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# Examining Student Perceptions: Ethics and Misconduct in Today's Police Department

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The University of Southern Mississippi

EXAMINING STUDENT PERCEPTIONS:  
ETHICS AND MISCONDUCT IN TODAY'S POLICE DEPARTMENT

by

William Andrew Davis

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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August 2014

## ABSTRACT

### EXAMINING STUDENT PERCEPTIONS:

### ETHICS AND MISCONDUCT IN TODAY'S POLICE DEPARTMENT

by William Andrew Davis

August 2014

Police ethics and decision making are issues of concern to both academic scholars and police leaders. While previous studies have focused on perceptions of police officers, little research has focused on the perceptions of young people about police ethical decision-making. This study aims to capture such perceptions from a cohort of college students majoring in criminal justice. Students from an undergraduate criminal justice program (n =263) were surveyed to determine their attitudes toward various ethical components of police work, including the prevalence of misconduct and the impact of a college education on ethical decision-making. Moreover, the effect of successful completion of a criminal justice ethics course upon their perceptions also was examined. Additionally, the effect of misconduct and unethical practices on community ties and rapport with citizens was explored. Policy implications are discussed.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Police officers have traditionally been public servants entrusted with protecting citizens and enforcing justice. Their daily duties are often guided by personal decision-making which requires sound judgment. Moreover, many of those decisions are made outside the presence of supervisor oversight; and as such, a blend of discretionary power and lack of consistent supervision produce opportunities for unethical decisions and the potential onset of misconduct. Unethical behaviors by such professionals are frequently noticed by the public and therein affect citizen attitudes toward the police. Such negative attitudes typically emanate from an assortment of factors, including an individual's experience with police (Dowler & Sparks, 2008). Callanan and Rosenberger (2011) argue that one consequence of such negative public perceptions is that it diminishes trust and confidence in law enforcement. Therefore, it is imperative to examine police misconduct and its effect on public perceptions, so that implementation of effective future policies can be designed in an effort to rebuild the often tarnished bonds with the community.

Dating back to 1829, the establishment of the police department began with the vision of Sir Robert Peele, who came to be known as the father of community policing. Peele was strongly committed to the notion that an officer's duty was to prevent crime and ensure safety in the community. Indeed, the work of Peele shaped the future conceptualization of American policing. Lewis (2011) suggests that Peele's primary goal for police as an organization was multi-dimensional. While Peele called for the provision of safety and security to the public, he also saw the need to recruit individuals who would



exhibit honesty, integrity, and professional conduct. Corruption among officers remained a focal point of concern in Peele's vision. While the original goal of policing was to staff departments in such a way that would reduce internal corruption, the American political system distorted this conceptualization of a professional police officer. Williams (2003) argued it was necessary for departments to be staffed in such a way that would fit the community in which they served. As such, the first police officers in the United States were politically appointed without consideration of professional merit. Gaines and Miller (2008) blamed these political appointments for police corruption in general, as well as the establishment of the patronage system. It was this patronage system which became the earliest form of police corruption through which low-paid officers reaped the spoils of unethical conduct. Additionally, this system gave way to the increased use of excessive force and other forms of misconduct. As a result, a lack of effective administration and officer professionalism quickly led to the rise of corruption that would later become the incurable disease for law enforcement.

The American police department possessed unethical structures early on, but it intensified with unintended consequences. However, its future would soon begin to take shape. Gaines and Miller (2008) suggest that the new era for policing as a profession began when August Vollmer founded the first collegiate criminal justice academic program. Vollmer was adamant that law enforcement could only professionalize through promoting higher education among police officers. Moreover, this educational effort was reinforced by the Wickersham Commission in 1929 – which was the first governmental support for professional standards in policing. The commission also provided support for

modernizing administration and promoting a more ethical atmosphere in the daily duties of police officers.

Research through the years has provided consistent support for the link between police education and professionalism. For example, Roberg and Bonn (2004) posited that police officers with a college education continues to be a necessary blend for the development of a professional police organization. Likewise, research suggests that higher education is now at the forefront of effective community policing efforts. As community policing generally creates more interaction with the public, ethical officers who present a professional code of conduct are an essential component to ensuring public satisfaction with police. Carlan (1999) noted that a lack of higher education in policing inhibits the degree to which the public views officers as deserving of respect and perceived as possessing integrity. This is vital for framing policing as a profession rather than a mere trade. Over the years, the criminal justice degree has proven its value in improving police performance as well as promoting more positive public perceptions (Paoline & Terrill, 2007; Telep, 2011; Truxillo, Bennett, & Collins, 1998). Moreover, research has expanded this conclusion by correlating higher education with more professional conduct in addition to fewer incidents of corrupt behavior. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the criminal justice degree holds a deepened value that has conceptualized over recent decades.

While the rise of higher education in policing has stimulated a heightened sense of professionalism, the prevailing concern of police misconduct continues to be driven by public perception. Considering the variation of an individual's daily access to news media, much of these perceptions are shaped by information to which they are exposed

— such as news media sources and popular crime dramas which often depict the consistent use of police force and unethical behavior. Callanan and Rosenberger (2011) suggest that such media sources often present a negative image of police officers and highlight negative connotations of the job. Although an individual's amount and type of media consumption affects the ways in which the public views the police, a citizen's personal experience with police is equally powerful in shaping their attitudes.

Although previous research has produced convincing results on the effect of police contact in shaping public perception, much of these perceptions appear to differ based on the gender, race, and age of citizens. While media consumption alone contributes to a negative perception, literature suggests that increased prior contact also tends to intensify negative perceptions. More specifically, those who experience more contact with police are more likely to believe misconduct exists. Nevertheless, the role of the police during citizen interaction does serve as a center of concern. Officers who present themselves in a professional manner may be successful in reducing this negative portrayal and promote change among public perceptions.

While an abundance of research has centered on the general perception of police, little research has focused on the student perception of misconduct. More specifically, the views of criminal justice college students are of particular importance. These individuals are tomorrow's police officers; and as a result, much of their perceptions toward the police may carry over into their law enforcement careers. Therefore, careful analysis of their attitudes toward the police, the predictors that trigger differing perceptions, and the variables that may alter those perceptions are of most importance to the present study.

Police misconduct is of particular concern to both police administrators and academicians. As previous research indicates, police misconduct and unethical behavior continue to be the primary contributors to negative perceptions. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the academic community has consistently encouraged a reduction of misconduct through increased higher education among officers. While academicians are primarily limited to equipping future officers with educational tools, it has been suggested that equal steps must be taken by administrators within the organization. A small percentage of police departments require any type of college education for employment. However, research suggests that departments who do require a college degree strongly value such an education for its officers. Moreover, these administrators feel that college education is imperative for promoting a professional organization (Bruns, 2010).

#### Statement of the Problem

Police misconduct perpetuates a negative view toward police officers and their daily efforts; and this in turn affects the community's satisfaction and trust in the police. Although many researchers have examined predictors of negative public perceptions, few have examined such perceptions of criminal justice undergraduate students. Previous research has also failed in determining the influence of the criminal justice degree and its course components in shaping perceptions toward misconduct. Moreover, little attention has been placed on the effect of a completed criminal justice ethics course and its impact on these perceptions. Therefore, the limitations of previous literature necessitate the need for new research not only regarding the effect of criminal justice education but also the degree to which a formal criminal justice ethics course affects those perceptions. Due to

these students being the future of law enforcement, their perceptions hold both educational and professional value.

### Purpose of the Study

Previous literature suggests there are variables which affect an individual's attitude toward police misconduct. This study will examine the relevant factors associated with the criminal justice college student's attitude toward police misconduct and ethics. Moreover, it aims to determine which factors may improve the future generation's perception of police. This study is guided by four research questions:

1. Do criminal justice students perceive misconduct as a growing concern within contemporary police departments?
2. If criminal justice students do perceive police misconduct to be a growing concern, to what degree are these perceptions associated with future implications of policing?
3. To what extent does a formal ethics course within criminal justice curricula influence student perceptions about police misconduct?
4. What are the primary indicators that best explain student perceptions of police misconduct?

### Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this study are as follows:

H<sub>1</sub>: There will be significant perception differences among levels of undergraduate educational attainment.

H<sub>2</sub>: There will be a significant relationship between the completion of a formal criminal justice ethics course and perceptions of police misconduct.

H<sub>3</sub>: There will be no significant perception differences among different academic majors with respect to a variety of ethical issues.

H<sub>4</sub>: There will be significant variables which explain some variance in student perceptions of police misconduct.

#### Delimitations

This study is delimited to the following conditions:

1. One university in the United States.
2. Criminal justice courses offered in one academic year.
3. Students who attended class on the specific day of instrument dissemination.

#### Assumptions

The assumptions of this study are as follows:

1. The data collection instrument will possess reliable metrics pertaining to the measurement of student perception.
2. The respondents in this study will provide honest responses to each component contained in the instrument.

#### Justification for the Study

Police misconduct has been strongly linked to negative views toward the police (Avdija, 2010; Hawk, Tourtelot, & Bradley-Engen, 2012; Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2005; Williams & Nofziger, 2003); and as previously discussed, there are a variety of factors that shape these negative perceptions. In addition, these factors influence an individual's likelihood of satisfaction and willingness to trust the police. Since criminal justice students are tomorrow's police officers, their perceptions are paramount in assessing the future of the criminal justice field as it pertains to reducing misconduct. Moreover,

understanding these perceptions after the completion of a formal criminal justice ethics course could hold great educational value. Understanding the criminal justice student perception of ethical misconduct allows the academic community to assess the effectiveness of offering such a course, and to gauge the general success of their respective programs in shaping the future police officer.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Police Misconduct

Many police departments continuously strive to professionalize their organizations. In an effort to present a public image of integrity and loyalty, police departments often aim to improve citizens' perspectives of their work (McMains, 2009). However, literature suggests that several factors contribute to the differing views of citizens toward the police — and specifically the prevalence of misconduct (Kääriäinen, Lintonen, Laitinen, & Pollock, 2008). Wolfe and Piquero (2011) define police misconduct as “. . . actions that resulted in the filing of a formal complaint, an internal affairs investigation, or departmental disciplinary charges against the officer” (p.333). Due to the fast pace of police work and an officer's array of discretion, many are given opportunities to bend rules and commit unethical behavior.

Police work has traditionally been regarded as an occupation relying heavily on personal decision-making abilities, moral integrity, and doing what is right based on individual values. Although laws and policies direct officers in their duties (and further place restrictions on their authority), Heffernan (1982) suggests that personal decision-making is the only true guide for the exercise of such authority when faced with ethical dilemmas on the street. Wolfe and Piquero (2011) suggest that “Police officers — as the gatekeepers of formal social control — are not only responsible for enforcing laws and protecting the public but also are entrusted to represent order and justice in society” (p. 332). As such, police misconduct has become a focal point of research aimed at identifying areas for improvement in the organization. Moreover, previous research has



pursued this ethical dilemma in order to further professionalize the field. Pointing clearly to the importance of such misconduct research, Wright (2010) argues that corruption and misconduct are two primary concepts that limit police effectiveness, and which may well be the sole determinants of community satisfaction and confidence in law enforcement.

### *Ethics and Police Discretion*

Conti and Nolan (2005) define ethics as “making a moral choice between right and wrong behavior; ethics is the theory of right conduct and the good life and morals is the practice of these things” (pp.168-169). Westmarland (2005) urges that ethics is a multi-dimensional concept intertwined with notions of morals and integrity. Stout (2011) further notes that police administrators and academicians urge there are two core dimensions of police ethics — honesty and integrity — and that these components are the essential building blocks of a professional foundation. Indeed, police officers exercise a vast amount of decision-making throughout daily routines. As a result, much decision making is deduced to a matter of what is right and wrong. Reiner (2000) points out that discretion is a common yet unavoidable facet of police work due to varied interpretations of the law. However, a substantial portion of officer discretion appears to be fundamentally controlled by the implementation of sound administrative policy (Rowe, 2007). Much police misconduct can be regulated through policy enforcement; but one common misconception is that this moral dilemma only begins after completion of the police academy.

Many contend that attitudes toward right and wrong behavior begin as early as the first day in the police academy (Conti & Nolan, 2005). Here, recruits are indoctrinated into a fraternal community where one looks out for another. Most police academies

operate for a number of months in settings where recruits spend much time with each other. As such, solidarity and the common blue code of silence are introduced (Westmarland, 2005) — essentially suggesting that each officer protect others regardless of the behavior. As a result, many officers either choose to display this behavior or simply turn their heads upon discovery of a fellow officer's misconduct. Examples of these behaviors include but are not limited to operating private businesses outside of a patrol shift, accepting gifts and/or food, accepting free alcoholic drinks, excessive force, bribery, etc. However, Kääriäinen et al. (2008) argue that police officers do report incidents of misconduct, suggesting that the blue code of silence may not be as prevalent a factor as some suggest. Nevertheless, an officer's likelihood of reporting unethical conduct is often a result of the blue code of silence and solidarity (regardless of rank).

Kingshott, Bailey, and Wolfe (2004) suggest that a police officer's mindset is readjusted and institutionalized during training. An organizational culture is established whereby similar mindsets are created to operate in one accord. As a result, loyalty to one another develops, which in turn creates solidarity against whistleblowing. The authors argue that this solidarity inhibits the effective use of loyalty to the law and policy in an organization. Conti and Nolan (2005) found that new recruits are initially made aware of a different lifestyle looming ahead. More specifically, it is argued that instructors engrain a police officer's way of life as part of their training. Instructors demonstrate that a police officer's life is held to a higher standard by society. As such, police recruits are made aware at the onset of training that they will forever be in the community's spotlight. They further add that police officers must live a public life that exudes ethical decision-making and one that “. . . provides the greatest benefit to the community and officers” (p.

183). However, a collective value resides within the police community that resists compromising close-knit relationships among officers — regardless of behavior.

Although these cultural dilemmas arise during training, some suggest this can be offset by the increased use of exhaustive ethics training during academic instruction. Wyatt-Nichol and Franks (2009) contend that police administrators favor ethics training during the academy as a means of inhibiting the corrupt culture. Further, this training provides support to the professional mission of a department and its policies. In a perception-based study of police administrators and their perceived value of ethics training, only 7% of all surveyed departments required officers who exhibited unethical conduct to undergo ethics training. However, departments that did require formal ethics training were only exposed to the course for one day or less. Regarding the value of this training, though, police administrators held favorable views of the training as a means of supporting departmental policies. These findings suggest that although law enforcement academies introduce recruits to ethics training and support its necessity, it is not extensive. As a result, police officers are not exposed to ethics training sufficiently when compared to other components of training such as physical fitness. Therefore, there appears to be a lack of concern toward ethical conduct among new police officers.

#### *Police Misconduct and the Organization*

Although literature has examined the influence of the police academy on the development of future misconduct, little focus has been directed on the organizational struggles that often equally contribute to the dilemma. While this new mindset develops as a result of academic training, organizational factors have also become a focus of attention as an additional cause of police corruption (Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). Police

administrators are charged with developing and implementing sound policy and standards of conduct for officers; however, officers who view their departments as unprofessional and mismanaged often engage in misconduct. Much of the acceptance for this type of conduct has been rooted in an officer's peer associations. Specifically, officers who associate with peer groups which support minor forms of misconduct are also more likely to conform to a code of silence in reporting greater misconduct (Norberg, 2013). As a result, these officers are more prone to holding the same views toward unethical behavior and later promote the participation in this conduct as well.

While peer associations can spur the onset of misconduct, literature also suggests that effective organization policies are often the tools needed to prevent police misconduct. Mears (2010) argues that an extensive evaluation is necessary for policies to effectively yield intended goals. He suggests that while a policy may appear to contain face validity, further examination should be conducted in order to define the following aspects of a policy: need and justification, theoretical foundation, effective implementation, outcome and impact evaluation, and cost efficiency. By creating administrative policies in this manner, police administrators can implement policies effective in reducing unethical behavior.

Banks (2009) suggests that police discretion is an equal contributor to misconduct. Police discretion should largely be guided by departmental policies and regulations. By creating policies that direct an officer's discretion, fewer opportunities exist to exhibit unethical conduct. Norberg (2013) suggests that while policies are designed to guide a police officer's actions, much of these efforts fail due to the vast array of discretion that comes with the job. Domonoske (2006) argues that to effectively

manage the discretionary powers of an officer, additional steps must be taken beyond the development of policies and establishing codes of conduct. Specifically, police administrators could benefit from establishing the following directives: additional in-service ethics training, consistent officer evaluation, increased supervision, and escalation in severity of disciplinary action. Although officers should not be micro-managed, efforts can be made to hold officers more accountable for their actions and decisions.

#### Perceptions of Police: Demographic Influences and Prior Contact

Scholars differ on the variety of citizen perceptions toward the police and the factors that produce misconduct. Many contend that a number of societal factors promote an unethical environment in policing. Due to the service nature of the job, community satisfaction lies at the cornerstone of measuring police effectiveness (Wright, 2010). Avdija (2010) found that police conduct was the most significant predictor of a citizen's attitude toward the police and their level of satisfaction. While this echoes findings of other research, other factors also appear to contribute to such citizen attitudes, including but not limited to demographics, contact with police, and media consumption (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011; Carr, Napolitano, & Keating, 2007; Dowler & Sparks, 2008; Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2005; Williams & Nofziger, 2003).

A variety of ethnic backgrounds, ages, and social classes come in contact with police officers on a daily basis; and this frequent interaction contributes to a community's perceptions of law enforcement (and their effectiveness), satisfaction with police services, and the effect of an officer's general behavior in shaping their views. Callanan and Rosenberger (2011) suggest that citizens who lack confidence in the police will often

refuse to cooperate with officers, which in turn creates consequences for departments who implement community policing efforts.

Previous studies have produced various results on the differences of community perceptions of the police across gender and racial lines. Avdija (2010) suggests that males generally hold more positive perceptions of the police than their female counterparts. However, Hinds (2009) found that females who feel safe in the community actually tend to hold more positive views of the police. These findings suggest that perceptions of males and females toward the police are largely dependent on other mediating factors (including race). For example, some research has found that although the general community holds a relatively favorable perception of the police, there are significant attitudinal differences according to its racial composition. Specifically, White citizens have been found to hold more favorable views of the police than do African Americans and Hispanics. Of the three racial groups, however, African Americans seem to hold the most negative attitudes toward the police — and this finding holds true for both general and neighborhood-level perceptions (Chermak, McGarrell, & Gruenewald, 2006; Dowler & Sparks, 2008). Avdija (2010) suggests this is largely due to increased police contact with African Americans which is generally initiated by the police, signaling a negative view at the onset of the interaction. Callanan and Rosenberger (2011) assert that African Americans hold less favorable views of the police as a result of inequality in racial fairness. African Americans feel that officers use excessive force toward their race more frequently. Schuck and Rosenbaum (2005), however, contend that these variations across race and gender can be a result of a community's delineation

between general perceptions of the police and those shaped by acknowledgment of the police in their respective communities.

Existing literature indicates significant differences among community perceptions of the police according to gender and race; however, much of these differences appear to be related to prior experience with law enforcement (Miller & Davis, 2008). Dowler and Sparks (2008) argue that citizens who experienced police contact — regardless of who initiated the contact — were generally less satisfied. The authors point out, however, that this lack of satisfaction often is related to the activity level of crime in the respective neighborhoods. More specifically, citizens who live in neighborhoods with high crime are more exposed to the police; yet interestingly, these individuals hold more favorable attitudes toward officers. In essence, citizens in high-crime communities take notice of consistent police patrol and presence, more response to crime, and increased cooperation with the community. Hinds (2009) proposes that these individuals feel the police are effective, exhibit fairness, are professional in their authority and procedure when interacting with citizens, and feel safer in their neighborhoods. However, others contend that citizens who experience contact with the police as a result of victimization tend to be more dissatisfied (Chermak et al., 2006; Dowler & Sparks, 2008). Callanan and Rosenberger (2011), though, suggest that those who have been criminally victimized or experienced prior household arrest tend to hold more favorable attitudes toward the police. Thus, it appears that while police- and citizen-initiated contact produce differing results in public perception, other factors such as neighborhood conditions, fear of crime, and police presence tend to modify these attitudes.

## Media Consumption

Much of society's information is filtered through technology. In recent decades, this has become a dynamic factor through which exposure to news sources and the amount of daily news consumption appears to influence one's perceptions about the police. Crime and fear of victimization is a sensationalizing topic that captures audience attention; but the phenomenon of crime is further endorsed by the popularization of television crime dramas. It nonetheless remains true, though, that literature examining the effect of such media has remained limited.

Callanan and Rosenberger (2011) argue that the two most significant media factors which drive public attitude toward the police are crime realities and television news coverage of crime. They suggest that as public consumption of media increases, the more sharply these factors enhance a favorable attitude toward police. Moreover, consistent news coverage of the police also seems to shift public perception in a favorable manner; as a result, more individuals may perceive the police as fair. Dowler's (2002) examination of the perceptions of police effectiveness according to the amount and type of media consumption associated with crime echo these previous findings. While consumption of crime dramas significantly affects one's perception of police effectiveness, those who regularly watch crime dramas tend to hold more negative views of the police. In a similar study conducted by Miller and Davis (2008), media consumption negatively affected public perception of police. Here, it is suggested that news media which paints police in a negative light creates a similar attitude among viewers. Moreover, news media of police misconduct intensifies this negative perception. Those who are exposed to such news stories create a preconceived notion of



negativity toward the police. Therefore, the findings of previous literature would suggest that news coverage of crime and policing efforts is influential in shaping public attitudes toward police effectiveness.

In addition to media influence on public perceptions of the police, research has also indicated that exposure to crime dramas and news coverage is significantly correlated with a negative perception among viewers who have previous contact with law enforcement. Dowler (2002) found that individuals with no previous contact with police tend to hold favorable attitudes regardless of media consumption — although these views are somewhat contingent upon age, college education, and experience with neighborhood crime problems. Conversely, though, those with prior contact with police — regardless of type — who regularly watch crime dramas tend to hold more negative perceptions of police effectiveness. Thus, it appears prior contact with police, blended with media consumption, largely shapes negative perceptions of police.

While much literature indicates that media consumption is a significant predictor of shaping public attitudes, Chermak et al. (2006) found that media consumption was insignificant in influencing public perception of police regardless of the amount of news coverage. Thus, more research is needed to examine the effect of media coverage of the police and its effect on shaping public attitudes toward police and misconduct. While much news coverage on policing efforts centers on achievements, misconduct and unethical behavior are equally brought to light. Therefore, it seems reasonably settled that the media definitely influences — to vary degrees — an individual's attitude toward law enforcement, ethical behavior, and police effectiveness.

## Student Perceptions of the Police

Citizens hold views of the police which often drive general perceptions.

However, literature is scant with regard to measuring perceptions of college students.

The research that does exist suggests there are numerous factors influencing a student's attitude toward the police. For example, Williams and Nofziger (2003) suggest student perceptions often are a reflection of the general perception of police, particularly in terms of race and gender. While Chermak et al. (2006) suggest age alone does not play a pivotal role in perceptions of police, others contend these attitudes become more favorable with age (Nihart, Lersch, Sellers, & Mieczkowski, 2005).

Williams and Nofziger (2003) argue that examining student perceptions toward the police rests on three concepts. First, a unique relationship exists between law enforcement and young adults that is largely shaped by an individual's prior victimization, offense history, and vicarious experiences — all of which generally remain unique to the particular age group and often cause differing perceptions from the remainder of the community. Second, sociological factors — such as socialization with like individuals, access to opportunities, and trust issues that arise with other authority figures — play an equal role. Third, conflict between the individual and education may, at times, arise during this stage of life — a struggle which may predispose a student to a differing perception of the police. Echoing this process, Nihart et al. (2005) suggest that students who succeed academically and hold positive attitudes toward their parents, teachers and other authority figures tend to also hold favorable attitudes toward the police. Thus, police are often viewed in a similar light as student peers, which only reinforces Williams and Nofziger's (2003) suggestion on the complexity of influential

factors which may contribute to such attitudes. Nevertheless, it is imperative to further examine the relevance of student attitudes toward police to effectively predict the outlook on future perceptions of the public. Examining a student's prior contact with police (including those from disadvantaged neighborhoods) are also factors of concern as these can produce conflicting perceptions of the police (Carr et al., 2007). Examining student and young adult perceptions is also necessary to improve programs that promote police efforts, as such programs strengthen ties with the young adult community and help to effectively implement police strategies such as community policing (Nihart et al., 2005).

### *Demographic Differences*

Existing literature on student perceptions of police suggests there are several variables of importance. In addition to the influence of student peer associations, demographic factors are of equal significance. Hurst, McDermott, and Thomas (2005) argue that gender remains the most significant predictor of juvenile delinquency. More specifically, they suggest that white females hold more favorable attitudes toward police than do white males and all African Americans. This finding is said to be a result of the female's perceived level of trust in the police. A student's trust and confidence in the police holds great value in determining how they view officers. Mbuba (2010) examined the influence of gender and its effect on student perceptions, and also found that females hold more favorable attitudes toward police performance and satisfaction than their male counterparts. Moreover, female students feel that the police are effective in providing essential services to the public. However, these female students felt differently when asked about police misconduct, reporting higher levels of perceived police unethical behavior than the male students. To the contrary, though, Hurst et al. (2005) found that

white teenagers (regardless of gender) held more favorable views of police performance and their value in providing assistance to the community. Carr et al. (2007) suggests, however, that much of these variations are determined by the student's prior contact with police.

### Students and Prior Contact

General public perceptions of the police are largely affected by experience with officers. Williams and Nofziger (2003) point out that college students, too, share equal prior contact with police but differ with regard to future action after initial contact. Specifically, college students are not only more likely to perceive police officers as unethical and unprofessional, but also more apt to report such behavior — and therein hold a negative view. Furthermore, they are also more likely to suggest that police officers exhibit unprofessional behavior during contact with college students. As a result, they hold less confidence in the police and are least likely to trust officers. These findings also hold true when evaluating the student perception of campus police.

Miller and Pan-Maureen (1987) assert that students who experience involuntary contact with campus police are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward officers. Additionally, these students are less likely to believe that campus relations with students are of importance to the police. Given that more of their time is spent on the college campus, college students are more likely to interact with campus police officers than other law enforcement officials. As a result, these perceptions of campus police are of great significance to the quality of student-police interactions. Williams and Nofziger (2012) contribute much of this to students' increased visibility on campus. These students are generally more concentrated, and as such are typically more aware of police

presence for a variety of factors including on-campus living, apartments near campus, and the added factors associated with on-campus fraternities and sororities.

### *Vicarious Experiences with Police*

While prior direct contact with police has been found to mold student perceptions, the impact of vicarious experience (or indirect contact) also seems to shape their attitudes — mainly through hearing or witnessing unprofessional conduct through someone others' experiences. Hurst et al. (2005) suggest that female students who either see or hear of police misconduct tend to hold more negative views toward police. More specifically, African American female students are more likely to experience vicarious contact with police. As such, they are more likely to have been exposed to police misconduct (such as exposure to excessive force against another citizen, officers protecting other officers' misconduct, and officers not working while on duty), and as a result hold more negative attitudes toward such police than their white female counterparts. One reason for this increased negative outlook appears to be a minority's increased likelihood of being targeted by law enforcement. Consequentially, they are more likely to hear of misconduct and unprofessional behavior, thus producing a negative stigma toward police.

Young adults and college students alike appear to be significant predictors of future public attitudes (Williams & Nofziger, 2003). While both groups share similarities in perceptions, the age-to-attitude ratio often poses conflict due to the young adult's status as a college student. Nevertheless, demographic factors and contact with police hold reasonably constant across both student and public attitudes. As negative contact with police tends to shape negative perception (Carr et al., 2007; Miller & Pan-Maureen, 1987), individuals become less satisfied with police and their services to the community

(Hurst et al., 2005). In order to promote more favorable attitudes toward law enforcement, Williams and Nofziger (2003) encourage administrators to promote community programs designed to rectify the issues which spur the negative stigma of police officers. In addition, training programs which address better interaction practices with college students can also alleviate the dilemma. Efforts may also be made in the university setting to establish more interaction with students and campus police.

### Criminal Justice Education and Policing

An abundance of research has focused on the link between college education, police professionalism, and ethical conduct; but the debate primarily has been contextualized in such a way that has questioned the necessity for college education among officers (Schanz, 2013). According to Carlan (2007), “Criminal justice educators are accused of operating ‘cop shops’ or ‘advanced training academies,’ yet few efforts test these stereotypes against the experiences of police consumers” (p. 616). Many have debated the importance of a college degree for police officers. The broader question, then, begs whether a college degree in criminal justice is a worthwhile investment pertaining to its utility and effectiveness, and whether such education actually produces a better-rounded police officer. Achievement among criminal justice graduates suggests that criminal justice curriculums enhance understanding of the core concepts necessary for a productive law enforcement career. Moreover, graduates themselves assert that the college degree provides information not taught in police training (Del Carmen, Butler, & Odo, 2006). Similarly, Carlan (2007) notes that criminal justice education tends to be strongly valued by police officers who hold such education, and that the degree provides essential information that they would not otherwise possess. Therefore, an examination

of the benefits of a college education is of paramount importance in determining whether the college degree truly shapes a more ethically-minded officer.

#### *Overview of Criminal Justice Curricula*

Owen, Fradella, Burke, and Joplin (2006) purport that criminal justice curricula must be designed to expose students to four major areas. First, a general analysis of deviance and social control which instills the acute mindset so necessary for discussing the ramifications and theoretical foundations of crime and deviant behavior. Second, an extensive examination of the legal concepts which allow academicians to familiarize students with an understanding of criminal and procedural law in addition to the legal concerns for careers in criminal justice, to include exposure to the theoretical background of criminal law; such exposure equips students with a historical timeline of law and justice that served as the stepping stone for today's justice system. Third, an introduction to various frameworks must be presented to pose philosophical ideologies toward crime. Last, the legal limitations of the criminal justice system must be explored to provide students with a guiding rule of legal boundaries that direct criminal justice professionals. Moriarty (2006) adds three primary goals: critical thinking skills, writing skills, and familiarization with criminal justice theory and philosophical concerns of law. Although these goals are, indeed, necessities of criminal justice careers, requiring a college degree in policing has not come without its limitations for professionals.

Only 1% of all law enforcement agencies require a baccalaureate degree (Hilal & Densley, 2013). Bruns (2010) attributes much of this academic stagnation to an overwhelming belief among police executives that requiring a college degree would negatively impact recruiting efforts. Additionally, such a requirement could produce

adverse reactions from minority groups for being misaligned with proper political policy. Although these findings are disheartening at first glance, Roberg and Bonn (2004) provide encouragement by pointing out that the high school diploma has, in fact, gradually been replaced by the four year degree. These authors suggest that nearly 25% of all police officers currently possess at least a baccalaureate degree — primarily attributable to the increased popularity of criminal justice academic programs. Therefore, considerable progress has been made in the efforts to produce more college-educated officers which, in turn, will professionalize criminal justice careers.

#### *Impact on Police Performance*

Possession of a college degree — irrespective of the academic major — means more than simply equipping one's self with credentials suitable for employment. A college degree provides essential tools necessary for succeeding in any career. Smith and Aamodt (1997) propose that a college education provides greater analytical understanding of a field, as well as increased confidence and satisfaction in the job. The authors also argue that police officers who possess college degrees perform significantly better than those who hold high school diplomas. Shernock (1992) supports this position: "Insofar as education militates against organizational parochialism and insularity, it serves the positive function of promoting an occupational rather than an organizational identification. . ." (p. 87). Carlan and Lewis (2009) conclude that this development of policing as an occupation among college educated officers also aligns with the criteria of professionalism. Rudoni, Baker, and Meyer (1978) emphasized early on that emerging research on police education was consistent with the anticipated goals of producing a professional body of officers. Therefore, college educated officers do appear to have



furthered the law enforcement field as a professional organization, rather than merely as a trade or occupation. However, to gauge the actual effectiveness of the college degree, a comparison of performance between college-educated officers and non-college educated officers is necessary.

Literature suggests that educated and non-educated police officers differ significantly with regard to effectiveness and performance. Truxillo et al. (1998) argue that college educated police officers attain higher supervisory ratings along multiple facets, specifically including higher perceived job knowledge, increased dependability, and higher likelihood of promotion opportunities. Carlan (1999) concurs with these findings when he suggests that the criminal justice system places an increased value on the college degree insofar as these officers are granted more opportunities for promotions, salary increases, and experience higher levels of job satisfaction. However, Carlan (2007) adds that there is a delineation in job satisfaction along educational lines, suggesting that officers who hold master's degrees were significantly more satisfied with their jobs than those who possessed baccalaureate degrees. These findings suggest that increases in educational attainment generally correspond with advantages in the areas of promotion, salary, and job satisfaction. Therefore, the criminal justice degree is largely viewed in modern policing as an invaluable tool for equipping more dependable and satisfied officers.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits pertaining to job satisfaction, salary and promotion, the criminal justice degree also has proven valuable in enhancing officer performance ratings. Some research supports the notion that police officers with a college degree have better verbal and written communication skills, as well as evince

more concern toward citizens (Lersch & Kunzman, 2001; Chappell, 2008). The college degree also seems to promote better decision-making among officers. With regard to police academy training, college-educated officers, again, tend to outperform those with only a high school diploma or GED. Bruns (2010) postulates that officers with bachelor's degrees demonstrate greater analytical skills and not only are more mature but also strive for excellence in the setting of career goals for increased satisfaction and advancement. As such, the college degree appears to more professionally shape police departments and separate law enforcement from the ideology of a trade. Instead, college education furthers the field of policing as a professional entity.

#### *Influence on Police Misconduct*

While college education has proven time and again to promote more well-rounded police officers, the effect the degree has specifically on police conduct is highly important. Community satisfaction with police is guided by perception of police behavior and conduct. As such, it appears reasonable to presume that a college degree would mitigate negative perceptions held by the public toward police ethics and professional behavior. Carter and Sapp (1989) suggest there are significant differences between the behavior patterns of college educated officers and those with lesser education. Not only are these officers more likely to show concern for citizens, but they also are less likely to use unethical means to resolve conflict with suspects and citizens. These officers are more aware of a citizen's constitutional rights, along with legal limitations when making such decisions. Therefore, those who hold college degrees not only are better candidates for adherence to laws and procedures, but also are more supportive of restrictions on police discretion — thereby limiting the prevalence of

misconduct and poor decision-making. Lersch and Kunzman (2001) report that officers without a college education not only tend to violate administrative policies with more frequency but also are more prone to administrative referrals and to receive multiple complaints for inappropriate behavior. On the contrary, though, officers who possess at least a two-year associate's degree were significantly less likely to violate policies. Manis, Archbold, and Hassell (2008) replicated this study and found that officers without college education also tend to receive more sustained citizen complaints. It appears, too, that these findings equally hold true with respect to police use of force.

Literature provides similar results when examining variation across educational backgrounds. Essentially, as education increases among officers, the corresponding likelihood to use force decreases (Chapman, 2012; Paoline & Terrill, 2007; Rydberg & Terrill, 2010); and this finding holds constant regardless of the nature of the force — be it verbal or physical. Not only do educational differences surface pertaining to the use of force, but these differences persist even when comparing educated police officers against those with less education but with more experience. Therefore, it appears that possessing a college education is essential to curbing verbal and physical force — regardless of job experience. While these college-educated officers appear aware of the power differential that exists when implementing force, they seem to better appreciate and understand the negative consequences associated with such behavior. Interestingly, an officer's likelihood to discharge a weapon during a shooting seems influenced by educational differences as well. McElvain and Kposowa (2008) report that police officers with college degrees are less likely to fire a weapon during a shooting. Here, it is suggested an officer's history of shooting is a significant predictor of discharging a weapon during a

shooting in the future. However, it also appears that college education negates such a tendency.

Prevailing literature on police education and behavior advises that much improvement has been made in professionalization efforts. Telep (2011) notes that while college may not solely explain the differing view toward misconduct, the driving factor lies within the individual. A college graduate acquires different attitudes toward unethical behavior and has a more positive outlook on the job. College-educated officers — regardless of attainment level — display more unfavorable views toward all forms of misconduct. It is worth noting, however, that these attitudes are more profound among officers who completed a college degree prior to employment within policing. Notwithstanding this finding, attaining a baccalaureate degree at any point in one's career still seems to produce significant perception differences toward the abuse of authority compared to officers who continue their careers without higher education.

#### *Utility of a Criminal Justice Ethics Course*

Existing literature has examined the significance of criminal justice education in shaping attitudes toward misconduct; and as expected, majoring in criminal justice is a significant predictor in forming such an unfavorable view (Tsoudis, 2006). Likewise, the criminal justice academic program also promotes a higher sense of professionalism in policing through exposure to the academic setting (Bumgarner, 2002). However, the question begs as to whether there are particular components of criminal justice education that contribute to this conceptualization. Most academic programs generally expose students to the role of ethics in a profession. Regardless of course depth, students are made aware of the ethical conundrums that exist in a given field in an effort to promote

awareness — this holds true for criminal justice curriculums as well. As a result, graduates of criminal justice programs are often more trustworthy individuals who abide by laws and policies. Moreover, criminal justice majors tend to hold favorable attitudes toward the criminal justice degree itself (Schanz, 2013). Specifically, students feel their education is a necessity for professional performance in future careers. As such, this holds great professional and policy value to the importance of requiring college degrees in policing. The question still remains, though, as to what effect the ethics course has in shaping the criminal justice graduate — which are the next generation of law enforcement. Therefore, their orientations toward police ethics are crucial for continuing to professionalize law enforcement.

Few studies have examined the effect of a formal criminal justice ethics course in shaping perceptions of police misconduct. Some researchers, however, have examined the ethical nature of the criminal justice curriculum in general and its effect on creating an ethical graduate. Shernock (1992) proposed that criminal justice education does produce a student orientation toward ethical values, but only in its entirety — not merely with a single course. However, Bjerregaard and Lord (2004) found that criminal justice students who are exposed to a single ethics course were less likely to participate in unethical behavior in their careers. Additionally, the criminal justice ethics course may also be successful in altering criminal justice student perceptions toward police misconduct. Interestingly, students are more likely to perceive misconduct as more serious prior to enrolling in the course. Therefore, research suggests that, indeed, a criminal justice ethics course may well be significant in promoting a more ethical

mindset in the future of law enforcement. However, future research must examine the effectiveness of the ethics course in shaping such attitudes.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

As criminal justice students are the future of policing, it is plausible to suggest that understanding their perceptions about police misconduct is vital for the professional police organization. Moreover, examining factors most closely associated with their perceptions hold value for academic scholars by providing information to gauge the effectiveness of the criminal justice degree in equipping students with an ethical approach to policing. Additionally, the findings of this research also provide professionals with valuable implications for future policies aimed at promoting the professional officer. The following chapter provides the framework for an exploratory analysis of the student attitude toward police misconduct.

#### Research Design

This study will utilize secondary data collected during a previous research project — conducted by W. Drew Davis (Approved IRB #13042201) — to assess how undergraduate college students in a criminal justice academic program perceive police misconduct. In addition, this study will seek to determine student perceptions toward the influence of a college education and, specifically, whether the completion of an undergraduate criminal justice ethics course influences those perceptions. Differing analyses will be used to assess the survey (see Appendix A) data in an effort to determine these factors and test the hypotheses of the study.

#### Research Questions

The goal of this project is to examine (1) attitudinal perceptions of undergraduate criminal justice majors toward police misconduct and (2) variables which influence such

behavior. The research goal will be achieved by analyzing variables related to misconduct, police professionalism, and criminal justice college education. The study is guided by four research questions:

Research Question 1: *Do criminal justice students perceive misconduct as a growing concern within today's police department?* Mbuba (2010) argues that variations do exist in such a way that reflects a contrasting view of the police in relation to a non-student population.

Research Question 2: *If criminal justice students do perceive police misconduct to be a growing concern in law enforcement, to what degree are these perceptions associated with future implications for policing?* Tsoudis (2006) suggests that a college education in a criminal justice discipline can be an effective means of shaping the future of the criminal justice system.

Research Question 3: *To what extent does a formal ethics course within criminal justice curricula influence student perceptions about police misconduct?* Bjerregaard and Lord (2004) assert that a single criminal justice ethics course does little to positively affect future thoughts of college students; however, extended exposure may alter these findings.

Research Question 4: *What are the primary indicators that best explain student perceptions of police misconduct?* Vis (2012) suggests that regression analysis allows for the isolation of significant independent variables that most closely influence the dependent variable.



### Dependent Variable

The study's dependent variable ("*Police corruption is increasing among today's police officers*") was measured using a five-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). The dependent variable will allow for examination of student attitudes toward this ethical dilemma. Wolfe and Piquero (2011) suggest the issue of misconduct and its associated factors have largely remained on the organizational level. However, this dependent variable aims to detect the factors that most closely predict student attitudes toward general misconduct and signal the associated independent factors before the criminal justice student begins a career in law enforcement.

### Independent Variables

While a variety of perception variables in this study aim to determine descriptive differences among the sample, the respondent's attitudes toward criminal justice education were also examined. This will allow the researcher to effectively measure their perceived level of confidence in the criminal justice degree and its influence on police behavior. These perception variables included but are not limited to

- Community perceptions of unethical decision making
- Misconduct and its influence on community policing
- Relationship between years of police service and misconduct
- Influence of discretionary power in policing and its effect on unethical behavior
- Prevalence of racial profiling
- Impact of criminal justice college courses in training officers in ethics

- Effect of a college degree in shaping police professionalism and ethical conduct

In addition, this project incorporated seven demographic variables about the student: gender, race, cumulative GPA, education classification, completion of a criminal justice ethics course, major, and familial relationship one may have to law enforcement.

#### Population

All students enrolled in criminal justice courses at The University of Southern Mississippi enrolled in two particular semesters served as the population for this study. The student base included criminal justice majors along with non-criminal justice majors, including forensic science and others. As a result, this will provide additional value to the study by allowing for the detection of statistical differences across academic majors. During the 2013-2014 academic year at The University of Southern Mississippi, the School of Criminal Justice had a total enrollment of 710 undergraduate students. Of these students, 168 were enrolled during the summer 2013 semester, while 542 were enrolled in the fall 2013 semester.

#### Sampling Frame and Subject Selection Procedure

The sampling frame for this study consisted of a compiled list of all undergraduate criminal justice courses offered during the two semesters of interest to this study (the summer and fall 2013 terms). This strategy produced a total of 38 courses. After compiling the list of courses, convenience sampling was utilized to select 10 criminal justice courses. Peterson and Merunka (2013) suggest that the use of convenience sampling of college students does pose concerns of generalization to non-student samples. However, they contend that no empirical research exists that would

refute the conclusions of such research. Likewise, Nesselroade (1986) offer that other forms of randomized sampling are not without their own respective issues of selection bias. Thus, it is argued that both convenience sampling and those that aim to safeguard against selection bias equally raise generalizability concerns in research findings. These courses were chosen by the researcher in conjunction with the Director of the School of Criminal Justice. The researcher then requested access to the courses by contacting each instructor. The selected courses were those typically taken by all student classifications, including two senior capstone courses. By selecting both lower- and upper-level courses, this allowed for determining whether descriptive differences exist across the levels of academic maturation.

#### Data Collection

The data in this study were collected using the *Student Perception Survey* (see Appendix A), which primarily aimed to measure a student's attitude toward police misconduct while also gathering demographic information. In order to effectively gather a representative sample, the researcher distributed the instrument to all students in each selected undergraduate course. Students were orally instructed regarding how to complete the survey, and also received an oral explanation regarding its purpose to ensure that students were fully aware that participation in the survey was voluntary and that no penalty existed for not participating. Additionally, a confidentiality statement was read to the class and then signed by the students who participated. Students at that time completed the survey and placed it face down on a table at the head of the room. If a participant wished to cease participation or became uncomfortable, the student was allowed to inform the researcher of their desire to cease participation, and their survey

was excluded from the sample. A non-participating student simply turned in the incomplete or blank survey with all others. Once all participants had completed the instrument, the researcher collected the surveys and proceeded to the next selected course.

### Analyses

This study will utilize a variety of statistical techniques, including descriptive analyses, correlation matrices, and logistical regression models. Regression models will be constructed to determine the predictor variables which explain the most variance in the dependent variable. By isolating the variables most closely associated with the perceptions of criminal justice students, researchers will be able to determine where more attention should be directed in future studies. Vis (2012) argues that regression analysis in the social sciences allows for the indication of interaction between multiple variables. Thus, constructing multiple models allows for the isolation of those variables that share interaction in order to create a stronger explanation of variance in predicting the independent variables responsible for explaining the dependent variable. Regression analysis will also evaluate the previously discussed research questions. The ultimate goal is to develop a regression model that most closely predicts perceptions of misconduct among college students entering law enforcement.

In addition to the use of regression models, descriptive analysis and frequencies will also be used. Due to the nature of this project, these descriptive differences are essential in order to determine if variations exist in student perceptions across demographic categories (e.g., age, student classification, etc.). Thus, utilizing a student's

$t$  in conjunction with one way ANOVA will allow this study to determine if such differences exist.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This chapter details the findings of the collected data along three primary avenues. First, descriptive analyses are used to provide a general portrait of the sample characteristics. Second, comparison-of-means analyses are used to identify which independent variables significantly differ with respect to the dependent variable. Third, multivariate analyses are conducted in order to assess which variables are most closely associated with the dependent variable.

#### Demographic Portrait and Comparison of Means Analyses

Table 1a reveals that participating students in this study were predominantly female (60%,  $n = 151$ ), non-White (52%,  $n = 132$ ), and had a cumulative grade point average of 2.5 or higher (87%,  $n = 199$ ). No significant perception differences were discovered for gender and reported grade point average, but analysis did determine that non-White students reported significantly higher agreement with increased police misconduct ( $t = 3.37, p < .01$ ). A significant portion of the sample also consisted of students who were majoring in various academic disciplines (74%,  $n = 193$ ) and were non-seniors (57%,  $n = 148$ ). No significant perception differences emerged along academic discipline lines, but significant perception differences were discovered between the two levels of academic maturation ( $t = 2.23, p < .05$ ), with non-seniors reporting higher corruption perceptions than seniors. A majority of respondents also reported not having completed an ethics course (62%,  $n = 160$ ). Lastly, a majority of respondents reported having no family members in law enforcement (58%,  $n = 150$ ). Of those who did have such a family member, though, most (58%,  $n = 51$ ) were either a father or uncle.

Table 1a

*Demographic Frequencies and Means Comparisons*

Variable	N	P	M	SD	SE	Test	p
<b>Gender</b>							
<i>Male</i>	100	40	3.35	0.90	.09	$t = 1.64$	.10
<i>Female</i>	151	60	3.54	0.92	.08		
<b>Race</b>							
<i>White</i>	123	48	3.24	0.85	.08	$t = 3.37^{**}$	.01
<i>Non-White</i>	132	52	3.63	0.97	.08		
<b>Student GPA</b>							
<2.5	30	13	3.53	0.97	.18	$F = 1.51$	.22
2.5-2.99	100	44	3.47	0.94	.10		
3.0+	99	43	3.27	0.91	.10		
<b>Student Major</b>							
<i>Forensic Science</i>	67	26	3.58	0.81	.10	$t = -1.42$	.16
<i>Other</i>	193	74	3.41	0.97	.07		
<b>Student Classification</b>							
<i>Senior</i>	112	43	3.31	0.98	.09	$t = 2.23^*$	.03
<i>Non-Senior</i>	148	57	3.57	0.85	.07		
<b>Completed Ethics Course</b>							
<i>Yes</i>	98	38	3.33	1.05	.10	$t = 1.72$	.09
<i>No</i>	160	62	3.53	0.84	.07		
<b>Family in Law Enforcement</b>							
<i>Yes</i>	109	42	3.46	0.93	.09	$t = -0.16$	.87
<i>No</i>	150	58	3.44	0.93	.08		
<b>Family Relation in LE</b>							
<i>Father</i>	20	23	3.50	1.00	.22	$F = 0.82$	.97
<i>Uncle</i>	31	35	3.42	0.89	.16		
<i>Cousin</i>	17	19	3.47	0.94	.23		
<i>Other</i>	20	23	3.55	0.99	.22		

\* Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

\* Means range from 1(Strongly Disagree) to 5(Strongly Agree).

\* p<.05, \*\* p<.01.

Neither of these variables, however, produced any significant perception differences.

In addition to descriptive data (see Table 1a), Table 1b provides analyses for each significant perception variable. Six (of twelve) perception variables were statistically significant, with five of the six variables significant at the .01 alpha level. Specifically, a large portion of respondents agreed (43%,  $n = 113$ ) or were neutral (35%,  $n = 90$ ) that police officers bend rules during daily operations. A one-way analysis of variance test produced significant mean differences ( $F = 7.71$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between those who strongly disagreed ( $M = 1.00$ ,  $SD = 0.00$ ) and all other respondents. Likewise, a similar portion of the sample indicated some level of agreement that police discretion significantly influences unethical decision-making (52%,  $n = 135$ ). Tukey analysis revealed that respondents who strongly agree ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) that police discretion negatively influences decision-making differed significantly from all other groups ( $F = 5.39$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In addition, a majority of respondents agreed that racial profiling is of equal concern (71%,  $n = 183$ ). A one-way analysis of variance test indicated that respondents who strongly agreed ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ) held significantly higher mean scores than those who disagreed and agreed ( $F = 4.82$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Respondents also tended to be neutral (39%,  $n = 103$ ) or in some agreement (35%,  $n = 92$ ) that criminal justice courses teach valuable lessons not taught in the police academy. Tukey analysis indicated respondents who disagreed ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) differed significantly from all other groups ( $F = 3.91$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Most respondents agreed (38%,  $n = 98$ ) or strongly agreed (21%,  $n = 55$ ) that a college degree promotes a more positive image in the community. Significant mean differences were discovered, revealing that those who agreed ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ) differed most significantly from respondents who were neutral response



Table 1b

*Perceptions of Misconduct*

Variable	N	P	M	SD	SE	Test	<i>p</i>
Unethical decision-making creates negative perception with community							
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	3	1	2.33	1.15	.67	$F = 2.87^*$	.02
<i>Disagree</i>	5	2	3.00	1.00	.45		
<i>Neutral</i>	20	8	3.35	0.75	.17		
<i>Agree</i>	97	37	3.32	0.91	.09		
<i>Strongly Agree</i>	137	52	3.60	0.93	.08		
Discretion influences unethical decision-making							
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	6	2	2.83	1.17	.48	$F = 5.39^{**}$	.00
<i>Disagree</i>	32	12	3.03	0.89	.16		
<i>Neutral</i>	87	33	3.43	0.79	.08		
<i>Agree</i>	97	37	3.46	0.90	.09		
<i>Strongly Agree</i>	38	15	3.95	1.06	.17		
Racial profiling is a problem							
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	8	3	3.13	1.13	.39	$F = 4.82^{**}$	.00
<i>Disagree</i>	17	7	2.88	0.93	.23		
<i>Neutral</i>	53	20	3.38	0.90	.12		
<i>Agree</i>	111	43	3.37	0.89	.09		
<i>Strongly Agree</i>	72	28	3.79	0.89	.11		
Police officers bend the rules							
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	2	<1	1.00	0.00	.00	$F = 7.71^{**}$	.00
<i>Disagree</i>	12	5	2.83	0.94	.27		
<i>Neutral</i>	90	35	3.32	0.83	.09		
<i>Agree</i>	113	43	3.51	0.92	.09		
<i>Strongly Agree</i>	43	17	3.81	0.91	.14		
CJ courses teach valuable lessons							
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	6	2	4.33	0.82	.33	$F = 3.91^{**}$	.00
<i>Disagree</i>	15	6	2.73	1.03	.27		
<i>Neutral</i>	103	39	3.43	0.86	.09		
<i>Agree</i>	92	35	3.52	0.83	.09		
<i>Strongly Agree</i>	45	17	3.47	1.12	.17		

Table 1b (continued).

Variable	N	P	M	SD	SE	Test	<i>p</i>
Police with college degree have more positive image							
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	2	<1	3.50	2.12	1.50	$F = 3.57^{**}$	.01
<i>Disagree</i>	23	8	3.26	1.01	.21		
<i>Neutral</i>	83	32	3.73	0.81	.09		
<i>Agree</i>	98	38	3.24	0.81	.08		
<i>Strongly Agree</i>	55	21	3.49	1.10	.15		

Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Means range from 1(Strongly Disagree) to 5(Strongly Agree).

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ) ( $F = 3.57$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Lastly, a majority of respondents reported strong agreement (52%,  $n = 137$ ) that unethical decision making creates a negative perception with the community ( $F = 2.87$ ,  $p < .05$ ); however, no significant mean differences emerged upon comparison of groups.

#### Factor Analysis

Table 2 illustrates two factors produced from the 14 perception variables in this study: one scale (Cronbach's alpha = .81) comprised of six variables about college education's positive influence on policing and professionalism, and a second scale (Cronbach's alpha = .37) comprised of two variables about unethical actions by officers, bending rules and racial profiling. Due to the second scale's low reliability coefficient, it was excluded from all regression analysis.

#### Correlation Analyses

Table 3 provides the results of an intercorrelation matrix presenting the associated correlations between the dependent variable and (1) all significant demographic variables and (2) significant perception variables. The variable unethical actions produced the

Table 2

*Exploratory Factor Analysis for Continuous Independent Variables*

Variable	Factor Loadings	
	College Education	Unethical Actions
CJ college courses teach valuable lessons in ethics...	.41	
Officers with college degree have more positive image...	.57	
Officers with college degree exhibit less racial profiling.	.62	
Officers with college education better understand law.	.65	
A college degree enhances professionalism in policing.	.80	
A college degree enhances ethical conduct in policing.	.82	
Racial profiling is a problem within policing.		.56
Police officers bend the rules during daily operations.		.60
Eigenvalues	2.63	1.11
Cronbach's Alpha	0.81	0.37
Cumulative % of Variance	26.28	37.35

strongest correlation with the dependent variable ( $r = .28, p < .01$ ).

#### Cross Tabulation Analyses

Tables 4a and 4b provide results of cross-tabulations between all demographic variables which exhibited significant mean differences (see Table 1). Table 4a indicates overabundance (Cramer's  $V = .22$ ) of White male students and an overrepresentation of non-White female students ( $\chi^2 = 11.39, p < .01$ ). Additionally, a strong relationship was revealed between student race and their respective grade point averages (Cramer's  $V = .22$ ). White respondents predominantly held a 3.0 grade point average or higher, while

Table 3

*Intercorrelation Matrix for Demographic Variables and Significant Perception Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Corruption (DV)	1.00										
2. Student Gender	-.10	1.00									
3. Student Race	-.21**	.22**	1.00								
4. Student GPA	-.11	.02	.22**	1.00							
5. Student Major	.08	-.24**	.06	.11	1.00						
6. Student Classification	-.14*	.05	.12	-.16**	-.26**	1.00					
7. Ethics Course	-.11	.06	-.04	-.13**	-.22**	.40**	1.00				
8. Decision-making	.19**	.07	.00	.03	.00	.11	.04	1.00			
9. Discretionary Power	.26**	-.05	-.11	-.05	-.07	.11	.07	.18**	1.00		
10. Unethical Actions	.28**	-.13*	-.34**	-.20**	.04	.05	.05	.28**	.28**	1.00	
11. College Ed Perceptions	-.10	.10	.18**	.05	-.04	.08	.07	.06	.02	-.09	1.00

\* p < .05. \*\* p < .01.

<sup>a</sup> Police corruption is increasing (DV) measured on 5 point scale (5= Strongly Agree, 1= Strongly Disagree).

Coding: Student Gender (Female=0, Male=1), Student Race (White=0, Non-White=1), Student GPA (<2.50=0, 2.5-2.99=1, 3.0+ = 2), Student Major (Other=0, Forensic Science=1), Student Classification (Non-Senior=0, Senior= 1), Ethics Course Completion (No=0, Yes=1)

Variables 8-11 measured on 5 point scale (5= strongly agree, 1= strongly disagree)

Note: Variables 10 and 11 are scaled factors (see Table 2).

students who were non-White tended to possess grade point averages of 2.50 to 2.99 ( $\chi^2 = 10.75$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Lastly, the findings indicate that a moderate relationship existed between student race and whether respondents reported having a family member in law enforcement (Cramer's  $V = .13$ ). White respondents tended to have fewer familial relationships to law enforcement ( $\chi^2 = 4.01$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Table 4b indicates a moderate relationship between student classification and grade point average (Cramer's  $V = .16$ ). The findings suggest that non-seniors held grade point averages of 3.0 or higher, while seniors tended to hold grade point averages above 3.0 ( $\chi^2 = 6.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Moreover, results indicated a strong relationship (Cramer's  $V = .25$ ) between student race and major. Here, findings indicate an overabundance of

Table 4a

*Contingency Table for Race against Other Independent Demographic Variables*

Variable	White	Non-White	$\chi^2$
Gender (Cramer's V = .22)			
Male	48 (E) 61 (O)	49 (E) 36 (O)	11.39**
Female	73 (E) 60 (O)	74 (E) 87 (O)	
Student GPA (Cramer's V = .22)			
<2.5	15 (E) 9 (O)	15 (E) 21 (O)	10.75**
2.5-2.99	49 (E) 44 (O)	51 (E) 56 (O)	
3.0+	48 (E) 59 (O)	49 (E) 38 (O)	
Student Major (Cramer's V = .06)			
FSC	32 (E) 35 (O)	34 (E) 31 (O)	0.82
Other	91 (E) 88 (O)	98 (E) 101 (O)	
Student Classification (Cramer's V = .12)			
Senior	54 (E) 61 (O)	57 (E) 49 (O)	3.64
Non-Senior	70 (E) 62 (O)	74 (E) 81 (O)	
Completed Ethics Course (Cramer's V = .04)			
Yes	47 (E) 44 (O)	49 (E) 52 (O)	0.48
No	75 (E) 78 (O)	80 (E) 77 (O)	
Family in Law Enforcement (Cramer's V = .13)			
Yes	51 (E) 43 (O)	54 (E) 62 (O)	4.01*
No	71 (E) 79 (O)	76 (E) 68 (O)	

Table 4a (continued).

Variable	White	Non-White	$\chi^2$
Family Relation in LE (Cramer's V = .22)			
Father	8 (E)	11 (E)	4.30
	10 (O)	9 (O)	
Uncle	13 (E)	18 (E)	
	16 (O)	15 (O)	
Cousin	7 (E)	9 (E)	
	4 (O)	12 (O)	
Other	9 (E)	11 (E)	
	9 (O)	13 (O)	

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01.

Note: E = Expected Count; O = Observed Count.

seniors who majored in other disciplines, while non-seniors tended to be forensic science majors ( $\chi^2 = 16.28$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Lastly, a strong relationship (Cramer's V = .39) existed between student classification and whether respondents had completed a formal ethics course. Specifically, seniors were more likely to have completed an ethics course, while

Table 4b

*Contingency Table for Classification against Other Independent Demographic Variables*

Variable	Senior	Non-Senior	$\chi^2$
Gender (Cramer's V = .05)			
Male	43 (E)	57 (E)	0.63
	46 (O)	54 (O)	
Female	64 (E)	85 (E)	
	61 (O)	88 (O)	
Student Race (Cramer's V = .12)			
White	54 (E)	70 (E)	3.64
	61 (O)	62 (O)	
Non-White	57 (E)	74 (E)	
	49 (O)	81 (O)	

Table 4b (continued).

Variable	Senior	Non-Senior	$\chi^2$
Student GPA (Cramer's V = .16)			
<2.5	14 (E)	16 (E)	6.08*
	18 (O)	11 (O)	
2.5-2.99	46 (E)	53 (E)	
	50 (O)	49 (O)	
3.0+	46 (E)	53 (E)	
	38 (O)	61 (O)	
Student Major (Cramer's V = .25)			
FSC	29 (E)	38 (E)	16.28**
	15 (O)	52 (O)	
Other	83 (E)	108 (E)	
	97 (O)	94 (O)	
Completed Ethics Course (Cramer's V = .39)			
Yes	42 (E)	55 (E)	40.69**
	67 (O)	30 (O)	
No	70 (E)	89 (E)	
	45 (O)	114 (O)	
Family in Law Enforcement (Cramer's V = .02)			
Yes	47 (E)	62 (E)	.06
	48 (O)	61 (O)	
No	64 (E)	84 (E)	
	63 (O)	85 (O)	

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01.

Note: E = Expected Count; O = Observed Count.

fewer non-seniors had completed the course ( $\chi^2 = 40.69$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

### Ordinary Least Squares Regression Analyses

Tables 5a and 5b provide results of the ordinary least squares regression analyses which examined the relative influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable. Table 5a includes all perception and demographic variables in a forced entry model, while Table 5b included only the variables that most closely predicted the

dependent variable. Completion of an ethics course was included in both models despite its lack of significance (see Table 1).

As shown in Table 5a, one fifth ( $R^2 = .20$ ) of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained through examination of all 14 independent variables ( $F = 3.25$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Results indicate that only two variables significantly predict the dependent variable. The most important contributor ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ) pertained to students who perceive police discretion to influence unethical conduct. Students who agree with the negative influence of police discretion were more likely ( $b = .26$ ) to agree that corruption is increasing. Meanwhile, student classification was the second largest contributor to the variance of the dependent variable ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Specifically, senior students were significantly less likely to perceive police corruption to be increasing ( $b = -.28$ ) when compared with non-senior students.

Table 5a

*Regression for Police Corruption Perception Subset*

Variables	<u>b</u>	<u>SE b</u>	<u>β</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>VIF</u>
Gender	-.12	.13	-.07	-0.92	1.18
Race	-.17	.14	-.09	-1.22	1.39
GPA	-.12	.09	-.09	-1.32	1.11
Major	.11	.15	.05	0.74	1.23
<i>Classification</i>	-.28	.14	-.15	-2.02*	1.35
<i>Completed Ethics Course</i>	-.09	.14	-.05	-0.72	1.25
Family in LE	-.02	.12	-.00	-0.12	1.07
<i>Unethical Decision-making</i>	.12	.08	.10	1.42	1.25
<i>Corruption Inhibits</i>	.02	.07	.02	0.29	1.22
<i>Duration of Service</i>	.03	.07	.03	0.35	1.24
<i>Discretion Influences</i>	.26	.07	.26	3.76**	1.12
<i>Officer College Education</i>	-.13	.09	-.09	-1.32	1.19
<i>Racial Profiling</i>	.03	.07	.03	0.41	1.42



Table 5a (continued).

Variables	<u>b</u>	<u>SE b</u>	<u>β</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>VIF</u>
<i>Officers Bend Rules</i>	-.09	.08	.09	1.19	1.25
<i>Constant</i>	2.30	.57		4.02**	
<i>R = .44</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup> = .20</i>		<i>F = 3.25**</i>		

\*\*p < .01. \*p < .05.

DV: Police corruption is increasing among today's police officers (1=Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree).

Coding: Gender (1 = Male, 0 = Female), Race (1 = White, 0 = Non-White), GPA (0 = <2.50, 1 = 2.50-2.99, 2 = 3.0+), Major (1 = Forensic Science, 0 = Other), Student Classification (1 = Senior, 0 = Non-Senior), Completed Ethics Course (1= Yes, 0 = No), Family in Law Enforcement (1 = Yes, 0 = No), All other variables (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

Table 5b provides results for a best fit regression model that predicts the dependent variable 'police corruption is increasing among today's police officers'. As indicated, 19% of the total variance can be explained through examination of six independent variables. Results indicate that student perceptions regarding discretionary powers ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < .01$ ) is the most influential predictor. Essentially, students who agree ( $b = .27$ ) that discretion influences future unethical conduct perceive police corruption to be a growing issue. Meanwhile, regression results indicate that the influence of unethical decision-making was the second most influential predictor ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Here, students who agreed ( $b = .20$ ) with the perception measuring the influence of unethical decision-making also perceive police corruption to be increasing. Furthermore, results indicate that ( $\beta = -.17$ ,  $p < .01$ ) student race was the third most influential predictor, suggesting that non-white students are more likely to agree ( $b = -.32$ ) that police corruption is increasing in contrast to their non-white counterparts. Lastly, the results of the model provide that student classification ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was the least significant

predictor, in that seniors are less likely ( $b = -.27$ ) to perceive police corruption to be increasing; non-seniors are more apt to agree with the notion of the increased problem.

Table 5b

*Best Fit Model for Police Corruption Perception Subset*

Variables	<u>b</u>	<u>SE b</u>	<u>β</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>VIF</u>
<i>Race</i>	-.32	.11	-.17	-2.87**	1.07
<i>Classification</i>	-.27	.12	-.15	-2.22*	1.25
<i>Completed Ethics Course</i>	-.11	.12	-.06	-0.93	1.22
<i>Unethical Decision-making</i>	.20	.07	.18	2.98**	1.04
<i>Discretion Influences</i>	.27	.06	.28	4.61**	1.05
<i>Officer College Education</i>	-.07	.08	-.06	-0.92	1.04
<i>Constant</i>	2.25	.42		5.31**	
<i>R = .43</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup> = .19</i>		<i>F = 8.98**</i>		

\*\*  $p < .01$ . \*  $p < .05$ .

DV: Police corruption is increasing among today's police officers, (1=Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree).

Coding: Race (1 = White, 0 = Non-White), Student Classification (1 = Senior, 0 = Non-Senior), Completed Ethics Course (1= Yes, 0 = No), All other variables (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary goal of this project was to evaluate perceptions of criminal justice students on police misconduct. As previously discussed, since many criminal justice students pursue law enforcement careers, it seems reasonable to suggest that it is vital for academic and professional communities to better understand their perceptions toward such unethical behavior. This research was also designed to gauge the perceived effectiveness of college education on policing. This chapter aims to assess the outcomes for the research questions and hypotheses posed by the researcher, while also providing implications for future research and criminal justice policy.

#### Revisiting Research Questions

This research was guided by three research questions. In order to discuss future research and policy implications, providing answers to this study's research questions is necessary:

1. Do criminal justice students perceive misconduct as a growing concern within today's police department? The results of this study suggest that criminal justice students do perceive police misconduct to be an issue of concern in policing. A sizeable portion of the sample were in agreement that police corruption is increasing and that a variety of factors contribute to this negative behavior. Although there was not a statistically significant mean difference among student majors, the results suggest that students majoring in other disciplines show similar agreement on the issue, indicating that criminal justice students share similar views toward police misconduct with other

college students. Much of this seems to be explained by students' strong agreement on the impact of police discretion in promoting unethical behavior.

2. If criminal justice students do perceive police misconduct to be a growing concern in law enforcement, to what degree are these perceptions associated with future implications for policing? A majority of respondents suggested that criminal justice courses and the college degree are favorable components of policing; and as such, promotes ethical behavior and a more professional appearance in the community. These findings promote favorable support for future educational implications for the policing field.

3. To what extent does a formal ethics course within criminal justice curricula influence student perceptions about police misconduct? Although the completion of an ethics course did not provide statistical significance, it appears that the criminal justice ethics course does not promote more agreement with the notion that police misconduct is a growing issue. In contrast, respondents who had not completed an ethics course were more apt to perceive misconduct as increasing. Furthermore, more seniors reported having completed an ethics course in contrast to non-seniors. This suggests that those graduating from a criminal justice program may actually feel that police corruption is less of an issue, thus signaling a need to further evaluate the criminal justice ethics course in promoting awareness of unethical behavior in policing.

4. What are the primary indicators that best explain student perceptions of police misconduct? Regression analysis indicated that demographic and perception variables were found to explain some variance in the dependent variable. A student's race and classification were found to most closely explain student perceptions, while two

perception variables also measured ethical issues in policing. These findings suggest that specific indicators exist which help explain student perceptions toward police corruption.

### Revisiting Research Hypotheses

Multiple analyses were conducted in order to effectively test the hypotheses posed by the researcher. The hypotheses are as follows:

*There will be significant perception differences among levels of undergraduate educational attainment ( $H_1$ ).* Analysis indicated there were significant perception differences with respect to student classification. Non-seniors reported significantly higher mean scores, indicating higher levels of agreement that police corruption is increasing. Bivariate negative correlations were also discovered between student classification and perceptions of police corruption. Lastly, multivariate analysis showed a statistically significant association between student classification and the dependent variable, indicating that non-seniors are more likely to show agreement that police corruption is an issue. At all analysis levels, the null hypothesis for  $H_1$  was rejected and support was found for the hypothesis.

*There will be no significant perception differences among different academic majors with respect to a variety of ethical issues ( $H_2$ ).* Analysis showed no significant mean differences according to student major. While forensic science majors reported slightly higher mean perceptions, no significant differences existed. Additionally, neither bivariate nor multivariate analyses produced statistically significant perception differences. Therefore, the null hypothesis for  $H_2$  was not rejected.

*There will be a significant relationship between the completion of a formal criminal justice ethics course and perceptions of police misconduct ( $H_3$ ).* The primary

focus of this study centered on the influence of a criminal justice ethics course in shaping student perceptions toward police corruption and misconduct. Surprisingly, no significant perception differences existed with respect to the completion of the ethics course.

Interestingly, though, those who completed an ethics course had slightly lower mean perceptions about the dependent variable, indicating they are less likely to perceive police misconduct to be increasing. As such, the null hypothesis was not rejected. At the bivariate level, there also was no statistically significant relationship between completion of an ethics course and the dependent variable. The results indicated an inverse relationship, further suggesting that those who had completed the ethics course held less agreement that police corruption is increasing. Therefore, at the bivariate level, the null hypothesis also was not rejected. Furthermore, multivariate analyses indicated no statistically significant associations between the completion of the ethics course and the dependent variable. Results provided similar findings as previous analyses, suggesting that those who had completed the ethics course were less likely to perceive police misconduct as an increasing issue. At the multivariate level, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

*There will be significant variables which explain some variance in student perceptions of police misconduct (H<sub>4</sub>).* Analysis revealed there were variables which help explain variance in the dependent variable. Specifically (and in addition to the two perception variables), regression indicated that student race and classification were significantly associated with the dependent variable. African American and non-senior students were most likely to perceive police corruption to be increasing. Furthermore, students who agree that unethical decision-making and discretionary power negatively

influences unethical conduct are most likely to agree that police corruption is a growing concern. At the multivariate level, the null hypothesis for H<sub>4</sub> was rejected and support was found for the hypothesis.

### Discussion

The findings of this study illustrate that a number of student demographics and perceptions are closely associated with perceiving police misconduct to a growing issue. Multivariate analysis revealed that student race and student classification were the only two significant demographic variables associated with the dependent variable. Specifically, non-white students and non-seniors are more likely to perceive police misconduct as increasing. Likewise, students who feel that unethical decision making promotes unethical behavior are also likely to perceive misconduct to be increasing among police officers. Finally, multivariate analyses provided support for the influence of police discretionary power in promoting misconduct. Students who feel that discretion is a gateway to unethical behavior are likely to suggest police misconduct to be an issue. As Banks (2009) suggests, police discretion is a powerful factor that often causes the onset of misconduct and unethical behavior among police officers. The findings of this study validate previous research in supporting this notion.

While the goal of this project was to gather student perceptions toward police misconduct and isolate variables which were closely associated with the dependent variable, this study also aimed to measure the general effectiveness of a criminal justice ethics course in shaping these perceptions. As the findings of this study indicate, a criminal justice ethics course does not appear to increase student agreement on the prevalence of police misconduct. Rather, students who complete the course appear to

feel that corruption and misconduct may be issues of less concern within policing. This begs the question whether the criminal justice ethics course is promoting awareness to the issue, as well as how the information is presented to students. Irrespective of these factors, this study suggests that variables other than the criminal justice ethics course are more likely to influence student perception about whether police misconduct is a prevalent issue. This research does, however, provide support for the positive influence of criminal justice education in policing.

Consistent research has previously suggested that the criminal justice degree is an invaluable tool that shapes an ethically-minded officer and promotes professionalism in the field. The results of this study confirm those conclusions, showing that students feel that criminal justice education not only equips police officers with tools provided in the police academy, but also improves conduct and their relations with the community. Specifically, students provide strong support for the criminal justice degree in shaping a positive police image within the community. Likewise, respondents suggested that officers with a criminal justice college education have a better understanding of the law, exhibit more professionalism in daily duties, and are likely to be more ethical. This study, coupled with the findings of previous research, suggests that criminal justice education is a necessary component of police work. In order to maximize ethical environments in policing, the college degree is a dynamic element that continues to be a necessary asset in both academic and professional fields.

#### Limitations

This study does have a few limitations that may affect the generalization of its findings. First, the study was limited to one university in the United States. Second, the



study only surveyed college students who were enrolled in criminal justice courses in one academic year. Third, the results are only representative of the students who attended class on the specific day the surveys were disseminated. While these limitations threaten the generalizability of the findings, this study nonetheless provided results that sufficiently contribute to criminal justice education and to furthering the professionalization of policing. Therefore, while these limitations do limit generalization, this study still provides useful information.

### Policy Implications

The results of this study provide essential information for practitioners in criminal justice. As such, there a number of policy implications that can be developed from these findings. This study poses areas of concern for criminal justice academia and professionals alike. First, this research found that a number of college students perceive that misconduct is a negative facet of policing which continues to rise. As previously stated, many of these students will become future police officers, and their attitudes toward misconduct may likely carry over into their careers. Therefore, it is necessary that criminal justice education be effective in promoting ethically-minded graduates who are mindful of the ethical conundrums that exist in criminal justice. This promotes the invaluable necessity of effective ethics courses in criminal justice academia. As this study indicated, though, students who completed the ethics course actually have less agreement with the perceived increase of police misconduct. As a result, criminal justice ethics courses must be evaluated to ensure that professional and ethical conduct is engrained within the curriculum in an effort to promote further awareness of unethical behaviors.

In spite of the influence of the criminal justice ethics course, this study provides promising implications for college education among police officers. Students typically agreed with a variety of educational measures that promote more ethical and educated police officers. Practitioners may use these findings as a supportive measure for recruiting more college educated officers. As previously stated, this study revealed that students perceive college education to provide lessons and information that officers are not exposed to during training. As a result, recruiting officers with college degrees is further deemed a necessity in order to establish more professionalism and an ethical image among police departments. Likewise, the findings of this research may also provide implications for promoting educational incentives for current officers. Departments may provide educational pay that will encourage officers to pursue a college degree during service.

This research also provides implications for increased ethics training in law enforcement. While many academies provide an ethics class, these typically fall short in adequately exposing recruits to ethical issues in policing. Moreover, by providing exhaustive ethics training to recruits during training, officers who lack the educational background in criminal justice would be instructed on the proper codes of conduct deemed necessary for daily duties in policing. Law enforcement academies may provide a week long course or provide incentives to current officers to attend special ethics training at academies.

#### Future Research Suggestions

This research provides several opportunities for future research. It is first necessary that future research replicate the findings of this study with a larger student

sample. Researchers may increase the scope of this study's findings by including multiple universities that provide criminal justice undergraduate programs. Likewise, future research populations should include students majoring in other disciplines, including those majoring in non-criminal justice fields. Doing so would allow for a comparison group with which to replicate the findings of this study. Additionally, future research may want to expand the amount of demographic information gathered from respondents. Including demographic items such as socioeconomic status may provide additional student information that may help explain the findings of this research and future research findings.

In addition to improving methodological approaches, future research may also wish to compare the perceptions of police misconduct between students and police officers. While college students are the target sample for measuring perceptions of future police officers, future research may provide new findings when comparing student and police officer perceptions. This may also help in predicting particular variables that may influence a future police officer's likelihood of police misconduct. Lastly, future research should more extensively evaluate the effectiveness of ethics courses in academia. While this research only focused on the completion of a criminal justice ethics course, other disciplines provide ethics courses for completing baccalaureate degrees. Exploring the effects of these ethics courses in comparison to criminal justice ethics courses may help not only to improve the criminal justice ethics course but also to measure the effectiveness of these courses in reducing misconduct in other fields.

## Conclusions

The results of this study offer several conclusions. First, and most importantly, a majority of college students majoring in criminal justice and forensic science feel that police misconduct is on the rise. Second, this research concludes that completion of a criminal justice ethics course is not significant in increasing student perception toward police misconduct. Third, this research concludes that seniors are less likely to perceive misconduct to be an issue of growing concern. Fourth, criminal justice education and the college degree are influential components in the promotion of police professionalism and ethical behavior. Lastly, students who perceive specific subtypes of police misconduct to be issues are more likely to agree misconduct is increasing.

The previously mentioned implications and conclusions should provide a foundation for future research to be conducted on student perceptions and the prevalence of police misconduct. Policing is a field that requires professional individuals which possess ethical traits and values. This researcher hopes that the study creates a continued area of research that will further explore perceptions of future police officers and provide criminal justice academia and practitioners with vital information that continues to promote police professionalism, educated police officers, and ethically-minded officers for tomorrow.

APPENDIX A  
STUDENT PERCEPTION SURVEY

*SD- Strongly Disagree D- Disagree N- Neutral A-Agree SA- Strongly Agree*

	<u>SD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SA</u>	
1) Police corruption is increasing among today's police officers.	1	2	3	4	5	
2) Unethical decision making among police officers creates a negative perception with the community.	1	2	3	4	5	
3) Police corruption inhibits the success of community policing efforts.	1	2	3	4	5	
4) As the duration of police service increases, police corruption among officers decreases.	1	2	3	4	5	
5) Police officer discretionary power greatly influences unethical decision making.	1	2	3	4	5	
6) Racial profiling is a problem within policing.	1	2	3	4	5	
7) Police officers bend the rules during daily operations.	1	2	3	4	5	
8) Criminal justice college courses teach police officers valuable lessons in ethics that are not taught in the police academy.	1	2	3	4	5	
9) Police officers with a college degree have a more positive image within the community.	1	2	3	4	5	
10) Police officers with a college education better understand the law.	1	2	3	4	5	
11) Police officers possessing a college degree exhibit less racial profiling.	1	2	3	4	5	
12) A college degree enhances professionalism in policing.	1	2	3	4	5	
13) A college degree enhances ethical conduct in policing.	1	2	3	4	5	
14) Gender:	Male					Female
15) Have you ever successfully completed a <u>criminal justice</u> ethics course?	Yes					No
16) Do you or any family member work in law enforcement?	Yes					No
If so, what is the nature of the relationship?	_____					
17) Race:	_____					
18) GPA:	_____					
19) Major:	_____					
20) Student Classification	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior		

## APPENDIX B

### ORAL PRESENTATION

#### PURPOSE:

This study is designed to gather undergraduate student perceptions of ethics in policing and the prevalence of police misconduct among today's police officer, so that we may better understand the views of the college student with regard to ethical decision-making in policing.

#### DESCRIPTION OF STUDY:

The survey about to be distributed contains 20 items and should take no longer than ten minutes to complete. After completing the survey, please place the instrument face down on the designated table at the front of the classroom. Students may decline to participate before the survey is distributed. Participation is strictly voluntary. If at any point during completion of the survey that a participant wishes to cease participation, he or she may do so by placing the survey face down on the desk and their survey will be discarded after collection.

#### BENEFITS:

The findings from this study will hold great educational value for both researchers and professors of criminal justice by helping them better understand the perceptions of undergraduate criminal justice students on ethics in policing. No direct benefits will be received by participants.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY:

All information collected from the surveys will remain confidential and maintained by the researcher for a period of three years following the completion of the study. Surveys will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the School of Criminal Justice for the duration of three years following completion of the study.

#### PARTICIPANTS ASSURANCE:

This project has been reviewed by the institutional review board at the University of Southern Mississippi, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and participants may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. Any questions about the research should be directed to W. Drew Davis at 601-266-4509.

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Signature of Person Giving Oral Presentation

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Date

## APPENDIX C

## CONSENT FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI  
AUTHORIZATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Consent is hereby given to participate in the research project entitled “*Examining Student Perceptions of Police Officer Ethics and the Degree of Police Misconduct in Today’s Police Department*”. All procedures and/or investigations to be followed and their purpose, including any experimental procedures, were explained by W. Drew Davis. Information was given about all benefits, risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that might be expected.

The opportunity to ask questions regarding the research and procedures was given. Participation in the project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. All personal information is strictly confidential, and no names will be disclosed. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided if that information may affect the willingness to continue participation in the project.

Questions concerning the research, at any time during or after the project, should be directed to W. Drew Davis at 601-266-4509. This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person explaining the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

## DEPARTMENT APPROVAL LETTER




## THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

*School of Criminal Justice*

118 College Drive #5127  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001  
601.266.4509  
[www.usm.edu/criminal-justice](http://www.usm.edu/criminal-justice)

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Institutional Review Board  
University of Southern Mississippi

FROM: Lisa S. Nored, Director   
School of Criminal Justice

RE: Drew Davis/ID # 750224

DATE: April 12, 2013

Please accept this memorandum in support of the request of the above-referenced student to administer a survey to several undergraduate criminal justice classes. I am familiar with his proposed study and would be happy to allow him access to our classes. Please advise if you need additional information.



## APPENDIX E

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | [www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board](http://www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board)**NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.  
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 14052101

PROJECT TITLE: Examining Student Perceptions: Ethics and Misconduct in Today's Police Department

PROJECT TYPE: New Project

RESEARCHER(S): W. Andrew Davis

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Science and Technology

DEPARTMENT: School of Criminal Justice

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 05/28/2014 to 05/27/2015

**Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.**  
**Institutional Review Board**

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