
How do police brutality videos affect us?

Dr. Karen McIntyre is planning to conduct an experiment in which she will show a video of police brutality to people while she monitors their heart rate, skin conductance and facial muscles. She hopes to determine the impact this video has on its viewers in terms of stress level and emotions.



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We have all seen them, these videos with tragic endings. From Philando Castle in Minnesota to Terence Crutcher in Oklahoma, numerous unarmed African-Americans have been killed by the police, with their deaths documented by a body camera or cellphone.

Such videos can be used to hold police accountable or determine whether officers' actions were justified. But they could be causing stress among people who watch the videos, says Dr. Karen McIntyre, an assistant professor at



Osita Iroegbu, a Ph.D. student in Media, Art and Text, prepares a subject for testing in Dr. Karen McIntyre's lab. (Photo by Joseph Forcier)

Researchers in the Robertson School of Media and Culture are investigating the psychological and physiological effects that a video of police brutality can have on people.



During the process, participants watch videos about violent encounters between police and civilians. (Photo by Joseph Forcier)

VCU's Robertson School of Media and Culture.

She and her colleagues are investigating the psychological and physiological effects that these videos can have on people.

McIntyre is planning to conduct an experiment in which she will show a video of police brutality to people while she monitors their heart rate, skin conductance and facial muscles. For example, she will attach electrodes to a participant's face to track facial expressions and emotions. That technique is called facial electromyography, or EMG.

Similarly, electrodes on the forearms will measure heart rate and indicate how much attention the participant is paying attention to the video. And electrodes on a person's palms will measure sweat glands and how aroused the participant gets while watching the images.

After that, participants will answer a survey about how the video made them feel. Then they will be shown posts on social media with both negative and positive comments about the video. The participants will be asked how those posts make them feel.

Using all this information, McIntyre hopes to determine whether the social media comments affect the stress triggered by the video. "We're looking to see what kind of impact these social media comments have on viewers. Do they intensify the stress? Do they act as coping mechanisms?"

In the experiment, McIntyre plans to use a video in which Linwood Lambert Jr. died in police custody in 2013 after officers in South Boston, Virginia, tased him more than 20 times. The incident was captured by dashboard cameras from the officers' vehicle. The video was shared



Dr. Karen McIntyre of VCU's Robertson School of Media and Culture

widely on Facebook.

A key focus of McIntyre's larger research agenda is what she calls constructive journalism. This is a form of news reporting that attempts to fix a problem or at least get the conversation moving in that direction.

The experiment involving the Lambert video is not directly related to constructive journalism. But there is some commonality: McIntyre wants to see if media content – whether a solutions-oriented news story or a Facebook comment on a graphic video – can have a positive impact. •