Book Review: Stinson Sr. Phillip M., *Criminology Explains Police Violence*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. 2020. ISBN: 9780520300095 (Paperback). 205 Pages. $ 29.95.

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Police violence, many believe that is currently a problem within the law enforcement profession. What does it accomplish, and are there negative consequences to this sub-culture? *Criminology Explains Police Violence* is an in-depth analysis of what causative factors in police violence are and how it is perceived by society. Research in the book focuses on identifying, correcting, and providing theories on why police misconduct occurs, some of which require further objective analysis. Unfortunately, violence is a part of police work. The definitions attributed to "police violence" by criminological theorists depend on their perceptions and police work views. Categorizing police work as a violent profession is an oversimplification of the facts and requires further study in different jurisdictions. Police work is a critical component of the overall criminal justice system but has not been studied as widely or thoroughly as other criminal justice system components. For the most part, studies on police conduct focus on two key factors: what behavior is illegal, and what should be the punishment for that behavior? (Ristroph, 2018).

In *Criminology Explains Police Violence*, Philip M. Stinson concludes that there is a lack of data to accurately study police violence. The reason might be that police violence, and corruption is not systemic issues as perceived by society. The study of police violence and crime focuses on cases that are known or have been substantiated, of which the book can

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only point to a few. Such as in any other profession, some employees are lackluster performers.

Stinson provides background on police officers who violate the law and provides suggestions on how to deter police misconduct. Stinson also provides information on theories that could explain police violence and misconduct. Stinson points to research indicating that nearly seven-hundred officers were arrested for two or more charges between 2005 and 2011. While seemingly a vast number of criminal acts, there were between 673,146 and 708,569 total active police officers in the United States in those years, with the highest number of active officers in 2008 (Duffin, 2019). While a single act of corruption by a police officer is a violation of trust and unacceptable, the total number of arrests account for approximately 0.099% of the entire police force in the United States at the time. While these cases must be addressed, the total number of police officers arrested does not account for even one percent of the workforce.

The author suggests ways of identifying violent behavior by using early intervention systems. A police officer's actions are tracked to identify violent behavior before it happens, known as the deterrence and rational choice theory. These first intervention systems were recommended by the Department of Justice (DOJ) and seemed to be the best way to identify violent behavior. Unfortunately, there are inconsistencies in how these early intervention systems are handled within departments. Additionally, these systems that track police use of force do not always follow if the force was used consistent with that officer's policy manual and federal and state law in their jurisdictions. (Bazley, Mieczkowski, & Lersch, 2009). One highly productive officer might have multiple proper uses of force encounters, while another officer that does not work as hard might have only one questionable use of force incident. If the modeling system does not improve, the officer with the questionable use of force might not be scrutinized as much as the officer with multiple accounts of proper use of force; this is a problem and could account for inaccurate data modeling.

Another way to monitor and identify police misconduct is by using technology. As the police profession evolves toward more focused community policing and increasing trust within the police, technology has helped prevent and identify police misconduct and violent encounters. The use of body-worn cameras, in-car global positioning systems, and the public's increased use of smartphones has helped departments hold officers accountable (Harden, 2017). Police officers might not always be aware the public is recording them. This "covert"

recording helps identify problem officers within their ranks. Body-worn cameras are an excellent way to monitor police actions and offer a sense of transparency. However, there is the perception that there is insufficient data to accurately address the efficacy of these body-cameras in police encounters (Wasserman, 2017). The use of technology and early intervention is critical in identifying police violence, but there is much more work. While there is more public acceptance, there is little evidence to show that these controls sway the decision-making process when disciplining officers. Some misconduct, while blatantly obvious, does not always get addressed appropriately. Some officers might not even be disciplined at all, keeping their positions and breeding further public distrust.

Individual-level theory suggests that the individual officer has attributes that make them prone to violence, such as how they are recruited and their mental state. Some of the research in the book, however, is very outdated regarding police recruiting. The author points to police recruiting tactics from the 1980s, where most recruits were blue-collar, white males with a high school diploma. This forty-year-old research is not valid today. In modern times, police agencies have a wide range of applicants, and recruiting does not discriminate against race or gender. There might be age requirements due to the job's rigors, but some police agencies do not have them if they complete the application process. Some agencies also require at least some college education or prior experience.

If not all, many police agencies also require psychological examinations to attempt and identify the propensity for violence. These tests have come into question as discriminatory in some areas and have been phased out or adjusted to ensure no bias when administering these tests (dos Santos, 2016). Additionally, the individual level theory suggests that an officer might be wrong, and their removal will correct the unit's problems. The job's weight has made them cynics, and that aggression and a totalitarian personality have led them down the path to violence (Levan & Stevenson, 2019).

There are other theories on why police misconduct occurs. These theories are described herein in several broad categories. These are the social structure, social process, and social conflict, and legitimacy theories. While these general theories help explain police violence from a criminological point to view, there are just a few in this book review that will be identified and presented in the context of police violence. One of the theories that resonate in the book is the idea of social learning. Social learning theory proposes that individuals learn their behavior from

observing others and emulating their actions. The consequences that follow dictate how that behavior will continue. In the case of police officers, social learning starts when they enter the police academy. While applicants are a wide range of people from different backgrounds, they begin to be indoctrinated to police thinking when they start learning police work. Police academies have training on the use of force, driving, firearms, and many other topics. Most, however, offer very little in the form of de-escalation training (Lynch, 2018). Police academies in the United States focus on being re-active rather than pro-active. However, there has been a push towards community-oriented policing, but it won't be easy to beak the police culture of habits that have been going on for decades.

Upon graduation, a police officer is assigned a field training officer (FTO). This FTO is responsible for the development and "street" education of their appointed "rookie" police officer. Here is where most of the social learning occurs. The trainee police officer uses the FTO as an introduction to the police culture (McKenna, 2010). The trainee, not only wanting to impress the FTO but coping with the FTO program requirements' stressors, will, for the most part, emulate their FTO's actions and act in the same way to receive acceptance. These actions are recognized by some in management and addressed. However, many mid-level and upper-level police administrators were trained the same way and did not heed the trainees' warnings about their FTOs (McKenna, 2010). Once the police officer is on the streets and patrolling by themselves, their behavior evolves, and they begin developing their reasoning behaving corruptly or violently. The book makes an excellent argument that police officers use what is called neutralization techniques to justify their behavior. Traditionally, this theory has been attributed to juvenile delinquency, but it has broadened its use in criminology. Conversely, these same techniques can be attributed to positive police behavior (Shoenberger, Heckert, & Heckert, 2012), but only negative examples will be used in the context of this review.

Police officers are subjected to the same decision-making processes as any other person. However, police officers are under constant observation from the public they serve and should act according to the law and the community's needs, rather than on decisions based on actions they justify with neutralization techniques. A police officer may justify their actions by saying that they acted upon provocation or justify their actions as appropriate, whether real or not. The problem is that there might have been an actual use or attempted use of violence against the police officer. It is challenging to view these incidents in the lens of

hindsight from someone that was not there with that officer. The Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) set out these rules in the landmark case of _Graham v. Connor_ _(Graham v. Connor_, 1989). Today's problem is that objectivity has fallen by the wayside, and subjectivity is used as the standard to evaluate police actions; this is evident in news articles, social media, and news stations across the United States.

Lastly, the author argues that race plays a role in police violence. While historically, the subject's race was a massive motivator in police actions and violence, which is not the case today. As mentioned earlier in the review, police officer recruiting historically was mostly white males. This hemogenic recruiting practice did cause police violence due to race. Today, however, there is no significant research that points to what is being called "systemic racism." While true in the past, it does not exist today. While racism cannot be discounted entirely in the United States, it does not exist as prevalently today as it did in the early stages of American history. However, some research shows that police tend to be more violent to minorities, but it is based on population size and the number of encounters. Studies on police use of force on minorities vary so widely that it cannot provide evidence that there is an actual race relations problem (Fridell, 2017). Additionally, some research suggests that people of all races are mostly happy with the police in their communities (Cao & Wu, 2018). There is no clear answer, but public perception is trending toward a systemic problem.

Police violence does exist. Sometimes it is misused, but most of the time, it is not. The idea that police are inherently violent and racist has not been supported by research or data. There is research speaking about the subject, but there is no empirical evidence to substantiate the claims. In the scope of their duties, police do have to commit violent acts; it is part of the job and a necessary one, but that is not all that police accomplish daily. Police are also responsible for changing tires, helping people in need, rescuing children, being on the spot social workers, firefighters, and juvenile counselors. Painting a picture of police as being generally violent when research does not support it is counterproductive and detrimental to society's goals.

As mentioned before, statistically speaking, approximately one-tenth of one percent of police officers are involved in misconduct. There has to be a call for reasonable, objective research beyond the few police officers involved in these rule-breaking incidents to ascertain if there are violent problems between the police and the public. Lastly, this research must be based more than just the race of the officer and ethnicity of the subject, and each demographics' population size. Time of day, location, type of

call, to name a few, must be evaluated. There are myriad factors that influence decisions that must be examined to reach a fact-based conclusion that there is actual overreaching police violence in America has been a point of contention. Currently, there has been a call for police reform. This call for reform is due to several incidents where police violence was perceived as excessive and unnecessary. In some cases, it is true. There is, however, the need to understand the use of force by police with the idea that not all the relevant facts are available until a full investigation is complete.

When fact-based evidence, witness statements, videos, and the case circumstances are thoroughly investigated, and the results compiled straightforwardly, can there be an objective opinion. As in any criminal case, the evidence has to prove that the officer overreached their legal authority beyond a reasonable doubt. The court of public opinion, which is the current standard in today's society, is not a basis for asserting that police violence is a problem.

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