

Aseal Nassar _____ 4 Your paragraphs are wandering some—go through and cut them down and make sure each is focused on one specific point (see my comments below).
Also, you need to add to your solutions section.

Professor Laguerdia

Crimonology

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Applying Social Learning Theory To Explain The Concept Of Police Misconduct

People look up to the police for safety and protection. Therefore, when the police fail to meet the public's expectations, the reaction is often negative. However, cases of police misconduct in American cities as well as in other regions of the world crop up now and then. A 2001 national study conducted by David Wesburd, Rosann Greenspan, Edwin Hamilton, Kellie Bryant, and Hubert Williams, indicate that police misconduct and abuse of authority is a phenomenon that has been in existence since the beginning of policing and has been on the rise in the twentieth century (9). Although numerous researchers have tried to profoundly understand and explain the concept and cause of different sorts of police misbehavior, there is no coherent theoretical justification of this occurrence. In addition, there is minimal credible data that can be used to examine the extent of cases of police brutality, misconduct, corruption among others that sum up to abuse of authority and police deviance. The Human Rights Watch (1998. Np), considers certain forms of police abuse such as race-related brutality to be among the some of the gravest violations of human rights. Although it is hard to find a single theory that fully accounts for or explains the issue of police misconduct, there are some theories which do an excellent job. On this note, this paper applies the social learning theory to police misconduct. The aim is to

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determine whether social learning theory can account for the increased cases of police misconduct.

To ~~theoretically~~ understand the concept of police brutality and misbehavior requires one to first understand the basic tenets of the criminological theory at hand. On this note, the general social learning theory associates attitudes, peer associations, and reinforcement to behavior ~~in sociology and psychology studies~~. However, ~~i~~n criminology, the social learning theory focusses primarily on the theory of deviance and crime. It was developed by Ronald L. Akers. The theory has been widely applied to understand and explain a variety of deviant and criminal behavior, and apparently, happens to be one of the most frequently tested theories in the field of criminology. Therefore, the current research finds this theory to be the most appropriate criminological theory for/in attempting to explain the concept of police brutality, abuse of authority, and overall misbehavior. Akers developed the social learning theory that is extended from the differential association theory initiated by Sutherland in an attempt to shed light on behavior that violates social norms. The primary assumption of the social learning theory is based on the fact that its similar learning processes has the ability to give delinquent and conforming or deviant behavior in human beings. In relation to this assumption, the scholar argues that definitions, reinforcement, differential association, and modeling are the four primary variables that function to instigate as well as strengthen one's attitudes towards social behavior. Differential association as a factor within the social learning theory refers to the influence that one receives from the people that he/she associates with on a frequent basis (Akers 64). The probability of criminal deviance or conformity, therefore, depends on the balance between these influences of an individual's behavior.

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Police misconduct takes many forms. Some of them include the use and sale of drugs, shielding illegal activities and people, insubordination, brutality, willful and unwarranted breaking of the rules such as over speeding unnecessarily, and neglect of duty. Despite the increasing levels ~~on~~ of police deviance, there are no sufficiently available statistics. It is possible that essentially every police department has at one time or the other witnessed or experienced some form of police misconduct or scandal caused by an abuse of authority and brutality. According to Weisburd et al. (9), apparently, every police department has put in place policies that prescribe officer conduct and regulate their use of force. However, this has not been enough to curb the cases of officer misbehavior that consequently make the public suffer in one way or the other. At the same time, this brutality and overall misconduct compromises the public's trust on the law enforcers and cost local communities huge sums of money in wasted taxes and legal damages. That is why it is important to understand how and why officers behave the way they do regardless of the high expectations that the public has upon them. It is argued that deviance and crime embrace variables that function to motivate as well as curb criminal behavior both to undermine and promote conformity (Akers 63). The blame goes beyond the individual officer who fails to act in accordance with the set policies, it extends to the chiefs, supervisors, and departments that condone it, as well as to the members of the public who fail to report such cases or even offer a fertile ground for the officers to continue abusing their authority.

The police force is recognized as the most visible and organized public institutions that is entrusted with the duty of enforcing the law. Therefore, police brutality is deviant in the sense that it fails to conform to the social norms, expectations, and policies. For this reason, the officers' excessive use of force has aroused a series of violent turmoil that has in essence compromised the police- public as well as conformity-deviance balance (Lersch and

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Mieszkowski 526). When the chiefs and supervisors fail to play their role in curbing the menace of police brutality, more and more good police officers may be influenced to join the bad few. As scholars put it, even good people placed in the wrong situation and/environment will find themselves doing the wrong thing (Weisburd et al. YEAR 10). This is the power of influence. It means that the police officer may not be all bad, but when placed in certain situations he/she may be forced to act in ways that he would otherwise not under normal circumstances. For example, in apprehending a violence suspect, the officer may be compelled to administer some excess force in the process. At the same time, the police subculture provides the most profound pressure in the form of peer influence. This subculture has the potential to facilitate deviance by transmitting the values, beliefs, manners of expression, and definitions that in one way or the other deviate from acceptable behavior. This is mainly because this, just like any other subculture, has a shared value system that allows or rather provides the officers with an opportunity to justify, rationalize, and excuse acts of deviance. Weisburd et al. notes a majority of police officers in America disapprove of the use of excessive force (24). However, the scholars point out that regardless of the majority's view and attitudes, there are some officers who believe that they should be given exclusive permission to use more force than is currently permitted under the law (Weisburd et al. 24). This, reference of the theory at hand, therefore means that the many who have negative attitudes towards the use of excessive force will likely not engage in any form of brutality but the few who are in support of it will find themselves using more force than is necessary. In as far as differential reinforcement is concerned, the theory holds that the balance between rewards and punishments determine the criminal behavior of individuals. On this note, it is argued that the choice of individuals continue or desist from committing a crime greatly relies on the present, past, and the future consequences

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for their action (Akers 66). By implication, this means that if rewards are given to officers who behave and treat without brutality, and punishments extended to officers who use their authority inappropriately by being brutal and engaging in various misconduct, then police brutality is likely to reduce. And this is why curbing this menace is a collective initiative involving all the people in the police force as well as members of the public. In other words, the profession itself places the officers in a position where they can be brutal or misuse their authority. In other words, this occupation has unique features that in turn contribute in one way or the other to the extent of police brutality and misconduct.

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This is because the officers are entitled to enjoy various privileges not available to the ordinary citizens. For example, they can ~~over~~-speed if they want to, use their sirens in order to get a way out of the heavy traffic among others. Under normal circumstances, ~~these~~-this would be inappropriate behavior, but because they are officers, ~~they~~-their misconduct passes without much attention. This is the point where the aspect of definitions comes in. According to the social learning theory, they are the attitudes and meanings that an individual attaches to a particular behavior. As already mentioned, the subculture offers an environment for justification of police brutality and misbehavior. In this same setting, attitudes play a significant role, and the theory holds that “the greater the extent to which one holds attitudes that disapprove of certain acts, the less one is likely to engage in them and vice versa” [Emphasis added] (Akers 65). This means that if an officer feels that it is proper to handle a suspect with brutality, then he/she is likely to engage in that behavior. Still, on the point of attitudes, it is evident that police attitudes and brutality are to some extent influenced by suspect characteristics in terms of gender, race, and even age (Klahm and Tillyer 216). On this note, Weisburd et al. note that whites are often

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treated better than blacks and other minorities, and police officers are therefore more likely to be brutal and use physical force against African Americans and fellow minority groups (40-41).

Imitation also happens to be one of the provisions of the social learning theory that can be used to describe the phenomenon of police brutality and overall misbehavior. On this note, Akers suggests that individuals are likely to imitate what they see other people doing. In other words, if fellow officers have been or are still being brutal and abusing their authority without anything being done to them or towards curbing such actions, then chances are high that more and more people will be tempted to act in a similar manner (67-68). On this note, it is suggested that one of the best ways to curb the menace of police brutality and abuse of authority would be to put in place good first-line supervisors who exhibit zero tolerance to such actions (Weisburd et al. 43). When that happens, fewer officers will dare to abuse their authority and likewise, cases of imitation will reduce. This means that behavior, whether good or bad may be determined by both intrinsic and extrinsic forces.

Apparently, the social learning theory offers a suitable explanation towards the understanding of police brutality and misbehavior, and this research therefore, concurs with the foundation and arguments posited by the criminological theory. It provides a unique theoretical base on which police misbehavior and brutality can be viewed. What comes out clearly is that the ideas of the likelihood of punishments and rewards, the attitudes of the officers, as well as the perceptions of the attitudes of their peers significantly influence the occurrence of police brutality and misconduct. However, this theory explains crime and deviance from a general perspective rather than police brutality and misbehavior in particular. Therefore, the reader may need to know more about applying a general theoretical perspective to fit a particular scenario such as the one discussed in this paper.

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Works Cited

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