

This article was downloaded by: [University of Central Florida]

On: 07 November 2011, At: 10:38

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Crime and Justice

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjcj20>

Police use of force: varying perspectives

Eugene A. Paoline III^a & William Terrill^b

^a Department of Criminal Justice, University of Central Florida, P.O. Box 161600, Orlando, FL, 32816, USA

^b School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, 532 Baker Hall, East Lansing, MI, 48824, USA

Available online: 31 Oct 2011

To cite this article: Eugene A. Paoline III & William Terrill (2011): Police use of force: varying perspectives, *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 34:3, 159-162

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2011.613157>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

INTRODUCTION

Police use of force: varying perspectives

Eugene A. Paoline, III^{a*} and William Terrill^b

^a*Department of Criminal Justice, University of Central Florida, P.O. Box 161600, Orlando, FL 32816, USA;* ^b*School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, 532 Baker Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA*

Police use of force has been a focal point of research for over half a century. Perhaps the only other police outcome to receive more empirical attention is the arrest decision. This special issue was designed to gather active police researchers, who have conducted force studies, and ask them to step outside of the traditional comfort zone template of article construction, thinking instead about police use of force without restraints. In varying degrees, the authors accomplished this goal. In addition, we not only asked researchers to examine police use of force creatively, but to serve as a reviewer for their peers' manuscripts. This generated a great amount of much needed debate, and in many cases new ways of conceptually thinking about force, as well as new ways of methodologically and statistically examining force. As a result, what we have in this special issue, 'Police Use of Force: Varying Perspectives', is a collection of quality pieces that approach the study of force from a variety of viewpoints. While they provide us with some interesting answers, they (more importantly) help stimulate additional use of force questions.

We begin the issue with a theoretical perspective of use of force decision making by Kane and Cronin. Here, the authors argue that a good deal of prior work has examined force from a 'harm perspective' as opposed to an 'occupational template perspective.' As a result, they revisit some foundational police studies by Jerome Skolnick (1966) and John Van Maanen (1974) to investigate police officers' use of occupational templates in applying force against citizens. As with all of the articles in this issue, the authors offer a valuable way to view the application of force, while also stimulating additional questions. For example, since most previous studies have looked at force in a dichotomous manner (i.e., force/no force), are such studies part of a harm or occupational perspective? Force can include anything from verbal commands and threats – to low-level hands-on tactics – to high-level impact weapons, and can fit within an occupational template via Van Maanen (to redress an affront) or for control/safety reasons via Skolnick. The question becomes what is the difference between control and harm? Further, might 'harm' be very similar to a Van Maanen conceptualization when it comes to the asshole? Relatedly, an officer striking a suspect may do so because s/he wants to pay back (or harm) the suspect for being an asshole, but it may be just as likely that the officer wants to establish control based on a perceived safety threat. So the same 'type' of force can be applied but based on two different reasons. Of course, it gets even more complicated if the

*Corresponding author. Email: epaoline@mail.ucf.edu

citizen is verbally disrespectful as well as resistant (by not responding to commands), has a weapon, and the officer strikes him or her. Was it for safety, control, or both? All of this indicates that there is further room to flesh out varying theoretical propositions.

Paoline and Terrill take an attitudinal perspective to examine what patrol officers believe to be appropriate forms of less lethal force when dealing with a variety of resistant citizens. Based on the survey responses of appropriateness, the authors then construct an officer-based use of force continuum, finding that officers are rather reserved in their views of force – perhaps even more so than how their organizations apply a force continuum. This approach highlights what front-line officers think about force appropriateness rather than what organizational leaders prefer as organizational policy (or what organizations such as the Police Executive Research Forum put out in the form of ‘model’ polices, which appear to leave empiricism by the wayside). Nonetheless, Paoline and Terrill apply but one fairly simple methodological approach in this article. Future work might focus on extended interviews with patrol officers in gaining deeper insight into cognitive justifications for their use of force orientations. For example, researchers could tease out the potential influence of the situational factors (e.g., suspect height/weight, perceived mental state, drug/alcohol use, seriousness of offense, presence of weapon, etc.) and how they might influence use of force attitudes relative to citizen resistance. Researchers could also examine the potential impact of internal (e.g., police policies, training, administration, peers, etc.) and external (e.g., courts, media, public pressure, etc.) factors in shaping officers’ coercive attitudes. Moreover, research could examine the role of officer experience in forming attitudes about the use of force. Such research could also assist in our understanding as to the way(s) in which coercive attitudes might change (or be stagnant) over the course of one’s career or translate to street-level behavior. Such inquires were not addressed in the current study, and if answered would lead to a more enriched understanding of police officers’ views of coercion.

Another officer attitudinal perspective is undertaken by Ready and White, who examine a contemporary addition to the force spectrum – conducted energy devices (CEDs). In doing so, the authors utilize survey responses to identify the prevalence of deployments among CED users, non-CED users, and high-frequency users, while also attempting to tease out potential explanatory factors across the three groups. The extent to which officers report using this type of controversial weapon and what may account for differences in such use offers tremendous value to any number of interested stakeholders. Moreover, a close examination of this article reveals just how many direct questions the authors raise: How are patterns of TASER use by the police distributed across large samples of officers? Are certain officers’ use patterns more pronounced because of their frequency of deployment or a greater willingness to use the device at lower points on the force continuum? Conversely, why do some officers avoid using the device altogether? What is the prevalence and frequency of TASER use among a sample of officers from multiple police agencies? What are the officer and work-related characteristics that distinguish non-users, users and high-frequency users of the TASER? Are there some officers who carry the TASER but who never (or seldom) use it? What types of force do they use instead? Are there heavy users of the TASER? And if so, in what types of situations are they using the device, and are there problems with their use patterns? Importantly, does heavy use in some cases indicate over-use? Are certain non-users avoiding deployment of the TASER when it is the best option – instead using other weapons, or physical

force which may increase risk of injury to suspects and the officer? In other words, could widespread non-use indicate a problem? Ready and White begin to answer some of these questions, but many are left pending. Moreover, future researchers should examine the questions raised in this article not only from an officer 'self-reported' standpoint, but also through 'actual uses' of the CEDs using official records.

Klahm, Frank, and Brown add yet another perspective, a behavioral one, to examine congruence between the use of two statistical analytic techniques (ordinal regression and hierarchical generalized linear modeling) using data gathered from the Cincinnati Observational Study. The authors also discuss their findings within the context of previous studies using Project on Policing Neighborhoods (POPEN) data. Despite arguing the importance of using the 'proper' analytic technique in relation to the data source, to a large extent the authors found that the two statistical techniques produced very similar findings. For the few differences that were found, one might ask whether they were the result of statistical modeling or other methodological or data issues. For instance, the demeanor effects found by the authors contrasts with Terrill and Mastrofski's (2002) force analysis. However, this may have less to do with statistical modeling, and be related instead to training differences between the projects in terms of measuring demeanor (e.g., POPEN conducted observer validity and reliability checks throughout data collection). Alternatively, the difference may be a result of the operationalization of citizen resistance POPEN researchers applied, which included not just fleeing and threat/assault of an officer, but also verbal and passive resistance, as well as simple physical defensive resistance. Hence, the differences in findings could have more to do with measurement than actual statistical modeling. As such, the use of multi-modeling may not always be the only (or soundest) approach just because one's data are hierarchical in nature. It is this kind of debate and questioning that we were looking for in this special issue. In the end, as Klahm, Frank, and Brown correctly assert, '[i]n theory, modeling the data according to their natural structure should increase our understanding of the factors associated with police use of force, but the reality is that doing so may generate more questions than answers.'

In providing a supervisory perspective, Ingram and Weidner's work focuses on sergeants' attitudes toward departmental use of force policies, as well as their views of appropriate force options across different types of resistant citizens. This study compliments the work of Paoline and Terrill in that the authors utilize data collected from the same study to examine key members of the police organization charged with transmitting policies to their street level subordinates. Ingram and Weidner found that sergeants' attitudes were mainly positive, with verbal and passive resistance offering the greatest challenge from a policy perspective. This line of research raises important questions highlighted by Ingram and Weidner such as: is it official policy that influences officers' use of force decision-making or is it how that policy is viewed by supervisors who instruct and review officers on use of force decisions that is important? To what extent do sergeants' attitudes toward force policy influence both their officers' policy attitudes and their officers' use of force behavior? What predicts attitudes toward force policy? Attempts to answer these types of questions will offer police administrators with information that can inform on policy, training, and practice.

Kuhns, Johnson, and King provide a much needed international perspective to understanding police mistreatment among Trinidadian citizens. More specifically,

the authors examine citizen perceptions and experiences of police mistreatment before and after the implementation of community policing, and then conduct multivariate analyses to understand factors that impact citizens' views of excessive force. They demonstrate the enormous challenge of attempting to implement and then measure the potential impact of a community policing initiative in a Caribbean country such as Trinidad. While they found little programmatic effects (i.e., changes in citizen attitudes and experiences involving police mistreatment over time), it is difficult to determine what role a host of historical, contextual, implementation, and methodological challenges played in this outcome. For example, as the authors point out, long-held tense relationships between the police and public combined with a short study time frame may help explain a shortage of positive findings, as might the lack of proper implementation (often for organizational practical reasons) or even contagion effects with other crime-fighting initiatives. What is abundantly clear is that we need more qualified researchers, such as these authors, who are willing to undertake challenging international projects.

In sum, the empirical work and various perspectives provided here suggests that, even with 50-plus years of inquiry, the study of police use of force is as vibrant as ever. Moreover, the host of unanswered questions, and the continual evolution of the use of force (e.g., public and academic debates, new technologies, revisiting policies and procedures, etc.), suggest that present (and future) scholars will have their hands full with research opportunities in this area.

References

- Skolnick, J., 1966. *Justice without trial: law enforcement in democratic society*. New York: Macmillan.
- Terrill, W. and Mastrofski, S., 2002. Situational and officer based determinants of police coercion. *Justice Quarterly*, 19, 215–248.
- Van Maanen, J., 1978. The asshole. In: P.K. Manning and J. Van Maanen, eds. *Policing: a view from the streets*. Santa Monica, CA: Goodyear, 221–238.