

Characterizing effects of popular TV shows on perceptions of law enforcement

Background

Popular TV shows such as CSI and Law and Order, among many others, have been found to influence people's perception of crime and law enforcement. Given the prevalence of these shows as well as the recently highly publicized string of police brutality incidents in the media, we wanted to find out if the media depiction would change preconceived notions of law enforcement personnel, in this case, police officers.



To assess participants' perception of police officers post-test, the Perceptions of Police Scale (POPS)¹ was utilized as a method of qualitative evaluation.

To do this, two different groups of participants were tasked to watch popular TV shows *The Good Place* (TGP), a non-police related sitcom, and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (B99), a police comedy show respectively.

Methods

Participants were randomly divided into two groups (N = 21). The first group (n₁=11) was tasked to watch a minute long clip of TGP². The second group (n₂=10) was simultaneously tasked to watch a minute long clip of B99³. Afterwards, both groups were asked to fill out the POPS.

Table 1 | Perceptions of Police Scale

Statement	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Neutral 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
Police officers are friendly.					
Police officers protect me.					
Police officers treat all people fairly					
I like the police					
Police are good people					

Methods – Cont'd

Table 1 | Perceptions of Police Scale (cont'd)

The police do not discriminate					
The police provide safety					
The police are helpful					
The police are trustworthy					
The police are reliable					
Police officers are unbiased					
Police officers care about my community					

Participants of this study were students enrolled in an undergraduate psychology research methods course at the University of Oklahoma. The demographics of the participants were not relevant in this study, and therefore no groups were excluded.

Results

In total, the minimum score able to be obtained on the POPS was 12 (12 statements x 1 point each – strongly agreed with the positive statements given) and the maximum score was 60 (12 statements – 5 points each – strongly disagreed with the positive statements given).

Keeping this in mind, the mean score obtained for participants in the first group was 39 while the mean score obtained for participants in the second group was 30.9 (Figure 1).

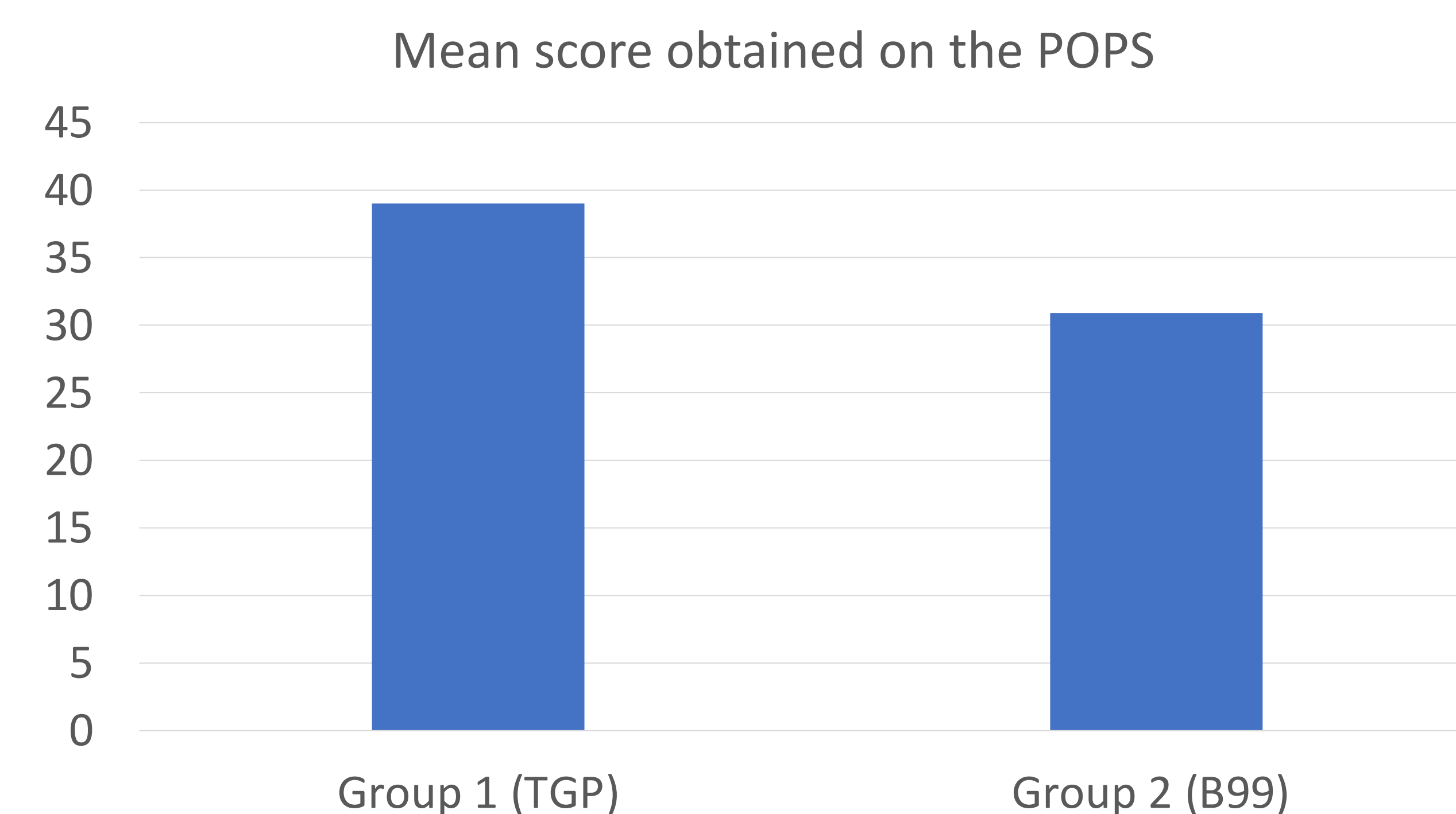


Figure 1: Graph comparing the average scores obtained on the POPS from Group 1 & Group 2 participants.

Results – Cont'd

An independent samples T test was run to compare results obtained between both groups.

The p value obtained was .062 (P>.05) and the t value obtained was 1.60, which is less than the critical value required to reject a null hypothesis (t=1.729) when the degrees of freedom obtained were taken into account. Thus, the conclusion is that the results obtained in this study was not statistically significant.

Therefore, the researcher was not able to reject the null hypothesis

Conclusions

There was no significant correlation found between TV show watched and demonstrated perceptions of law enforcement. Although it was observed that participants that watched TGP, a sitcom that had nothing to do with the subject of law enforcement, viewed police personnel more negatively due to their higher average score (39).

This is in comparison to participants that watched an excerpt from B99 (average score 30.9), which featured a police officer defusing a situation in a comedic and lighthearted manner.

In the future, in order to obtain more significant results, the study should be run on a larger scale, with more participants, from a wider variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, in order to fully capture perceptions of law enforcement from a representative sample of the community .

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References

1. Nadal, K., Davidoff, K. (2015). Perceptions of Police Scale (POPS): Measuring Attitudes towards Law Enforcement and Beliefs about Police Bias. *Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Science*, 3(2); 1-9.
2. *letsbepandas*. (2017). The Good Place – Jason's Litmus Test. (video file). Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/ZnvpU0d7vyM>
3. *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. (2016). Brooklyn Nine-Nine – Holt Shows Up a Dancer (Episode Highlight). Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/1gKMoQaeDFQ>