

ABSTRACT

South African studies have conducted research pertaining to the physical and psychological effects of police brutality, but not much is known about the public sense-making and constructions of police brutality. This study examined public commentary that appears in the “comments” sections of YouTube videos of the use of force by police. The aim of this research project was to understand the interactional and discursive practices of how the public constructs and makes sense of police brutality videos on YouTube. Conversation Analysis (CA) and Discursive Psychology (DP) are used as methodological framework to determine how meanings of police brutality are constructed in online interactions. The findings from this study revealed that there were contestations regarding the use of force. Some Participants’ treated the transgression of the law as validating police use of excessive force while other Participants’ constructed it as a violation of human rights. In addition, the Participants’ attributed the police use of force as being racially motivated. There were also contestations orienting foreign nationals as being responsible for criminal activity which warranted the use of police force against them. Overall, this study has implications on future policies in terms of how police officials can be monitored with regards to police-suspect/victim interaction.

Keywords: Police brutality, conversation analysis, discursive psychology, South Africa