

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Police officers' opinions of the use of unnecessary force by other officers

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This study examined the assumptions that the use of unnecessary force is acceptable to police officers and they are unlikely to report its use to a supervisor. Suspect characteristics, situational aspects, and examples of force were integrated into vignettes. Officers from three small departments responded to two vignettes. Officers accept unnecessary force if a suspect flees, but not the use of physical force. Police officers are doubtful that any other officer will report the use of force to a supervisor when a suspect appears to be involved in criminal behavior. Research limitations and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: police use of force; excessive force; unnecessary force; vignettes; smaller departments; police attitudes

Introduction

This study examined police officers' opinions of the use of force. An examination of officers' opinions about unnecessary force is important for both theoretical and policy reasons. Early theoretical examinations of the police contributed to our understanding of police beliefs about their working environment but lacked rigorous empirical support (Skolnick, 1975; Wilson, 1968). This study expands upon the police use of force literature in several ways. First, it focused on unnecessary force, an area of limited empirical understanding (Adams, 1999). Second, the dependent variables are two belief indicators of police officers: the acceptance of unnecessary force used by another officer and the willingness of officers to report the use of unnecessary force. Findings here can contribute to our understanding of the types of force that are acceptable to officers. Furthermore, understanding the situational aspects of a police–citizen encounter that might explain the variation in an officer's acceptance of the use of force can improve policy attempts to reduce its use or misuse.

This research is presented in several sections. First, a review is provided of the thoughts and studies that attempt to explain police use of force. This review identified independent variables to be included in this study. A discussion of the use of force as a common element of police work is provided, including excessive and unnecessary force. The research design section discusses the use of vignettes to collect self-reported responses. Information on data collection locations is also discussed. Officers from three small law enforcement agencies responded to vignettes. This, unfortunately, limits the generalizability of findings. The findings section discusses officer opinion about the use of unnecessary force, the factors that influence this opinion, and the factors that influence the likelihood of an officer reporting the use of unnecessary force to a supervisor.

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Literature review

The defining feature of the police is their capacity to use force (Bittner, 1990), which captures their unique role in society (Crank, 1998), and is the subject of research in the USA, Canada, and Great Britain (see Manning, 2005; Manzoni & Eisner, 2006). Force includes officer presence, verbal commands, or physical controls (Garner, Buchanan, Schade, & Hepburn, 1996). The use of force is assumed to be constrained by the force factor, a continuum for determining the use of force relative to the actions of a citizen (Alpert & Dunham, 1999). For example, if a suspect used verbal resistance an officer might use strong language. If a suspect physically resists an officer by struggling when being handcuffed an officer might use a 'takedown' technique to control the suspect. There is reason to question if the force factor is completely accepted by officers. Literature suggests the use of excessive or unnecessary force is acceptable to the police as they perform their tasks in their unique work environment.

Identifying when police use of force is excessive or unnecessary is difficult because no single definition of excessive force exists (Garner, Maxwell, & Heraux, 2002; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002). Scholars often rely on an inaccurate measure of force, such as the use of complaints against the police, because they lack a clear definition of excessive force (Adams, 1999). Others used subjective measures, such as citizen perception (Durose, Schmitt, & Langan, 2005). 'Excessive force' is described as using more force than necessary to gain compliance in an incident (Adams, 1995, 1999; Worden, 1995). By this standard an officer might use reasonable force, but at some point in the encounter the officer surpasses reasonable force (Alpert & Smith, 1994). 'Unnecessary force' is described as the force that precedes citizen resistance or continues after a citizen has stopped resisting (Adams, 1999; Worden, 1995). By this definition an officer may use physical force against some types of suspects before it is justified or 'beat' a suspect who is under control (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993).

Most research seeks to explain the variation in police use of force by examining the relationship between force and the characteristics of a suspect, the officer, or situational characteristics of an incident. Recent studies examined the relationship between police belief systems and the use of force (Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Terrill, Paoline, & Manning, 2003). Most use of force studies focus on legitimate force an officer might use as part of their work environment, rather than excessive or unnecessary force (see Garner et al., 2002, for a review), but there are exceptions (Carter, 1985; Friedrich, 1980; Worden, 1995).

Use of force: frequency and severity

The ability to use force may be a central feature of policing, however, physical force is not often used by police officers (Adams, 1999; Langan, Greenfeld, Smith, Durose, & Levin, 2001). When force is used the level can be characterized as excessive in only a few of the police–citizen incidents (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993). Research found an officer used force in a very small percentage of police–citizen encounters, yet roughly one-third of those incidents were considered excessive (Friedrich, 1980; Worden, 1995). National survey data found the police used or threatened some type of physical force in 1% of all police–citizen traffic stop encounters (Durose et al., 2005). Officers, overall, do not use force in most cases, but, when force is used, a sizable proportion seems to be excessive or unnecessary force (Worden, 1995).

Use of force: explanatory factors

Most studies of police use of force focus on physical force, but they do not necessarily examine it in the context of unnecessary force (Garner et al., 2002; Terrill & Reisig, 2003). Studies

that examined the factors that led to an officer's use of force typically explored three broad components, resulting in an assortment of findings. The first factor is offender characteristics. Officers were more likely to use force against suspects who are young (Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Terrill et al., 2003), African-American (Kaminski, DiGiovanni, & Downs, 2003; Schuck, 2004; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Terrill et al., 2003; Worden, 1995), male (Garner et al., 1996; Kaminski et al., 2003; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Terrill et al., 2003; Worden, 1995), lower class (Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Terrill et al., 2003), or intoxicated (Garner et al., 1996, 2002; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Terrill et al., 2003; Worden, 1995). These features, however, do not influence the police use of force with the same consistency as suspect resistance (Garner et al., 2002; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Terrill et al., 2003) or antagonism toward the police (Friedrich, 1980; Garner et al., 1996, 2002; Worden, 1995).

The second factor examined to explain variations in the use of force are officer characteristics. Research suggests officer race and gender have no relationship to the use of force (Garner et al., 1996; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Worden, 1995). These same authors provide different results with reference to police experience. Where Garner et al. (1996) and Worden (1995) found no link between experience and the use of force, Kaminski et al. (2003) and Terrill and Mastrofski (2002) found a significant negative relationship between an officer's years of service and the use of force.

The third factor explaining the use of force is situational: legal and extra-legal aspects of an incident. Use of force has been linked to suspects involved in a violent offense (Alpert, Dunham, & MacDonald, 2004; Friedrich, 1980; Garner et al., 1996; Worden, 1995), weapon possession (Garner et al., 1996; Kaminski et al., 2003; Terrill et al., 2003), and offenders who are arrested after a foot or car pursuit (Kaminski et al., 2003). Terrill et al. (2003) also found when the officer initiates the encounter increased levels of force are more likely. Conversely, MacDonald, Manz, Alpert, and Dunham (2003) found, relative to suspect resistance, officers used more force in non-violent property crime calls than in more violent types of service calls, such as domestic violence calls.

Use of force: officers' opinions

Scholars suggest that officers believe excessive or unnecessary force can be acceptable under the proper circumstances (Carter, 1985; Crank, 1998; Herbert, 1998, 2001; Reiss, 1972; Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993; Van Maanen, 1985; Westley, 1953). Research in Indianapolis, IN, and St Petersburg, FL, examined the use of coercive force and included police attitude dimensions. The relationship between the use of increased levels of force held for officers who possessed attitudes that are aligned with 'pro-culture' or traditional tenets of policing (e.g., aggressive law enforcement role, willing to violate a citizen's rights) and officers who held midrange beliefs of policing (e.g., aggressive but selective law enforcement, favorable view of citizens) (Terrill et al., 2003). Carter (1985) found almost two-thirds of officers believed excessive force could be used for retaliation, not just self-defense. In 2000, Weisburd and Greenspan analyzed survey data from 925 police officers in 113 different police departments. A majority of officers disapprove of the use of excessive force, but 'a substantial minority believed that officers should be permitted to use more force than the law currently permits and found it acceptable to sometimes use more force than permitted by the laws that govern them' (p. 3).

Secrecy is considered important in the police working world. There is a 'code of silence' that hinders communications from street-level officers to their supervisors (Crank, 1998; Manning, 1978; Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993; Van Maanen, 1978a, 1978b; Wilson, 1968).

Officers learn that mistakes often occur and silence provides protection for officers. They will keep secrets among each other allowing them to function in an ambiguous work environment (Van Mannen, 1978b). Weisburd and Greenspan (2000) examined officer beliefs about reporting the use of excessive force to superior officers and found a gap between opinion and behavior. Where police officers do not believe abusive officers should be protected, 'they often do not turn them in' (p. 3). When an officer uses more force than necessary, just over half of his or her fellow officers would turn a blind eye to the behavior. This is understandable because two-thirds of the officers felt that whistle-blowers would get 'the cold shoulder' by other police officers.

The literature assumes that officers view the use of force, including excessive or unnecessary force, as an acceptable aspect of their work environment. It is suggested that officers are unlikely to believe that another officer will report the use of force to a supervisor. What has not been empirically examined in any of the research, beyond descriptive data (Weisburd & Greenspan, 2000), is the accuracy of these assumptions. This study examined these assumptions by using vignettes to combine situational variables associated with the use of force with police behavior that might be considered unnecessary force.

Data

Factorial design

Factorial research designs use vignettes to investigate the influence of independent variables on dependent variables (Rossi & Anderson, 1982). Vignette designs employ aspects of a random experiment by incorporating each variable as a unique dimension and randomly vary the level of each dimension between vignettes. The available vignettes are then randomly assigned to respondents. This design measures a respondent's judgment or decision-making as the level of each dimension changes.

Using vignettes can be useful for testing the assumptions regarding the use of force. The vignettes described the use of force of another officer and were constructed of several independent variables. Responding officers were asked to judge the use of force. Vignettes have been successfully used to examine the self-reported decision-making of officers (Eterno, 2003) and to examine the opinion of police officers regarding the behavior of other officers (Hickman, Piquero, Lawton, & Greene, 2001; Ivkovic, 2005). Analyzing the reported responses will provide an understanding of the influence each independent variable has on the opinion of the use of unnecessary force. Scholars argue that vignettes provide invaluable insight into a topic that may be difficult to observe (Applegate, Wright, Dunaway, Cullen, & Wooldredge, 1993) and improve on earlier attempts to model the factors that influence decision-making (Thurman, Lam, & Rossi, 1988). A sample vignette is located in Appendix 1.

Dependent variables

Two dependent variables were examined. First, officers were asked to judge the behavior of another officer described in a vignette, a method used by others (Hickman et al., 2001; Weisburd & Greenspan, 2000). Respondents indicated the acceptability of the behavior toward a suspect on a 5-point scale from 'completely unacceptable' to 'completely acceptable.' The second dependent variable measured the belief, on a 5-point scale from 'very doubtful' to 'very likely,' that any officer would report the behavior described in the vignette.

Independent variables

Vignettes include several independent variables normally associated with the use of force. Research found that officers were more likely to use force against suspects who are young (Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Terrill et al., 2003) or African-American (Schuck, 2004; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Terrill et al., 2003; Worden, 1995). Suspect age was included as a three-level dimension: a suspect who appears to be a teenager, late 20s in age, late 30s in age. Suspect race was also a three-level dimension: white, black, or Hispanic. Suspect's gender is constant in vignettes because most officers encounter males (Terrill et al., 2003; Terrill & Reisig, 2003).

Legal and extra-legal variables influence the use of force. Seriousness of the crime is a legal variable related to the use of force (Black, 1980; Friedrich, 1980). It is likely, however, an officer's *perception* of an incident will play a role in the use of force prior to actually determining the specific legal status of the incident. The legal status of an incident can be ill-defined if the suspect flees before the officer ascertains the details of the incident. Various types of suspicious behavior were integrated into vignettes rather than specifically defined legal behavior because officers are trained to identify suspicious behavior based on their own experience of suspect activity that does not fit a situation (Alpert, MacDonald, & Dunham, 2005). Vignettes described suspect behavior that is assumed to range from mildly suspicious to potentially serious criminal behavior. The behaviors selected are intended to attract the attention of the officer during routine patrol activity: the suspect is standing in front of a convenience store, the suspect fits the description of a possible drug-dealer, or the suspect is attempting to break into an automobile.

An extra-legal variable missing from the literature is the impact that work shift might have on what an officer views as acceptable behavior. Most serious crimes and disturbances occur at night (Walker & Katz, 2005), yet it is assumed that an officer will understand the activities of other shifts. Vignettes included information that indicates the work shift of the incident: day shift, afternoon shift, or night shift.

It is assumed that an officer will use force, particularly unnecessary force, when a suspect challenges the authority of the officer (Terrill et al., 2003; Westley, 1953). Fleeing from an officer is interpreted as a challenge to the officer's authority to stop the suspect (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993). When the suspect is caught by the officer it is likely that the suspect will receive a slap or beating. Challenging police authority was included as a two-level dimension: the suspect either flees from the officer or the suspect stands with his hands out, supplicant to the officer's presence.

Three law enforcement agencies participated in the study, each with unique characteristics discussed below. It was decided that vignettes should examine an officer's opinion and belief regarding the use of force from a local as opposed to global perspective because research questions the existence of a universal police belief structure (Paoline, 2001; Waddington, 1999). Each vignette begins with the preliminary statement: 'A police officer that works in your district or beat is on routine patrol.' This allows an officer to place the vignette within the context of their police agency.

The final vignette dimension described the type of force used by an officer: verbal force, slapping a suspect, or punching a suspect. Force was described as occurring after the officer has control of the suspect. Each type of force could be considered unnecessary because the force was not used to take a suspect into custody or for self-defense. The three levels of force were integrated into the vignettes that describe an officer's behavior after the suspect is under control: the officer says to the suspect 'what the fuck do you think you're doing,'

the officer slaps the suspect once in the back of the head, or the officer punches the suspect a couple of times in the stomach.

The three levels of force are grounded in empirical and theoretical literature. Verbal force characterizes a minor type of force that might be used by an officer (Serone, Pereira, & Kovath, 2004). Some officers might view verbal force as unnecessary depending on the level of the other dimensions of the vignette. An officer slapping a suspect in the back of the head is an intermediate level of unnecessary force. This type of physical force is usually seen by police administrators as unnecessary and more severe than offensive language (Serone et al., 2004). Street officers might view a slap in the back of the head as a minor form of discipline and not judge this behavior harshly if the officer views the behavior as warranted. The most serious type of force, punching a suspect several times in the stomach, embodies a beating (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993; Van Maanen, 1985). A punch uses a closed fist, and the suspect's stomach is a vulnerable location in which to be hit. It should be remembered that each type of force occurs after a suspect is taken into custody by the officer.

Study locations

Police officers from three police agencies in New York State completed surveys for this study (all agency names are pseudonyms). The Upper Town Police Department and the Lower Town Police Departments serve townships and each employ part-time and full-time police officers. These townships border each other, as well as a city of approximately 50,000 people, which is not part of this study. Officers in the townships furnish routine patrol services, are dispatched to calls by the county sheriffs' department, and provide no special services, such as detectives. The townships offer a fairly diverse working environment for officers, with neighborhoods that include single family and apartment housing, rural areas with farms, shopping plazas, and secondary highways with extensive commuter and commercial traffic. The third agency is the Northern County Sheriff's Department. Deputies provide patrol services for suburban areas and a large rural area, as well as several small towns and villages that employ no other police services. All three agencies serve racially homogenous populations and have few violent index crimes. Asking questions of officers from these three police agencies should be considered a convenience sample. While most police agencies have less than 50 officers (Reaves & Hickman, 2002), findings here will lack generalizability because it does not include larger agencies, police departments from other regions of the country, and small departments that serve heterogeneous populations. Very few female or minority officers or deputies work in the study locations, so only work experience and work shift information was collected from the respondents.

Police officers were provided with a survey that included two use-of-force vignettes among nine vignettes describing police activities. Several methods were employed to improve the validity of responses because others have found officers to be reluctant to respond to outsiders who ask questions about their behavior. A cover letter informed the respondents that their answers would not be seen by police management, officer identities would be kept anonymous, and that the survey was seeking their opinion of police behavior, not the actual behavior of them or any other police officer (Ivkovic, 2005).

Two methods were used to collect data during the summer of 2005. First, surveys were passed out to patrol deputies in the Northern County Sheriff's Department during all roll-call periods over several days. Deputies completed the surveys during that time and returned them in a sealed envelop to the researcher. Thirty-nine surveys were passed out and 38 were returned completed. Surveys were passed out in a similar manner to the officers of the

Upper Town Police Department, although Upper Town does not have a routine roll-call period. The department had previously scheduled a full staff meeting during the data collection period. The police chief allowed the researcher to distribute surveys to officers during this meeting. Thirteen surveys were distributed and all were returned completed.

The second method for collecting data was used in the Lower Town Police Department, which had no roll-call period. Surveys were left for the 10 officers in their departmental mailboxes. Officers returned the surveys to the police chief in sealed manila envelopes, and they were returned in bulk to the researcher. It is unknown if this procedure impacted the responses of the officers. Ten surveys were distributed and nine were completed. A total of 60 police officers and sheriff's deputies completed two use-of-force vignettes (97% response rate) for a *N* of 120.

Roughly 25 police officers and sheriff's deputies were missed during data collection. There is no reason, however, to consider the missed officers as potential 'problem' officers. In recent history none of the agencies had fired an officer for abuse of force or other violent on-duty behavior, nor were any officers under suspension during data collection. Further, because officers have civil service protections, agencies had few options for dealing with problem officers. The primary method was to move officers to different patrol areas or work shifts.

Findings

Completed vignettes contained a fairly even distribution of the three types of force: 40% verbal, 30% slap, 30% punch. Table 1 provides response frequencies for the dependent variables. Most respondents reported that the force described in the vignettes was unacceptable. Only 17.5% of respondents felt that the use of force was acceptable at any level. The mean for officer's opinion regarding the use of force was 2.16, similar to findings reported by Ivkovic (2005). Respondents are doubtful, however, that any officer would report the behavior to a supervisor. Less than 15% of police officers responded that any officer would be likely, either somewhat or very likely, to report the behavior. The mean for the dependent variable 'Report to a Supervisor' was 2.12.

Table 1 shows the use of force by an officer was completely or somewhat acceptable in only a small number of vignettes, and the likelihood that officers believed the behavior would be reported to a supervisor was similarly low. The 'acceptable' and 'likely' responses, therefore, were combined, resulting in two ordinal level dependent variables with four levels. Several suspect dimensions were recoded for analysis: race, age, and suspicious behavior. Police agency was dichotomized as township and sheriff. Work experience ranged from 1 to 24 years and averaged 8.72 years. The actual years' experience for each agency was 5.0 for Upper Town, 12.4 for Lower Town, and 8.4 for Northern County. This variable

Table 1. Frequency of dependent variable response (*N* = 120).

Opinion of force	Frequency	Report to a supervisor	Frequency
Completely unacceptable	51 (42.5%)	Very doubtful	53 (44.2%)
Somewhat unacceptable	25 (20.8%)	Somewhat doubtful	22 (18.3%)
Really can't say	23 (19.2%)	Really can't say	28 (23.3%)
Somewhat acceptable	16 (13.3%)	Somewhat likely	12 (10.0%)
Completely acceptable	5 (4.2%)	Very likely	5 (4.2%)

was also dichotomized for analysis with officers split into those who worked less than 10 years (65%) and those who had 10 or more years' experience.

Ordinal regression analysis, an extension of the logistic regression model, was used to analyze the scaled dependent variables. Instead of considering the probability of a dichotomous event, the analysis considers 'the probability of that event and all events that are ordered before it' (Norušis, 2005, p. 70). As with ordinal level independent variables that must be dummy coded in regression analysis, the ordinal regression dependent variable coefficient requires a reference category. In ordinal regression analysis each estimated coefficient reveals the effect of an independent variable on the odds of a respondent being in a dependent variable coefficient relative to the reference category (Knoke & Bohrnstedt, 1994). Many significant predictor variables will have a negative sign. 'This is done so that larger coefficients indicate an association with larger scores' on a scaled dependent variable (Norušis, 2005, p. 71). That is, a negative coefficient on a dichotomous independent variable demonstrates that respondents are less likely to score the dependent variable at the low end of the scale. It was decided, because the officers used in this study were not randomly selected, that the level of significance would be placed at 0.01 as opposed to the traditional 0.05.

Table 2 shows the results of an officer's opinion regarding the use of force. Both slap and punch are significantly related to the opinion of the use of force at a significant level. Officers find both types of force unacceptable, while holding the other independent variables constant. A third variable is significantly related to the acceptability of the use of force. When a suspect flees from an officer, respondents find the use of unnecessary force acceptable. This supports the hypothesized relationship between a challenge to police authority and the police opinion regarding the use of unnecessary force. None of the situational aspects, suspect characteristics, or officer characteristics was significantly related to the opinion of the use of force.

Table 3 shows the relationship between the independent variables and the belief that any officer will report the use of unnecessary force to a supervisor. Officers are unlikely to believe that if a fellow officer uses force against a suspected drug dealer any police officer will report the use of unnecessary force to a supervisor. None of the independent variables are significantly related to the belief that another officer would report unnecessary force. Three variables were strongly related to the belief that another officer would report the use of force but failed to reach the stringent 0.01 level: when an incident described an officer slapping a suspect, an officer punching a suspect, or whether an officer worked during the afternoon shift.

Discussion

The opinion of police officers regarding the use of unnecessary force is an area of study with little empirical research. This study examined an officer's opinion regarding the use of unnecessary force by another officer and the belief that any other officer would report the force to a supervisor. Vignettes appear to be a reasonable method for integrating the different independent variables contained in this study, because vignettes allow a researcher to control for specific situational variables and connect them in different combinations that might not be found in field research (Rossi & Anderson, 1982).

The results of this study show that an officer's opinion of the use of unnecessary force might be predicted by a factor that is ubiquitous in the theoretical research: challenging the authority of a police officer. As operationalized here, a suspect who flees from the police has the strongest relationship to an officer accepting the use of unnecessary force. Fleeing

Table 2. Ordinal regression model for officer's opinion of the use of excessive force ($N = 120$).

	Coefficient	SE	Wald
<i>Dependent variables</i>			
Somewhat/completely acceptable	2.939	0.998	8.672
Can't say	1.871	0.983	3.624
Unacceptable	1.014	0.971	1.091
Completely unacceptable ^a			
<i>Independent variables</i>			
Day shift	-0.382	0.327	1.368
Afternoon shift	0.426	0.338	1.863
Offender black	0.373	0.311	1.441
Offender Hispanic	0.057	0.328	0.030
Age – teenager	0.321	0.307	1.092
Age – 20s	0.535	0.329	2.641
Drug dealer	-0.628	0.351	3.199
Auto thief	-0.605	0.340	3.172
Flees	-1.332***	0.297	19.816
Slap	0.867**	0.309	7.900
Punch	1.671***	0.385	18.833
Officer experience	-0.480	0.268	3.216
Sheriff Department	-0.219	0.300	0.532
Cox and Snell R^{2b}	0.377		

^aRedundant.

^bThe R^2 in ordinal regression is not as useful as ordinary regression because the interpretation is not straightforward.

** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

from the police might be viewed as the penultimate demonstration of disrespect. While fleeing is related to an acceptable opinion of the use of unnecessary force, respondents do not accept the use of physical force.

The belief that another officer would likely report the use of unnecessary force to a supervisor might be related to slapping or punching a suspect, but these variables did not meet the more rigorous level of significance. It is unclear why officers who work afternoons would be strongly related with the belief that some officer would report the unnecessary behavior. When unnecessary force is used against suspects who appear to be a possible drug dealer, respondents are unlikely to believe an officer will report the use of unnecessary force to a supervisor. While the policing literature states there is a code of silence among officers, when officers use unnecessary force as described in the vignettes, these findings suggest that officers do not believe others in their department will remain silent.

These findings broaden the research of Weisburd and Greenspan (2000) in several ways. First, results provide empirical support for their finding that officers disapprove of excessive force. Second, vignettes in this study present specific types of unnecessary force and findings suggest when an officer uses physical force on a suspect other officers do not view this behavior as acceptable. Third, frequency results (see Table 1) show a difference between an officer's opinion regarding the use of unnecessary force and their likelihood of believing that the behavior will be reported to a supervisor. This suggests that Weisburd and Greenspan were accurate in their suggestion of a gap between attitude and behavior.

Table 3. Ordinal regression model for likelihood of reporting the use of excessive force ($N = 120$).

	Coefficient	SE	Wald
<i>Dependent variables</i>			
Somewhat/very likely	1.444	0.980	2.171
Can't say	0.215	0.961	0.050
Doubtful	-0.464	0.959	0.235
Very doubtful ^a			
<i>Independent variables</i>			
Day shift	-0.383	0.355	1.159
Afternoon shift	-0.819	0.332	6.090
Offender black	-0.039	0.331	0.014
Offender Hispanic	0.091	0.332	0.075
Age – teenager	-0.300	0.315	0.910
Age – 20s	0.132	0.336	0.154
Drug dealer	1.292**	0.395	10.693
Auto thief	0.416	0.289	2.077
Flees	0.299	0.273	1.199
Slap	-0.666	0.339	3.867
Punch	-0.787	0.333	5.578
Officer experience	-0.447	0.270	0.2739
Sheriff Department	0.374	0.269	1.931
Cox and Snell R^{2b}	0.283		

^aRedundant.^bThe R^2 in ordinal regression is not as useful as ordinary regression because the interpretation is not straightforward.** $p < 0.01$.

Offender race or age characteristics were not related to police opinion regarding the use of force. This is contrary to the findings of other studies that found a significant relationship between the use of force and young suspects or African-American suspects. Different findings might result from the types of data used or how the studies operationalized force. Furthermore, the self-reported nature of vignettes may cause different findings.

While the findings of this research have expanded our knowledge surrounding the opinion of officers regarding the use of unnecessary force, there are several limitations. The research was conducted with a convenience sample in three law enforcement agencies in the same geographic area. Each agency is relatively small with respect to the number of patrol officers, the officers handle a small number of index crimes and violent crimes, and the agencies serve homogenous populations. The results are tentative and research is needed in larger, more active police agencies, in diverse areas, to determine if the findings of this study are representative of police opinion in general. Second, unnecessary force was operationalized based on the information in Serone et al. (2004), Skolnick and Fyfe (1993), and Van Maanen (1985) because there is no single definition of unnecessary force. It is unknown if other descriptions of force would render different results. Third, vignettes seem adequate to combine independent variables, but other offender dimensions might influence an officer's opinion regarding the use of force, such as verbal belligerence toward the officer. Other situational variables might also influence officer opinion, such as possession

of a weapon or bystander presence. Fourth, other officer characteristics might influence opinion or likelihood of reporting the use of force, such as officer gender or education level. Finally, research into an officer's likelihood of reporting the use of unnecessary force requires improved conceptualization and measures. Further empirical research can address each shortcoming.

Finally, this research does not examine a direct link between attitude and the use of force, but examines an officer's beliefs about the use of force by another officer. Still, there is a limit to its ability to confirm a link between what an officer sees in a vignette (i.e., the use of unnecessary force) and the reality of an officer's opinion about the incident (i.e., unacceptable behavior) or their opinion about what they believe would happen (i.e., another officer would report the use of force). Some researchers were unable to find a link between officer attitude and behavior (Reiss, 1972; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002), while others suggest attitude can predict behavior in situations that are 'highly institutionalized or routinized' (Crespi, 1971, p. 333). Further research is needed to determine if unnecessary force incidents are routine enough to create a tight attitude-behavior connection.

Conclusion

Despite the limitation of the data set this study provides several important contributions. First, it explores an area of research with very little empirical exploration, and the results mirror those of Weisburd and Greenspan (2000). Police officers accept the use of some types of unnecessary force, and they are unlikely to report the use of excessive force to a supervisor. Still, not all types of unnecessary force are accepted, and there are indications that officers believe some types of unnecessary force will be reported. These findings suggest that officers identify some types of behavior as unacceptable and might believe that some officer behavior warrants administrative involvement.

Second, practitioners might find these results helpful when developing administrative controls for officer behavior. Results indicate that police administrators have the ability to tap into officer opinion to identify types of behavior that are unacceptable and situations that make some types of unnecessary force tolerable. Findings also reveal the types of force that officers feel may be in need of administrative attention. Administrators can utilize this knowledge to explore methods to abate the code of silence and encourage communication between street-level officers and supervisors. Allowing workers to participate in development of policy or other organizational goals is a motivational technique (Cordner, Scarborough, & Sheehan, 2004) that may improve this relationship. Furthermore, officer-administration collaboration might be a method of internal self-regulation that can increase the professionalism of a police agency.

Notes on contributor

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Appendix 1

The following paragraph is a description of police patrol activity. It seeks your opinion of the activity of other police officers. Please read the paragraph carefully and then mark on a scale of 1–5, your opinion of the officer's behavior.

A police officer that works in your district or beat is on routine patrol during the (*day shift / afternoon shift / night shift*). The officer sees a (*white, black, Hispanic*) male who appears to be (*a teenager, late 20s in age, late 30s in age*) and (*is standing in front of a convenience store / fits the description of a possible drug-dealer / is attempting to break into an automobile*). When the man sees the officer (*he stands in place with his hands out / he flees on foot. The officer catches the man after a short foot chase*). After the suspect is under control the officer (*says to the suspect 'what the fuck do you think you're doing,' slaps the suspect once in the back of the head, punches the suspect a couple of times in the stomach*).

Based on the information in the above case description, what is your opinion of the officer's treatment of the suspect? (Please circle your answer)

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| [1] Completely unacceptable | [2] Somewhat unacceptable | [3] Really can't say |
| [4] Somewhat acceptable | [5] Completely acceptable | |

Based on the information in the above case description, would you expect any other police officer to report the behavior to a supervisor?

- | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| [1] Very doubtful | [2] Somewhat doubtful | [3] Really can't say |
| [4] Somewhat likely | [5] Very likely | |

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