



# FORCE SCIENCE® NEWS

Chuck Remsberg  
Editor-in-Chief

## In This Edition:

I. New study: Impact of social media on cynicism about police

II. In-Box: Readers write about civil litigation, Tactical Medicine

To register for a free, direct-delivery subscription to Force Science® News, please visit [www.forcescience.org](http://www.forcescience.org). Articles are sent twice per month via email. For reprint or mass distribution permission, please e-mail: [editor@forcescience.org](mailto:editor@forcescience.org)

## New study: Impact of social media on cynicism about police

Training note: For information on how you can bring the two-day **Force Science Basics Course** to your agency, including pricing and scheduling details, please e-mail us at [training@forcescience.org](mailto:training@forcescience.org) or reach out to Scott Buhmaster by phone at: (312) 690-6213. Thanks.

### I. New study: Impact of social media on cynicism about police

Watching cell phone footage of a use-of-force incident on social media is more likely to generate negative feelings toward the police than watching the same encounter on a conventional TV broadcast, according to a new study from researchers at Kentucky State U.

Plus, social media viewers tend to be more likely to believe that officers have acted criminally in their use of force.

If the findings from this limited study reflect broader public reactions, the research is disturbing for law enforcement because the younger population—and increasingly older adults as well—relies more on social media to shape its worldview than on mainstream news outlets.



Thus, the already-formidable challenge for police in winning community trust potentially becomes even more difficult and the risk of an adversely tainted jury pool in police-related litigation more concerning.

**A TEST OF CYNICISM.** The research, believed to be the first to explore this aspect of social media, was conducted by Lana Browning, a master's degree recipient and adjunct faculty member, Dr. Johnathon Sharp, assistant professor, and Dr. Mara Merlino, associate professor, all in the Psychology Dept. at KSU. Their findings won recognition as "best research paper" at the latest conference of the Society for Police and Criminal Psychology.

The volunteer participants in their study were 93 college students, most (92%) younger than 25, most (71%) female, and most (63%) African-American.

They first were given an 18-question "cynicism survey" to measure their baseline of "mistrust and lack of confidence" in four occupational groups: physicians, professors, attorneys, and police. Even at the outset, the results of this "paper-and-pencil" questionnaire showed that the participants on the whole "felt more negatively toward police than toward the other groups."

**2 TAKES ON UOF.** Then the participants were randomly assigned to watch one of two versions of a real-life videoed encounter in Kansas in which two municipal officers are down on the grass beside a thoroughfare, struggling with a male subject.

**Version #1** consists of raw footage taken with a cell phone by a "Citizen Video Journalist" and posted on YouTube. The action is shot from a distance and details of the struggle are hard to make out, but it's

clear that the subject is thrusting his leg and trying to break free. An officer can be heard telling him to "relax" and "get your foot down."

The cameraman yells at the subject, "Come on, guy! Quit moving, man! *They're gonna fuckin' kill you, bro.* Quit moving!" After 36 seconds, the film ends with the struggle still underway. No explanation is given about the circumstances or the ultimate outcome.

This version "went viral" and drew vigorous attacks on the police on social media. **Click here** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKzOxSrhb2o> to view it.

**Version #2**, originally shown hours later, is a 2 min. 28 sec. clip from a TV newscast about the incident, produced by professional journalists at a local NBC affiliate. Cell phone footage from the conflict is incorporated, but the reporter provides context.

The subject, she explains, was initially pulled over for a traffic violation and proved to have an outstanding warrant. When officers tried to handcuff him, he broke loose and was then taken to the ground. Dash cam footage is included showing this occur.

A major from the officers' department is interviewed, explaining why officers behaved as they did and emphasizing that they were "very professional" and "did what they had to do to get the individual into custody."

The reporter concludes by stating that the suspect was charged with battery of the officers. **Click here** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FC\\_Wn3Foovs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FC_Wn3Foovs) to view it.

After experiencing one or the other of these versions, the study subjects then took the “cynicism test” again and were also asked if they thought the officers involved committed misdemeanor assault (intentionally, wantonly, or recklessly causing physical injury).

**RESULTS.** After thoroughly analyzing the data, the researchers confirmed that there was a significant difference in cynicism regarding police between the group that viewed the unfiltered social media posting and those who saw the professional broadcast.

In the baseline testing, “the level of cynicism was fairly equal” between the two viewing groups. But after seeing the respective videos, the average level of cynicism and mistrust among the group that saw the social media footage significantly “increased, while the cynicism score for the broadcast media group decreased slightly” from their pre-viewing levels, the study reports.

In addition, “a greater percentage of the participants in the social media group felt that the officers committed misdemeanor assault than did participants in the mainstream video group,” the researchers write. “Of the 93 participants, 33 (35.5%) reported that they believed the officers violated [the criminal] statute, 26 of whom were in the social media group and 8 of whom were in the broadcast media group.”

Moreover, “there was a difference in the severity of sanctions” considered appropriate by the two groups. “The social media group opted for [significantly] more severe sanctions that did the mainstream media group.”

### CAUTIONARY CONCERNS.

The researchers warn that the “results should be generalized with caution.” They’d like to see larger and most diverse population samples tested in future research.

Nonetheless, they argue that the study raises an important issue. Given society’s technological trend and the “media exposure explosion,” there must be concern not only with what is being viewed by the public and how police are portrayed but how information is *delivered* to citizen consumers.

“Social media is becoming an integral part of how information is presented to the public,” the researchers note. “Raw citizen videos of police actions have added a new dimension to the scrutiny of police behavior.

“By creating a greater understanding of how cynicism develops...we can focus on a direction that is conducive to reducing the negative reinforcers that may contribute to the overall effectiveness in the criminal justice system.”

The research paper, “Citizen Journalism and Public Cynicism Toward Police in the United States, is currently under peer review for publication in an academic journal. Meanwhile, for more information contact Lana Browning at [lane.browning@kysu.edu](mailto:lane.browning@kysu.edu) or Johnathon Sharp at: [johnathon.sharp@kysu.edu](mailto:johnathon.sharp@kysu.edu)

*Our thanks to Dr. Dawn O’Neill, a behavioral scientist with the Force Science Institute, for helping to facilitate this report.*

## II. In-Box: Readers write about civil litigation, Tactical Medicine

Two recent reports in *Force Science News* prompted reader responses you might find useful in training or practice:

1) The webinar presented by Atty. Bruce Praet, co-founded of the public safety risk-management organization Lexipol, on “10 Ways to Lose Police Lawsuits” (see FSN #355) and

2) The annual Lewinski Lecture by Dr. Matthew Sztajnkrzyer of the Mayo Clinic, a “SWAT doc” and Force Science consultant, on the urgent need to expand training in Tactical Medicine (see FSN#356 and [click here http://www.forcescience.org/lewinski-lecture-tactical-medical-care.html](http://www.forcescience.org/lewinski-lecture-tactical-medical-care.html) for the full video of his presentation).

Here’s a representative sampling of email that landed in our in-box, lightly edited for brevity and clarity.

### Law school steps up with police training

Specifically related to your recent article on testifying: A group of my certified DT instructors are currently taking classes at Capital U. Law School, here in Columbus, on how to be an expert witness for use-of-force cases. Our City Attorney’s office defends us in civil litigation and uses our officers as expert witnesses for depositions, trials, and grand juries.

To my knowledge, this is the first time a law school has delivered expert witness classes for law enforcement.

*Cmdr. Bob Meader  
Training Bureau  
Columbus (OH) Division of Police*

### “Hit the nail on the head”

Of the many superb articles I have read in *Force Science News* this one may have been the most relevant of all. Praet succinctly dispensed salient advice that all officers, regardless of their tenure or experience, should incorporate into their handling of incidents.

Having experienced federal court from the defendant’s table myself, I can testify he hit the nail directly on the head with each point. I am forwarding the article to each officer I supervise.

*M/Sgt. Nicholas Berry  
Missouri Hwy. Patrol*

### Lessons learned about cell phones & word choice

The attorney is absolutely correct! I had two cases where lawsuits for wrongful death resulted, and an issue that the attorney touched upon cannot be overlooked: It is now standard practice whenever there is a lawsuit against the police for plaintiffs’ attorneys to subpoena personal cell phone records of the officers involved.

In one case a resistant homeless individual my officer struggled with died. Relatives who could not live without him came out of the woodwork! The plaintiffs’ lawyers took all of our personal cell phone records to find out if I was called first, before the officers called for an ambulance. The City ended up paying about \$2,000,000.

In the second incident, involving a fatal excited delirium episode, I was a defendant. I struck the subject many times to restrain him, though that alone was not the cause of death. The lawsuit said we failed to render or summon medical attention, since we put

him in a police vehicle to take him to the station.

The key for this lawsuit was the word “limp.” In many jurisdictions, if you are injured fighting with a suspect, then you are the victim, and not tasked with writing the report. That is what happened here. Another team of officers wrote the report and used the word “limp,” because we had to carry the suspect into the car.

That one word was the lynch pin of the case. We testified that he was *not* limp, and was resisting when put into the vehicle, but they also wanted to hear from the officers who wrote the report, even though they admitted not actually being present when he was loaded into the car

Choice of words in a report is vital. After that, whenever I could, I taught officers and my students in a college law enforcement program, that certain words must never, ever be used. If you ever choose to use the word “limp,” make sure it is followed by how you sought immediate medical attention.

We did prevail in that civil litigation—the deceased’s estate got nothing—but it was a close call.

*Sgt. Richard Aztlan (ret.)  
Chicago PD*

**Watch your mouth!** After an OIS where I shot and wounded a subject wanted for two murders who had grabbed the barrel of my shotgun and was trying to get it away from me, I started saying to one of the responding officers that I wondered if there could have been another way than shooting him. The officer stopped me from asking that.

Later in training I learned that plaintiffs’ attorneys often contact people present at shooting scenes, looking for statements like I made to use in lawsuits against an officer.

In another case an attorney brought an informant to us to buy drugs. The attorney said of the targeted drug dealer, “I’d like to get that SOB.” When we went to court, the informant told what the attorney said in response to a defense attorney’s question. I learned to not say anything I would not want repeated in court.

*Chief Ken Moore  
Cawker City (KS) PD*

**“Awkward phrase?”** I cannot, for a split second, believe that a law enforcement agency in this country would use the awkward phrase, “*reasonably appears necessary,*” in a use-of-force policy.

*Maj. Mark Sawa (ret.)  
Certified Force Science Analyst  
Travis County (TX) SO*

**The tip that changed report writing**  
You asked for other info that readers may think is important. The one that has stuck with me is this: “If it isn’t in writing then it’s presumed to have not occurred.”

This caused me to change my report writing philosophy. I now include everything that could possibly be relevant or important. I describe scenes thoroughly, statements and actions in detail (both mine and the suspect’s), my frame of mind and how I felt—as many details as possible so that they are in writing and presumed to have occurred.

Thanks for a very good article!

*Sgt. Kirk Pool*  
*Fresno (CA) PD*

### **“Common sense” approach that eases stress**

Mr. Praet’s insight and experience provide valuable advice in a very understandable and practical manner. His “common sense” approach to preventing and resolving issues that greatly increase the stress levels of all involved offers measures that officers can take to help themselves and administrative procedures that command personnel can put into place to help officers and the agency itself.

*Chief Dale Gustafson (ret.)  
Oakton Community College PD  
Des Plaines, IL*

### **How to open sealed medical equipment without compromising safety**

Your article on Tactical Medicine suggests that officers open sterile items in advance. However, one does not need to compromise the seal of the package and trade the safety of perishable medical products to make it easier to open under high stress.

A local paramedic demonstrates how to make heavy-duty pull tabs with duct tape on his YouTube channel. See the SkinnyMedic channel: Duct Tape Pull Tabs by [clicking here](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbWp iqhs7Ro&feature=youtu.be>

*Richard Sabo  
Registered radiological therapist  
Greenville (SC) Health System*

### **A question about video**

In your recent newsletter on Tactical Medical Response you provide a link to Dr. Sztajnkrzyer’s two-hour video lecture that we would like to include in our FTO training. Will that link expire or will it remain indefinitely?

*Lt. Lynn Aswegan  
Johnston (IA) PD*

**Editor’s Note:** The video link will be maintained indefinitely. [\*\*Click here\*\*](http://www.forcescience.org/lewinski-lecture-tactical-medical-care.html) <http://www.forcescience.org/lewinski-lecture-tactical-medical-care.html> to see it.

Written by Force Science Institute  
March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018

**Visit [www.forcescience.org](http://www.forcescience.org) for more information**

Reprints allowed by request. For reprint clearance, please e-mail: [editor@forcescience.org](mailto:editor@forcescience.org). To unsubscribe from these mailings, please send your request to [editor@forcescience.org](mailto:editor@forcescience.org) and you will be removed promptly.