Implicit Bias in Policing: Detection and Prediction in Officer Selection

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INTRODUCTION

- This presentation focuses primarily on detecting implicit bias and the identification of personality indicators that predict officer conduct.

- Inherent in policing is profiling, a heuristic practice of determining the level of threat to officer safety, particularly during traffic stops, based on subject characteristics.

- Profiling is warranted in situations which carry a high potential for risk to the officer.

- Historically, the practice of profiling was based on the race of the subject receiving police action.

- Studies consistently indicate that the officer's race is not related to racial disparities in traffic stops, searches, warnings/citations, or arrests (Barnum & Perfetti, 2010; Novak, 2004; Smith & Petrocelli, 2001).

- However, there was evidence that White officers were more likely to initiate searches of drivers (Lundman, 2004).

POLICE BIAS

- The proliferation of body camera use provided additional evidence of the disparity of treatment between Black and White members of communities by White officers in the line of duty.

POLICE BIAS (cont'd)

- Body camera footage revealed that even after controlling for the race of officers, the severity of infractions, and the location and outcome of traffic stops, researchers found that officers spoke with consistently less respect to Black subjects than White subjects (Voigt et al., 2017).

- The issue of racial bias was validated by accounts by the minority plain-clothed police officers who were subject to aggressive police action by White officers.

- Reported aggressive actions by White officers against officers of color varied in severity, from perceived discrimination to fatal shootings of the Black police officers due to mistaken identity (Paul & Birzer, 2017).

- The outstanding issue was the finding that White officers had a higher probability of initiating searches of minority drivers, with more stringent dispositions than for non-minorities, and with more aggressive police actions.

- What appears to be missing in the literature are the aspects of personality that could provide indicators or predictors of bias; indicators and predictors of implicit bias would be beneficial during the officer selection process.

METHOD: *Procedure*

- To fill the gap in literature, we used the results of the pre-employment MMPI-2, a widely-used tool for the assessment of police officer applicants, to examine the relationship between personality traits and history of offensive conduct in commissioned officers in their first year on the job.

- Regression analysis was conducted with inhibition of aggression, overcontrolled hostility, dominance, antisocial attitudes and practices, cynicism, misanthropic beliefs as predictors and racially offensive conduct as DV.

METHOD: *Participants*

- Participants were 10,444 police officer candidates in the Southeastern U.S. evaluated for pre-employment screening and rated by their supervisor after one year.

Officers By Race

25% African American
75% White

Officers By Gender

15% Women
85% Men
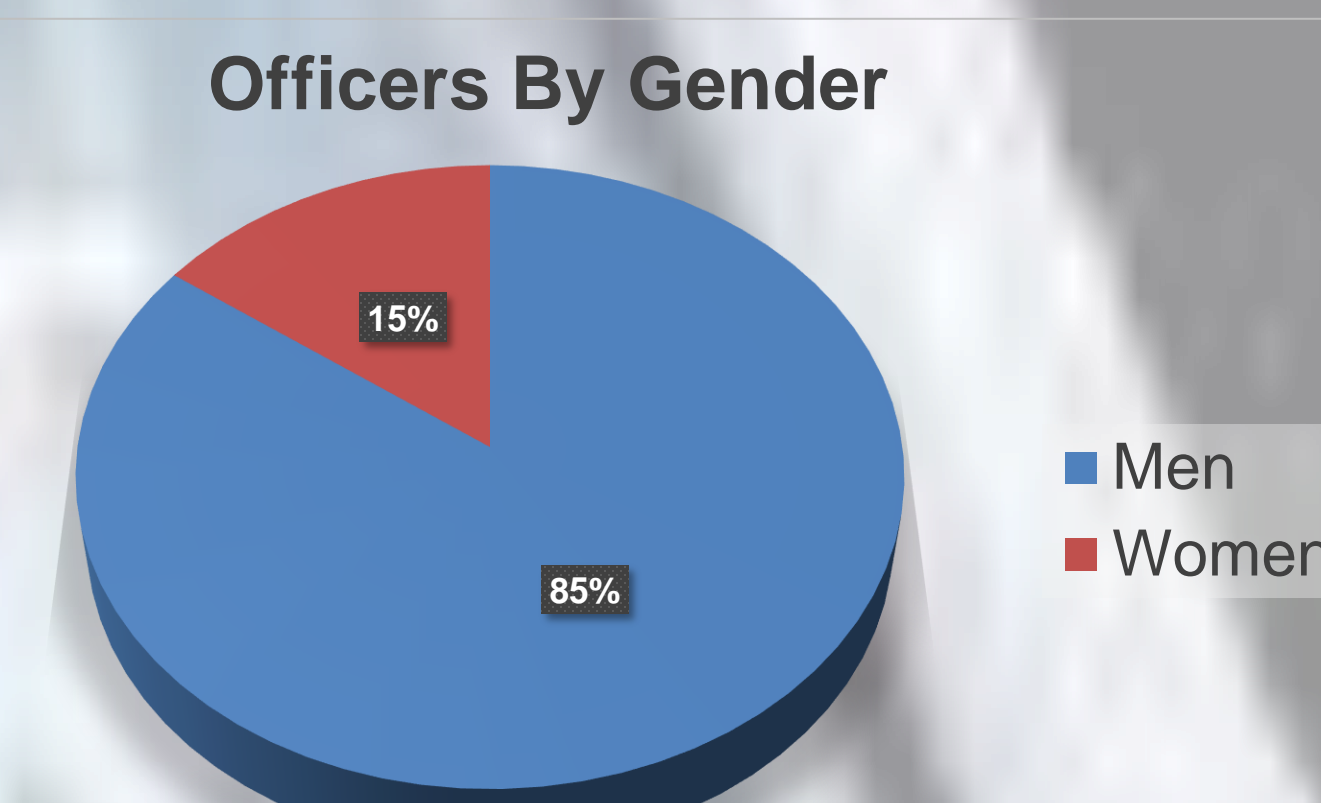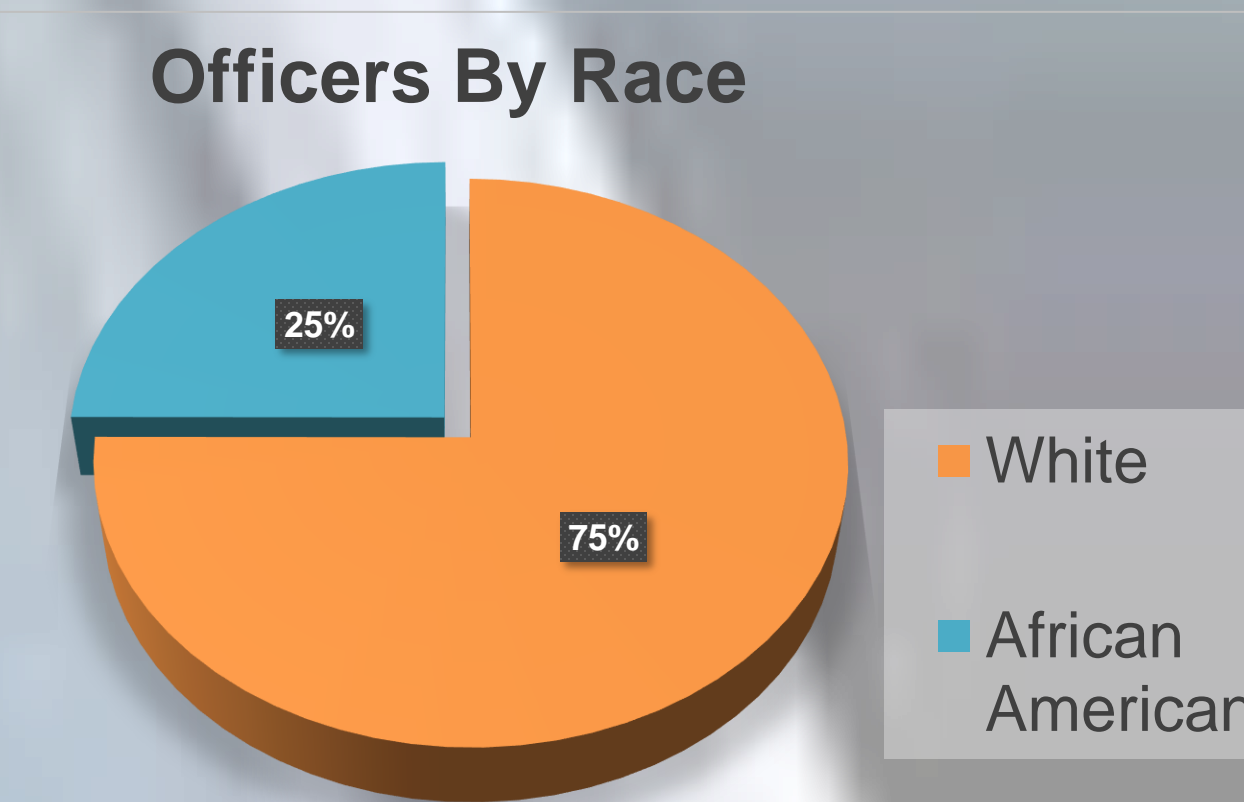
RESULTS

- Regression revealed overcontrolled hostility to be the best predictor, so ANOVA was used to compare officers who reported being accused of racially offensive conduct and those who were not accused on overcontrolled hostility.

- There was a significant main effect, $F(1, 7723) = 9.58$, $p = .002$, with overcontrolled hostility associated with racially offensive conduct.

FINDINGS AND THE FUTURE

- The findings suggest that levels of controlled hostility could predict the possibility of racially motivated conduct against minority citizens in the first year working as a police officer.

- Future examinations of implicit bias should focus on developmental factors, such as White officers' upbringing, contributing to officers' implicit bias.

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