

ETHICAL ISSUES

# Do you have a moral duty to watch the police beating of Tyre Nichols?

If you choose not to, many apps give you the option to restrict graphic images



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In Ukraine, ubiquitous video footage is [documenting war in real time](#). Darnella Frazier [changed history](#) by recording the 2020 murder of George Floyd with her smartphone camera. And in recent days, law enforcement body cameras showed the brutality of the [attack of Paul Pelosi](#) and the police beating of [Tyre Nichols](#) in Memphis.

This footage may be essential for accountability and for the loved ones of victims. For all of us, it also raises ethical questions: Should we bear witness by watching graphic videos of human cruelty and suffering? Or do we [honor the victims by not looking](#) at the worst moments of their lives?

Allissa V. Richardson, a University of Southern California journalism professor who researches Black Americans' use of social media as journalism, said people should not feel a moral obligation to view violent records of important events.

Richardson said there is both power and risk in the ways that smartphones and social media regularly broadcast so much evidence of brutality to us.

“People should be very careful about consuming these videos casually through social media,” Richardson said in an email. “For many Black Americans especially, it can be retraumatizing to see someone who looks like you or a loved one be brutalized this way.”

Richardson also said that when violent moments grab our attention, we may conflate passive watching with action.

“Pressing play is not the same as pressing for tangible changes. Social media can make us forget that sometimes,” she said.

But even if you want to, looking away isn’t always easy online. Apps like YouTube, TikTok and Twitter are designed to automatically play one video after another as you scroll.

For example, when I was looking at Twitter on Friday night, I found it overwhelming to see one video clip start to play after another of the violent confrontation after police stopped Nichols for an alleged traffic violation.

It was jarring, too, to see those images interspersed with people’s posts of Nichols skateboarding or doing other joyful activities.

(A note about The Washington Post’s treatment of the Pelosi and Nichols videos: In online news articles, The Post included warnings about the graphic nature of the videos when people clicked to watch them. The videos also did not play automatically when people scrolled The Post’s website and app.)

Most popular apps do, however, give you some control to view graphic images on your own terms. In some apps, you can change your settings to stop videos from playing automatically when you scroll. You can still press play when you choose.

Or apps may let you choose to see a warning when you encounter potentially sensitive photos and videos, including those that depict violence. You can still click if you want to view them.

Here is how to change those settings in some popular apps:

## **Instagram**

Click on your profile image in the lower right of your screen.

Then from the upper right corner, tap on the three horizontal lines.

Go to Settings → Account → Sensitive content control. Choose “Less.”

*Note: If you change this setting, you may still see graphic images from accounts that you follow. This setting affects accounts you don’t follow.*

## **TikTok**

“Restricted Mode” limits graphic videos from the For You Page. You will see a warning about “Sensitive content” and can choose to click to watch or not.

Click on your profile in the lower right corner. From the next screen, click on the three horizontal lines in the upper right.

Go to Settings and privacy → Content preferences → Restricted Mode. Choose a passcode to turn this mode on and off.

## **YouTube**

**On Youtube.com:** On the bottom of any YouTube video you are watching, flip the switch for “Autoplay” to off and it will not automatically play a new video when you finish watching.

Another option:

Click on your profile in the upper right corner.

Choose Settings → Playback and performance → Browsing. Turn off “Inline playback” so videos do not automatically play as you browse.

**In YouTube’s iPhone and Android app:** Click on your profile in the upper right corner.

Choose Settings → Autoplay. Tap off to stop one video from automatically playing when you finish another.

Another option: Settings → General → Restricted mode. Tap on to hide videos that YouTube considers “potentially mature.”

Another option: Settings → General → Playback in feeds. Choose “off” to stop videos from playing as you browse.

## **Facebook app**

In the iPhone app, tap on Menu, or three horizontal lines in the lower right corner of your main screen. Or in the Android app: Tap on the three horizontal lines in the upper right of your main screen.

On the next screen, choose the icon that looks like a gear in the upper right.

Under “Preferences,” select “Media.” Select the option that says “Never Autoplay videos.”

## **Twitter**

**Twitter.com:** From the left side of the screen, choose the image of the circle with three dots in the middle.

Then pick Settings and support → Settings and privacy → Privacy and safety → Content you see. Uncheck the box for “Display media that may contain sensitive content.” You will see a warning on photos and video considered sensitive and will have the choice to click to view it.

Another option: From Settings and support → Settings and privacy → Privacy and safety → Content you see. In “Search settings,” check “Hide sensitive content.”

Another option: From Settings and support → Settings and privacy → Accessibility, display and languages → Data usage → Autoplay. Select “Never” to stop any video from playing automatically as you scroll.

**In Twitter’s iPhone and Android apps:** Click on your profile image in the upper left of the screen.

Choose Settings and Support → Settings and privacy → Accessibility, display and languages → Data usage → Autoplay (iPhones only) → Video autoplay.

Select “Never” to stop any video from playing automatically as you scroll.