The Public's Perception of Policing and the Evolution of Media

by

Michaela Joshlyn Hope Butt

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONOURS)

in

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

……..……

Honours Thesis Supervisor
Kelly W. Sundberg, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

Department of Economics, Justice, and Policy Studies

MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY

April 10th, 2024

© Michaela Joshlyn Hope Butt 2024
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

This thesis may be made available for loan and limited copying in accordance with the *Copyright Act, RSC 1985, c C-42.*

Michaela J.H. Butt

04/05/2024
Date

Notice One

Under the *Copyright Act, RSC 1985, c C-42*, this thesis must be used only under the normal conditions of scholarly fair dealing. In particular no results or conclusions should be extracted from it, nor should it be copied or closely paraphrased in whole or in part without the written consent of the author. Proper written acknowledgement should be made for any assistance obtained from this thesis.

Notice Two

I certify that I have made all reasonable efforts to secure copyright permission for third-party content included in this thesis and have not knowingly added copyright content to my work without the owner's permission.

Michaela J.H. Butt

04/05/2024
Date

ABSTRACT

This exploratory thesis in the style of a literature review examines the public perception of policing and what effects that perception, with a considerable interest in the under explored connection between media consumption and the public's perception. The purpose of this paper is to discuss and explore what factors impact an individual's perception of police- either positively or negatively- accounting for factors such as race, age, and consumption of media. This research is of incredible significance as it focuses on unique aspect of what contributes to the public's perception of policing through a theoretical lens that merges traditional Criminal Justice theories with theories house within unorthodox explanations to discuss why and how the public is affected by what they consume. It has also become increasingly clearer throughout recent years that the public's perception of policing has shifted significantly, likely negative, with the rise in movements such as "defund the police" indicating that something is fulling this phenomenon with this thesis exploring possible explanations for shifting opinions. The core research question can be stated simply as 'what factors contribute to shaping the public's perception of policing and why'. Due to the nature of this question the methodology of this research utilizes a merger of several theories into a literature review of relevant research papers discussing and exploring what impacts individuals' opinions of police officers. This research is providing a unique look into the public's perception of policing while also utilizing an unconventional theory to underpin the importance of media consumption regarding this topic- a narrative and discussion that is of incredible significance when exploring further what impacts an individual's perception of policing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I must first thank my two loving parents, Michael Butt, and Maureen Butt. Together the two of them have raised me to be an ambitious and driven individual that has enabled me to be completing this ambitious project today. Not only have they encouraged my academic endeavours and supported them unconditionally- all while also footing the bill with no complaints- their love for myself and each other has created a beautiful environment that truly impacts all aspects of my life- including my positive attitude throughout this entire thesis.

I also would like to thank all my grandparents, each respectively supporting me in different aspects throughout my life. I thank those who have gotten to watch my journey throughout my entire life, and those who have watched and protected me lovingly from above.

I must also thank my friends, namely Amirah Azmi. Thank you for consistently having conversations with me regarding policing and the way modern media showcases officers and their actions; our conversations have been immeasurably significant to the formulation of this thesis and laying the groundwork for future research within this area.

Lastly, I would like to thank Kelly Sundberg, my supervisor who provided unwavering support and freedom throughout this process. Allowing me to utilize unconventional theories and explanations while researching topics incredibly underdeveloped. I appreciate the freedom, as I feel I have been allowed to truly contribute to this discipline in a meaningful way because of this. I thank you sincerely.

I dedicate this thesis, and my entire academic journey to my loving Nan, Mary Coombs. Every day you are missed, but we know you are always around- I thank you for the many dimes.

PREFACE

From a young age I have loved Robin William (yes, I recognize this is a seemingly unconventional sentence to start a Criminal Justice thesis with and my purpose of completing one). I watched many of his amazing works throughout my lifetime, with *Ms. Doubtfire* being a common favourite for my father and I to watch together. Yet, his work that stood out to me the most was *Dead Poets Society*, in this film Robin Williams character delivers one incredibly impactful line that has stuck with me forever: "No matter what anybody tells you, words and ideas can change the world".

I began this paper wanting to understand the disconnect I saw in my community between officers and the public. I have witnessed the growth of incredible distrust for officers over the last several years, and I wanted to explore possible ways of rectifying this by understanding this disconnect further. I wanted everyone to feel safe and protected with policy to reflect this. However, quickly, I realized my goal was lofty as research did not exist that even explained *what* impacted *why* the public felt this way- I recognized that this goal first needed a compilation of explanations and a theoretical framework to exist before policy suggestions and analysis could even begin.

This paper offers that groundwork. Although policies are not discussed throughout this paper, I hope they are not a null point. I hope the words and ideas I offer in this paper can eventually help change the world and the academic understanding of what effects the public's perception of policing. The first step of changing the world is understanding why it acts the way it does.

I intend for this exploration to be taken as a jumping point for future discussions and policy. I also intend for this paper to push exploration into the effect of media and advocate for it to no longer be a forgotten point in this discussion.

Table of Contents

DECLARATION ..... **I**

NOTICE ONE I

NOTICE TWO I

ABSTRACT ..... **II**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ..... **III**

PREFACE ..... **IV**

TABLE OF FIGURES ..... **V**

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION **1**

I-1) CHAPTER OVERVIEW 1

I-2) BACKGROUND 1

I-3) RESEARCH QUESTION 2

I-4) RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE 2

I-4-a) Rationale *2*

I-4-b) Significance *3*

I-5) SCOPE AND STRUCTURE 3

I-5-a) Scope *3*

I-5-b) Structure *4*

I-6) CHAPTER SUMMARY 4

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW **5**

II-1) CHAPTER OVERVIEW 5

II-2-a) Interpretations *6*

II-3-a) Interpretations *8*

II-4) THE UNIQUE NATURE OF AGE 9

II-4-a) Interpretations *10*

II-5) AN ALTERNATIVE STUDY 10

II-5-a) Interpretations *11*

II-5) CHAPTER SUMMARY 12

CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL APPROACH 13

III-1) CHAPTER OVERVIEW 13

III-2) OVERVIEW OF THEORETICAL APPROACH 13

III-3) RATIONALE FOR USING THE CHOSEN THEORETICAL APPROACH 15

III-3-a) Media Effects *15*

III-3-b) Race Theory, & Socialist Theories *15*

III-4) CHAPTER SUMMARY 16

CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN 17

IV-1) CHAPTER OVERVIEW 17

IV-2) OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH 17

IV-3) DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY 18

IV-4) COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA AND INFORMATION 19

IV-5) CHAPTER SUMMARY 21

CHAPTER V: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS 22

V-1) CHAPTER OVERVIEW 22

V-2) DATA AND INFORMATION ANALYSIS 22

V-2-a) Collection of Data and Information *22*

V-2-b) Analysis of Data and Information *25*

V-3) RESULTS FROM ANALYSIS 26

V-3-a) Race *26*

V-3-b) Age *27*

V-3-c) Media Consumption *27*

V-4) CENTRAL FINDINGS FROM ANALYSIS 29

V-5) CHAPTER SUMMARY 30

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION 32

VI-1) CHAPTER OVERVIEW 32

VI-2) ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTION 32

VI-3) RELATION TO EXISTING RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP 33

VI-4) IMPLICATIONS 34

VI-5) CHAPTER SUMMARY 35

CHAPTER VII: CONCULSION 36

VII-1) CHAPTER OVERVIEW 36

VII-2) ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTION 37

VII-3) LIMITATIONS AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS 37

VII-4) SUGGESTED FUTURE RESEARCH 38

VII-5) CHAPTER SUMMARY 38

REFERENCES 40

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Categorizing Data…… 24

Figure 2: Categorizing Theories…… 25

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I-1) Chapter Overview

This chapter is designed to begin establishing the intricate nature of public perceptions of policing and what effects that perception utilizing existing literature from Canadian and American sources. Throughout this chapter factors such as direct interactions with police, community influences, race, age, and media- a critical aspect discussed throughout this thesis- will all begin to be discussed drawing only on existing studies.

This chapter will also discuss the research question and purpose of this thesis overall, while expanding on these topics through the rationale section and stressing the importance for primary research to be conducted; but its primary purpose is to address conflicting findings and the scarcity of Canadian-centric studies, the overall significance lies in filling critical gaps in understanding public opinions on policing.

In summary, this chapter sets the groundwork for a deeper exploration of the nuanced dynamics shaping public perceptions of policing throughout the remainder of the thesis.

I-2) Background

The convoluted nature of policing leads to an even more complex situation regarding the perception of policing and the factors that affect these opinions. Many local communities within Canada and the United States of America have been surveyed regarding their opinions of police agencies, each with their own complex opinions regarding police and many dynamic factors effecting those opinions. In Bain et al.'s 2014 study of individuals residing in New York City, it was outlined that publics perceptions of policing are shaped by their direct interactions with policing (p. 269) and the communities that these individuals reside in (p. 269), while others discussing the significant importance of race regarding the impact of these interactions, a concept expanded further in Chatterjee & Ryan's 2020 study (p. 606). Whereas Maguire and Johnsons 2010 study of various American communities suggest that individuals opinions on

policing are incredibly nuanced and must be treated as so, stating that it is often inappropriate to attempt to separate specific factors regarding the public's perception on policing as may members of the public cannot distinguish specific and small aspects of their opinions, and that these concepts often **intertwine with other factors** that contribute to the publics opinion (p. 723). A newer and more common narrative for what shapes the publics opinion in the United States of America and Canada is the individual's access to specific media and the 'voice' of those media outlets (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2020, p. 614). It is also critical to note, that age is discussed as a likely contributing factor to an individual's perception of policing, however more research should be done as to why individuals of certain age groups hold specific opinions.

The background regarding the public's perception of policing is critical to fully understand the importance of this topic. As discussed above, literature exists that deeply suggests there are three main aspects of an individual's life that impacts their perception of policing, 1) race, 2) age, and 3) media- with the latter of the three being understudied in the context of criminal justice.

I-3) Research Question

What are the factors that deeply impact an individual's perception of policing- and can these factors be explained?

I-4) Rationale and Significance

I-4-a) Rationale

The rationale for this thesis is to further the ultimate understanding of the nuance of public's perception of policing and what seems to deeply impact an individual's perception- if possible, this thesis also aims to explore theoretical explanations as to *why* these things impact an individual's perception in hopes of creating a comprehensive understanding and lay the groundwork for suggestions regarding managing perceptions and future policies.

A literature review must be conducting as influential data on this topic has been collected by many studies, yet a clear narrative is hard to locate. Many studies suggest multiple conflicting reasons, yet very few studies acknowledge the intertwined nature of what effects an individual's perception (Maguire & Johnsons, 2010, p. 723), and even fewer acknowledging newer explanations like media.

I-4-b) Significance

It is incredibly important to comprise a dynamic literature review to ensure a conversation regarding the wider view of police perception can be displayed. A critical gap exists in explanations regarding individuals' perception on policing, what impacts those opinions and why, as well as what factors cause an individual to hold this opinion. Another gap that exists in the literature is the intertwined nature of these factors, and/or theoretical explanations as to *why* or *what* causes these opinions to arise. These are all critical aspects that must be expanded and explored, all of which will be covered in this paper.

I-5) Scope and Structure

I-5-a) Scope

The scope of this study is intended to encompass a wide variety of literature to ensure that proper insight and background knowledge regarding this topic can be gathered and theorized, however it is incredibly critical to note that this topic is understudied and academically forgotten with much repetitiveness in explanations and studies. To ensure non-repetitiveness in findings but a comprehensive viewpoint presenting multiple opinions and explanations nine total studies will be included in the Literature Review section, as well as three academic textbooks to propose appropriate and peer reviewed theoretical explanations.

I-5-b) Structure

The structure of this introductory chapter is set out to provide critical information briefly to inform the readers of major aspects governing the discussion and research regarding this exploratory question.

I-6) Chapter Summary

This chapter serves to provide a succinct overview of the importance of this research paper and expanding the general academic knowledge regarding the dynamic factors that contribute to perception of policing and filling gaps in existing literature, while also justifying the necessary scope of this thesis.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

II-1) Chapter Overview

This chapter is designed to discuss the ways that the public informs their opinion of policing. Many individuals never directly interact with police officers (Brain et. al., 2014, p. 269) and often find alternative ways to inform their opinion, with three major factors arising as an intertwined explanation. The purpose of this research paper is to discuss how the public, as informed by American and Canadian research, are believed to shape their opinion of policing while exploring, when appropriate, interpretations of the data and research presented. Throughout the paper, the topics of **race, age, and media** consistently arise as being critical aspects informing the publics opinions on police, with much focus on discussing the complicated nature of media and how it may interplay with the demographic aspects that inform an individual's opinion of police officers discussed throughout this paper. The final aspect of this paper will explore alternative viewpoints regarding the public's opinion of police - exploring that the public opinion may skew positive or be relatively unimpacted by various factors, shifting social climates, or demographic makeup, with the inclusion of this study in this thesis serving as evidence that it is nearly impossible to attempt to outline a *single* aspect that effects an individual's perception without significantly struggling to prove the findings in a academically significant way.

II-2) **The Role of Race Shaping an Individual Perception of Policing:**

Individuals of racialized communities have been subjected to countless instances of 'high-profile' acts of police misconduct over the years (Gau et al., 2022, p.539), with the most recent and most media covered high-profile case -at the time of writing- being the recent death of George Floyd, an incident that was caught on camera and distributed online and by many main stream media organizations showcasing Floyds arrest and subsequential death due to

actions that occurred during the arrest (Gau et al., 2022, p.539). Since the death and distribution of the footage regarding Floyd a marked dramatic spike in mistrust or negative opinions towards the police has been observed in racialized communities- specifically African American communities (Gau et al., 2022, p.539). It is high-profile cases like Floyds that are believed to directly lead to public's perception of policing in racialized communities shifting substantially negative and leading to a lower likelihood to utilize or trust police services (Kwon & Scot, 2022, p. 647) Racialized communities are also significantly less confident in police ability to support and protect their interests than their Caucasian counterparts (Kwon & Scot, 2022, p. 652).

II-2-a) Interpretations

When exploring the overall impact that race has on individuals and their opinion of policing it is clear that individuals of racialized communities have different perception of policing then those who are not members of that community- with the studied racialized communities having a deeper distrust for policing (Kwon & Scot, 2022, p. 647). This phenomenon is directly linked to the rise in 'high profile cases' that gain notoriety amongst the public, often by social media or by being picked up by traditional mainstream media sources (Gau et al., 2022, p.539). Although race itself seems to have a statistically significant impact on an individual's perception and trust of police (Kwon & Scot, 2022, p. 647), it is incredibly important to note, that in Kwon & Scot's and Gau et al.'s respective studies, high-profile cases- ones shared through media sources- is cited as a **critical** reason for increased negativities perception of policing for racialized communities (Gau et al., 2022, p.539), (Kwon & Scot, 2022, p. 652), meaning the concept of 'race' in these studies cannot be directly isolated as media coverage regarding acts committed against racialized communities is what seems to be driving the individuals perception- indicating a directly connected nature.

The term 'high-profile case' as outlined above directly intertwines with media distribution and handling of cases, as cases can only enter this status through wide distribution. The utilization of this term above indicates the critical role media and media consumption has on race and the perception of policing among racialized communities- theories as to why, or even direct acknowledgment of this intertwining fails to be explored within the above presented literature however, it will be expanded and explored further in this thesis.

II-3) **The Critical Impact of Media on the Public Opinion of Policing**

With the rise of cell phones that have built-in video cameras, social media, and the perpetuation of the traditional media and news cycles, the public is incredibly connected to all current events, often with only a few touches of some buttons. Chatterjee and Ryan's 2019 study explored the trends regarding the media's portrayal of policing and how this directly impacts the public's perception; with data showcasing a slow, yet **clear** and **consistent** shift towards more 'negative' news stories about policing every year (p. 609), and the public opinions in turn shifting dramatically as they consume more media (p. 614). Chatterjee and Ryan's findings state that some years see upwards of 40% of randomly selected news stories portray police using identifiably negative language, language that deeply impacts the readers perception towards a negative perception of officers (p. 611); the findings note that media stories, on average, are 38.95% more likely today to be a negative news story about police officers then it would have been 5 years ago, matching the decline in positive perception of policing among the public (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 614).

The study also puts forward critical findings stating that the **more media** an individual consumes the more their opinion of policing will be **shaped by that media** (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 614). The study continues to expand on this finding by connecting the data appropriately to showcase that if an individual consumes more positive news stories about policing, they will hold a more positive opinion of police officers (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019,

611), and that those who consume more negative news articles about police will have a more negative opinion of police officers (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, 611).

Another critical impact that media plays on shaping the public's opinion of police is the fact that the media creates an opportunity for the public to discuss and dissect the media they are consuming. Individuals who consume more medias are more likely to discuss the stories they are reading and seeing with their social group, often solidifying their opinions on police officers and the more that an individual discusses the media they consume the more likely they are to hold a negative perception of police officers, regardless if those individuals consumed positive, negative or neutral news regarding policing (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 614). However, when examining this information, it is critical to note that more consumption of media is documented and linked to a more negative opinion of police **overall,** regardless of if the individual discusses media with their network (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 614); a trend that seems to exist regardless of what type of media they consume- positive, negative or neutral- linking increased media consumption with negative perceptions of policing (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 614). The final aspect of media impacting public opinion is the final analysis of the data finding that 71.35% of the public believe that media does **directly** impact an individual's perception of the police and that it causes public opinion to skew negatively (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 614), indicating that the average member of the public believes that media has a negative impact on their lives regarding this specific opinion.

II-3-a) Interpretations

When stepping back from this study and synthesizing more broadly how media affects public opinion, it can be interpreted that media has an incredible impact on individuals' perceptions and opinions on policing. The evidence presented in the study directly links more media consumption with a more negative perception of policing (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 614), the evidence also points out that the tone of the media an individual consume directly

impacts an individual's perception of policing as well, with consumption of (limited) positive media lending to more positive perceptions and consumption of negative media leading to more negative perceptions on policing (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 611)- neutral media is not analysed for influence in this study beyond analysing its impact in negatively swaying perceptions when media is consumed on mass (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 611). The media consumption an individual accesses and discusses explicitly impacts an individual's perception of policing.

As mentioned in the prior section, racialized identities can also be tied heavily to media consumption and the negative perception of policing that comes from this consumption. Several studies regarding the impact racial identity have on overall perception of the police cite the existence of 'high profile cases' and their subsequential consumption via media as an incredibly important aspect that shapes an opinion on policing (Gau et al., 2022, p.539). The term 'high-profile case' is understood as cases that have wide coverage and visibility on social media and traditional media (Gau et al., 2022, p.539), directly interplaying with the role media has on an individual's perception of policing, critically connecting these two aspects and these two studies.

II-4) The Unique Nature of Age

Age is an understudied aspect of an individual's identity that is believed to impact their opinion on policing. One 2022 study by Kwon and Wortley indicates that age seems to deeply impact an individual's trust in policing and their likelihood to report crimes to police based on trust. Kwon and Wortley's study gathers and questions diverse individuals of various communities and have them discuss their likelihood to report victimization to police and overall trust, finding that younger individuals are far less likely to report crimes to police (2022, p. 652)- however, no explanation as to why is provided, with no theoretical explanation offered, nor accounting for what could be contributing to the differences among demographics. Yet, it

is critical to include this study as it provides comprehensive and statistically significant data indicating that age deeply effects the perception of policing amongst individuals.

II-4-a) Interpretations

When considering this study in conversation with the consumption of media study, it is critical to note that it is common knowledge that younger individuals are the most likely individuals to consume media at a higher rate- possibly explaining why younger individuals are more hesitant to report to police, as more consumption of media is believed to lead to a more negative opinion of police (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 614). This explanation is not offered in the paper included above, yet will be explored later in this thesis, however, the data presented by Chatterjee and Ryan indicating media consumption is linked to negative perception and younger individuals having higher rates of media consumption- with youth consuming upwards of 18 hours a week of content, mostly through social media (Csibi et al., 2019, p. 617), a common news source for youth (Lowenstein-Barkai & Lev-on, 2021, p. 88).

II-5) An Alternative Study

Not all studies regarding police officers and the publics opinion of officer's state that individuals have negative or altered opinions of officers, or if there **are** individuals who have negative opinions of officers that there is not a sizable population of these individuals. Maguire and Johnson's 2009 study suggests that, when applied to the wider public, approximately 85-90% of the public will hold positive opinions on officers (p. 711-713). This study focuses on isolating the six important aspects of an individual's perception of policing as previously identified in a 1999 study by Mastrofski, published by Gallagher et al. in 2001, (p. 1); these six aspects are, 1) attentiveness, 2) reliability, 3) responsiveness, 4) competency, 5) manners and 6) fairness. During this study, Maguire and Johnson aimed to **separate** the six aspects of policing to establish the level of confidence in police on each aspect of policing (Maguire & Johnson, 2009, p. 711-713), with each aspect being at least 'slightly positively' viewed by

over 80% of all respondents to the survey (Maguire & Johnson, 2009, p. 711-713), indicating a clear departure from all previously presented research, as the general public has a positive view of the police, with the shift in media opinion or rise in high profile cases not shifting the publics opinion negative or unfavourable as previously suggested by prior studies. However, it is important to note the age of this study, being published in 2009, yet critically one factor discussed in this paper has origins through the 1950's and should indicate at least some negative opinions held by individuals in this study. Chatterjee & Ryan 2019 study, high profile cases, media, and the importance of race on publics opinion of policing can be scholarly traced as factors affecting the publics opinions since the **1950s and 1960s** (Gau et al., 2022, p. 539). It is also critical to note that this study is extremely flawed and fails to fully consider the previously mentioned aspects that shape opinions on police into account- media, race, and age, and acknowledges many flaws as discussed below.

II-5-a) Interpretations

Maguire and Johnson openly admit that their study took place on a small, homogenous **white** population that lived in a well-off community with little to no crime, and **no media** coverage of the local police agency (Maguire & Johnson, 2009, p. 718), the latter factor actively removing a leading theory and reasoning regarding what could shape an individual's opinion of police officers- their media consumption. Although Maguire and Johnson frame their findings as indicating positive views of police overall, if reframed in the context of the other studies presented in this paper, the presence of the homogenous white population with little media coverage having a positive view of police does lend itself to supporting the theory that being a member of a marginalize or racialized community as well as media consumption are critical aspects of shaping a negative or mistrusting opinion on police- as the absence of these factors lend to an overall positive view of the police. This study is also critical to include as it directly indicates the flaws found in studies when attempting to isolate single aspects of an

individual's perception as outlined by Maguire and Johnson throughout the study, repeatedly stating they cannot successfully isolate single aspects of one's perception as they seem to be intertwined.

II-5) Chapter Summary

It is critical to understand that the public's opinion on policing is shaped by a convoluted collection of factors, with media coverage, media consumption and high-profile cases being primary among them, with age likely contributing, although understudied. Despite the claims of the 2009 study that suggest the publics opinion has not shifted, the inherent flaws and age of the study within them directly lend to the theories discussed throughout this chapter that race and media consumption drastically impact an individual's perspective on policing. Although the studies currently available often forget to acknowledge the previously published studies and it is difficult to establish if the overwhelming **majority** of the public holds a negative or positive opinion of police, it can be established that a section of the population, those of racialized communities, younger individuals and those who consume a lot of media will have more negative opinions of police officers- with these factors directly circling back to media consumption as argued by the existing literature. Overall, the public's perception of policing appears to be governed by race and media, with age also likely playing a factor, all underpinned substantially by media.

CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL APPROACH

III-1) Chapter Overview

This chapter is organized to provide a comprehensive overview of the guiding perspectives and theories utilized in discussing and analysing the literature reviewed within the Literature Review section of this thesis. This chapter begins by establishing the foundations of the theories utilized within this paper and providing specific working definitions for each theory to ensure a shared understanding of the deployment of each theory. This chapter also serves as a justification for utilizing each theory, including deeply discussing the rationale behind utilizing theories outside of Criminology- such as the *Media Effects Theory*- for this Criminal Justice thesis by grounding each theory in the existing literature discussed throughout this paper; this section also briefly acknowledges shortcomings of the inclusion of unorthodox theories to refute possible arguments against the inclusion of non-criminology theories. This chapter concludes by discussing the importance of including criminological theories using a macro lens to explore the public's perception in a non-limiting fashion. Overall, this chapter acts as a discussion and justification for the theoretical approach utilized throughout this thesis and lays the groundwork for interpreting and discussing any data throughout this thesis.

III-2) Overview of Theoretical Approach

The theoretical approach for this thesis is underpinned by several different theories outlined within the literature review. The most critical aspects of the theories are underpinned by the importance of race, and media as indicated in the earlier discussed literature review- with small discussions regarding age, due to the lack of sources discussing this aspect.

The macro level theory that governs the dynamic aspects of this research is the anti-oppression and critical social theory- although, notably, it must be understood that there is no overall single governing theory for oppression or anti-oppression actions, however, they are often tied together by criticizing and exploring the oppression present within society (Anzovino et al., p. 3). As noted by Robert Mullaly's- a well-established social theorist- this macro level theory is the complex intersection of many micro level discussions and theories that contribute to a system of oppression and distrust (Anzovino et al., 2019, p. 4). For the sake of this thesis, in conversation with the Literature Review section, the macro level aspects of race theory, defined as racisms causing oppression and distrust (Anzovino et al., 2019, p. 4), will underpin the conversations regarding race, in conversation with structural oppression theory- the structures of a societal hierarchy lend to oppression and distrust (Anzovino et al., 2019, p. 4). It is *critical* to note that race theory, as utilized in the context of this thesis, will only be discussed in the context of the aforementioned definition given by Mullaly's research.

With that theory in mind, it is important to understand that all the data will be interpreted and discussed through a theory often housed squarely within the study of communications and broadcasting- this is the social theory of *media effects*. This theory, although not one that has been deeply and complexly defined, has been simply stated by communications social theorist Valkenburg in their 2016 publication to be a social theory that the media an individual consumes deeply impacts an individual's cognitive attitudes towards the world around them and emotional states (Oliver et al., 2019, p. 17). As outlined in the literature review section of this thesis the media an individual consumes has an astronomical effect on their opinion of policing, possibly being the most critical factor in developing and changing an individual's perception. Any choice to exclude theories housed in alternative research realms simply due to the unconventional crossover would be entirely inappropriate and remise of the purpose of this thesis, especially excluding theories regarding media

consumption due to the data presented priorly deeply suggesting media consumption has an incredible impact on an individual's perception.

III-3) Rationale for Using the Chosen Theoretical Approach

III-3-a) Media Effects

The inclusion of the theory of media effects is unorthodox, and an inclusion that is not in any of the included literature within the Literature Review section. Yet, while recognizing this uncommon theory inclusion, it is *critical* to include this theory as a guiding theoretical approach due to the ideas discussed within the prior sections. As outlined, the media an individual consumes has an astronomical effect on their opinion of policing, possibly being the most critical factor in developing and changing an individual's perception; any choice to exclude theories housed in alternative research realms simply due to the unconventional crossover would be entirely inappropriate- recognizing the critical nature of including this theory does not negate shortcomings of the theory, however.

The media effects theory struggles to find itself a complicated or rotund definition being able to be explained in a few short sentences, a short coming for the theory as every individual may interpret the theory slightly differently at the micro-levels (Oliver et al., 2019, p. 17). Another critical shortcoming for this theories inclusion may come from the inclusion of this theory in the first place, this theory is a theory of communications, not a social science theory nor a theory utilized within Criminal Justice papers, which could indicate a possible incompatibility between disciplines. Despite these challenges of the theory, I believe the inclusion of this theory is not a shortcoming but rather a critical lens that must be utilized in order to converse with the data and other theories included within this paper.

III-3-b) Race Theory, & Socialist Theories

The existing literature, as outline in the Literature Review section of this paper, discusses the critical role race plays into an individual's perception of policing and the idea

that marginalized individuals may feel as though they are targeted or unfairly represented within the system- indicating a need to include the macro aspects of race theory. The macro lens of structural oppression theory, that structures of a societal hierarchy lend to oppression and distrust (Anzovino et al., 2019, p. 4), is also utilized for the same purpose, as evidence suggests both age and race factors that seem to be impacting an individual's perception of policing can be equated to a level of distrust and/or oppression as indicated in prior sections of this thesis. The macro lenses are utilized to ensure that the largest and most dynamic understanding of the issues discussed within this paper can be explored without artificially limiting the scope by hampering the parameters of the theory.

III-4) Chapter Summary

In summary, the Theoretical Approach chapter serves as a concise yet pivotal guidepost for the thesis. It is critical to discuss the basics of anti-oppression and social theory, particularly emphasizing the macro-level lenses to ensure that the scope and reach of these theories are not artificially limited. The inclusion of the unorthodox social theory of media effects is justified by discussing the significant role media has in shaping individual perceptions, as underscored in the prior sections of this thesis. Despite its lack of universal acceptance in Criminal Justice analysis, the media effects theory is deemed crucial for its impact on public opinion.

This chapter, though brief, outlines the theoretical foundations that will underpin the subsequent analysis. The interconnectedness of race theory, socialist theories, and media effects theory is recognized as essential for a comprehensive understanding of how race, age, and media contribute to perceptions within the Criminal Justice System. The purpose of this chapter is to create a comprehensive understanding of the theories utilized throughout the research and analysis to seamlessly connect to the following chapters. The subsequent chapters will employ these theoretical perspectives to analyse and interpret the collected data, providing a robust framework for understanding the intricate dynamics explored in this thesis.

CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

IV-1) Chapter Overview

The methodology of this thesis is an exploratory literature review, designed to compare and compile existing literature discussing the public's perception of policing- specifically in the American and Canadian context- while documenting existing gaps in this research. The intended purpose of utilizing this methodology is to ensure a deeper understanding of the guiding research question examining and documenting what impact the public's perception of policing, and why.

This chapter itself is organized into several sections that outline specific aspects of the methodological approach and the justification for this approach for ease of reading and comprehensive understanding of the choices made regarding the approach.

IV-2) Overview of Methodological Approach

The methodology for this research begins with an initial exploration and analysis of existing research in regard to the public's perception of policing. The first aspect of this thesis required a relevant exploration of critical existing literature. All sources and research accessed was openly available for Mount Royal University students through the university's library portal as or was openly accessible through Google Scholar or a regular Google search. Following this exploration nine relevant articles were chosen, and three relevant textbooks.

The relevant of the aforementioned documents were chosen by searching for key terms- including "public perception", "policing", "public perception of policing", "police brutality", "social media and policing", "social media growth", "media effects", "media consumption", "the effects of social media on public perception of policing", and "public perception of policing-North America". The textbooks were chosen based on prior knowledge of the three books having relevant and comprehensive theoretical analysis and explanations that encompass their relevant fields- with two selected Criminal Justice textbooks, and one selected

Broadcasting and Communication Studies textbook selected. Documents and books were excluded based on irrelevancy, blatant bias, and/or repeating statistics or information within other resources included within the priorly selected studies.

A limitation of this methodology and literature review exists when examining the limited number of resources included- totalling thirteen, however, this limitation in limited sources is due to the lack of available and credible sources that meet the criteria of inclusion. The topic of public perception of policing appears to be covered extensively on the surface, which lead to its selection for this thesis topic, however, many resources simply repeat the same cases and statistics, with very few offerings information regarding the statistics, cases, or police, with fewer discussing how the public perceive the police; many sources will simply document an incident or statistic, with no discussion regarding the humanistic aspects of the public's perception. Several were also excluded due to the speculation on public perception, however, these sources failed to cite *why* or *how* the researchers were able to distinguish the public's perception on policing.

This exploratory literature review exposed a rather large gap in existing research available, with very few sources examining the reasons for the public's perception of policing, possible shifts in public perception, and why these shifts- positive or negative- occur. Initially, this thesis was designed to *explore* these gaps through primary exploratory mixed method research by utilizing surveys targeting specific undergraduate groups within Mount Royal University, alongside the sources used in this to fill the gaps in the existing literature, however, the primary research was abandoned due to deadlines and failure to hear back from the appropriate ethical approval boards in a timely manner.

IV-3) Description of Methodology

The methodology employed in this research involves an exploratory literature review, aiming to summarize existing literature on the public's perception of policing in the American

and Canadian context in a post 2001 publication date- the time frame was kept wide due to the lack of resources available. The chosen method is a systematic search for relevant articles, government codes, and studies, guided by key terms such as "public perception," "policing," and "social media and policing".

The research originally begins with accessing material and sources available to Mount Royal University students and additional material on Google Scholar, and Google. The selection process led to identifying nine relevant articles, and three relevant textbooks. Key terms that lead to the inclusion of these sources include the aforementioned search words. Studies were included as they made reference to and either maintained the established precedence set by similar studies that utilize literature review and this same method, or appropriately showcased an important aspect of the debate that was relevant to this thesis.

The research design itself draws inspiration from established exploratory literature reviews that have success in establishing backgrounds for possible further studies while categorizing and analysing the studies included in their review. While each study included in this thesis is unique in its approach, each study does include a literature review section that examines and discuss the relevant literature that each paper relies on- the factor that shaped the set-up of this literature review.

In summary, the methodology deployed for this research, an exploratory literature review, is targeted search and selection criteria. The overall justification in this choice is ultimately rooted in established practices within existing literature reviews.

IV-4) Collection and Analysis of Data and Information

IV-4-a: Collection

The data collection process for this thesis primarily employed an exploratory literature review methodology. The initial step involved a systematic search for relevant articles and studies, utilizing key terms such as "public perception," "policing," and "social media and

policing." Open-access materials available to Mount Royal University students and additional resources on Google Scholar and Google were accessed for the purpose of this study.

The selected sources are comprised of nine relevant articles, and three relevant textbooks. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to every study encountered and ensured that any chosen material would address the research question and contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the research question. Notably, the methodology focuses on existing literature to identify gaps, and categorize existing patterns and discussions.

Ethics approval for primary exploratory mixed-method research was initially considered, as indicated in the 'Methodology' chapter, due to the identified gaps during this portion of the research, however, the primary research component was later abandoned due to time constraints and delayed ethical approval. It is important to note that ethical approval for the literature review was not needed, and literature review was ultimately the favoured methodology due to this. It is also critical to note at this point in the thesis that AI editing tools, namely *Grammarly*, were utilized in the review stage of this thesis- no part of this thesis was **produced** by AI, all ideas and conversations are strictly my own, produced without AI assistance.

IV-4-b: Analysis

The analysis of data involved a detailed examination of the selected literature, exploring the specific approaches and findings of each source. The ultimate synthesis of data and information was guided by the identified theoretical frameworks that were priorly discussed, with a focus on understanding the complexities of public perception influenced by factors such as race, age, and media.

Relationships, trends, and possible contradictions found in the data were assessed through a thematic analysis. The literature was organized into key themes, allowing for the identification of commonalities, divergences, and patterns. This analysis was sensitive to

possible potential biases, and limitations in an attempt to ensure a nuanced and unbiased interpretation of the data within this thesis.

In summary, the collection and analysis of data in this thesis was rooted in the context of an exploratory literature review. The data collection process involved a systematic search for relevant literature, and the analysis that incorporated a thematic approach. The assessment of relationships, trends, and possible contradictions was conducted with purpose and careful consideration, acknowledging the complexities of this topic.

IV-5) Chapter Summary

The Methodology and Research Design chapter of the thesis discusses the exploratory literature review methodology utilized throughout to examining and discuss the public perception of policing in the American and Canadian contexts. This chapter also identifies gaps in existing research and justifies the methodological choices due to historical practices established by research. The systematic search involved accessing the Mount Royal University Library resources, Google Scholar, and Google, leading to the selection of nine articles and three textbooks based on specific key terms. Challenges presented in this chapter discuses limited available literature and time constraints necessitated abandoning primary research leading to gaps in literature that the primary research was intended to fill. The collection and analysis of data involved thorough examination and thematic organization of selected literature, with attention to theoretical frameworks and potential researcher biases- both my own and the original authors. Despite facing challenges, the methodology offers a comprehensive approach to understanding public perception of policing, bridging gaps in existing literature, and laying the groundwork for further exploration in the field regarding including unorthodox theories in analysis.

CHAPTER V: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

V-1) Chapter Overview

In this chapter the focus is on analysing the explanations offered by the literature and factors that seem to affect the public's perception of policing by deeply exploring media, race, and age. This chapter also discusses and explores the challenges in data collection and analysis but ultimately analyzes the three consistent categories found throughout literature utilized in this thesis by discussing the factors discussed throughout this paper as deeply connected to the public's perception of policing: race, age, and media consumption. The results will showcase a distrust among racialized communities and argue that this factor should be attributed partly to media portrayal of high-profile cases, justifying media's larger role in the public's perception. Age is also discussed through a theoretical analysis, with younger individuals exhibiting lower levels of trust in police- possibly due to media consumption. Critically throughout this chapter media consumption emerges as a major factor deeply shaping and impacting the publics opinion of police. The findings of this analysis are intended to highlight the interconnectedness of these factors, with media playing a central role in shaping attitudes towards policing. This chapter underscores the need for further exploration of media's influence in shaping public perceptions of law enforcement.

V-2) Data and Information Analysis

V-2-a) Collection of Data and Information

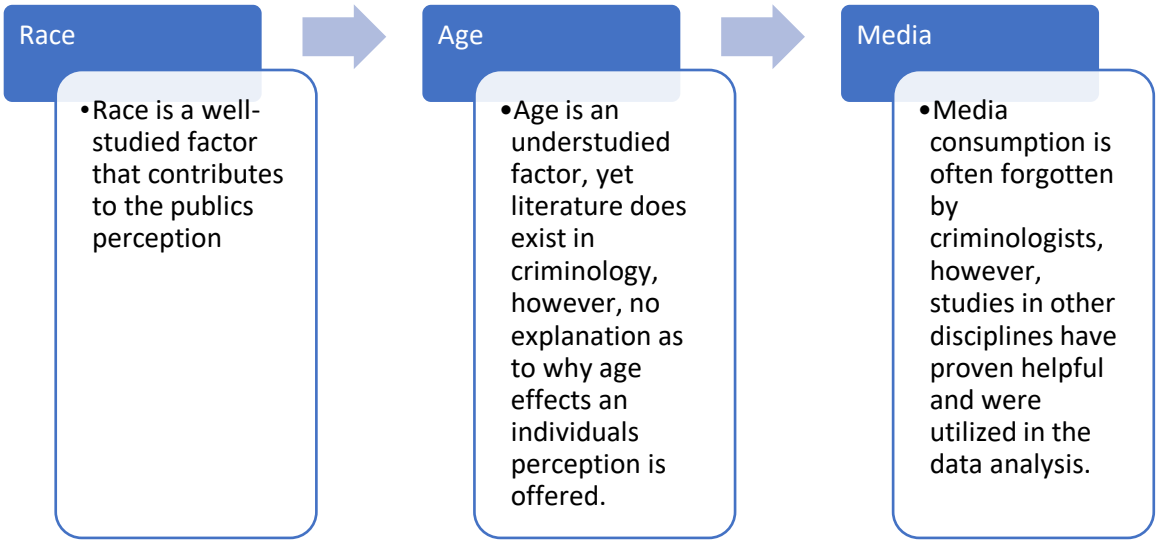
The collection of information for the purpose of this paper proved difficult at times. The public's perception of policing appears well studied on the surface; however, many studies fail to explain the factors that effect this perception and why- which is the key focus of this thesis. When gathering data and studies, many studies were not utilized from this thesis due to the fact that the paper would provide opinions or conclusions that stated that the public opinion was either favourable or unfavourable but would not explain the *why* or *what* impacted this

perception. This has led to the inclusion of a selection of several sources that provide clear data and explanations as to what the public's perception is and why the public hold this opinion, discussing specific factors. In hopes of filling the research gaps left by minimal sources being available, the original hope for this thesis was to conduct primary research on university students regarding why they hold certain perceptions of policing and what factors they believe contributes to this opinion- however, this aspect was forfeited due to failure to hear back from the internal ethics review board of Mount Royal University in a reasonable time frame.

The collection of data yielded a consistent three categories that appear to contribute heavily to the public's perception of policing- at an individualistic level. The three consistently discussed contributing factors, as outlined in the literature review section are race, age, and media consumption, with the prior two factors possibly a result of the later factor- however, data and research regarding this claim is incredibly limited and often not conducted by individuals within the criminal justice field.

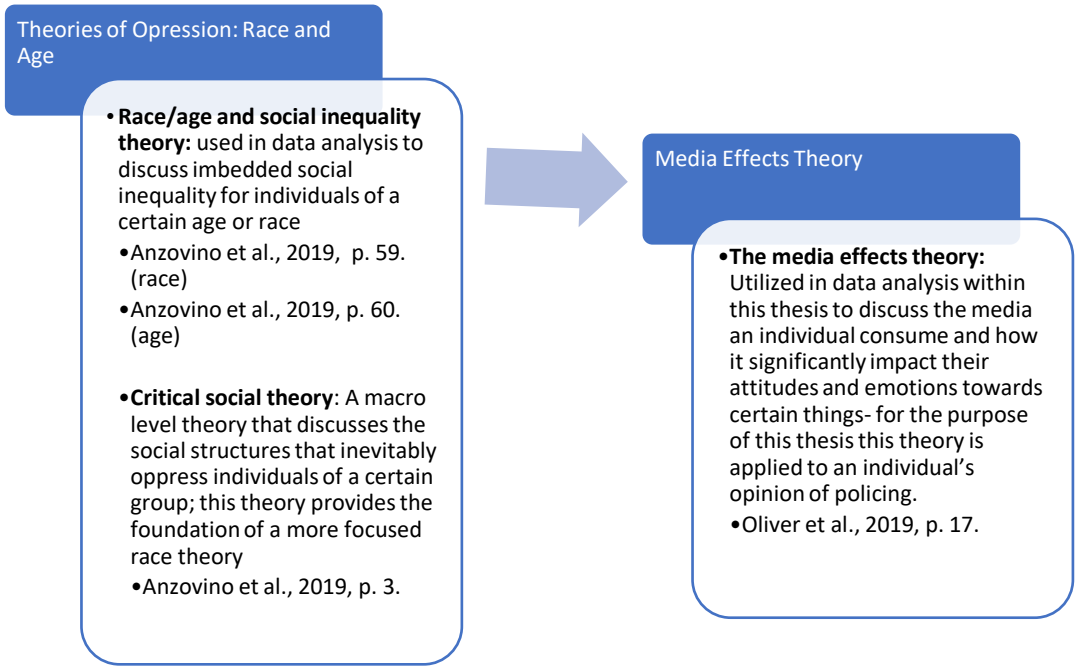
Overall, the data collection for this discussion and thesis proved difficult due to the lack of explanation offered by many available papers, leading to gaps in *why* the public members hold certain perceptions, but the sources included within this thesis offer context and possible explanations as to why the public holds certain opinions of officers and what factors can contribute to these opinions. However, it is critical to note that despite the inclusion of these sources, many of them failed to discuss theory directly, which has led to the later inclusion of two theoretical based criminology textbooks to explain race, and age, as well as the inclusion of one communications textbook that discusses why media plays a large role in an individual's opinions and perceptions.

Figure 1: Categorizing Data



Disclaimer: As referenced in the Literature Review section of this thesis, each aspect outlined below **cannot** be studied separately as each factor intertwines to explain and analyse an individual's perception and each study included in this paper discusses multiple aspects effecting the public's perception of the police. In short, numbers are not available for how many studies **only** focus on race, age, or media consumption, as **all** studies included discuss each aspect within their study- a practice justified in the Literature Review section of this thesis as outlined in Maguire and Johnsons 2010 study. However, three categories were created for the purpose of organizing leading factors repeated throughout the literature review process.

Figure 2: Categorizing Theories



V-2-b) Analysis of Data and Information

When analysing this data, the biggest challenge was explaining *why* these aspects effected individuals' opinions. The studies provided no explanation regarding theories or reasons for these impacts, and data on percentages of individuals who believe race and age impacted their opinion were also not present. The biggest challenge however was analysing and attempting to explain why media effects individuals' perception so deeply; in order to rectify this problem, the school of Communications needed to lend a theory to this thesis, despite its common usage in existing, as justified priorly, it provided an ideal theory to house a possible explanation within. Race and age also proved difficult for a similar reason upon analysis, however, utilizing a macro level social theory instead of micro level rectified this situation, although it does leave a gap in need of exploration to discuss why the system create mistrust for individuals of those groups.

V-3) Results from Analysis

V-3-a) Race

As discussed in the Literature Review section of this thesis, the data collected suggests that race, and being part of a racialized community deeply effects an individual's perception of policing and trust in police. The results from the analysis regarding race can be summed up rather succinctly and reliably, with data *consistently* pointing to individuals who identify as a member of a racialized group are more likely to hold negative opinions of policing and police members then their Caucasian counterparts (Kwon & Scot, 2022, p. 647). However, it is critical to note that the result from the analysis also points to a possible explanation as to why individuals of racialized communities hold negative opinions of policing- their exposure to media and 'high profile case' (Gau et al., 2022, p. 539). The data and results suggest that as the publics exposure to police and their interactions with racialized communities rise in media- as it has been in recent years- so too does the negative perception of police by these communities (Gau et all., 2022, p. 539). The results presented in the Literature Review regarding the interplay of media and race are critical in the analysis and data interpretation of this aspect of what impacts individuals' perception of policing- suggesting a deep implication that an individual's media consumption is incredibly important to their opinions and perceptions of police, a concept explored heavily throughout this thesis.

This phenomenon is analysed through the social inequality theory as outlined above, as an individual's race is a factor that inevitably leads directly to imbedded inequality, both perceived and actual, in the criminal justice system and the individuals' interactions with police (Anzovino et al., 2019, p. 59). With this theory in mind for the analysis of the results, it is clear to see how this theory lends to individuals of racialized communities having a significant mistrust in and negative perception of policing (Kwon & Scot, 2022, p. 647). When partnered

with this theory, the inequality of high-profile media covered cases being mainly members of racialized communities (Gau et all., 2022, p. 539) showcases the foundations of social inequality theory in action.

V-3-b) Age

Age is an underexplored aspect of the public's perception of policing, yet, must be discussed and analysed due to its persistent presence as an explanation, as outlined in the Literature Review section of this thesis. As discussed briefly priorly in this thesis, an individual's age directly has an inverse relationship regarding their trust in police and likeliness to seek police assistance when needed (Kwon & Wortley, 2022, p. 652)- with younger individuals being less likely to report or seek assistance from police due to mistrust (Kwon & Wortley, 2022, p. 652). However, the reasoning for this phenomenon is underexplored, it is simply currently just a documented consistent occurrence.

When utilizing social inequality theory and applying this theory to the results regarding age, an individual's trust of police being linked to age is likely due to either a perceived or actual belief that individuals who are older than that individual- like most officers and justice officials are- control the social structures that govern police and policing, leading to a hesitance to utilize the actors within that social structure.

V-3-c) Media Consumption

The results of the media aspect of this review are critical, media seems to play a dramatic and under studied role in an individual's perception of policing, as exhibited by the need to utilize media effects theory, a theory not housed within justice studies. As mentioned in the Literature Review section of this thesis, negative news stories regarding policing continue to rise year by year (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 609), an incredible trend observed throughout the data collection and analysis of this thesis. Utilizing the media effects theory to

interpret the results of the Literature Review, it is easy to see how the increase in negative news stories regarding policing has directly led to the increase of negative opinions regarding police, a trend which has emerged in the last 5 years (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 614). The media effects theory also interprets the data suggesting that individuals who discuss and consume media that is positive towards the police will have a more positive relationship and view of officers and their conduct (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 611). In conversation with each aspect of this relationship, it clearly outlines the importance of the media one consumes and how it deeply effects an individual's perception of policing, creating an almost hivemind like state, as individuals who consume positive media continue to seek information that confirms that bias and vice versa with negative (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 611, 614). This trend of negative media being discussed more frequently with individuals' social networks is also explained by media effects theory, as individuals observing negative behaviour will be deeply affected by this conduct and wish to discuss the conduct further.

Unlike age and race, which are uncontrollable variables but can be explained by the power imbalance between police and those groups, media consumption is a *controllable* factor, as individuals are able to directly shift their media consumption habits, and this variable deeply impacts an individual's opinions and perceptions of policing. As mentioned, individuals get bogged down consuming media that mirrors their viewpoints, whether it is reality or not, and as the media effects theory suggests, this has a **critical** impact on the individuals' beliefs. There is no implicit imbalance between those who consume media and police, as in 2024 it is understandable to believe media consumption is widespread, the data instead suggests that the bias of the media they consume is what directly skews their opinions, and it is a bias that has critically shifted over the last 5 years (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 614).

V-4) Central Findings from Analysis

Age and race are much akin to the other, each effecting the opinion of policing due to the imbalance seen between these groups and the officers and/or justice system as a whole, and one that has historically been present, something that is critical to note as it is seemingly a non-changing pattern, with race disparities being present since the 1950's (Gau et al., 2022, p. 539). Media is the most alarming factor that has dynamically shifted, with over 40% of all media consumed by the average individual being deeply negatively coded (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 611), a troubling pattern as common knowledge suggests reports regarding the actions of officers are intended to be neutral- a pillar of media creation. As discussed in the Literature Review section of this thesis, the media consumption an individual partakes in effects their perception of policing deeply, with 71.35% of individuals stating it directly and deeply impacts their opinions (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 614)- it is critical to note, the studies presented in this thesis regarding age and race do not indicate how many individuals of specific subcategories feel effected by those factors, so a direct comparison cannot be discussed here.

Age and race are similar and are factors effecting perception present due to an inherent bias in the system, media, however, holds the seemingly largest influence over individuals and the largest group of individuals due to the widespread nature of media consumption, with inherent bias in the justice system being *irrelevant* as the bias within **media consumption** not policing is what seems to deeply effects the view of the Justice System. This outlier is incredibly understudied, yet its effects are incredibly widespread, and as discussed above, is one that may be linked with other categories presented. As stated, individuals of certain racialized groups mistrust the police due to 'high-profile cases' (Gau et al., 2022, p 539); one may ask 'what spreads these high profiles cases?" the answer is **the media.** The media consumption an individual experiences and how they react to it has a direct link to race, and

that aspect of race impacting opinion can be explained by the media effects theory when viewed through the lens of interconnectedness.

The central findings overall point to media being a critical and connected aspect of the public's perception of policing, with race having a connection directly to media consumption, and age needing more studies, yet as indicated in the above sections younger individuals consume more media than older individuals (Csibi et al., 2019, p. 617), indicating that a linkage between these factors are likely. The findings also suggest that media must be examined further as numbers are presented in many studies, and a direct acknowledgement of one's bias because of media is also known (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2019, p. 614), yet the studies stop short of analysing the data on a theoretical approach or discussing the interconnectedness of aspects that are accepted widely in the criminal justice context as to why individuals of certain groups hold certain opinions and how media effects it. There is the overall suggestion during this analysis that data is incredibly relevant, and **all three factors** are critical, but the interplaying of media must be focused on as evidence suggests race and age are connected to media consumption.

V-5) Chapter Summary

Throughout this critical chapter, the deep analysis into the factors shaping public perceptions of policing is explored and discussed. Despite encountering challenges in data collection, the analysis still underscores the seemingly significant role of these three categories in shaping the public's perception of policing. Racialized communities exhibit a negative opinion towards policing, often attributed to media portrayal of high-profile cases, while age inversely affects trust levels in police- as younger individuals indicate lower levels of trust. However, throughout this analysis the influence of media consumption is **consistently** justified as being profoundly impactful on the public's perception of policing relating to the other two factors through critical evidence and studies. The findings deeply highlight the

interconnectedness of these factors, with media playing a critical and *central* role in one's perception of policing. This chapter bridges the analysis conducted and the subsequent chapters as it begins to emphasize the need for continued exploration of media's role in shaping public perceptions of policing while showcasing the findings in a wider context.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

VI-1) Chapter Overview

This chapter is intended to serve as a comprehensive discussion of the findings and exploring the importance of this research- specifically in regard to the connections between the aforementioned theoretical frameworks and the factors influencing public perceptions of policing. The research essentially confirms the hypothesis as the thesis intended to set out to discover *what* influences an individual's perspective. This section and thesis as a whole particularly highlight the significant role of media consumption, with this chapter discussing its often-overlooked nature in contemporary justice studies. Unexpected discoveries regarding the intertwined relationship between media, race, and age outlines the complexity of the research question throughout this thesis and emphasizing the need for a multifaceted approach- within this discussion and future research.

This thesis also offers a critical addition to existing scholarship by bridging often disconnected theoretical perspectives within criminal justice and beyond. Importantly, this chapter acknowledges the limitations of previous research while advocating for a more holistic understanding that considers the interconnected nature of external and societal influences. The implications of this study may eventually extend beyond academia, as this research is outlined throughout this chapter to begin to offer insights for both criminal justice practices and communication studies. This chapter concludes by discussing the importance of recognizing the profound impact of media on public perception and calls for conscientious consideration of media influence in policy discussions and ethical communication practices.

VI-2) Addressing the Research Question

Throughout this thesis multiple different theoretical explanations and multiple factors deeply effect the public's perception of policing are explored and discussed. Given the nature of the governing hypothesis of this thesis as a whole, the information presented is designed to

lay the foundation as to *what* effects the public's perception and what theories govern these effects. Due to this, the research directly 'confirms' in a sense the hypothesis, as it is not necessarily a 'true or false' style question but instead a search for an explanation and exploration into compiling and theoretical linkages regarding the presented factors.

The findings offered much beyond what I had initially expected to find, especially regarding the media consumption explanations that deeply impact the public's perception. As indicated throughout this thesis, there is limited discussion and explanation in modern research that explores the importance of media consumption, yet there is enough to suggest linkages between perception of police and consumption of media. The interconnectedness of media and race, and age, was also an unexpected finding relating to the research question, with race and age indicating a deep connection to media consumption. This connection also indicates that in future research regarding this explorative research question must be answered in a **non-singular** fashion, accepting, and exploring that **many** factors deeply impact the public's perception with each factor connecting to the others.

VI-3) Relation to Existing Research and Scholarship

This thesis creates a marriage between many theoretical explanations utilized across the Criminal Justice discipline to explain various factors that may impact the public's perception of policing. Throughout this paper a critical look is offered into the importance of widening the exploration and explanation regarding what impacts the public's perception of policing while also establishing credit to theoretical explanations outside of the traditional justice system explanations.

The findings relate deeply to existing research, as all aspects presented were already established theoretical explanations and factors with this research offering a new look into the interconnected nature and offering credit to the importance of media consumption- an often-forgotten explanation in justice studies. The inclusion in the Literature Review section of a

research paper that ultimately failed to yield statistically significant results was done so to ensure that individuals consuming this paper were fully aware that scholarship does exist that states aspects presented in this theory **may not** hold statistical significance. However, despite the existence of alternative explanations, as stated in the Literature Review, the theoretical analysis offered did disprove the alternative explanation while utilizing the results as evidence to support the need to accept a multitude of influences on the public's perception of policing.

VI-4) Implications

This study is intended to provide the groundwork for many other explorations into the topic of public perception of policing and what factors influence this perception. This is in no way a comprehensive study, nor does it provide 'new' research- it instead complies existing research and connects common threads amongst them.

Implication wise, it should be taken as a 'jumping off' point. I believe my compilation clearly indicates that media is an underlying factor and one that **deeply** impacts aspects of the justice system, yet it is understudied with no existing relevant media focused theories being utilized by justice scholars. The intended contribution to the practices and theories that currently exist within this discipline is to offer a new lens on a problem we have been struggling with for decades- what effects the public's perception of policing and theoretical explanations as to why those factors impact the public's perception of policing. This research showcases findings that are undiscussed in other existing papers, as often the interconnectedness of theories is unexplored- as showcased throughout this paper, namely within the Literature Review section. Isolation of explanations proves unproductive, and multiple answers *must* be accepted to ensure a realistic picture emerges, again, as discussed throughout.

This thesis also has many implications that may be of interests for communications-based studies. The media is clearly an incredibly impactful entity and is able to shift and interplay with many important factors of an individual's life- with this paper focusing on its

ability to shape and shift public opinions. The impact this has on an individual's perception of police is clearly evident as presented throughout, and the hope with this paper is that policy makers begin to consider the deep impact media has on shaping the public's perception on various aspects, or at the very least, this thesis serves as a conversation starter to explore conscious and ethical consumption and publication practices.

VI-5) Chapter Summary

This chapter serves as a thorough discussion regarding the importance of the research findings, emphasizing the significance of understanding the factors influencing public perceptions of policing. It confirms the initial hypothesis, focusing particularly on the role of media consumption, which is often overlooked in traditional criminal justice studies. Unexpected discoveries regarding the interconnectedness of media, race, and age were discussed throughout this chapter and beyond, highlight the complexity of the research question and emphasizing the need for a multifaceted approach regarding future research. The chapter contributes to existing scholarship by bridging theoretical perspectives within criminal justice with external disciplines and advocating for a necessary understanding of external influences- namely media. It acknowledges the limitations of previous research while calling for conscientious consideration of media influence in policy discussions and ethical communication practices. The research presented offers a new lens on understanding why individuals hold certain perceptions of policing and suggests implications for both criminal justice practices and communication studies, urging for further exploration and consideration of media's profound impact on public perception.

CHAPTER VII: CONCULSION

VII-1) Chapter Overview

This thesis delved into the intricate collection of influences shaping public perceptions of policing, with a particular focus on the underexplored role of media consumption and its influence over this opinion. Through a comprehensive examination of existing scholarship and theoretical frameworks within the criminal justice discipline, the study explored the concept of what effects the public's perception of policing, and guided by the hypothesis, discovered multiple factors that contribute to shaping one's perception.

This research contributes deeply to the discipline of Criminal Justice in many ways. Most obviously, this thesis lays the foundation for exploration into what impacts an individual's opinions of police, allowing future researchers to take this work and explore the implications further. Another contribution is the metaphorical marriage offered throughout this paper and the advocating for an interdisciplinary approach to answering complex issues. This thesis contributes to bridging theoretical perspectives gaps between justice studies and other disciplines while also contributing to the school of communications by showcasing the need for conscientious consideration of media influence in policy discussions and ethical communication practices when discussing policing.

This thesis is positioned as a jumping-off point for further exploration, urging for a multifaceted approach in understanding why individuals hold certain perceptions of policing, while also suggesting implications for both criminal justice practices and communication studies, emphasizing the ***profound*** impact of media on public perception within a broader societal context, while recognizing the critical importance of race and age in this same discussion; in no way is this thesis intended to downplay existing research nor discredit the importance of race and age, instead offered to create an environment where multiple perceived explanations can be analysed and discussed as a collective contributing factor.

VII-2) Addressing the Research Question

This thesis directly answers the research question posed in the beginning of this thesis. As stated, this question was slightly abstract in nature due to the literature gaps and instead served as an exploratory paper that establishes what these factors are and the theoretical reasoning for these factors. The literature utilized within this thesis finds that an individual's perception of policing is impacted by three major factors- media, race, and age, with media playing an incredibly interconnected role in the remaining factors- the central focus of this thesis is to emphasise this later factor. Of course, the thesis does not answer to what extend these factors influence- if one is stronger than the rest- or if it is a causal or spurious relationship as this was not the intended purpose of the question. The purpose of the research question was to simply discover what factors seem to contribute to the public's perception of policing to offer background information for future research.

VII-3) Limitations and Other Considerations

The main limitation for this study is discussed consistently throughout this paper- there is limited research available for the targeted area. Although many studies exist offering general ideas such as racial differences, nearly none offer theoretical explanations as to why, with even fewer discussing the interconnected nature of the different aspect that effect an individual's opinion. These limitations contributed substantially to the research, as entire theoretical explanations had to be discovered and connected to the explanations offered by the existing literature to explore their possible connected nature. Despite these limitations, the methodology was appropriate, nevertheless. The methodology and theoretical explanations utilized throughout this thesis contributes deeply and is in line with the existing literature while connecting in logical ways as defended priorly in this thesis- the groundwork was established by peer-reviewed articles, with proven and accepted theories being logically applied to draw any conclusions offered in this paper.

VII-4) Suggested Future Research

Suggestions for future research is rather short, yet very encompassing- future research must explore the factors that contribute to the public's perception further. It is clear that more research needs to be done regarding what impacts the public's perception and *why*- theoretical approaches and explanations are often limited in existing research. Yet, the most pressing aspect that needs future research is the medias implications on the public perception of policing. It is clear, as explained in the theoretical aspects of this thesis, that media impacts the public's perception deeply. Research recommended may explore topics such as 'what media avenues most effect individuals' perception?' and continuing the research into the interconnected nature of media.

VII-5) Chapter Summary

The conclusion chapter serves as a cohesive and understandable endpoint, effectively responding to the introduction of the hypothesis in a digestible and understandable section. This section encapsulates the central arguments of each prior chapter, emphasizing the significance of the research in accepting the complex dynamics that shape public perceptions of policing. By reaffirming the initial hypothesis and highlighting the critical role of media consumption, the conclusion emphasises this thesis's success in advancing our understanding of the multifaceted influences on perceptions within the criminal justice system. Moreover, this chapter, and thesis as a whole calls for continued exploration and deeper recognition of media's profound impact, advocating for conscientious consideration of the medias influence in policy discussions and communication practices.

In summary, the conclusion of this thesis provides a comprehensive synthesis of the thesis's findings, demonstrating how each chapter contributes to fulfilling the overarching research objectives discussed in this final chapter. It not only reaffirms the importance of understanding the factors influencing public perceptions of policing but also suggests implications for both criminal justice practices and communication studies. By bridging theoretical perspectives and advocating for a multidisciplinary approach, this conclusion is designed to leave a lasting impact, urging for further exploration and consideration of media's pervasive influence on shaping public perception.

References

Anzovino, T., Boutilier, D., & Oresar, J. (2019). *Walk a mile: a journey towards justice and equity in Canadian society* (Second edition.). Nelson.

Bain, A., Robinson, B., & Conser, J. (2014). Perceptions of Policing: Improving Communication in Local Communities. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, *16*(4), 267–276. https://doi.org/10.1350/ijps.2014.16.4.345

Chatterjee, D., & Ryan, A. M. (2020). Is policing becoming a tainted profession? Media, public perceptions, and implications. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *41*(7), 606–621. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2471

Csibi, S., Griffiths, M., Demetrovics, Z., & Szabo, A. (2021). Analysis of Problematic Smartphone Use Across Different Age Groups within the 'Components Model of Addiction.' *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *19*(3), 616–631. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-019-00095-0

Dixon, T. (2020). *Media effects: advances in theory and research* (M. B. Oliver, A. A. Raney, & J. Bryant, Eds.; 4th edition.). Taylor & Francis.

Gallagher, C., Maguire, E., Mastrofski, S. and Reisig, M. (2001), *The public image of the police", Final report to the International Association of Chiefs of Police.* International Association of Chiefs of Police. https://www.theiacp.org/resources/the-public-image-of-police

Gau, J., Paoline, E., & Paul, N. (2022). De-policing as a result of public scrutiny: examining officers' perceptions of negative media attention and willingness to engage in self-initiated activity. *Journal of Crime & Justice*, *45*(5), 539–551. https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2021.2024082

Goff, C. (2020). *Criminal Justice in Canada* (Eighth edition.). Nelson Education.

Kwon, J., & Wortley, S. (2022). Policing the Police: Public Perceptions of Civilian Oversight in Canada. *Race and Justice*, *12*(4), 644–668. https://doi.org/10.1177/2153368720924560

Lowenstein-Barkai, H., & Lev-on, A. (2022). News videos consumption in an age of new media: a comparison between adolescents and adults. *Journal of Children and Media*, *16*(1), 78–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2021.191583

Maguire, R., & Johnson, D. (2009). Measuring public perceptions of the police. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, *33*(4), 703–730. https://doi.org/10.1108/13639511011085097

Oliver, M., Raney, A., Bryant J., & Dixon, T. (2019). Media effects: advances in theory and research (4th ed). Routledge