Suicide by Cop:

A Sociological Study of Comparative Cases

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DEDICATION

To all those who have taken their lives with their own hands or through the hands of another.

Gone but never forgotten.

~mH

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ABSTRACT

Police brutality towards unarmed black men in the United States has been the center of much contemporary discussion on police violence. However, one area of police violence that has been greatly understudied is when armed civilians desire a violent response from police. This study examines the phenomenon of suicide by cop (SbC) where civilians purposefully provoke the police in order to end their lives. This study not only compares SbC cases to failed attempts but also other suicidal events for which police were present at the scene but did not contribute to the suicide. The research sample is 136 suicidal events from January through March 2015 from the database Police and Civilian Outcomes of Threatening Events (PACOTE). Descriptive statistical analysis finds that suicide by cops are similar to traditional suicides in the demographic composition of victims; different from traditional suicides regarding the increased civilian threatening actions toward the police, the decreased presence of firearms, and the increased suicidal calls for emergency response; and different from other fatal police shootings in terms of city population distribution. Content analysis of notes and text messages points to the uniquely American cultural understanding of police as legal instruments producing death. The varying police organizational responses to suicidal events have important social implications on police perceptions towards SbC and what constitutes appropriate training and official response to suicidal situations.

On January 4, 2015, San Francisco police officers shot and killed a 32-year old white male for trespassing onto the police department's private parking lot. Fatal police shootings like the one mentioned above happen all across the United States in a given year. Nothing is quite unique about this one event even when police officers were legally justified and exonerated from this fatal killing. After all, the civilian pulled out what appeared to be a firearm, although it was an airsoft gun, that prompted police to retaliate to this perceived threat with lethal force. However, approximately 10-13 percent of all police shootings are just like what happened above where the civilian intentionally provoked the police to react with lethal force (Miller 2006). The distinction in the example above is that this civilian had planned this deadly encounter with police for months and even left a suicide note that apologized for what the police were forced to do. This event, in the heart of the Bay Area in California, belongs to a special type of fatal police shootings referred to as suicide by cop.

Suicide by cop (hereinafter SbC) is a relatively new phenomenon discovered in the mid-20th century when compared to suicide in general (Azizi 2011). Previous studies on SbC have primarily focused on understanding and conceptualizing this subset of suicide. Scholars like Lord (2014), Miller (2006), and others have focused their examinations of SbC on characteristics that create a typical profile for a potential individual that might commit SbC, standards that help establish suicidal intent, and level of use of force utilized in the situation among other variables of interest. However, no previous study has been comprehensive in not only understanding the characteristics and demographics profiles of the SbCs but understanding this phenomenon in a cultural context through comparative cases.

Using newspaper articles and a subset of data from the Police and Civilian Outcomes of Threatening Events database, this study seeks to achieve the following: (1) utilize comparative

cases of police present suicides and failed attempts of both suicides and SbCs to distinguish and explore the uniqueness of SbCs as a form of suicide, (2) replicate and confirm previous studies' findings on demographics and characteristics profiles for SbCs and individuals involved in these situations using updated 2015 national data, and finally (3) examine cultural understandings of police violence in the context of SbCs from the perspectives of both the civilians involved and law enforcement to show how varying police organizational ideologies serve as an inadequate response to address SbCs. In doing so, this research finds that suicide by cops are different from traditional suicides with an increased presence of suicidal calls for emergency response, a decreased reliance on the use of firearms, an increased number of civilian to police threatening actions and most similar to traditional suicides in the demographic profiles of the victims. The findings in this paper are essential not only for policy prescriptions but providing the most complete and accurate knowledge on these situations to reduce the likelihood of use of deadly force in future SbC encounters.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Violence

Violence, according to influential sociologist Randall Collins (2008), is actually quite rare and difficult to achieve because it counters the normalized interactions between individuals in society. Collins believes that a micro-situational understanding on the dynamics of how violence comes to be in certain situations is more valuable than examining psychological or background factors. Violence is not unique to a certain group or population, but what truly births violence is the dynamics of an antagonistic, emotional situation. Collins centers his theory on the idea of "confrontational tension/fear," which acts as a wall, or stalemate, that actually blocks the

potential for violence to occur because fearful emotions on both sides creates this barrier (2008). Thus, what makes violence difficult to occur in these confrontational situations is various pathways that serve to, both figuratively and literally, go around this wall of confrontational tension. The most dangerous of these pathways, and the most pertinent one for this discussion on violence, is what Collins calls "forward panic." This forward panic is characterized by built-up tension by both sides which is then released by the abrupt weakness one side demonstrates (2008). In other words, this confrontational tension has the potential to build to an emotional intensity that reveals the weakness of one side of the situation that in turn provides an advantage to attack the opponent in what is known as violence. This tension builds to a climax that is suddenly released into violent behavior, from domestic violence to murder, that seeks to destroy the weak victim and any others involved. To summarize Collin's processual theory of violence, confrontational tension must exist as the minimum for any situation with the potential for violence. Once confrontational tension is met, these situations can lead to two results with the first being the more common: (1) the situation ends with no violence due to the wall of tension that is built between the parties or (2) a pathway like forward panic is found that is used to evade this wall and thus birth violent behavior.

Police violence. Collin's micro-sociological theory of violence can be directly applied to police violence witnessed in US society. Police violence, like general violence, is actually rare and infrequent because people tend to comply with police orders and defer to their assumed authority in most situations. Moreover, from the beginning of any encounter with civilians, police seek to establish control and authority over the civilian (Alpert and Dunham 2004; Collins 2008; Rubinstein 1973). The ideal goal for any police officer is to control every step or phase of an interaction with a civilian to avoid the possibility of any action to fall outside of police-

civilian norms. When these norms are broken by civilians, such as physically resisting arrest, threatening or attacking an officer, or disobeying verbal commands, this brings what Collins describes as confrontational tension (Collins 2008; Friedrich 1980). Once confrontational tension is reached between the police and civilian, this "rais[es] the possibility of the officer using both official authority and informal pressure to gain command" of the situation (Collins 2008:90). At this point, the threshold to break out in violence still has not been met until the pathway of "forward panic" is applied to escalate the confrontation.

This idea of "forward panic" erupting into police violence is exemplified in the prime example of suicide-by-cop. In suicide-by-cop situations, the individual dramatically shortens the duration of the event by provoking and threatening the lives of police (confrontational tension) which quickly builds to a climax that erupts into a forward panic of lethal violence towards the individual. These suicide-by-cop incidents are unique applications of this violence theory in that the individual initiates the confrontation as an aggressor and places the police on the defensive stripping them of their control of the situation and thus leaving them vulnerable—the police are considered the "weak victim" in suicide-by-cop situations because the officers are left vulnerable to be attacked by the civilian (Collins 2008). Thus, police react with lethal force as their only option knowing that it within their legal right to employ deadly violence towards the aggressor to regain control over the situation. This legal right for law enforcement to use deadly force against civilians has been reformed over time to make state-sanctioned police violence clearer to employ and thus justify.

Legal justifications for deadly force. The legal standard for appropriate use of deadly force is primarily based on the Supreme Court case *Tennessee v. Garner* (1985). The Court did not find that failing to detain a fleeing felon, who posed no immediate threat or harm to officers,

justified the use of deadly force (Flanders and Welling 2015; Zimring 2017). The Court ruled

that law enforcement deadly force was only permissible in instances where the fleeing civilian

was perceived as a threat to police or someone nearby (Azizi 2011; Flanders and Welling 2015).

Thus, this case stood as a constitutional challenge to the broad grant of use of force that police

officers previously had in order to reduce unnecessary killings that would have otherwise been

justified (Zimring 2017). *Tennessee v. Garner* "reframed the standard for deadly force . . . with a

shift from legal formality [a focus on whether the crime committed by the civilian was a felony

or misdemeanor] to protection against death and great bodily harm" (Zimring 2017:178). Thus,

officers need to reasonably believe that they were protecting themselves or others from a threat

that could produce death or great bodily harm (Lord 2014; Zimring 2017). This would lead to the

creation of the "Objective Reasonableness" standard in *Graham v. Connor* (1989) that helped

determine whether it was objectively reasonable under the circumstances of the situation for the

police to believe that the civilian intended to kill or produce injury to others (Azizi 2011). These

rules and standards would be further modified in the Model Penal Code that provided specific

restrictions on use of force, in arrests, for example:

> the officer believes the use of deadly force creates no substantial risk of injury to
> innocent persons AND the officer believes that: (1) the crime for which the arrest is made
> involved conduct including the use or threatened use of deadly force; or (2) there is a
> substantial risk that the person to be arrested will cause death or serious bodily harm is
> his apprehension is delayed (Zimring 2017:177).

Finally, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP),[1] a non-profit organization

focused on ethics in policing, established that deadly force is to be used as a final resort or means

to control a situation by developing a use-of-force continuum with the following levels of force

in progressive order: passive interference, commands, physical coercion, incapacitation, threat of

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[1] The IACP has influence on law enforcement policies and strategies working closely with agencies even on a global platform.

deadly force, and deadly force (Lord 2014). The legal system and organizations like the IACP have worked to find solutions to police killings and brutality, but one area of violence that society has been unable to adequately address is suicide.

Suicide

Emile Durkheim, a founding father of sociology, conducted the earliest study on suicide and its social causes. Durkheim defined suicide as "every case of death which results directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act, carried out by the victim himself, *knowing* that it will produce this result" (1897:42). It is essential to Durkheim in defining and distinguishing suicide that an individual recognizes, whether the action is intentional or not, that the outcome of his or her actions would result in death. He wanted to study the social causes, and thus the social environments and institutions that constituted society, to understand why individuals resorted to the phenomenon of suicide.

Durkheim (1897) distinguished four types of suicide—egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic—based on the two social forces of social integration and regulation. In egoistic suicide, the individual experiences a lack of integration into society and thus feels there is no meaning to life. As a result, this individual, a drug abuser for example, internalizes that their death will not have any effect on society. Durkheim came to understand this type of suicide by examining the social integrative structures of religious institutions like Protestantism, Judaism, and Catholicism. Jews and Catholics had lower rates of suicide, according to Durkheim, due to the strict control these religions had over their members whereas Protestants had greater freedom and less connection to other members in forming social bonds. The diametrically opposed view is altruistic suicide in which an individual is overly integrated into society and thus feels there is meaning to life beyond life itself. As a result, the individual views it as one's altruistic duty to

commit suicide. The third type of suicide, anomic suicide, is related to a factor known as anomie that is present in modern, industrial societies that is connected to the way in which people are regulated by society. Anomie, or normlessness, is due to a lack of regulation between individuals. Thus, in anomic suicide, people resort to suicide when dramatic changes, whether positive or negative, happen in the economy or society at large, for instance, that leaves society unable to regulate individuals from their demise. The final type, which is opposite to anomic suicide, is fatalistic suicide where there is strict and excessive moral regulation on individuals that leads to suicide as an escape. This is illustrated with the suicides that occur in prison in which the incarcerated feel that the strict control is overly burdensome and thus utilize suicide as a means to regain control of their lives. If Durkheim were looking at modern suicide statistics for the United States, he might classify the high numbers of suicides as egoistic because modern society, with all of its technological advances to connect people, manages to balance regulation of individuals with individual liberties with some degree of success. However, suicides that still occur may be due to feelings of alienation from mainstream conventions and traditions.

Suicide is a form of interpersonal violence that makes up almost two-thirds of all gun deaths in the United States (Gun Violence Archive 2018). In addition, the use of a firearm in committing suicide is the most common method, composing fifty-one percent of all suicides (American Association of Suicidology 2016; CDC Report 2016). According to the National Vital Statistics Report (2016), when examining race and gender together for gun-based suicides, white males are the most overrepresented group than any other combination with whites twenty times more likely to commit suicide than any other race. In fact, "the risk of dying from suicide was more than double for the white population than for the black population (NVSR 2016:12). The most common age for gun-based suicides are ages 45-54, regardless of gender (NVSR 2016).

Along gender lines, there is a 1:6 ratio with males disproportionately represented than females (NVSR 2016).

Suicide by Cop

       Definitions. Defining suicides requires assessing the intent and harm of a violent actions against ones' self (Durkheim 1897). However, there are more ambiguous suicides to define when individuals wanting to harm themselves require the assistance of a second person, for example euthanasia or suicide by cop. Suicide by cop is a difficult concept to define since there are various criterion and standards used to explain it. Today, there is still no commonly accepted definition for the term SbC (Azizi 2011). Scholarly literature credits American sociologist Marvin Wolfgang for first articulating the idea of SbC in 1959, police officer and psychologist Karl Harris for coining the actual term in 1983, and police commander Vernon Geberth for the first formal definition of SbC (Azizi 2011; Homant and Kennedy 2000; Homant, Kennedy, and Hupp 2000; Miller 2006). Geberth's (1993) early definition of SbC attempted to capture the complexity of these events viewing them as "incidents in which individuals, bent on self-destruction, engage in life threatening and criminal behavior in order to force the police to kill them" (p. 105). Years after this initial definition by Geberth, the definition of SbC has continuously been adapted and modified to paint a more accurate and detailed portrayal of this fatal exchange between civilians and law enforcement. Scholars have advanced the concept of SbC through conceptualizing it to include the suicidal intent and motivations of the civilian in the encounter. Huston et al. (1998) expanded the definition of SbC to include suicidal intent where the civilians:

> . . . *intentionally* engage in life threatening and criminal behavior with a lethal weapon or what appears to be a lethal weapon to gain attention of law enforcement officers . . . These suicidal individuals then *intentionally* escalate the potential for a lethal encounter

by threatening officers or members of the civilian population . . . This forces officers to use deadly force by shooting the suicidal individual. (p. 666)

Central to Hutson and colleagues' (1998) definition is the focus on the civilian's deliberate intentions to not only provoke the police into a threatening encounter but also intentionally further escalate the situation to force officers to react with fatal force. Other scholars such as Lindsay and Lester (2008) add physical evidence like the presence of suicide notes at a scene to further establish the suicidal intent of the civilian. This linkage of suicidal intent with SbC led researchers to recognize SbC as a subset, or subcategory, of suicide due to the verbal or behavioral actions demonstrated by civilians that establish suicidal motivation (Lord and Sloop 2010). Finally, the American Association of Suicidology (2013) provided a recent and collaborative definition of SbC describing it as "when an individual desiring death engages in a set of intentionally life-threatening behaviors in order to compel a law enforcement officer to respond with lethal force." Overall, the definitions used to conceptualize SbC have become more accurate and sophisticated as the academic and professional world have better understood this rare phenomenon. One key area of interest when seeking to understand SbCs has been the situational characteristics that go beyond the definition and actually into these complicated situations.

Situational characteristics. Researchers have always understood and studied the idea of SbC through its various situational components. This approach has enabled for a deeper and richer analysis of the characteristics that help not only define but distinguish SbC from other suicidal and threatening events with police. In order for any event to have the potential to become SbC, there must be a means to initiate police engagement with the civilian. A majority of SbC encounters result from the police responding to armed robbery calls with the second most popular means of initiating the police being domestic disturbance (i.e., domestic

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assault/violence) calls (Miller 2006). These domestic disturbance calls most likely result from the civilian experiencing a stressful event in regard to relationship issues that trigger a potential SbC event (Lord 2004). Unlike typical events classified as suicides, in SbCs, a civilian may engage in committing a violent crime, or what is known as an "outrageous act," for the sole purpose of attracting attention in order to meet the police (Lord 2014:83). No matter the specific reason that police are called upon to respond, the civilian in SbC events engages in an event that ensures a police response in one hundred percent of all SbC cases (Lindsay and Lester 2008).

The actions that the civilian undertakes in a SbC event has been a focal point of many studies and research on the subject. The civilian's actions in encountering the police is the single most important predictor that determines the level of force employed by police to counter the situation (Lord 2014). In fact, this relationship between action and force is positive and proportional such that lesser aggressive action on the part of the civilian will be met with a more benign police response rather than higher levels of force (2014). Thus, the actions of the civilian determine what type of police response will occur. In many ways, this leads police to always react defensively with little influence and choice in how to handle a threatening aggressor. In almost all SbC cases, the civilian initiates the situation and forces a threatening confrontation with the police (Lindsay and Lester 2008). The most common methods that civilians initiate aggressive action is through refusal to follow commands to drop a weapon, threaten the officer(s) with a weapon, or advance towards the officer(s) (Lindsay and Lester 2008). It is essential to recognize that the actions by a civilian were not haphazard, opportunistic, or decided in that moment with police. The contrary is true in that a considerable number of these cases seem to be planned because law enforcement officers find suicide notes where the civilian apologies for the actions that the officers took in a third of SbC cases (Miller 2006). This points to a significantly

understudied and key element of SbCs. These events possess a premediated nature that may be unlike what the common person may expect.

A police officer's decisions in these type of encounters is clearly a vital if not the sole determinant in the final outcome as the name SbC suggests. This decision, whether it involves nonlethal or lethal measures, is directly tied to what finally happens to the civilian. Prior studies find that "negotiation and/or physical restraint are more frequently used in SbC incidents than non-SbC incidents, especially when the subject appears mentally ill or intoxicated" even though "SbC subjects are not affected by many legal interventions, including verbal negotiation, physical restraints, or less lethal response options, even though these options are used in SbC incidents" (Patton and Fremouw 2016:117). Although prior research claims that nonlethal strategies are used or at least an attempt is made to employ such strategies in SbC incidents, the short duration of these events (on average an hour or less) makes it unfruitful to consider using such methods if not impossible (Patton and Fremouw 2016). This is why police resort to more lethal measures due to a lack of adequate time to counter a suicidal subject more effectively. Even more, in every case of SbC, the subject is threatening the lives of police, so the response time is dramatically shortened. Lord (2004) even suggests that the use of nonlethal techniques can actually backfire and work to the police's detriment because that may force the civilian to engage in more extreme methods to ensure a violent response to produce the civilian's own death. Thus, law enforcement is left to employ lethal force to counter the threat produced by the civilian. This produces a key characteristic of SbC in which the death rate, or lethality, of the civilians involved in SbCs is high, especially with the time constraints and lack of nonlethal interventions available (Patton and Fremouw 2016).

SbC events, being a modern form of what is considered traditional suicide, raises questions of mental health for the civilians involved in these suicidal interactions with police. When compared to purely suicidal and non-suicidal people, "SbC subjects are often less mentally ill and more criminally active than suicide-only subjects and less criminally-active than non-SbC subjects" (Patton and Fremouw 2016:113). This lower level of mental health severity can be related to the civilian possessing more control over the situation and thus over the desired fatal outcome. However, it is still crucial to understand that these individuals still display signs of mental impairment which ultimately acts to their favor in pursuing death because "people who are mentally unstable are significantly more likely to physically resist, assault officers, and possess a weapon" (Lord 2014:82). The existence of mental issues within these individuals helps to aggravate and propel a situation to fatal outcomes because the actions of a mentally disturbed person provokes a completely different police response than when officers are not under threat.

Demographics. Some studies on the topic of SbC have primarily focused on developing a typical profile of the type of individual and population in society that have engaged in these fatal interactions with the police. The literature agrees that the typical SBC individual is a white male with an average age ranging from the mid-20s to the late-30s (Lord 2014; Miller 2006; Mohandie, Meloy, and Collins 2009; Patton and Fremouw 2016). This adds to the gender narrative that already starts with a disproportionate number of males interacting with police that results in use-of-force situations (Lord 2014). These individuals, according to many studies, have a history of substance abuse, which includes drugs and/or alcohol that may, when combined with other common characteristics found in these individuals, lead to suicidal intent and ultimately SbC (Azizi 2011; Lord 2014; Miller 2006; Mohandie et al. 2009; Patton and Fremouw 2016). Like other types of suicide, SbC individuals possess other signs that lead to SbC including an

economically disadvantaged background, unemployment, depression, and relationship problems (Azizi 2011; Mohandie et al. 2009). Information on other essential demographic characteristics such as marital status and educational attainment have mixed results and not enough data to determine consistent findings (Patton and Fremouw 2016).

Police reactions and perceptions of SbC. Studies on SbC incidents have primarily focused on police in connection to the civilians in those events. However, the impact of SbC on an officer and thus police perceptions of SbC has been largely ignored and greatly understudied in scholarly literature. Lord (2004) and some scholars make small attempts to understand a situation in which officers arrive with the preconceived notion of assisting an individual but leave the situation as a cause for that individual's own death. SbC encounters leave officers feeling powerless in failing to save the civilian and feeling manipulated and used as an instrument producing death; both feelings which result in shooting trauma post-SbC (Homant et al. 2000; Kennedy, Homant, and Hupp 1998; Miller 2006; Van Zandt 1993). In future incidents, officers second-guess their actions after being manipulated before in shooting and fatally wounding a civilian (Van Zandt 1993). According to Clagett (2004), some officers may even criticize and blame themselves for unnecessarily taking the life of an individual regardless of the intent and motivations the individual displayed during the incident.

At the same time, these internal feelings are displayed defensively in reality as the usage of the term SbC suggests. In other words, "the classification [of SbC] tends to insulate police officers from blame even when their actions were unreasonable" (Azizi 2011:187). This is utilized as a defensive mechanism to shield law enforcement from legal repercussions and public scrutiny. Moreover, this refers back to the earlier idea that police are merely a tool, or instrument, in producing civilian death; thus, this shifts the rhetoric from blaming the police to

the victim as responsible for their own death. In fact, when it comes to reporting these SbC events, "police [in completing reports] have incentives to find every killing by an officer justified" (Zimring 2017:29). Thus, regardless of any traumatic emotions experienced post-SbC, law enforcement protect themselves and their actions from both public and legal repercussions.

      The key takeaway points from this literature review that inform this research study and variable creation are as follows: (1) Previous studies show that SbCs occur in a typical, linear pattern due to the civilian initiating the encounter with law enforcement. Thus, I understand these events to follow a processual pattern: the situation before the officer, the precipitating event by civilian, police decision and response to civilian action(s), and finally outcomes for police and civilian. This pattern enabled me to develop an exhaustive set of variables to capture and confirm this process, which I test using the comparative set of suicide cases for which officers were present but not involved in the fatality of the suicide. (2) A section of the project is dedicated to replicating and confirming previous studies' findings on the typical profile of SbC individuals with updated national data from 2015. However, to this literature, I add new dimensions of analysis focusing on the geographic/population distribution to further understand the SbC population. I also add a new perspective on the civilian choice of weapon to better understand the fatal nature of SbCs. 3) Lastly, the premeditative nature of SbCs is an understudied part of SbCs that inspired my use of content analysis to discover and analyze the physical markers of SbC left behind by civilians in an attempt to not only prove the premeditative nature of these events but reveal the cultural understandings of police violence in suicidal encounters.

DATA & METHODS

Sample

The data I utilize in this study come from an ongoing national database known as Police and Civilian Outcomes of Threatening Events (hereinafter PACOTE). I received permission and was granted full access to the PACOTE database for the purposes of this study. PACOTE is a database composed of more than 11,000 news articles that capture all of the reported police and civilian fatal and nonfatal encounters across the United States in 2015 (Smith 2018). The unit of analysis in PACOTE, and thus in this study, is the threatening event. Since this database is currently in progress, only quarter 1 (January-March) of the data collection has been completely coded thus far. For the confines of this study, my sample size was predetermined for me, and I only used quarter 1 of PACOTE. Although this partial sample from 2015 is not ideal in terms of sample size, nothing suggests that this three-month span of the data should be different than the rest of the year. There were 1,260 unique threatening events between police and civilians in the first quarter of the dataset.

I subset this sample to include only 136 police-civilian threatening *suicidal* encounters within the scope of this study. I used a two-pronged approach to arrive at the 136 suicidal events. First, the PACOTE database included a category designed to capture the status of the civilian in a specific threatening encounter with the police. One possible status was the suicidal nature of the civilian. Thus, PACOTE already had a system in place to record all the civilians in these threatening encounters that were considered suicidal. I conducted a reliability check on this predetermined list of suicidal civilians by manually searching for suicidal events within the news articles collected for PACOTE. PACOTE contains unique event IDs that are linked to folders that house all of the news articles directly tied to that unique event ID. Thus, I ran text searches

for all PACOTE quarter 1 event folders for each of the following search terms: "suicide,"

"suicidal," and "suicide by cop." I removed all false-positives (articles that have the word suicide

in the text but are outside the scope of this study, e.g., a sidebar ad that references a suicide

hotline) by returning to every article that appeared to be a match and read the context in which

any one of the three aforementioned terms appeared in the article. This process resulted in 136

unique events that involved a suicidal person and the police. In total, my search led to 383 local

and national news articles on these events (average 2.8 articles per event).

Table 1 shows the three different types of suicidal encounters within PACOTE, and these

three types provide meaningful comparative cases: 82 failed attempts (FAs), 36 police present

suicides (SnCs), and 18 SbCs. As seen in Table 1, the majority of threatening suicidal events

were FAs with SbC cases being the rarest among the three types of cases, about half the size of

the SnC cases.

Table 1. Sample Size of Suicidal Comparative Cases, n=136

	FA Failed Attempt	SnC Suicide Not by Cop	SbC Suicide by Cop
n number of cases	82	36	18
% of total cases	60%	27%	13%

I operationalize failed attempt (hereinafter FA) as any attempt at either suicide or SbC in

which the civilian survived the incident. These are cases in which police were able to intervene

and diffuse the threating event without fatal force. Police present suicide (hereinafter SnC, which

stands for suicide *not* by cop), for this study, is defined as a civilian taking his or her life and thus

being solely responsible for his or her death even when police were present at the event. SnCs are different from common suicides because they occur in the presence of a police officer. Consistent with the literature, the SbC cases require the following three elements present during the event: (1) the subject is clearly described as, or clearly demonstrates, suicidal tendencies through either speech, behavior, or other identifiable means, (2) the subject produces a threat to the police where police perceive the threat as an endangerment to their safety and the safety of others, and (3) the police, through their own means, end the life of the subject (American Association of Suicidology 2013; Geberth 1993; Hutson et al. 1998). Any events that do not fit this criterion are not to be labelled or described as SbCs in this study. In fact, any events that do not fit the aforementioned definitions are considered to be outside the scope of the study.

Variables

To code these events, I used a mixed-methods approach to maximize the amount of information I could potentially extract from these news articles. For the descriptive statistical analysis, I created and utilized an exhaustive set of variables: age, gender, race, weapon of choice, civilian status, count of law enforcement agencies present, officer experience, civilian action towards police, situation before officer arrived at scene, and threat or violence directed at the police officer. The first three variables are designed to better understand the demographics that compose this population of potentially suicidal people. Age is a continuous variable ranging from 17 to 83 in this study. Gender is a categorical variable that is binary for the purposes of this study, including both man and woman. The race variable includes white, black, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. The weapon of choice variable is categorical, so if the civilian is armed, then a weapon type is listed; otherwise, "no" is the option for an unarmed civilian. The status of the civilian is also categorical and deigned to capture a variety of statuses

including but not limited to: mental health condition, alcohol, drugs, etc. I included a variable on the number of law enforcement agencies involved. This count ranges from 1-6 law enforcement agencies present at the scene. Officer experience includes the number of years a police officer had in his or her profession, which may influence the action(s) he or she took in resolving or diffusing a suicidal situation. The civilian action towards police is part of a larger variable that reveals the most violent action of the police officer followed by the most violent action by the civilian with actions ranging from fatal violence to no violence and no threat. For example, this variable can capture an officer killing a civilian after the civilian threatened the officer. This measure is categorical and consequential in comparing the actions of these two opposing groups in these threatening situations.[2] The officer directed action at the civilian helps define the three comparative cases of suicidal events used in this study. The second piece of information is of interest because it measures the most violent action of the civilian not already predetermined by definitional restrictions. Situation before officer and police outcome are both situational factors and thus designed to decompose these complicated and often times confusing events into manageable parts to make analysis achievable. The situation before the officer is the initial factor to consider and an important one for this study because this reveals the exact reason as to how the two opposing groups, civilian and police, come to interact with each other. For example, this may include a response to a suicide call, a domestic violence call, or any call to the police that would prompt the police to come into contact with the civilian. Once the two groups come into contact with each other, the aforementioned civilian action towards police variable is designed to capture the action(s) by the civilian that is directly connected the police decisions and outcomes of the threatening situation. Police decisions and civilian outcomes of these cases are not

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[2] See Appendix A for the full list of possible combinations for civilian and police actions found in the PACOTE Codebook.

variables of interests due to their predetermined nature set forth by the categorical

conceptualizations of each category. For instance, in an SbC, by its very nature, the police

decision is lethal force and the civilian outcome is death. However, the final outcome of what

happens to law enforcement as a result of these threatening suicidal encounters will be accounted

for because that is not predetermined and may vary within and across categories. Once the police

outcome is measured, this marks the conclusion or end of an event. Finally, I created a "notes"

section at the end of each unique event in the spreadsheet to include all of the following: specific

instances in the article that directly mentioned any one of the category types, any police

statements during or after an event, physical signs of suicidal tendencies (note, text message,

statement), and any additional details that would provide a more complete context or picture to

understand the suicidal threatening event.

I also added a geography/population component to the study for just the SbC cases. I

utilized Google Maps to locate and create a national map of all the cities in which the eighteen

SbCs took place. In addition, I obtained the most recent population counts from 2016 for all the

SbC cities for further population analysis.

Content Analysis

My study still required a qualitative approach to answer some of the unanswered

questions in PACOTE that remain understudied in the literature. Content analysis is a useful

method that is better at tapping into understanding and making meaning of these suicidal events

and what SbC means to both the civilians and police involved. I used the "notes" section from

coding to identify and flag cases that provided additional data for content analysis. I re-analyzed

these events by digging into every article related to the event of interest to extract statements,

notes, speeches, text messages, or any form of communication from either the civilian or police

officers involved in the incident. I paid close attention to make sure these messages are related to police violence, use of force, suicide, and/or SbC. Finally, I analyzed the statements in relation to the event and what transpired between the police and civilian in order to develop the most informed understanding of the party that communicated the message and their thought process.

Originally, the spreadsheet was organized by month, then event, and finally by article for each event (e.g. January, 0107_CA_SAC, Sac Bee). Once the data collection was complete, my task was to collapse (combine and change data) and re-organize the data. For every event that had more than one article, I re-analyzed each event and accounted for all similarities and differences between the various articles. The end result for the entire dataset across the three months was a "one row one event" scheme. This master spreadsheet was unique than all the previous ones because instead of organizing it by event, I chose to distinguish the data by the sample of FAs, SnCs, and SbC. This layout served two purposes: (1) visualize the data through patterns based on event type and (2) analyze within and across categories in a more effective and efficient manner. From this arrangement, I could easily compare and contrast within and across groups over a multitude of variables in this mixed-methods approach.

RESULTS

Demographics. The three comparative cases have great similarity across the demographic variables of age and gender. Whereas, FAs and SnCs tend to be more similar in race compositions and quite different from SbCs, especially when comparing whites across the suicidal cases. These demographics findings are displayed in greater detail in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Summary of Demographics, Weapon of Choice, and Situational Characteristics Across All Comparative Cases

	FA Failed Attempt (n=82)	SnC Suicide Not by Cop (n=36)	SbC Suicide by Cop (n=18)
Gender			
Male	73 (89%)	34 (94%)	18 (100%)
Female	8 (9%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Missing	1 (2%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Race			
White	22 (27%)	17 (47%)	13 (72%)
Black	3 (4%)	2 (6%)	2 (11%)
Hispanic/Latino	8 (10%)	0 (0%)	3 (17%)
Other[a]	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Missing	47 (57%)	17 (47%)	0 (0%)
Age[b]			
Min	17	22	23
Max	83	67	61
Mean	43	45	43
Weapon of Choice			
Firearm	45 (55%)	33 (92%)	10 (56%)
Knife	14 (17%)	0 (0%)	4 (22%)
Other[c]	23 (28%)	3 (8%)	4 (22%)
Situation before Officer			
Suicid(al) call[d]	46 (56%)	9 (25%)	11 (61%)
Domestic call	11 (13%)	3 (8%)	3 (17%)
Other[e]	25 (31%)	24 (67%)	4 (22%)
Police Outcome[f]			
None	80 (98%)	35 (97%)	17 (94%)
Injuries	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)
Death	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)

Notes: [a] 45 percent of the data on age is missing for FAs and 33 percent for SnCs, [b] includes Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, [c] includes nonlethal firearms (e.g., BB guns), [d] defined as any call that involves a suicidal subject, suicide in progress, or attempted suicide, [e] includes a variety of 911 emergency calls (e.g., hostage calls, armed subject calls, etc.), [f] measures the potential outcomes that may happen to law enforcement as a result of a threating suicidal encounter

Table 2 shows a male-female ratio in gender that clearly posits a mostly male phenomenon across all suicidal categories. Truly, in the entire sample of 136 events, only nine women are represented, with eight in FAs, one in SnCs, and zero women in SbCs. As for age, both FAs and SbCs share a similar average age of 43 years with SnCs at a mean age of 45 years.

Across all three suicidal categories, the average age of the sample involved in these events is considered to be middle-aged. Both SnCs and SbCs shared a similar difference in the minimum and maximum ages represented in their respective groups whereas FAs displayed the greatest variation at sixty-six years with the youngest at 17 years and the oldest at 83 years of age. Race provided the most diverging findings in the demographics portion of the study with whites disproportionately represented than any other racial group combined for each of the three categories. Even more, white representation increased proportionally in these events from one-quarter in FAs to almost half in SnCs to finally three-quarters of the SbC sample. Other major racial groups like blacks and Hispanic/Latinos have small counts and thus small percentages of each respective sample that do not provide any meaningful comparisons. Across the comparative cases, there is a total seven blacks and eleven Hispanic/Latinos in the data. Besides a small sample, a major limitation in presenting age and race data is due to the missing data. For both age and race in FAs, half of the data is missing on those two measures with a third of age data and almost half of race data missing for SnCs. The most complete race and age information across the three groups are SbCs with no missing data. Regardless, these demographics findings prove to be comparable to the findings in national suicide trends that attribute these phenomena to a middle-aged white male population (Lord 2014; Miller 2006; Mohandie et al. 2009; the National Vital Statistics Report 2016; and Patton and Fremouw 2016). My demographic analysis shows that SbCs mostly affect a middle-aged white male population.

Weapon of choice. Firearms are the most prominent weapon of choice used by civilians in these suicidal encounters across all the categories. FAs and SbCs show similar firearm usage in about sixty percent of those cases. SnC events, however, are unique in that all but three cases, a firearm was employed by the civilian. This is consistent with the findings of the American

Association of Suicidology (2016) and the CDC Report (2016) that find firearms to be the most common method to commit general suicides. In the three SnC cases that no firearm was utilized, the weapon or means that led to the SnC was unidentifiable. As for SbC cases, every civilian in those interactions with law enforcement was armed but not always with firearms. The highest group of unarmed civilians belong to the FAs category with 15 out of the 82 possible events (18 percent). These unarmed civilians likely pose the least threat to law enforcement, and are a strong event level indicator of why police are successful at diffusing these suicidal encounters. It is also interesting to consider that SbCs and FAs also have similar usage rates of knives as the second most common weapon in the database. Knives make up 18 percent of FAs and 25 percent of SbCs. Thus, SnCs are the only category to stand out with 92 percent firearms involved in those events whereas FAs and SbCs are nearly identical in weapon of choice. It is worth noting that no missing data exists on weapon of choice. My analysis of weapons of choice confirm what we know about the fatality of firearms and suicides, but they introduce new questions about threat toward the officer when similarly armed suicidal civilians have vastly different outcomes of SbCs and FAs.

  Situation before officer. A call for a suicidal subject, a suicide in progress, or attempted suicide is the most prominent call type across the categorical groups that places police officers in contact with civilians in suicidal encounters. However, it is surprising to find that the lowest proportion of suicid(al) calls occur in SnC cases (25 percent according to Table 2) where a more conventional form of suicide actually happens. In other words, in only a quarter of these SnC situations were law enforcement aware that they were directly responding to a potential or actual suicide in progress. Thus, in three-quarters of emergency calls to the police, law enforcement was originally brought into contact with a civilian for reasons other than a potential or actual

suicide. This is in sharp contrast with FAs and SbCs, which share similar percentages of suicide(al) calls in their respective samples, at over fifty percent. In fact, FAs and SbCs also have similar proportion breakdowns of domestic violence/assault calls at thirteen and seventeen percent, respectively. The biggest discrepancy exists where in 60 percent of SbC events, police are specifically responding to a call for a suicidal person compared to only 25 percent of SnC events. My finding on the different proportions of calls for police assistance for suicidal civilians is not only new to the discussion on SbCs but also surprising because law enforcement should be better prepared in arriving at SbC situations ready to encounter a suicidal subject.

Police outcome. Across all comparative cases, almost all cases of suicidal encounters between police and civilians left the police officer(s) involved alive and without injuries. In fact, in the entire sample of 136 events, there are a total of 3 injuries to police officers (identified in Table 2 as injury) and only one police officer death (identified in Table 2 as fatal). Two of the police injuries occurred in FA cases with one injury in a SbC. The one officer death was in an unusual SnC case that involved gunfire from both sides of the encounter that left the officer dead. It is clear from this case that the individual died through means of suicide, but it is unclear who killed this police officer in the line of gunfire. It is interesting to contrast the stark difference between the 54 civilian deaths (this number combines both SnC and SbC cases) to the lone officer death in the entire sample even though all of these cases are classified as threatening events in PACOTE.

Civilian action towards police. SbCs, proportionally, are the outlier with more than twice as many civilian to police non-contact threat level cases when compared to both FAs and SnCs. In fact, as Table 3 shows, FA and SnC cases have similar civilian to police action breakdowns with just over half of cases in no violence and just under half in no-contact threat. In 94 percent

of the total SbC events, the civilian is threatening the officer(s) whereas this occurs in only 45

percent of FAs. This threat to the officer can come in a variety of forms from simply displaying a

weapon to firing the weapon but making no hits. Thus, the greatest discrepancy among the

comparative cases lies where the civilian threatens the police officer(s) but makes no contact,

which serves as grounds to legally justify fatal police shootings like SbCs. The majority of all the

cases are at the no violence or threat levels except for three cases in the entire sample where the

civilian makes contact with the police officer(s) involved. Two of these cases are FAs with one

in the SbC category. Therefore, there are no cases in the sample where civilians directly and

fatally injured law enforcement, even though in the aforementioned *Police outcome* section one

officer died in a SnC case as a result of gunfire from both sides. In trying to understand why

some of these suicidal encounters end fatally and others nonfatally, the proportion of SbC cases

that include threats—even threats that include no direct contact—are likely an important insight

towards the legal justification of these SbC events.

Table 3. Civilian Action Towards Police Across All Comparative Cases

	FA Failed Attempt	SnC Suicide Not by Cop	SbC Suicide by Cop
0 (no violence)	43 (52%)	21 (58%)	0 (0%)
n (non-contact threat)	37 (45%)	15 (42%)	17 (94%)
c (contact)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)
f (fatal)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Other variables. Other factors that were thought to have a potential effect or useful

application in understanding these various encounter types include status, agencies count, and

police experience in number of years. All of these other variables are not unique to one group

over another and thus serve as a tool to discuss suicidal interactions in a broader sense. For example, in only ten cases overall were there clear indications of substance abuse present in the civilian that may have enhanced or contributed to the civilian's behavior and/or actions. The other 126 events were all marked as mental health for the status of the individual for explicit or implicit reasons. For instance, the news article mentioned the civilian's mental illness as an existing factor or the end result involved the individual being sent to a hospital for a mental health evaluation. In addition, the presence of suicidal intent, thoughts, remarks, or actions by the civilian all are linked to a potential mental health issue. In regard to the agencies count, no significant variation among the cases existed with about two law enforcement agencies present during each suicidal encounter. Lastly, the number of years a law enforcement officer has served played no role in shaping the outcome of the event. It is worth addressing that the lack of reporting and available information on these variables is a contributing factor for why there are little findings in this area of the research.

Geographic and population distribution. For the geographic analysis, I shift my focus away from the three suicidal event comparative cases to map only SbCs and their populations to compare with other research on fatal police violence. As shown in Figure 1, ten of the eighteen SbCs in the sample happened in the western region of the United States. Thus, all other SbCs in the other regions (i.e., South, Midwest, and Northeast) combined do not reach the dense concentration of SbCs in the West. The South had four SbCs, the Midwest had three, and only one SbC in the Northeast of the country. California leads all states with six SbC events, three each in the north and south regions of the states. This concentration of SbCs in the West is consistent with other police shootings (*The Guardian* 2018).

Figure 1. Geographic Distribution of SbCs.
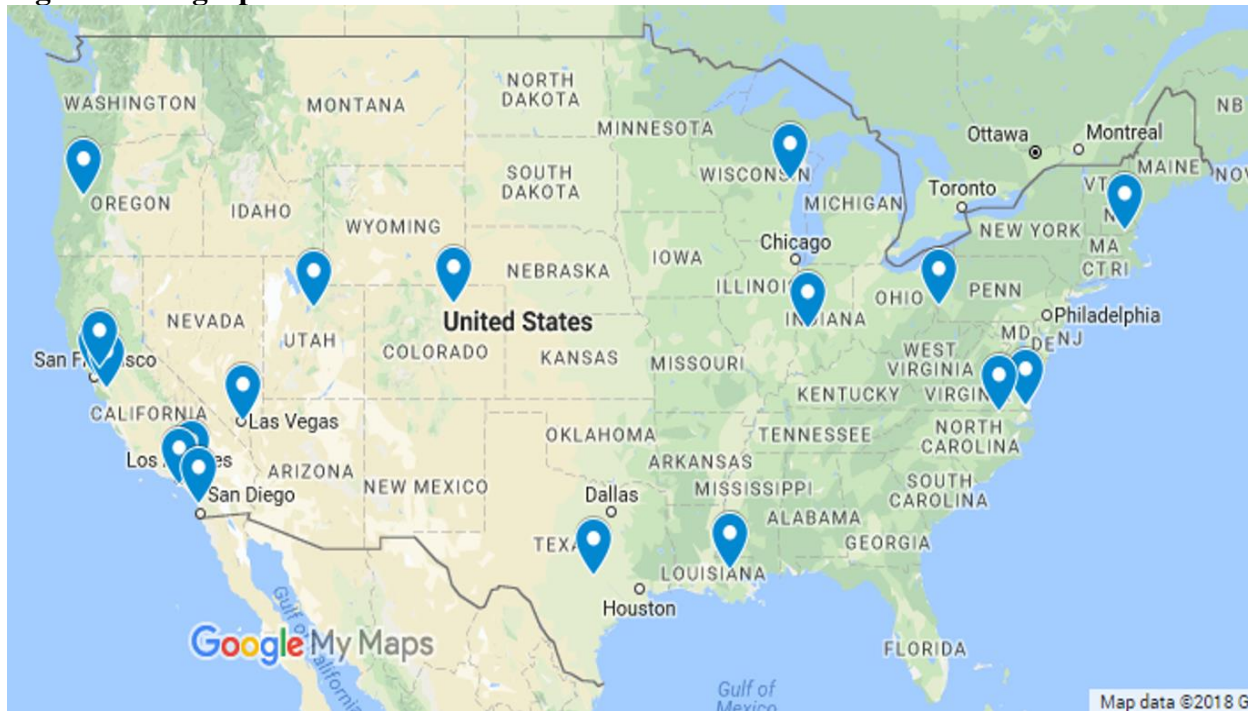
Source: Google. 2018. "GoogleMyMaps." Retrieved November 16, 2017
(https://www.google.com/maps).

The populations of the cities in which these SbCs occurred demonstrates that a majority

of SbCs occur in populous areas with populations of at least six figures. As Figure 2 shows, 33

percent of SbCs are in cities with at least 100,000 people and up to 249,999 people, and 22

percent of all SbCs are in large cities with populations over a quarter million people. With over

half of SbCs occurring in urban cities, the line of best fit in Figure 2 illustrates that more SbCs

are happening in urban areas than in rural ones with rural areas from less than 25,000 to under

10,000 only combine to a quarter of all SbCs. These findings are in direct contrast with

criminologist Sherman's (2018) findings when comparing these population distributions with

fatal police shootings overall. His findings show that fatal police shootings are happening more

often in smaller city population sizes than larger ones, meaning that a majority of all fatal police

shootings are happening in cities with populations under 10,000 with the least number of fatal

police shootings in the largest cities totaling over 250,000 people (2018). Thus, Sherman's

findings display an inversely proportional line of best fit in contrast with my work on SbC (a

type of fatal police shooting) population distributions.

Figure 2. Population Distribution of SbC Cases.
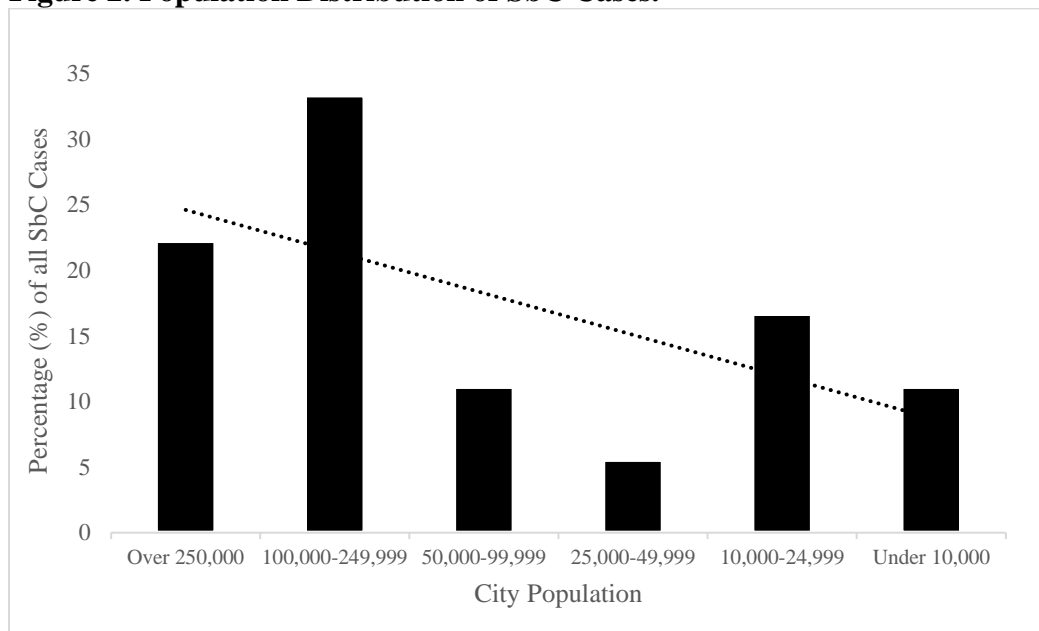
Organizational police response to SbC. There were only 18 SbCs in the sample, but only

three of these cases included a public departmental response to the SbC events. Three police

departments publicly displayed their own understandings of these rare events where the civilian

acts in an aggressive and threatening manner towards police officers. These understandings of

threatening police-civilian encounters were discovered from transcribed verbal communications

with officers representing their respective police agency. One police department looks at these

types of threatening situations and recognizes them as situations where the individual is suffering

from a mental health condition that needs helps:

> There's times when you go to a situation and someone is unstable, and you can see that,
> and you can see that it's not necessarily drugs or alcohol but there just – there is some
> instability with them – and so it's a matter of using those skills and training we receive to

help them do things to minimize a situation. There's a lot of things we go through at training to help identify not only the verbal things that people may say, but also the non-verbal cues that we can look at and say, OK that person, he may not be saying much, but I can tell by his actions that there are some psychological issues that are there that we need to look in and pursue further and get that individual some help. (Green Bay Police Department, Wisconsin)

It is important to remember that this particular police officer from the Green Bay Police Department made this statement after a SbC event had transpired. The missing component from this ideological approach to these situations is that sometimes it doesn't matter how much training and skills the police officer(s) uses to diffuse a situation. As expressed by another police officer from a different police agency, the civilian forces the police officer to react in a more violent manner to quell the situation:

When you come out of your vehicle, knowing that you're being pursued by police officers … One conclusion that comes to mind, for me and for most police officers, is tragically, it appears to be on the onset a SbC. I can tell you: In most instances, if you come out of a car armed with a handgun and police officers are chasing you in a pursuit and you've already been engaged in violence at your residence threatening to kill your wife, that is not wise. There's a high probability that you're going to end up getting shot and potentially killed, no matter who that police officer is. (Austin Police Department, Texas)

Clearly, this police officer demonstrates an ideological approach that comes from an opposite extreme than the first officer by saying with almost certainty that the situation will end fatally for the civilian aggressor. What is more interesting and illuminating is that an armed civilian who has already engaged in prior violence before police arrival is "on the onset of SbC" when that individual decides to engage and come after law enforcement. At least for Austin Police Department in the state of Texas, this police agency is well aware of and knows how to accurately distinguish and recognize a SbC when it is about to happen or in progress. However, like all of these highlighted cases, this one, as well, unfortunately resulted in an end of a life by means of police. This point of view to meet aggressive and threatening civilians with the same

type of response and reaction is ultimately manifested and explained briefly and clearly with this police officer from another police agency:

> If somebody's gonna pull a gun on a police officer … I'm not going to use pepper spray. That force is going to be matched with equal force. You're not shooting to kill them. You're shooting to stop them. (Denham Springs Police Department, Louisiana)

It comes as no surprise that this statement comes from a police officer right after a SbC had transpired with his or her involvement in the situation. This mentality from this police officer is clearly not one unique to this one individual but to a myriad of individuals and agencies across the nation who believe that fatally wounding a civilian in the act of attempting to stop them is justified both in the legal and social sense of the action. However, by comparing FAs to SbCs, it is also evident that the degree of force, whether lethal or nonlethal, is largely if not fully determined by the police officer on the other end of these situations. As I show in my comparative analysis, the majority of suicidal events end nonfatally with the officer able to diffuse the situation. Police officers with this simplistic mentality seem to blur the line between effectively stopping someone to effectively ending their life. This lack of distinction to draw the lines makes every SbC a legally justifiable killing by the police and every failed one left to chance or luck. These police perceptions about civilians and these SbC situations is not only revealing as to the minds of these agents, who are legally granted to kill when deemed necessary, but also cultural understandings of police roles in violence. Cultural understandings of police in threatening situations like SbC can be understood and explored in two ways: (1) understanding what law enforcement thinks and believes of these civilians and situations and (2) understanding what civilians believe the role of law enforcement to be and thus their belief in the feasibility and practicality of SbC.

Physical SbC signs. This second prong to understanding the cultural notions of police

roles in SnC can be examined through physical signs discovered in these threatening situations.

Physical signs include but are not limited to SnC notes or letters, text messages on a cellular

device, or any physical object that sheds light on the civilians' mind and thought process in

engaging in these deadly encounters. Like the statements from the police officers, these physical

markers were only discovered in situations when a SbC had occurred. It is also worthy to

mention that all of these signs that clearly indicated that the civilian was planning SbC were all

found by law enforcement *after* the SbC had transpired. These physical markers proved to be

quite insightful into many aspects of these SbC events such as the following text message found

on the civilian's phone after being killed by law enforcement, which appears to have been

written to the officers themselves:

> You did nothing wrong. You ended the life of a man who was too much of a coward to
> do it himself. I provoked you. I threatened your life as well as the lives of those around
> me. You were completely within your legal rights to do what you did.

Every part of this statement, which was written prior to the event from ever happening, is

indicative of SbCs in general. Civilians know that police officers who employ lethal force to end

the life of a civilian as a reaction to a threat made by the civilian have done nothing wrong in the

eyes of the law and society at large. This statement attempts to absolve the civilian's guilt about

the situation by understanding that law enforcement will not be criticized and punished for taking

such actions against an aggressive civilian who threatened the lives of law enforcement.

However, as seen in the second sentence, a great deal of shame remains when the civilian labels

himself as a "coward." This sentence can be seen as law enforcement actually creating a positive

change by ending the life of someone who no longer wanted to live. Even more, law enforcement

is seen as doing a service to this individual by assisting in an action that he individual alone

could never do. The following sentence is short, but it is indicative of every SbC where the civilian intentionally and knowingly "provokes" law enforcement for the above-mentioned reasons. The sentence after seems almost obvious that by provoking law enforcement someone would be potentially threatening their lives; however, this civilian adds a second element to this by mentioning that through his own actions he was threatening not only the lives of law enforcement but everyone in his immediate surroundings. This civilian, like many others, understand how law enforcement will internalize and justify their actions. This situation now becomes more than protecting the lives of law enforcement but preserving the safety of society from these suicidal individuals. Finally, the statement ends with the acknowledgement that the civilian is completely aware that police actions that are fatal to a civilian's life are legally justified and thus protected under the law. Essentially, this is why law enforcement become the perfect group to carry out these SbCs just like doctors when it comes to euthanasia.[3] These material signs of SbCs are rare, but when they are present they highlight how civilians understand the predictability of law enforcement violence in the US.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

This paper compared three types of suicidal events involving law enforcement: suicide by cops, suicides in the presence of cops but with no violence from the cops, and failed attempts at suicides for which the officers were able to diffuse the event and save lives. My findings show that suicide by cops are similar to traditional suicides in the demographic composition of victims; different from traditional suicides regarding the increased civilian threatening actions toward the police, the decreased presence of firearms, the increased suicidal calls for emergency response,

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[3] See Appendix B for a full list of physical signs of SbC left by civilians.

and the cultural understandings of the police as a tool for suicide; and different from other fatal police shootings in terms of city population distribution.

My demographic analysis confirmed findings in prior literature that suicidal interactions, across the three comparative suicidal cases, but especially SbCs, have a typical middle-aged white male profile. In fact, these cases show an exclusively male phenomenon dominated by whites. Even with almost half the data missing on race and age for FAs and SnCs, there is nothing to suggest that these results should be different, especially with confirmation from previous studies and literature.

My analysis of threat through weapon of choice and civilian action towards police shows large differences across the three types suicidal events. Although, I find no differences in the civilian use of firearms or knives between SbCs and FAs, almost half of FAs and SbCs involved either a knife or nonlethal firearm, two alternatives that should be considered less threatening than a firearm. Truly, the weapon a civilian chooses can be viewed as a symbol or statement that communicates a message to law enforcement. Possession of a knife, with similar usage rates in both SbCs and FAs, may suggest that harming others is not as likely as possessing a lethal firearm. Indeed, despite this identical profile in weapon of choice across both categories, SbCs undoubtedly have a more fatal outcome even when this seemingly less fatal weapon is used in both cases. The major distinction between these two comparative cases is the most violent action of the civilian to the police. SbCs, proportionally speaking, have twice as many cases of civilians threatening the police but making no contact than FAs. This finding demonstrates when the civilian might have most control of their own fate and in the outcome of the threatening suicidal encounter because possession of a less fatal weapon can still produce a fatal outcome by manipulating police into an instrument that fears for its life and safety. Truly, the civilian is not

intentionally trying to commit harm to the police or others but is simply utilizing the weapon to

appear dangerous or threatening. In fact, it can be seen as a mechanism or ploy to manipulate

officers to make them feel threatened and thus react with what might be unnecessary lethal force.

Even more, the overwhelming presence of firearms in SnCs may suggest a similar narrative even

though firearms are a much more lethal weapon than knives. Although firearm possession may

be perceived as an imminent threat to the lives of others in the vicinity (i.e., SWAT teams and

law enforcement agencies gathered outside the suicidal person's residence), it may also indicate

that the subject wants to end their life quickly and effectively with a sure means of

accomplishing the fatal goal of ending their life. Thus, a greater frequency of knives appearing in

SbC cases may lead to achieving a false but necessary perception of threat to law enforcement to

achieve the desired ends while a greater frequency of firearms in SnC cases may suggest the

same ends through a completely different context.

The most surprising result of this research is how SnCs have the lowest proportion of

suicid(al) calls than the other two comparative cases even though SnCs are the most conventional

form of suicide in these data. This finding combined with the fact that suicid(al) calls compose a

majority of SbCs illustrates the premeditative nature of these SbC events. Law enforcement, in

most SbC cases, are brought into contact with civilians with the preconceived notion that they

are handling a suicidal subject yet the fatal result of the interaction still remains. This may easily

speak to the inadequacy of law enforcement agencies to properly handle this rare form of suicide

or even the ability to discern SbCs from SnCs at a more foundational level.

My geographic/population findings are a new component to the study of SbCs that adds a

potentially different angle to further understand these complex situations. The majority of SbCs

are concentrated in the western United States, which has been confirmed to be consistent with

other major research on fatal police shootings. However, SbCs, which are truly a special form of

fatal police shootings, contradict the latest research on the population distributions of the cities in

which fatal police shootings take place. On the contrary, SbCs are more concentrated in urban

areas with populations of at least six figures rather than rural areas with less than 10,000 people.

These geographic and population findings both could help future studies on SbCs on where to

more likely expect and find these events and also begin to answer the question of *why* SbCs are

concentrated in the western part of the United States and occur, overall, in urban over rural

populations.

Through a two-pronged approach in examining cultural understandings of police

violence, this study also showed how some police organizational ideologies served as an

inadequate response to addressing SbCs. The law enforcement agencies who gave statements in

response to SbCs may all agree that fatally wounding a civilian in the act of attempting to stop

them is justified both in the legal and social sense of the action. However, the disagreement

among these several agencies seems to lie over how to effectively handle an SbC event with

agencies on both sides of the spectrum from some who believe it doesn't matter how much

training and skills the police officer(s) uses to diffuse a situation to others who accurately

distinguish an SbC and match the use of force to apprehend the individual at all costs. Police

officers with this mentality seem to blur the line between effectively stopping someone to

effectively ending their life. This lack of distinction to draw the line makes every SbC a legally

justifiable killing by the police and every failed one left to chance or luck. As for civilians'

perspective on SbCs, law enforcement is the perfect group to administer this type of "euthanasia"

that civilians want to end their lives. Even more, civilians end their lives without feeling guilty

knowing law enforcement will be absolved; truly, they know that police officers who employ

lethal force to end the life of a civilian as a reaction to a threat made by the civilian have done nothing wrong in the eyes of the law and society at large. In other words, a civilian is completely aware that police actions that are fatal to a civilian's life are legally justified and thus protected under the law. As a result, SbC becomes a practicable and *legal* means to end one's life.

Three major limitations exist in this study: sample size, missing data, and potential missing cases. Due to time constraints, I only utilized quarter one (January-March 2015) of the PACOTE database. In an ideal scenario, I would have been able to utilize the entire database to create a more complete picture in the results of this study with yearlong data. Thus, one future goal is to revisit this study using all the possible suicidal events upon PACOTE's completion. Another limitation in this particular study is the missing data that existed when analyzing the race and age dimension. Although race and age were accounted for in all SbC cases, about half of the race and age data for FAs and SnCs was missing. This, of course, is a foreseeable limitation when relying on third-party sources, news media companies, as the primary source in this type of methodology. Race and age are important components in creating a full demographics profile for these suicidal individuals; however, this limitation did not impair the study in any serious manner. Despite this limitation, the results were confirmed by previous studies and even provided an interesting take when examining the categories comparatively. Finally, one limitation to consider are potential missing cases in which there was no reporting and possibly not included in PACOTE. It may be likely there was a selection bias of reporting towards SbCs because they are the most fatal of the three comparative cases. At the same time, it is also very likely that news reporters are less likely to report FAs due to a greater number of FAs than SnCs and especially more than the rarer SbC cases. While PACOTE may not contain

the full population of FAs, there is no reason to think that there is systematic bias in the FA cases

captured by PACOTE.

Future research should seek to further develop the cultural understandings component of

the project by approaching the organizational side of the two-pronged approach with different

methodology. For instance, a random sample of police departments across the United States (or

even a convenient sample of police agencies based on what geographic locations SbCs took

place) should be interviewed or surveyed to further explore the perceptions of SbC by this key

actor, the approaches taken in the past to SbCs and approaches to be taken in the future, and

finally what still needs to be done to effectively diffuse SbCs in a predictive and standard

manner. As for trying to understand the second actor in SbCs, other than written communication

left behind (i.e., suicide notes) there is no better approach to understand these individuals who

have passed away due to SbC. Even trying to find individuals who have attempted SbC in the

past is an improbable approach because of institutional interests to keep this information

confidential and to protect this vulnerable population. Another direction that is actually an

unexplored piece to many SbC studies is the mental health dimension in SbC events. A potential

hypothesis, based on this study, is that SbC individuals have a lower severity or degree of mental

health issues than those individuals that are just suicidal with no intent to ever attempt SbC. I

think utilizing a comparative lens by examining the mental health states of SbC individuals

versus purely suicidal individuals will prove useful for a variety of reasons. First, the mental

health status of these individuals can confirm and point to the premeditative nature that is so

inherent to SbCs. The planning of how these events will transpire, along with sometimes leaving

written communications, may potentially show that these individuals still have greater mental

faculties and capacities than those who want to end their lives with traditional means. This could

especially be the case when SbC individuals know how to manipulate law enforcement officers to do exactly what they desire. Thus, it is worth focusing on and dedicating a study on the mental health aspects of SbC cases that may prove to have major beneficial implications in fully understanding the dynamics and workings of this phenomenon.

This study is a return to Durkheim's classic example of suicide as an object of sociological analysis with the more contemporary insights of Randall Collin's micro-sociological processual model for how violence occurs. The premeditative nature of SbCs, revealed through the situation before officer finding, is a confirmation that a civilian has already controlled the confrontational situation. Law enforcement unknowingly enter into a trap with the preconceived notion of dealing with a suicidal subject or attempted suicide in progress, but in actuality, law enforcement has been manipulated in a short duration of time to produce those very ends in the context of a SbC. Even more, civilian possession of a nonfatal weapon in half of SbC cases truly demonstrates civilians' influence on the situation because civilians know they can still successfully increase the forward panic of police to reach a fatal and violent reaction. Thus, this model can successfully be mastered to the advantage of law enforcement to be at least one step ahead of civilians to keep them from using various pathways to get around this wall of confrontational tension. This model is not only a useful tool for law enforcement to follow but also a reminder for them to use extra caution when approaching a situation with a suicidal subject threatening law enforcement to overreact with deadly force. These suicidal comparative cases also shine a light on Durkheim's different types of suicide. If Durkheim were here today, he could classify SnCs as being different from traditional suicides due to police presence and describe them as an example of anomic suicide in which there is a lack of regulation from society. The police are merely brought to the scene as spectators with no power or influence to

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alter the situation. This is exactly what these SnC victims desire due to this feeling of anomie, or normalness, they are experiencing. Durkheim might also suggest that SbCs are only a step further from SnCs as anomic suicide because the police are still unable to take control in these situations as seen in Collin's model; however, SbCs highlight a new aspect of Durkheim's suicide types showing how the state can be used as a means to perform suicides on behalf of individuals. Instead of passive spectatorship in the case of SnCs, the state is legally sanctioned to execute these suicides as active participants and thus taking suicide to a level that perhaps even Durkheim never envisioned.

This study, like many previous ones, has the intended goal of better communicating this phenomenon to society at large and especially to law enforcement. It is no secret that the more knowledge law enforcement has about a certain type of situation the better prepared they will be to address the situation appropriately. Law enforcement can use the results of this study to better identify and distinguish SbCs from other suicidal events. Although there are similarities across all types of suicidal encounters, the problem still lies in the fact that law enforcement need to better understand SbCs, through the successes of FAs that save lives, in order to reduce the number of SbCs and SnCs. This study calls for a change in law enforcement agencies across the United States to adopt uniform strategies and approaches to handling the distinct challenges that potentially SbC individuals present in these threatening events. By adopting this uniformity across agencies, researchers will be better able to determine the nuanced differences in these SbC cases that lead to drastically diverse outcomes than FAs. This is essential to not only further understandings of SbC as a unique phenomenon in both research and in practice but to reduce the likelihood of use of deadly force in SbC encounters.

Appendix A
PACOTE Codebook-Dyad Outcome

Dyad Outcome

This two character ordered pair code denotes the most violent action of the police actor followed by the most violent action of the civilian actor. Time order is not important for this code.

f: fatal
c: contact (non-fatal contact, may result in injury but not necessary)
n: no contact threat (shot at with no hits, threatened, violence directed, weapons present/pulled/displayed/pointed at officers but not used)
0: no violence (may include weapons that were concealed or otherwise unknown to the officers)
If the civilian outcome was previously given an out of scope or death in custody code, mark this column **OUT OF SCOPE**

Code	Description
ff	Officer kills Civilian, Civilian kills officer
fc	Officer kills Civilian, Civilian non-fatal contacts officer
cf	Officer non-fatal contacts civilian, civilian kills officer
fn	Officer kills Civilian, Civilian threatens officer
nf	Officer threatens Civilian, Civilian kills officer
cc	Officer non-fatal contacts civilian, civilian non-fatal contacts officer
cn	Officer non-fatal contacts civilian, civilian threatens officer:
nc	Officer threatens civilian, civilian non-fatal contacts officer
nn	Officer threatens Civilian, Civilian threatens officer
f0	Officer kills civilian, civilian is non-violent
0f	Officer is non-violent, civilian kills officer
c0	Officer non-fatal contacts civilian, civilian is non-violent
0c	Officer is non-violent, civilian non-fatal contacts officer
n0	Officer threatens civilian, civilian is non-violent
0n	Officer is non-violent, civilian threatens officer
00	Officer and civilian are non-violent
OUT OF SCOPE	Civilian outcome code included out of scope or death in custody code(s).

Appendix B
Physical Signs of SbC

1. "Fuck this I'm going to get drunk and off myself; I got that fake gun that looks real I get pulled over on pointed at the cops; Told u I got that fake gun I'm going to make them shot me."

-Hispanic/Latino male, 39 years old, Colorado

2. Individual had a note in his truck that apologized for the trouble he had caused and for forcing officers to end his life.

-White male, 37 years old, California

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