage in excessive force. Society may use the event as a reason not to repeat the actions of the victims. Attribution theory cannot only help to explain the public's perception of whether or not excessive force was used, but it may also explain officers' perceptions of excessive force. Officers may also blame the victim because they are making an internal attribution. An internal attribution may be the suspect is fleeing because they are guilty, while an external attribution may be the suspect is fleeing because he or she is in an unfamiliar situation and feels threatened. When officers believe the level of force is necessary and criticism of that force occurs, officers may engage in the self-serving attributions to defend their reasoning and what was perceived as necessary.

Perception Differences in Excessive Force

Social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006) can offer an explanation for the differing perceptions of excessive force in society. Social dominance orientation is an individual's perception that his or her group is the dominant group in society, and may explain how social attitudes affect individual differences. Groups with a greater influence in society perceive their group as the dominant group. These dominant groups believe in hierarchical social stratification and believe themselves to be superior to other social groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The tolerance of abuse principle, also introduced by Sidanius and Pratto, indicates that those with higher social dominance may tolerate abuse of individuals from a lower or less powerful social group. Essentially, this principle suggests that law enforcement officers that may abuse their power will not experience serious repercussions especially when the abuse is towards outgroups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006).

According to Chevigny (1995, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006), law enforcement officers have the potential to be rewarded when they engage in excessive force towards groups considered to be inferior. This suggests that officers accused of excessive force are rarely punished for their actions. In fact, most officers in Chevigny's (1995) study received promotions or official recognition for their actions. Considering this, individuals with high social dominance orientation will be less likely to perceive excessive force by law enforcement officers in comparison to those with low social dominance orientation.

Authoritarianism may also affect individuals' perception of excessive force. Right-wing authoritarians tend to demonstrate blind loyalty to groups with power, such as law enforcement officers (Altemeyer, 1998). Furthermore, individuals with high authoritarianism tend to have double standards towards issues such as civil rights. For example, Altemeyer observed that an

authoritarian has no problem referring to the democratic foundation of America and while ignoring civil liberties and rights. Additionally, right-wing authoritarianism is positively related to self-righteousness, belief in a dangerous world, ethnocentrism, conformity, and a need for structure (Altemeyer, 1998). Historically, American society has considered homosexuals and Blacks to be inferior groups. This is true of individuals considered to be right-wing authoritarians (Altemeyer, 1998, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006). Thus, the right-wing authoritarianism scale may predict an individual's perception of excessive force by law enforcement officers as acceptable. This is because individuals high in right-wing authoritarianism have characteristics of being submissive to the power of their ruling group; there may be a tendency for this group to accept deadly force as justifiable in many situations.

Currently, patriotism is considered to be characterized by differing concepts: blind patriotism and constructive patriotism (Schatz & Staub, 1997, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006). Being high in blind patriotism means individuals are extremely devoted to their country and its leaders. Thus, they are intolerant of criticism and those who express criticism of their country. In contrast, individuals high in constructive patriotism support their country, but also recognize that faults are inherent in their country. In order to reduce the faults, these individuals will attempt to strengthen their country through active political movements (Schatz & Staub, 1997).

Studies conducted by Schatz and Staub (1997, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006) indicated that blind patriots were more passive when challenged with possible destructiveness, such as new policies, by their government. If this destructiveness did occur, blind patriots were also more likely to be nonchalant towards the situation. Schatz and Staub (1997) referred to this loyalty as *embeddedness in the group*. Because blind patriots associate themselves with the

dominant group in society, they are more agreeable towards behavior that may be deemed as unacceptable by the rest of society. By being accepting, loyal, and unresisting to the dominant group, blind patriots will be less likely to judge law enforcement officers' actions or behaviors as excessive. Blind patriots and constructive patriotism are contradictory of each other and may have differing perceptions of excessive force. Although blind patriots are willing to conform to the dominant group for social acceptance, they do not perceive law enforcement officers as being involved in excessive force; individuals high in constructive patriotism want to protect their country and their rights, and perceive actions by law enforcement officers as being excessive (Schatz & Staub, 1997, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006).

Limitations of Previous Studies on Excessive Force

Law enforcement use of deadly force is difficult to study because situations involving deadly force are not generally open to researchers. Not only are such situations potentially dangerous to researchers, but they may also be quite unexpected. Thus, the sample sizes of these studies tend to be small, making it difficult to properly analyze the data and attain statistics that are significantly correlated. "Generally, research has focused on the following questions: Who shoots? Who gets shot? What are the circumstances of the shooting? What are the circumstances related to officers killed?" (Fyfe, 1988, p. 174). In order to gain the data from this type of research there must be direct contact with the victim and/or the law enforcement officer. Even then, interviews and reports may be tainted by personal perceptions and attributions on behalf of the officer and the victim. Limited research has focused on the restraint used by the officer and the discretion process applied in the use of deadly force. Binder and Scharf (1980) suggest excessive force used by law enforcement officers is based on sequences of decisions and behaviors made, not only of the officer, but of the suspect. Based on this concept, further

research has been developed to try to determine whether it is even necessary for a law enforcement officer to draw a weapon. The best researchers have done to test this is to develop scenarios and used field simulators to collect data. A recent study conducted by Doerner and Ho (1994) concluded that officers survived 65% of the simulated shooting situations, when 70% of the situations were designed to justify the use of deadly force.

To overcome these limitations research has also been conducted to assess the relationship between organizational issues, such as an organizational concern for data that ranking officers may consider over the danger in which their officers operate, and excessive force (Fyfe, 1988), to depict situational characteristics of an excessive force situation (Alpert & Dunham, 1995), and to examine the victim in an excessive force situation (Alpert & Dunham, 1995). Until recently, the literature has been focused on the law enforcement officer. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has been compiling data on officer killings since 1961 through the use of the Uniform Crime Report. Currently, researchers have shifted their focus towards the victim's characteristics and actions during an encounter in order to determine officer discretion and to determine whether law enforcement officers are actually engaging in excessive force.

Due to current societal disagreement over fatal shootings that involved multiple officers, questions have developed concerning excessive force and law enforcement officers. The main question being posed is how the presence of multiple officers and/or the amount of shots fired in a situation affects individuals' perceptions of excessive force. According to Latane's (1981) social impact theory, as the number of officers increase in a situation involving multiple gun shots, individuals' perceptions of excessive force will also increase (Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006). Social Impact theory may have a converse effect on the officers' decision to use lethal force. When emotional instances, such as school shootings or the movie theater shooting in Colorado,

society deems officer force as necessary to gain control of the situation. Social impact theory works in reverse. This is likely due to a high level of sympathy for the innocence or number of victims.

According to the evidence provided, it can be inferred that personality differences may be related to perceptions of excessive force. In this study, it is hypothesized that those scoring high in social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, and blind patriots will be less likely to perceive the force used by officers as excessive in comparison to those in minority social groups and those with a more egalitarian view. Individuals high in social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, and blind patriots tend to conform to the beliefs of the dominant group. Determining whether the dominant group has strong and positive social relationships will support the idea of whether these minority groups will perceive force as excessive.

In addition to developing hypotheses based on personality traits, hypotheses can be developed based on how the different personality traits vary in different situations; if perceptions of force vary. As situational factors change, for example the number of officers in a shooting, how will the perceptions of excessive force change within groups of given personality traits? According to Mischel and Shoda (1995, as cited in Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006), behavior is the result of individual personality differences that is based on social and environmental factors, as well as personal beliefs and values. As clearly as social impact, attribution, and group dominance can have an effect on perceived use of force, so can personality with its broad range of factors and individual situational circumstances, which cannot be easily predicted. This adds circumstances and individual characteristics to the mix of impacts on the perception of excessive force.

Overview of Current Study

Perkins and Bourgeois (2006) developed a two-part study design to test the perception of deadly force among law enforcement officers. Study 1 is based on the hypothesis that as the number of officers and shots fired in a police-citizen confrontation increases, so does society's perception of the misuse of deadly force. In order to test this hypothesis, 351 undergraduate students received eight scenarios to read that involved the fatal shooting of a suspect. Each scenario differed in the number of officers and shots fired. Perkins and Bourgeois (2006) found partial support for their hypothesis. The statistics portrayed as the number of shots fired increased, so did the perception of misuse of deadly force. However, there was an opposite determinate for the increase of law enforcement officers.

Study 2 related personality traits to perception of deadly force. Four personality traits, right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, blind patriotism, and constructive patriotism, were studied to determine whether personality characteristics could possibly affect perception of deadly force. Perkins and Bourgeois (2006) hypothesized that those testing high in right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, and blind patriotism would be less likely to perceive excessive force. One hundred seventy five college students were given the same scenario as the previous sample size used in Study 1. Additionally, the 175 college students were given a 14-item social dominance scale (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Appendix A), a 32-item right-wing authoritarianism scale (Altemeyer, 1998; Appendix B), 12-item blind patriotism scale and 6-item constructive patriotism scale (Schatz & Staub, 1997; Appendix C). The personality traits were then correlated to the number of shots fired and number of law enforcement officers. It was found that perception of misuse of force increased when the number of shots fired and

officers increased. However, the personality traits did not have an effect on the perception of deadly force (Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006).

This study replicates Perkins' and Bourgeois' (2006) original study to determine whether differing results can be found. With the literature that was presented, as well as data and statistics, it was difficult to comprehend the lack of support that was found. In the attempt to replicate Perkins' and Bourgeois' (2006) study, this study proposes similar hypotheses and research design to determine whether similar results can be found. Similarly to previous research, this study hypothesizes that (1) perception of excessive force increases when the amount of law enforcement officers and fired shots increase and (2) personality traits would be related to individual perception of excessive force. This study offers an extensive literature review and research design to determine whether deadly force is an exaggerated assumption. However, this study does operate on a smaller scale. Whereas Perkins' and Bourgeois' (2006) study consisted of a two-part design, this study consists of a single design; resulting in a smaller sample size and proportionately scaled participant survey. Additionally, the scenarios developed within this study were not taken from Perkins and Bourgeois (2006). Different scenarios were developed in order to determine if this study would receive different results.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Participants

The participants consisted of a convenient sample of 205 students (189 undergraduate, 15 graduates, 1 failing to indicate their level of education) from Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Georgia. There were 118 females, 86 males, and 1 individual who did not indicate his or her gender. Participants ranged from the ages 16 to 43 years, with the mean being 21.97. Participants were recruited through social science professors in Kennesaw State University's College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Professors allotted class time for the administering of the survey. Different degree concentrations were surveyed. The same survey was administered to all participants.

Procedure

A survey (Appendix E) was developed in order to determine how attitudes may affect participants' perceptions of deadly force. The survey was six pages long and consisted of five parts. Part 1 (social dominance scale), Part 2 (right-wing authoritarianism scale) and Part 3 (blind and constructive patriotism scale) consisted of questions to assess participants' attitudes. Part 4 contained three hypothetical scenarios that assessed perception of deadly force. Part 5 consisted of the demographic information.

Attached to the survey was a cover letter explaining the nature of the study. The cover letter served as informed consent, and informed participants of the purpose of the survey, as well as their rights including the right to refuse to answer any portion of the survey. The cover letter explained that all information would be anonymous and all responses would be destroyed once the data have been recorded.

All surveys were self-administered and data collection occurred over a 2 week period (February 24, 2014-March 3, 2014). Permission was given by professors to survey their classes. These students were administered the survey in the first 15 minutes of class. Prior to administration of the survey; it was verbally explained to participants. All surveys administered were completed (100% response rate), although not all questions were answered.

Instruments

In order to determine each participant's personality type, questions were used from Sidanius and Pratto's (1999) social dominance scale (Appendix A), Altemeyer's (1998) right-wing authoritarianism scale (Appendix B), and Schatz and Staub's (1997) blind patriotism and constructive patriotism scale (Appendix C). Five questions were selected from each scale in order to reduce survey size. The questions were selected based on length and simplicity. According to each scale, higher scores indicate the participant being strong in that particular personality type. Participants were asked to record their agreement to each question on a 5 point Likert Scale with the following labels: 1 (*strongly disagree*), 2 (*disagree*), 3 (*neutral*), 4 (*agree*), or 5 (*strongly agree*); differing from the scales used by the previous researchers.

Social dominance was measured using five questions (Appendix A) from Sidanius and Pratto's (1999) social dominance scale: (1) "some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups," (2) "to get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups," (3) "all groups should be given an equal chance in life," (4) "increased social equality is beneficial to society," and (5) "no group should dominate in society." Higher scores indicate participants as stronger social dominance orientation. Three of the five questions were reversed scored.

Right-wing authoritarianism was measured using five questions (Appendix B) from Altemeyer's (1998) right-wing authoritarianism scale: (1) "gays and lesbians are just as healthy

and moral an anybody else,” (2) “there is absolutely nothing wrong with nudist camps,” (3) “what our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil and take us back to our true path,” (4) “there is no ‘ONE right way’ to live life, everybody has to create their own way,” and (5) “this country would work a lot better if certain groups of troublemakers would just shut up and accept their group’s traditional place in society.” Three of the five questions were reversed scored.

The blind patriotism and constructive patriotism (Appendix C) was also measured using five questions from Schatz and Staub’s (1997) scale. To test blind patriotism, the following questions were chosen: (1) “I would support my country right or wrong,” (2) “I believe that U.S. policies are almost always the morally correct ones,” (3) “people should not constantly try to change the way things are in America,” (4) “I support U.S. policies for the very reason that they are the policies of my country,” and (5) “there is too much criticism of the U.S. in the world and we its citizens should not criticize it.” To test constructive patriotism, the following questions were chosen: (1) “people should work hard to move this country in a positive direction,” (2) “if you love America, you should notice its problems and work to correct them,” (3) “I express my love for America by supporting efforts at positive change,” (4) “I oppose some U.S. policies because I care about my country and want to improve it,” and (5) “my love of country demands that I speak out against popular, but potentially destructive policies.”

There were three scenarios developed that described police shootings that resulted in the death of a suspect (Appendix D). Each scenario differed in the number of officers present (1 or 2) and the amount of shots fired (2 or 4); all scenarios were intended to depict realistic situations. Scenario 1 involved 1 officer firing 2 shots, Scenario 2 involved 2 officers firing 4 shots, and Scenario 3 involved 2 officers firing 2 shots. Before beginning, participants were informed that it

is routine for police departments to dispatch at least two officers to suspicious situations. Because the majority of police departments issue semiautomatic pistols to their officers, the amount of shots fired in each scenario was based on this fact.

After reading every scenario, participants were asked to rate their perception of the force on a 10-point scale with anchors of 1 (*absolutely no misuse of force*) and 10 (*absolute misuse of force*). Additionally, three categories were given: *The officer(s) in this scenario behaved appropriately*, *the officer(s) in this scenario should have attempted to subdue the subject more peacefully*, and *the officer(s) in this scenario were justified in using force*. Participants were asked to choose one of the three responses as it related to their opinion of the scenario.

Lastly, participants were asked to answer the following demographic questions: age, gender, race, religion, country/state of origin, class, major, and questions regarding interactions and employment with law enforcement agencies. These questions were measured through yes/no and short answer responses.

Design and Analyses

The independent variables being tested are the scenarios which contains three levels. The personality traits are the predictor variables and the perception of excessive force is the dependent variable being tested. In order to test the hypotheses, this scale calls for a Pearson correlation. The mean scores of the average number of shots fired will be compared across the three scenarios. This comparison tested how well the variables were related. As the number of officers and the number of shots fired increases, the perception of excessive force will also increase.

An ordinary least squares analysis was used to analyze the perception of excessive force based on personality traits. This method estimates the unknown parameters in the linear regression model. The variable of excessive force was the criterion variable, and social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, blind patriotism and constructive patriotism were the predictor variables. An alpha level of .05 was used for all tests of significance.

Chapter 4

Analysis and Discussion

The hypotheses being tested are: (1) perception of excessive force increase when the amount of law enforcement officers and fired shots increase, and (2) personality traits would be related to individuals' perception of excessive force. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the independent and control variables (e.g., demographics). The scenario is the independent variable, which includes three levels: 1-officer/2-shots scenario, 2-officer/4-shots scenario, and 2-officer/2-shots scenario (Appendix D). The mean scores for these scenarios represent perception of deadly force. It was expected that as the number of fired shots and law enforcement officers increase, so will the perception of force. Essentially, the 1-officer/2-shots scenario should have the lowest perception of force and the 2-officer/4-shots scenario should have the highest perception of force. Within this group, Table 1 shows the following mean scores for the scenarios: 2.91 (1-officer/2-shots), 3.11 (2-officer/4-shots), and 5.05 (2-officer/2-shots). Contrary to the hypothesis, the mean score of 5.05 indicates the sample reported that the 2-officer/2-shots scenario contained the highest levels of excessive force by the law enforcement officers.

The personality traits, social dominance, right-wing authoritarianism, blind patriotism, and constructive patriotism, are predictor variables. As shown in Table 1, the predictor variables have mean scores of 2.04 (social dominance), 2.69 (right-wing authoritarianism), 2.44 (blind patriotism) and 4.28 (constructive patriotism). Constructive patriotism had the highest mean score, 4.28, which suggests, as a whole, participants tested high in constructive patriotism.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Reference Values for the Dependent, Independent, and Control Variables

	IV	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<u>Perception</u> <u>of</u> <u>Force</u>	1-officer/2-shots scenario	200	1.00	10.00	2.91	2.47
	2-officer/2-shots scenario	200	1.00	10.00	5.05	3.01
	2-officer/4-shots scenario	198	1.00	10.00	3.11	2.55
<u>Personality</u> <u>Traits</u>	Social Dominance Right-Wing	200	1.00	5.00	2.04	3.64
	Authoritarianism	203	1.00	5.00	2.69	3.79
	Blind Patriotism	202	1.00	5.00	2.44	3.80
	Constructive Patriotism	205	1.00	5.00	4.28	2.99
<u>Demographics</u>	Gender	204				
	Male	86				
	Female	118				
	Age	197	16.00	43.00	21.97	3.80
	Race	204				
	White	131				
	African American	42				
	Not Answered	1				
	Country/State of Origin	194/182				
	USA	12				
	International	11				
Not Answered	11					
Pulled over	205					
Yes	159					
No	46					

To test the hypothesis that personality traits are related to participants' perception of excessive force separate Pearson correlations were conducted. The personality traits, predictor

variables, will be related to excessive force, criterion variable. Table 2 represents Pearson correlations between the personality traits of participants and their perception of deadly force used in three scenarios.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between the Personality Traits and Perception of Deadly Force across Three Scenarios

	SD	RWA	BP	CP	1o/2s	2o/4s	2o/2s
SD							
RWA	.37**						
BP	.16*	.26**					
CP	-.12	-.07	-.20**				
1o/2s	.04	-.03	.06	-.17*			
2o/4s	.07	.07	.06	-.12	.67**		
2o/2s	-.04	-.10	-.18*	.05	.37**	.43**	

SD=social dominance, RWA=right-wing authoritarianism, BP=blind patriotism, CP=constructive patriotism, 1o/2s=1-officer/2-shots, 2o/4s=2-officers/4-shots, 2o/2s=2-officer/2-shots

N=205

*(p<.05); **(p<.01); ***(p<.001)

It was hypothesized that constructive patriotism would be positively correlated with perceptions of deadly force. In addition, it was hypothesized that social dominance, right-wing authoritarianism, and blind patriotism would be negatively correlated with perceptions of deadly

force. According to this correlation analyses presented in Table 2, there are only two significant relationships between the predictor and criterion variables. First, there is a negative correlation between constructive patriotism and the 1-officer/2-shots scenario ($r=-.17$). Increases in constructive patriotism were associated with less perceived use of excessive forces in the 1-officer/2-shots scenario. Because the relationship was in the opposite predicted direction, there is no support for the proposed hypotheses. Second, there is a negative correlation between blind patriotism and perception of excessive force in the 2-officer/2-shots scenario ($r=-.18$). Blind patriotism increases, perceptions of excessive force decreases in the 2-officer/2-shots scenario. The correlations found between right-wing authoritarianism and blind patriotism does give slight support for the proposed hypotheses. However, Table 2 does not show any relationships between social dominance and the scenarios, providing no support for the proposed hypotheses.

To further examine the potential relationship between personality traits and perceptions of excessive force, an ordinary least squares analysis was used. This method estimated the unknown parameters in the linear regression model. The variable of excessive force is the criterion variable being tested, while social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, blind patriotism and constructive patriotism were the predictor variables. Three regression analyses were conducted, one for each of the three scenarios.

Table 3 presents the relationship between the personality traits and perceptions of excessive force in the 1-officer/2-shots scenario (Appendix D1). Unexpectedly, according to this regression, there are is only one personality trait that is significantly related to the perceptions of excessive force. Constructive patriotism was negatively and significantly related to perceptions of excessive force ($B=-.17, p=.02$). Based on this analysis, as the attitude of the sample becomes more constructive patriotism then perception towards the situation described in the 1-officer/2-

shots scenario is perceived as less use of excessive force by law enforcement officers. According to the constructive patriotism personality, this group was hypothesized as perceiving all force as being excessive. Therefore, this analysis does not show support for the proposed hypotheses.

Table 3

Linear Regression Analysis between Perception of Deadly Force (1-officer/2-shots scenario) and Personality Traits

<u>Coefficients^a</u>					
Model	<u>B</u>	<u>Std. Error</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
(Constant)	6.48	1.80		3.60	.00
SD	.02	.05	.02	.28	.78
RWA	-.05	.05	-.08	-.95	.34
BP	.01	.05	.02	.28	.78
CP	-.15	.07	-.17	-2.27	.02

Table 4 presents the relationship between the personality traits and perceptions of excessive force in the 2-officer/4-shots scenario (Appendix D2). In contrast to Table 3, there is no significant relationship between the scenarios and constructive patriotism ($\beta = .09$, $p < .09$). This analysis does not support hypothesis proposed that constructive patriotism is related to perceptions of excessive force.

Table 4

Linear Regression Analysis between Perception of Deadly Force (2-officers/4-shots scenario) and Personality Traits

<u>Coefficients^a</u>					
Model	<u>B</u>	<u>Std. Error</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
(Constant)	5.41	1.89		2.72	.01
SD	.02	.06	.03	.36	.72
RWA	.02	.05	.03	.36	.72
BP	.00	.05	.01	.07	.95
CP	-.19	.07	-.13	-1.70	.09

The third regression analysis presented in Table 5 showed the relationship between the personality traits and perception of excessive force in the 2-officer/2-shots scenario.

Table 5

Linear Regression Analysis between Perception of Deadly Force (2-officer/2-shots scenario) and Personality Traits

<u>Coefficients^a</u>					
Model	<u>B</u>	<u>Std. Error</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
(Constant)	8.40	2.16		3.90	.00
SD	.01	.06	.01	.12	.90
RWA	-.06	.06	-.08	-.99	.32
BP	-.16	.06	-.20	-2.65	.01
CP	-.03	.08	-.03	-.37	.71

There was a negative and relationship between blind patriotism and perceptions of excessive force ($\beta=-.20, p<.01$) in the 2-officer/2-shots scenario (Appendix D3). As the attitude of the sample becomes more blind patriotism then perception towards the 2-officer/2-shots scenario is seen as being less use of excessive force. With there being a negative and significant relationship between 2-officer/2-shots scenario and blind patriotism, there is slight support of the proposed hypotheses.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

It is understood that law enforcement officers will encounter situations where deadly force is a necessity to protect themselves, their partner, or the community; it is intended to be used as a last resort. In order for this type of force to be justified, the force applied must be in direct proportion to the level of threat. The use of excessive force has been a significant topic in criminal justice for several decades. Officers have been allotted the discretion to determine what type of force is appropriate. The decision-making process is directed through policy and training. Daily, law enforcement officers encounter deadly situations and, with proper discretion, have the legal authority to end the threat.

This study proposed two hypotheses: (1) perception of excessive force increases when the amount of law enforcement officers and fired shots increase and (2) personality traits are related to individual perception of excessive force. Applying the standards and characteristics of the social impact theory, the number of shots fired by law enforcement officers and the amount of officers present in a situation has the potential to negatively impact society's perception of excessive force. Although this idea was supported in Perkins and Bourgeois (2006) study, support was not found in this investigation. Social dominance, right-wing authoritarianism, blind and constructive patriotism were unrelated to perceptions of excessive force. This study found no support for the proposed hypotheses. Table 2 shows the negative correlation between constructive patriotism and the 1-officer/2-shots scenario. As constructive patriotism increases the attitude in the 1-officer/2-shots scenario decreases. Additionally, the regression analysis shown in Table 3 portrays the negative and significant relationship between constructive patriotism and 1-officer/2-shots scenario. Once these analyses were conducted, strong relationships were not demonstrated; therefore, failing to support the hypotheses. According to

constructive patriotism, those testing high will perceive force to be excessive regardless of force being justified. Despite the slight relationships, there is still weak support for the hypothesis that will not allow for the hypothesis to be valid. In regards to the hypothesis perception of excessive force increase when the amount of law enforcement officers and fired shots increase, there is not a relationship between 2-officer/4-shots scenario (Appendix D) and the independent variables.

There are limitations in the sample used in this study. College students from Kennesaw State University comprised this study's data. There is the possibility that college students may have different perceptions from other populations. Also, the majority of the college students sampled were white, females between the ages of 16 to 25. This could also cause skewed results due to the fact that this group will have similar perspectives. Essentially, given the demographics of this sample, it is less likely that they would have had negative experiences in the past with law enforcement. Therefore, their responses to deadly force may be different in comparison to other groups.

One possibility for future research may be changing the social status or race of the suspect in police shootings to determine what role the suspect has in perception. If the characteristics of social dominance theory are a factor in people's perception of excessive force, then the social status and race of the suspect may affect perception. Social dominance theory can be better tested to determine how perceptions of excessive force vary when characteristics differ between the suspects involved in the excessive force. Current literature dictates that a strong relationship will be demonstrated between perceptions of excessive force and social dominance orientation; however, there is limited literature and statistics available that suggest how this relationship will vary when the suspect is a member of the dominant group or subordinate group. The development of future research and literature could benefit law enforcement agencies

because it may portray how they are perceived by society. However, perceptions and group dominance change over time. Therefore, this would have to be an area of ongoing study.

Also, additional suggestions for future research would be role play. Participants can associate themselves with the thoughts and actions of law enforcement officers. By placing themselves in the situation of the officer, participants can depict their reaction in a shoot/don't shoot scenario. By use of imagination or live observation, researchers can measure how participants will react when placed in a similar situation as a law enforcement officer. Measurements can be recorded based on the amount of time it takes participants to fire their weapons and/or the amount of fired shots by the participants. It would be interesting to determine if those individuals with higher scores in social dominance orientation will be quicker to react in situations that require excessive force.

It could also benefit researchers to study the decision-making process of law enforcement officers involved in intense criminal scenarios. Law enforcement officers typically have higher social dominance orientation and may perceive themselves as having certain dominance in society due to their career and their stated roles. It's worth consideration to determine whether their sense of dominance affects their decision-making process. Considering this study is attempting to relate social dominance orientation qualities to society's perceptions, future study should attempt to associate social dominance orientation to decision-making practices of law enforcement officers. There is a possibility unnecessary force can be drastically reduced.

Despite force being an essential part of policing, it is also problematic. "While police officers must at times use or threaten to use force to restrain and detain those that violate the law and such force is rare—roughly 1.5% of all contacts with civilians results in the use of force—in

those encounters, seventy-five percent of those subject to such force or threats felt that the police officer's actions were excessive" (Schatmeier, 2012). Research seems to confirm that law enforcement officers often engage in excessive force and minority groups are usually targeted (Harris, 2009). Furthermore, United States police chiefs in prominent cities have expressed their belief that excessive force is a fundamental concept in policing. Its use dates back to antiquity, serving as a deterrent and public example. However, it is the responsibility of the department to sufficiently train law enforcement officers in the areas of deadly force and reasonable discretion. The misuse of force has the potential to violate the Constitutional rights of the victim and create a public uproar.

However, prior to the nineties, reports of police brutality were almost nonexistent because of the failure of the federal government to regulate the use of force. Also, incidents of abuse or excessive force could not be taped and televised on a wide scale. Hidden, unspoken excessive force is easier to control. As a response to the abuse demonstrated in the Rodney King incident, Congress ratified Title 42 (1994) as a way to restrict unlawful excessive force. Title 42 permits civil action to be taken against any police department that continuously violates the constitutional rights of the American citizens. Within a decade of its ratification, the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice has taken action against eleven law enforcement agencies. Currently, the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice no longer focuses attention on legal actions, but through providing technical support to police departments (Jerome, 2006).

Appendix A

Social Dominance Scale (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999)

A 7-point Likert Scale is used for each item. Participants rate their agreement or disagreement with the statements 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

1. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.
2. In getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups.
3. It's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others.
4. To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups.
5. If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems.
6. It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.
7. Inferior groups should stay in their place.
8. Sometimes other groups must be kept in their place.
9. It would be good if groups could be equal.
10. Group equality should be our ideal.
11. All groups should be given an equal chance in life.
12. We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups.
13. Increased social equality is beneficial to society.
14. We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally.
15. We should strive to make incomes as equal as possible.
16. No group should dominate in society.

Appendix B

Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (Altemeyer, 1998)

You will probably find that you agree with some of the statements, and disagree with others, to varying extents. Please indicate your reaction to each statement according to the following scale:

Write down a -4 if you very strongly disagree with the statement.

Write down a -3 if you strongly disagree with the statement.

Write down a -2 if you moderately disagree with the statement.

Write down a -1 if you slightly disagree with the statement.

Write down a +1 if you slightly agree with the statement.

Write down a +2 if you moderately agree with the statement.

Write down a +3 if you strongly agree with the statement.

Write down a +4 if you very strongly agree with the statement.

If you feel exactly and precisely neutral about an item, write down a "0."

1. Our country desperately needs a mighty leader who will do what has to be done to destroy the radical new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us.
2. Gays and lesbians are just as healthy and moral as anybody else.
3. It is always better to trust the judgment of the proper authorities in government and religion than to listen to the noisy rabble-rousers in our society who are trying to create doubt in people's minds
4. Atheists and others who have rebelled against the established religions are no doubt every bit as good and virtuous as those who attend church regularly.

5. The only way our country can get through the crisis ahead is to get back to our traditional values, put some tough leaders in power, and silence the troublemakers spreading bad ideas.
6. There is absolutely nothing wrong with nudist camps.
7. Our country needs free thinkers who have the courage to defy traditional ways, even if this upsets many people.
8. Our country will be destroyed someday if we do not smash the perversions eating away at our moral fiber and traditional beliefs.
9. Everyone should have their own lifestyle, religious beliefs, and sexual preferences, even if it makes them different from everyone else.
10. The “old-fashioned ways” and the “old-fashioned values” still show the best way to live.
11. You have to admire those who challenged the law and the majority’s view by protesting for women’s abortion rights, for animal rights, or to abolish school prayer.
12. What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil, and take us back to our true path.
13. Some of the best people in our country are those who are challenging our government, criticizing religion, and ignoring the “normal way things are supposed to be done.”
14. God’s laws about abortion, pornography and marriage must be strictly followed before it is too late, and those who break them must be strongly punished.
15. There are many radical, immoral people in our country today, who are trying to ruin it for their own godless purposes, whom the authorities should put out of action.
16. A “woman’s place” should be wherever she wants to be. The days when women are submissive to their husbands and social conventions belong strictly in the past.

17. Our country will be great if we honor the ways of our forefathers, do what the authorities tell us to do, and get rid of the “rotten apples” who are ruining everything.
18. There is no “ONE right way” to live life; everybody has to create their own way.
19. Homosexuals and feminists should be praised for being brave enough to defy “traditional family values.”
20. This country would work a lot better if certain groups of troublemakers would just shut up and accept their group’s traditional place in society.

Appendix C

Blind and Constructive Patriotism Scale (Schatz & Staub, 1997)

Blind Patriotism

1. People who do not wholeheartedly support America should live somewhere else.
2. The United States is virtually always right.
3. I would support my country right or wrong.
4. The anti-Vietnam war protesters were un-American.
5. For the most part, people who protest and demonstrate against U.S. policy are good, upstanding, intelligent people. *
6. I believe that U.S. policies are almost always the morally correct ones.
7. If another country disagreed with an important United States policy that I knew little about, I would *not* necessarily support my country's position. *
8. People should not constantly try to change the way things are in America.
9. I support U.S. policies for the very reason that they are the policies of my country.
10. There is too much criticism of the U.S. in the world, and we its citizens should not criticize it.
11. It is un-American to criticize this country.
12. We should have complete freedom of speech even for those who criticize the country.*

Constructive Patriotism

14. People should work hard to move this country in a positive direction.
15. If you love America, you should notice its problems and work to correct them.
16. If I criticize the United States, I do so out of love for my country.
17. I oppose some U.S. policies because I care about my country and want to improve it.

18. I express my love for America by supporting efforts at positive change.

19. My love of country demands that I speak out against popular but potentially destructive policies.

Note. * Indicates the item is to be reverse scored

Appendix D

Scenarios

1. The subject had reported a history of carrying concealed weapons throughout his adolescent and adult life. He also had a past arrest for using a firearm in the commission of a crime and had served time in prison. An officer operating radar pulled him over for speeding. At the time of the traffic stop, the subject was transporting marijuana and cocaine in amounts that would have resulted in an arrest and a possible felony conviction. In addition, a warrant had been issued for him due to a parole violation. As soon as the officer engaged the emergency lights, the offender pulled to the side of the roadway. As he looked in his rearview mirror, the subject noticed the officer was not watching him. The subject then took his weapon from under the car seat with the intentions of shooting the officer as he approached his vehicle. However, as the officer approached the vehicle the subject fled the vehicle with gun in hand. During pursuit of the subject, the subject then turns and points his gun at the officer. Without hesitation, the officer shoots the subject twice; resulting in his death.

2. The subject had reported a history of carrying concealed weapons throughout his adolescent and adult life. He also had a past arrest for using a firearm in the commission of a crime and had served time in prison. Two officers operating radar pulled him over for speeding. At the time of the traffic stop, the subject was transporting marijuana and cocaine in amounts that would have resulted in an arrest and a possible felony conviction. In addition, a warrant had been issued for him due to a parole violation. As soon as the officers engaged the emergency lights, the offender pulled to the side of the roadway. As he looked in his rearview mirror, the subject noticed the both officers were not watching him. The subject then took his weapon from under the car seat

with the intentions of shooting the officers as they approached his vehicle. However, as the officers approached the vehicle the subject fled the vehicle with gun in hand. During pursuit of the subject, the subject then turns and points his gun at the officers and fires a shot. Without hesitation, both officers fire four shots and two shots hit the subject; resulting in his death.

3. The subject had reported a history of carrying concealed weapons throughout his adolescent and adult life. He also had a past arrest for using a firearm in the commission of a crime and had served time in prison. Two officers operating radar pulled him over for speeding. At the time of the traffic stop, the subject was transporting marijuana and cocaine in amounts that would have resulted in an arrest and a possible felony conviction. In addition, a warrant had been issued for him due to a parole violation. As soon as the officers engaged the emergency lights, the offender pulled to the side of the roadway. As he looked in his rearview mirror, the subject noticed the officers were not watching him. The subject then took his weapon from under the car seat with the intentions of shooting the officers as they approached his vehicle. However, as the officers approached the vehicle the subject fled the vehicle and put his gun in his waistband. During pursuit of the subject, the subject then turns and makes a movement towards his waistband. Without hesitation, the officers draw their guns and aim for the subject. After warning him not to move, the subject makes a motion towards his waist. One officer shoots the subject twice, while the other officer never fires his weapon. The shots killed the subject.

Appendix E

Survey to Determine Attitudes that May Affect Perspectives of Deadly Force by the Police

February 10, 2014

Dear Student:

Often there are reports of people being the victims of excessive force from law enforcement officers. Despite the occurrence of documented cases of excessive force, there is a possibility the assumptions are exaggerated. Theories that are related to personality and situational factors have been correlated to excessive force to determine how individual perceptions may vary. The purpose of this study is to determine how situational factors and differing personalities can differ in their assumptions of excessive force. I have been allowed to conduct this study at Kennesaw State University. Your responses can provide useful information about how situational factors and personality differences can affect perspectives of excessive force.

Please be assured that your participation in this study will be strictly anonymous. You can return the completed survey (5 pages total) to me, in person or via email. This survey will be conducted and completed between January 27, 2014 and February 10, 2014. Please be advised, you have the right to skip or refuse to answer any questions. If you choose to observe this right, please respond to the question with "Choose not to answer."

If you have any concerns or questions about this study, please feel free to contact me. Please accept my sincere appreciation for participating in this survey.

Sincerely,

Ashley Wooton

Graduate Student

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Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 1000 Chastain Road, #0112, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (678) 797-2268.

Survey to Determine Attitudes that May Affect Perspectives of Deadly Force by the Police

Part 1: Social Dominance Scale

A 5-point Likert Scale is used for each item. These questions will determine where the participant measures on the social dominance scale. It will predict social and political attitudes. Rate your agreement or disagreement with the statements 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.					
To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups.					
All groups should be given an equal change in life.					
Increased social equality is beneficial to society.					
No group should dominate in society.					

Part 2: Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale

This section will determine the participants' level of right-wing authoritarianism. This group tends to have a high degree of willingness to submit to authorities they perceive as established and legitimate. A 5-point Likert Scale is used for each item. Circle which response best applies to you.

1. Gays and lesbians are just as healthy and moral as anybody else.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

2. There is absolutely nothing wrong with nudist camps.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil, and take us back to our true path.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

4. There is no “ONE right way” to live life, everybody has to create their own way.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

5. This country would work a lot better if certain groups of troublemakers would just shut up and accept their group’s traditional place in society.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Part 3

Rate your agreement or disagreement with the statements 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

Blind Patriotism Scale: The following questions will determine your acceptance and support for the nation's policies and practices. Blind patriots have an intense alignment with their nation or group.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would support my country right or wrong.					
I believe that U.S. policies are almost always the morally correct ones.					

People should not constantly try to change the way things are in America.					
I support U.S. policies for the very reason that they are the policies of my country.					
There is too much criticism of the U.S. in the world and we its citizens should not criticize it.					

Constructive Patriotism Scale: Constructive patriotism is the need to balance attachment to and consideration for the well-being of one's own group with an inclusive orientation to human beings, with respect for the rights and welfare of all people.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
People should work hard to move this country in a positive direction.					
If you love America, you should notice its problems and work to correct them.					
I express my love for America by supporting efforts at positive change.					
I oppose some U.S. policies because I care about my country and want to improve it.					
My love of country demands that I speak out against popular, but potentially destructive policies.					

Part 4: Scenarios

Read the scenario and indicate on a scale of 1 (*absolutely no misuse of deadly force*) to 10 (*absolute misuse of deadly force*). Additionally you will be required to indicate whether you believe *the officer(s) in this scenario behaved appropriately, the officer(s) in this scenario should have attempted to subdue the subject more peacefully, or the officer(s) in this scenario were justified in using force.*

An officer pulled over the subject in what was meant to be a routine speeding violation; however, the subject took a weapon from under the car seat with the intentions of shooting the officer as he approached his vehicle. The subject was transporting drugs that would result in a felony conviction. To escape a possible arrest, the subject fled the vehicle with gun in hand as the officer approached the vehicle. During pursuit of the subject, the subject then turns and points his gun at the officer. Without hesitation, the officer shoots the subject twice; resulting in his death.

Absolutely no

Absolute

misuse of deadly

misuse of deadly

force

force

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

<i>The officer(s) in this scenario behaved appropriately</i>	<i>The officer(s) in this scenario should have attempted to subdue the subject more peacefully</i>	<i>The officer(s) in this scenario were justified in using force</i>

Two officers pulled over the subject in what was meant to be a routine speeding violation; however, the subject took a weapon from under the car seat with the intentions of shooting the officers as they approached his vehicle. The subject was transporting drugs that would result in a felony conviction. To escape a possible arrest, the subject fled the vehicle with gun in hand as the officers approached the vehicle. During pursuit of the subject, the subject then turns and

points his gun at the officers and fires a shot. Without hesitation, both officers fire four shots and two shots hit the subject; resulting in his death.

Absolutely no *Absolute*
misuse of deadly *misuse of deadly*
force *force*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

<i>The officer(s) in this scenario behaved appropriately</i>	<i>The officer(s) in this scenario should have attempted to subdue the subject more peacefully</i>	<i>The officer(s) in this scenario were justified in using force</i>

Two officers pulled over the subject in what was meant to be a routine speeding violation; however, the subject took a weapon from under the car seat with the intentions of shooting the officers as they approached his vehicle. The subject was transporting drugs that would result in a felony conviction. To escape a possible arrest, the subject fled the vehicle with his gun in his waistband the officers approached the vehicle. During pursuit of the subject, the subject then turns and makes a movement towards his waistband. Without hesitation, the officers draw their guns and aim for the subject. After warning him not to move, the subject makes a motion towards his waist. One officer shoots the subject twice, while the other officer never fires his weapon. The shots killed the subject.

*Absolutely no
misuse of deadly
force*

*Absolute
misuse of deadly
force*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

<i>The officer(s) in this scenario behaved appropriately</i>	<i>The officer(s) in this scenario should have attempted to subdue the subject more peacefully</i>	<i>The officer(s) in this scenario were justified in using force</i>

Part 5: Background

This section will ask you to answer questions about your background. Accurately and honestly answer the question as it applies to you.

Gender: **Male** **Female**

Age: _____

Race: **Caucasian** **African American** **Hispanic** **Native American** **Other**

Religion: _____

Country/State of origin: _____

Class: **Freshman** **Sophomore** **Junior** **Senior** **Graduate**

Major: _____

Have you had any prior arrests? **Yes** **No**

Have you ever been pulled over by law enforcement officers? **Yes** **No**

Have you even been involved in a physical altercation with law enforcement officers? **Yes** **No**

Is anyone in your family employed with a police department? **Yes** **No**

Are you employed with the police department? **Yes** **No**

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Ashley Nicole Wooton was born in Marietta, Georgia. She attended Brewton-Parker College in Mount Vernon, Georgia and received a Bachelor of Arts with an emphasis in Sociology and a minor in Criminal Justice in 2012. From there, she began her Masters of Criminal Justice at Kennesaw State University, which she obtained in 2015. Her hopes are to gain employment with the FBI in the Behavior Analysis Unit. In the future, she wants to attend law school to become a criminal prosecutor.