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METHODS ON FAIR DECISION MAKING

by

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A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the need to deter criminal activity has been necessary for the creation and sustainment of successful colonies, states, and countries. According to Palmiotto (2016), prosperous societies are dependent upon social order. To constitute a sense of security, societies establish governmental systems that institute laws to increase social control among their members. In many established societies, the development of organizational entities has been perpetuated for the governing and protection of the members of the community. Police officers are tasked with maintaining order by enforcing laws and regulations upon citizens, ensuring the success of a country altogether.

The United States' first utilization of social regulation for security measures dates back to the early settlers during the colonization of the country (NAACP, 2022). Large cities such as Boston, Massachusetts, New York City, New York, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania were the first to implement volunteer systems designated to deter criminal activity and warn community members of forthcoming threats and danger (Potter, 2013). This system was known as the watch. These new cities created opportunities for business and employment in which a chance for wealth was created. According to Brandl (2019), in northern states, the congregation of immigrants and United States citizens into these confined areas came with a plethora of issues. Those unable to work often found themselves living in poverty and poor living conditions, leading to criminal activity and riots. The watch was unable to uphold proper security measures necessary for the safety of the cities it aimed to protect. The inability of the watch to effectively control criminal activity throughout large cities led to the creation of a professionalized form of law enforcement.

The southern states faced a similar reform in their law enforcement system in the following years. During the period of slavery, many individuals of African descent were brought to America to work on plantations. In these areas, "slave patrols" were instituted to regulate the behavior and actions of the slaves and deter escape efforts while keeping them working under harsh conditions (Reichel, 1988). Those who served in this position did not receive formal training or education, and the overall lack of professionalism resulted in incredibly harsh and unfair treatment of enslaved African Americans. Ultimately, the actions of slave patrols resulted in many ethical and racial concerns, dividing the nation further concerning the treatment of enslaved individuals. After the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery, slave patrols were reformed into police departments and expected to enforce new segregation laws.

Today, the scope of policing has exponentially widened as officers deal with a wide range of issues including criminal activity, court hearings, medical emergencies, natural disasters, and a host of other crime control, order maintenance, and service functions. In each scenario, officers exercise discretion to make decisions on how to handle such issues as they see fit. The discretion used by officers and the decisions they make when confronted with these situations is heavily influenced by past experiences. The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (2009) found that over time, the human brain retains and categorizes information, allowing individuals to quickly relate current experiences to prior encounters. These past experiences may include educational backgrounds, training programs in academies, and prior workplaces. To create positive cognitive mapping, ensuring improved decision-making processes, it is necessary to account for the impact of previous higher education experiences and training methods used in police academies on the decisions officers make.

As police decisions on the street might contribute to a range of racial and ethnic

disparities, it is important to review the effects of education and training on police behavior. Results from such analysis could guide the implementation of officer standards and training requirements. Therefore, this paper will explore the contentious topics in present day policing such as improving upon outdated training methods, increasing minimum education requirements, and the impacts these changes could have in relation to use of force events, racial discrimination and stereotypes held by officers, and the decisions officers make while working.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF POLICE EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND CURRENT ISSUES

Historically, education among law enforcement has not always been a fundamental qualification of policing. In fact, during the early 1600s and 1700s, cities such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia created an informal network of community members who gathered at night and were responsible for alerting their communities of foul play or concerning activity. This system known as the watch is considered the first form of law enforcement and community organized social control (Potter, 2013). Watchmen often drank or slept while on duty and oftentimes were placed on the watch as a form of punishment (Potter, 2013). At this time, individuals responsible for what is presently known as policing, were not appointed to their jobs because of profound character, educational achievements, or other honorable accomplishments. Rather, the job of policing was viewed as uncomplicated, requiring very little skill and intelligence. According to Archbold (2012), those that were involved in the watch held responsibilities "including lighting street lamps, running soup kitchens, recovering lost children, capturing runaway animals, and a variety of other services; their involvement in crime control activities at this time was minimal at best. Policing in England and Colonial America was largely ineffective, as it was based on a volunteer system and their method of patrol was both disorganized and sporadic" (Archbold, 2012, p. 3). The lack of training and protocols for members of this group proved a need for further education of police.

In large northern cities, informal policing practices were present throughout the 1800s (Potter, 2013). These policing practices began with the night watch in larger cities such as Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia. Eventually, New York City and Philadelphia found it necessary for members of the watch to be present during daytime hours as well. To supplement

the watch system, official law enforcement officers were created and referred to as constables

(Potter, 2013). Constables were tasked with a wide range of duties including land surveying,

verification of scales and measures, and supervising those serving on the watch (Potter, 2013).

Although the United States developed as a country and the criminal justice system

progressed over time, a great divide in the politics of the nation led to new responsibilities for

law enforcement. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (2022)

reported the enslavement of African Americans became increasingly popular in Southern states

throughout the 1600s. To control their slaves, plantation owners implemented a system known as

slave patrols responsible for catching runaways, inciting fear in slaves, and imposing sanctions

on those who revolted (Hadden, 2003; Potter, 2013; Reichel, 1988). Those who served in these

positions were elected by local government officials and most commonly held by wealthy,

landowning, white men (Hadden, 2003). To fill these positions, emphasis was placed on skin

color and socioeconomic status rather than experience and education. Following the Civil War

between northern and southern states, slave patrols were exchanged for militia-style groups

responsible for implementing and enforcing the new laws (NAACP, 2022). Though these

officers had different responsibilities than the previous policing groups, this new system was not

free of flaws.

As a result of the American Revolution, citizens and migrants began flocking to cities

such as Boston, New York City, and Chicago. The population growth in these areas brought

increased crime levels that proved to be more than members of the watch and constables could

control. The inability of these forms of law enforcement to move effectively to the end proved

the need for professionalized police forces. In the 1880s, professionalized police forces were

employed in larger cities. The new police forces were a large improvement from the watch and

constables. These new forces had public support, full-time employment, rules and procedures, all while performing under a centralized government entity (Potter, 2013).

As time continued and the responsibilities of police officers grew, August Vollmer, the early 20th-century police chief of Berkley, California, realized the need for the professionalization of police forces nationwide (Carte, 1973). Vollmer's desire to professionalize the field of policing led to techniques like scientific detection methods, motorized police forces, and a centralized crime record collection. In addition to these improvements, Vollmer increased employment standards by implementing psychological testing, training academies, and aimed to recruit individuals with higher education degrees (Carte, 1973). The changes and implementations made by Vollmer have directly impacted the current state of policing.

For the past sixty years, efforts have been made by United States presidents to gather information and data concerning the status of the criminal justice system nationwide. In 1967, President Johnson implemented the Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. Individuals serving on the commission were tasked with finding the strengths and weaknesses within the justice system and providing suggestions to the president to create a well-rounded, flaw-free system. Those serving on the 1967 commission found that police agencies lacked the ability to control criminal activity. To combat this flaw, the authors suggested that police departments recruit officers with higher education levels in hopes of increasing expertise and integrity levels (President's Commission on Law Enforcement, & Administration of Justice, 1967).

In 2014, with a similar effort in mind, President Obama created the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. President Obama's goal was to identify effective policing and crime reduction practices. Members of the task force found that the current education and

training standards are not fit to equip officers with the necessary level of education and training needed for the plethora of challenges they might face throughout a career. To change this narrative, members of the task force made recommendations for different training methods such as crisis intervention, disease and addiction, and implicit bias training (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). While these recommendations are hopeful in improving officer performance, no new national educational requirements have been implemented, though many departments encourage working officers to continue their education to better prepare them in their career.

Modern Day Policing

Today, the criminal justice system has expanded, and the job requirements of an officer have continued to grow. Officers are employed to enforce local, state, and federal laws, protect the public from various crimes, and provide an array of specialty services to the community. In addition to making arrests on and off the road, police officers are expected to patrol assigned areas, conduct preliminary and follow-up traffic or criminal investigations, respond to community calls for police service, arrest and process criminals, prepare written reports and notes of patrols or investigations, along with many more responsibilities. To be of assistance to the community, this role is needed at all hours of the day or night, in every location, and for all citizens. Officers are expected to conduct themselves according to the standards and ethics set before them, yet no two public encounters will be the same. Therefore, it is imperative that officers are properly educated and trained to ensure fair decision-making while serving the community.

Currently, the criminal justice system has yet to impose standard requirements upheld by all policing agencies nationwide. Some agencies require individuals to hold a high school

diploma or GED, while others require 60 college credit hours or the equivalent to an associates degree. Recruits may be required to complete 21 weeks of academy training where the skills and techniques taught may vary depending on the agency (Cheatham & Maizland, 2022). While United States policing agencies and policy makers have failed to agree upon standard requirements, many other developed countries have successfully done so.

For comparison, Norway requires recruits to attend the Norwegian Police University College. Officers are required to attend this university and enroll in a three-year program focused on practical and theoretical foundations of policing (Osce Polis, n.d.). Finland accepts recruits one time each year. Recruits are enrolled at the only police training institution in Finland. This program takes two and a half years to complete, granting recruits a diploma in police studies upon graduation (Osce Polis, n.d.). Additionally, Iceland requires recruits to study and train for two years, upon completion recruits are rewarded with a police science diploma (Osce Polis, n.d.). While countries outside of the United States face their own challenges, the idea of policing is similar worldwide. Nonetheless, the United States experiences a higher rate of crime, more use of force, and increased racial discrimination, making it vital for agencies to understand the effects of education and training methods on officer decision-making (Hirschfield, 2015). Equipping officers with the knowledge and tactics to effectively protect communities across the country is crucial for creating strong, effective police fronts, but also has the potential to create safer communities across the country by addressing the current issues amongst policing agencies.

CHAPTER 3

IMPROVED ACADEMY TRAINING METHODS

Prior to patrolling, responding to calls, and performing the job of policing, recruits are required to endure some type of academy training. While training regimens and requirements may vary slightly from agency to agency, a similar goal is shared. . Members of the 21st Century task force report say, "Though today's law enforcement professionals are highly trained and highly skilled operationally, they must develop specialized knowledge and understanding that enable fair and procedurally just policing and allow them to meet a wide variety of new challenges and expectations. Tactical skills are important, but attitude, tolerance, and interpersonal skills are equally so. And to be effective in an ever-changing world, training must continue throughout an officer's career. The goal is not only effective, efficient policing but also procedural justice and fairness" (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015, p. 52). The idea presented by members of the 21st Century Task Force agrees that an officer's ability to shoot, run, and drive a car at rapid speeds are vital to the job of policing, yet to create change that truly impacts the citizens police officers protect, interpersonal skills are equally as important and are used more frequently. The ability of an officer to effectively interact with citizens can enhance their decision-making process and ultimately improve community relations through fair treatment. Despite the goals of present-day policing set forth by the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015), very few changes have been made to training regimens since 1986 (Bradford & Pynes, 1999). In order to create police forces that are able to make correct and fair decisions, it is vital that training academies understand the impact of current training styles and new techniques to positively impact officers careers and community relations.

Improved Training Techniques

De-escalation training is used in many professions and has been a topic of interest for criminal justice researchers and police academies. De-escalation techniques are present in many professions such as teaching, healthcare, and social work. For police officers, de-escalation techniques can be useful in tense situations with subjects who are probable to become violent or resistant to police efforts. Those with close ties to conventional beliefs about police procedures argue that de-escalation training methods decrease officer safety. "In many de-escalation trainings, the need for officers to slow down during potentially volatile situations and consider a range of options before rushing into action is emphasized. In contrast, in traditional training, quick and decisive action is typically taught to be the safest approach for officers faced with dangerous or unpredictable circumstances" (Engel, Corsaro, Isaza, & McManus, 2020, p. 722). De-escalation works by slowing down the officer and encountered citizens, giving time to properly assess the situation, and allowing the officer to make fair judgments and decide how to proceed with the conflict.

Wood and his colleagues (2020) aimed to diminish the distrust held by citizens towards police officers through procedural justice policing strategies. Implemented in the city of Chicago, Illinois, nearly 8,500 officers received the procedural justice training style. This style of policing takes a more humanistic approach to the job of policing, placing more importance on specific values like respect and transparency for citizens. As a result of this new policing style, officers participating in the study found a 10% decrease in citizen complaints and a decrease of nearly 7% in use of force incidents. These findings indicate the ability of procedural justice training to positively impact officer performance. Allowing officers to be transparent during citizen interactions allows officers to personally connect with who they are dealing with, allowing for

more fair and equitable treatment to the members of the community (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015; Wood, Tyler, & Papachristos, 2020).

Furthermore, Andersen and Gustafsberg (2016) focused on the human nervous system and its innate ability to react to high-pressure situations. In response to a stressor, an officer can expect to experience activation of the sympathetic nervous system and a complete shutdown of the parasympathetic nervous system. Many refer to this process as "fight or flight" in which the nervous system allows officers to decide how to react to any given stressor. "Aspects of the fight or flight response, including perceptual distortions, reduced motor dexterity, and impaired cognitive function, can be detrimental to use of force decision making during critical incidents" (Andersen & Gustafsberg, 2016, p. 2). High pressure situations also negatively affect important areas of the human brain, ultimately impacting an individual's response to specific stimuli. Specifically, stressful situations directly affect the dendritic and synaptic terminals within the brain (Yaribeygi et al., 2017). The lack of function in these areas can be linked to memory dysfunction and reduction, weakened verbal abilities, and a reduction in reaction time. High pressure situations can cause officers to hold their breath, affecting oxygen levels within the bloodstream. When this occurs, proper functioning of the brain is unable to occur, negatively affecting an officer's ability to rely on previous training, department rules, regulations, and laws. Furthermore, a lack of oxygen can lead to a decline in coordination, diminishing the officer's ability to properly react.

Andersen and Gustafsburg (2016) designed a study to track the systematic nervous system of police officers during high pressure events. During this initial training, data was collected to assess the nervous system activity and would later be used for comparison. In the second training session, officers underwent training through a program called iPREP. This

program emphasizes education concerning the physiological reactions of the body when under stress. Furthermore, iPREP teaches officers how to properly conserve energy, prepare the body for situations requiring increased performance, increase their mental focus and visualization techniques, and implement controlled breathing exercises proven to improve the systematic nervous system while in stressful situations. After iPREP training was completed, officers were then asked to perform another critical incident training. Andersen and Gustafsberg (2016) found that officers showed improved bodily control, awareness of surroundings, and performance all together. Additionally, officers showed an improvement in the decision to use force in scenarios where it was truly needed. Educating officers about the systematic nervous system and their natural reactions to stressful situations allows officers to understand what is happening within. Teaching officers' techniques, such as breathing patterns, allows officers to gather themselves in high pressure situations to make correct and accurate decisions. While the iPREP training scenario proved beneficial for police performance, this method is also beneficial for public safety and improving community relations. It is crucial for officers to learn techniques that will allow them to improve control over their actions, thus promoting them to learn to control the actions of others to prevent use of force scenarios.

In a different approach, the National Policing Institute said procedural justice training is an effective training regimen to positively influence officer behavior, reduce crime, and improve community perceptions and relations (National Policing Institute, 2022). Included in this study were three different police departments consisting of twenty-eight police officers responsible for patrolling over one-hundred popular criminal locations. Officers were randomly selected to participate in procedural justice and standard condition training methods. Those participating in the forty hours of procedural justice training were taught to treat citizens with specific traits like

respect, neutrality, trustworthiness, and a listening ear (National Police Institute, 2022). Meanwhile, officers participating in the standard condition group were given no further instruction on how to deal with individuals they interacted with throughout a working shift. Results indicate that procedural justice training is not only effective in influencing the ways in which officers work and interact with those in popular crime areas, but also effective in reducing criminal activity and improving police perceptions and community relations (National Police Institute, 2022). Procedural justice training teaches officers to treat citizens with a considerable amount of respect, diminishing the use of any personal biases that an officer might hold. Ultimately allowing for healthy and transparent communication, allowing the officer to make fair and equal decisions for all involved.

While the present-day techniques used in police academies have seen very few changes since 1986, de-escalation, iPREP, and procedural justice training methods offer resolutions to present issues by teaching future officers to make fair decisions, no matter the situation. (Bradford and Pynes, 1999). To create a police force that can protect all its citizens, it is necessary for police officers to receive the proper training allowing them to do so. This training should equip officers with the ability to make fair and equal decisions in all aspects of police work. Ultimately, this goal is best achieved through present day training techniques.

Dealing with Discretion

When discussing training methods and the effects on police officer decision making, it is necessary to understand officer discretion. Hawkins (1992) says, discretion is a vital tool for those involved in the legal system. More specifically, an officer's use of discretion is a vital tool for decision making and whether or not to take action in specific scenarios. Discretion is a necessary attribute when performing the job of policing. Bittner (1990) says a new officer with

little to no experience is not under the direct view of a manager, boss, or hierarchical members when on patrol. Police officers are heavily reliant on their discretionary powers when speaking with citizens, handling traffic stops, and deciding which vehicles to pull over during patrol (Bittner, 1990).

Ultimately, officers can combine their discretionary powers with prior education and training experiences to guide them in decision making circumstances. If proper education and training methods are not used, officers are not equipped with the necessary tools and skills to make the best decisions in each situation presented. As a result, unwanted outcomes have the potential to arise. These unwanted outcomes put the lives of not only police officers in danger, but citizens as well. For this reason, the influence of prior education and proper training experiences is vital to officer discretion, directly impacting the decision making of police officers.

Use of Force

Of the many situations police officers are responsible for responding to, some may require officers to take forceful actions. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2020), use of force is defined as "the amount of effort required by law enforcement to gain compliance from an unwilling subject" (p. 1). These measures may include physical, non-lethal, and lethal force tactics (National Institute of Justice, 2020). When necessary, an officer must use their own discretion within constraints of department policy and the law to determine if and when force should be used as well as the type of measures to take.

In a cross-national comparative analysis, Hirschfield (2023) compiled statistics from eighteen different countries with historical, demographic, and criminological factors that closely align with the United States. Analyzing the respective countries' data from 2018 through 2020,

Hirschfield (2023), concluded that among all countries included in the study, the United States ranked third in fatal police violence and first in fatal police shootings. Additional findings from Jones and Sawyer of the Prison Policy Initiative (2020) indicate similar results. The United States ranked first in citizens killed by police officers per ten million people and total number of people killed by officers. Specifically, for every ten million people in the United States, almost thirty-four individuals are killed by officers. Nearly 1,100 were killed by officers in the United States; the next closest country, Canada, totaled just thirty-six deaths caused by officers (Jones and Sawyer, 2020). These findings bring to question United States police officers, use of force tactics, and ultimately the fairness of decisions that officers make in these life altering situations.

Decisions made by police officers in use of force situations can be directly linked to academy training methods. Throughout the United States, the average training program consists of eight-hundred forty hours of training time (Reaves & Trotter, 2017). Of this training period, an average of twenty-one hours is spent on use of force tactics. In a ten-hour working day, twenty-one hours accumulates to just above two days of training. According to Lally and colleagues (2010), to create a habit or "automaticity" of a specific skill, a range from eighteen to two-hundred fifty-four days on average are required before an individual can perform the skill habitually. With current training requirements concerning time spent addressing the use of force, training academies are significantly undertraining future officers and negatively impacting their abilities to make fair decisions.

Community Perceptions

According to the American Bar Association (n.d.), the main objectives for police officers in the United States include defending freedom, upholding constitutional rights, and properly imposing laws and regulations to maintain public order. Though officers are aware of these

standards, poor decision making on behalf of law enforcement can contradict these goals and tarnish relations with community members. In doing so, the community may lose trust, confidence, and perceive officers as unreliable. According to Haerpfer and colleagues (2022) of the World Values Survey, 31% of surveyed Americans expressed little to no confidence in the police. The loss of trust in law enforcement can greatly hinder the outcomes of police and community encounters. When citizens no longer respect police, there may become resistance to the officer's requests, and potentially negative reactions and poor decision-making from the officer.

In recent years, the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Bothom Jean have been highlighted across many media platforms. The United States watched as police officers wrongfully ended the lives of many citizens without any apparent need, furthering the distrust towards law enforcement. A single interaction between a citizen and an officer, whether first or secondhand, holds the potential to persuade entire communities (National Institute of Justice, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial for police officers to ensure their demeanor and actions align with the values of their agency.

To ensure legitimacy of officers and regain trust throughout communities, an emphasis must be placed on proper education and training standards. By requiring officers to hold a minimum of a four-year degree, community members will view officers as well-educated individuals thus potentially increasing the status of the job of policing and legitimacy. Increasing education requirements will also ensure future officers are being enrolled in implicit bias and fair treatment training, creating police forces that are aware of racial disparities and are able to interact with community members in a fair, respectful manner. In addition to reduced bias on an officer's behalf, higher education standards may lead to a more positive perspective of policing

from community members.

Along with the necessary changes to the education requirements for police officers, training academies have also been a topic of focus for many researchers. According to Birzer (2003), police training programs are structured in a highly regulated and militaristic manner. Bradford and Pynes (1999) hold that the officer training curriculum is outdated for the present-day police officer. In an analysis of police training academies of all fifty states, Bradford and Pynes (1999) found that very few changes have been made to training programs since 1986. In fact, less than 3% of a cadet's training is dedicated to cognition and decision-making skills (Bradford & Pynes, 1999). The 21st Century task force report concludes, "As our nation becomes more pluralistic and the scope of law enforcement's responsibilities expands, the need for more and better training has become critical" (21st Century Task Force Report, 2015).

To combat the new challenges and responsibilities of police officers, proper education requirements and training methods need to be implemented to ensure proper decision making by police officers. For example, Birzer (2003) argued the training of police officers needs to be delivered in a way that prepares recruits for the job of policing in a more effective and efficient manner and advocates for change through the adult education theory of andragogy. Moreover, Birzer (2003) suggested the most efficient and effective training should center around self-directed learning. By focusing on this specific style of learning, trainees will develop problem solving skills, communication skills, and create a sense of independence. Each of these attributes are vital to fair decision making. Birzer (2003) said learning these skills while in training academies compared to on the job will increase overall police performance. Additionally, he stated recruits should be trained in a style that is representative of the tasks and styles of policing that they will face when they become police officers. Continuing to train recruits with the same

methods that have seen little change since 1986 fails to improve the current state of policing

(Birzer 2003; Bradford & Pynes, 1999). By deviating from the current militaristic style of

training, police academies should focus on teaching recruits how to recognize, acknowledge, and

solve issues pertaining to a wide range of criminal activity, prompting fair decisions to be made

in each scenario. It is with hope that a softer approach during academy training will prompt

officers to react to situations in a more appropriate manner, leading to improved relations with

the communities they serve.

CHAPTER 4

THE IMPORTANCE OF INCREASED EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

The effects of higher education are proven to be beneficial, specifically in the workplace. In effort to encourage changing the educational requirements, August Vollmer linked education to policing with hopes of creating a well-rounded and professional police force. Vollmer believed that schools dedicated specifically for the job of policing were necessary to improve policing overall (Carte, 1973). Throughout his service as President of the California Police Chiefs Association, Vollmer's impact concerning policing standards and police education programs influenced state legislation in California and the United States criminal justice system (Carte, 1973). While Vollmer advocated for the professionalization of police forces through increased education requirements, present day research continues to develop the relationship between police work and higher education.

Current Education Requirements

Despite the benefits of higher education, a college degree is seldom a mandatory requirement for recruits wishing to join a policing agency. Statistics obtained from the 2003 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey found of 13,000 local police departments, 18% obligated officers to possess a form of college experience, of which, only 1% required a minimum of a bachelor's degree (Hickman & Reaves, 2006). Years later, the survey was completed again in 2013 and showed 84% of departments required a high school diploma, 10% required an associates degree, and 1% required a bachelor's degree (Reaves, 2015). Little to no changes were made concerning education requirements for police officers from 2003 through 2013. Even in recent years, only 35% of police officers held a bachelor's degree or higher (Gardiner, 2017). As the job of policing continues to grow and evolve,

education requirements should follow, ensuring officers are prepared to respond to a wide range of situations.

As the United States continues to grow and develop, higher education has become essential to Americans. In past generations, Americans often held no high school diploma and college education was not considered a necessity. Although, in recent years higher education has become increasingly popular. According to Hanson (2024), from 1970 to 2020, the number of students enrolled in college level courses has increased by 11.6 million students, 61% identified as full-time students. Despite these statistics, police departments continue to impose education requirements that do not correlate with education trends throughout the United States (Roberg & Bonn, 2004). To create a police force that is fit to serve and protect all its citizens, it is necessary for the United States, policy makers, and policing agencies to understand the effects of education and raise such requirements on a national level.

Effects of Education and Officer Quality

With the previously mentioned benefits of higher education and its impact on individuals in the workplace, one would believe that requiring a bachelor's degree would be a requirement held by police agencies nationwide to improve police officer performance. Yet, this is simply not the standard. In fact, only 1.3% of police agencies require a minimum of a four-year college degree for recruits to be eligible to begin the application process (Gardiner, 2017). This statistic has recently raised concern for citizens and communities across the United States, yet the call for improvements of higher education and police training originated long before. In 1931, The National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement submitted their suggestions for officer requirements, which were later reinforced by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice in 1967, along with the National Advisory

Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals in 1973 (Manis, Archbold, & Hassell, 2008). Although the need for further prerequisites has been discussed for a multitude of years, very few revisions have been made.

In a study conducted by Kappeler, Sapp, and Carter (1992), one-hundred twenty full-time police officers of an average sized Midwest department were analyzed over a five-year period. Kappeler and his colleagues examined the relationship between the number of citizen complaints towards officers with a bachelor's degree and officers without a college degree. Over the period, it was found that 29% of the officers did not have a college education, yet they were responsible for over 40% of citizen complaints. While the less educated police officers represented a smaller population within the police department, their officer to complaint ratio drastically outnumbered the officers with an education (Kappeler, Sapp, & Carter, 1992). Throughout the study, citizens' complaints against officers were categorized as the improper or unlawful uses of deadly or excessive force, assault, misuse of weapons or firearms, inaccurate reports and false statements, illegal searches of vehicles, reckless driving, and rudeness. Rudeness was found to be the most frequently occurring variable, and undereducated officers continued to generate most of the undesirable outcomes. The study also identified an indirect relationship between education and citizen filed complaints (Kappeler et. al, 1992). The higher the education an officer holds, the less likely they were to have a citizen file a complaint against them. With officers interacting with the community daily, it is imperative they conduct themselves in a professional and cordial manner to ensure fair treatment of all citizens.

Likewise, Manis, Archibold, and Hassell (2008) performed a study focusing on citizen complaints towards officers. Manis and colleagues explored the types of complaints filed by citizens, differences in discipline methods, and the effects of education and field experience

factors on complaints made by citizens. They, too, found strong differences in the number of complaints between officers with four-year degrees and officers without. Although officers with higher education were found to have fewer complaints, this statistic was not impacted by the area of study for the college degree (Manis, Archibold, & Hassell, 2008). Such conclusions indicate that the area of education is insignificant to the performance level of a police officer; rather, overall higher education is necessary to improve impartial decision making and treatment of citizens. These results coincide with Kappeler and colleagues' findings in their study of education versus complaints. Officers must be properly educated to be equipped with the attributes necessary to make fair decisions while patrolling their communities.

In addition to the previous research, Worden (1990) stated increasing the education standard will "prepare candidates more thoroughly for supervisory and administrative positions, and it might enhance the human resources on which innovative managerial practices (such as quality circles or problem-oriented policing) could draw. Stiffer educational requirements might serve to attract better recruits by raising the status of the occupation" (p. 589). While increasing the education requirement may decrease the number of potential recruits willing to complete a bachelor's degree, police agencies can expect to employ officers with the ability to make better decisions, increase community perceptions, and create safer communities overall.

According to the data collected from the previously mentioned researchers, it is statistically proven a higher level of education results in superior decision making and an improved quality of service to the community. While some may argue a 60-hour education is sufficient for the role of an officer, Manis, Archibold, and Hassell link the positive correlation trend of education to performance, therefore proving a traditional bachelor's degree, or 120 hours of education, to be a more favorable requirement.

Workplace Benefits

Obtaining a degree of higher education is a vital step not only for improving the understanding of a specific subject of interest, but also obtaining the skills that come along with the completion of the degree. The education and skills that are learned while working towards a degree can be constructive attributes in the workplace. Better decision-making and problem-solving are just the beginning of the benefits from attending an institution for higher education.

Throughout a college career, a student can expect to interact with a wide range of people, each with different demographics, financial situations, and lifestyles (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). These differences offer a vital opportunity for students to learn how to interact and accept others who may not look, believe, or think like themselves (Pauker et. al, 2018). Learning to accept these differences has the potential to create strong relationships, improve group performance, and teach future police officers how to interact with a wide range of suspects and co-workers. The ability of an officer to put aside their differences allows for the clear and concise implementation of laws and regulations, a comfortable work environment, improved relations with community members, and ultimately leading to improved performance and decision-making. Rather than solely relying on academy training, officers can integrate prior experiences from their higher education to decide the best way to deal with each situation for the most desirable outcome.

Racial Discrimination

Presently, disparities towards minority groups, specifically African Americans, continue to be present and are highlighted throughout the United States prison population. As of 2021, over 1.1 million individuals were in the U.S. prison system, of which African Americans represented 32% of the total population (Carson, 2021). While the previously mentioned data

only accounts for those in confinement, African Americans are also disproportionately stopped and arrested by police officers compared to Caucasian Americans.

In a study conducted in Oakland, California, researchers found that during routine traffic enforcements, over 60% of citizens stopped by police officers were African American though the group accounts for under 30% of the city's population (Hetey & Eberhardt, 2018). While these statistics merely represent one city of the United States, disparities can be found nationwide. Kochel, Wilson, and Mastrofski (2011) compiled data from twenty-seven previous studies concerning suspect skin color and the likelihood of an arrest occurring. Minority suspects were nearly 30% more likely to be arrested than suspects who were White. Suspect skin color is a predictive factor in determining the outcome of a suspect and police officer interaction.

Robinson (2017) found that unarmed African American males are shot and killed at unequal rates compared to other races. From January 1, 2015, to December 31, 2015, 36% of deaths caused by police officers were African American, despite this race only accounting for 7% of the population in the United States.

The combination of data from these studies shows the disproportionate number of stops and arrests African Americans experience compared to other races. Implementing training techniques such as diversity and inclusion trainings as well as exposure to minority groups could serve to lessen the disproportionate level of police targeting. According to Greene (2000), in a survey of five-hundred forty-three universities, nearly sixty-five percent required undergraduate students to participate in diversity and inclusion courses. These courses aim to teach students anti-racism beliefs that will impact them not only throughout their time as a college student, but also in their professional careers as well. College educated officers have the potential to learn skills through these courses that could positively impact their skills and relations with whom they

serve.

In addition, college students are exposed to a wide range of demographics through classes, sports teams, clubs, and campus activities. This exposure can be linked to the contact theory, which suggests that increased contact between two different groups can lead to a better understanding, as these groups start to acknowledge and accept differing values, beliefs, cultures, and issues (Forbes, 2004). By simply going to college, the ability of an officer to relate with individuals of different demographics has the potential to increase.

When policing, officers are exposed to an entire population of different races, religions, beliefs, and more. It is important for law enforcement to be unbiased, yet some have personal stereotypes about certain groups of individuals, potentially leading to the disproportionate and unfair treatment of members within society. Stereotypes can be referred to as preconceived thoughts and opinions towards members of different groups in a society (Lee, Jussim, & McCauley, 1995). These stereotypes may include police officers' beliefs that specific demographics can be linked to increased criminal activity, gang involvement, etc. To prevent unfavorable outcomes from stereotypes, Forbes (2004) believes that by simply increasing the amount of contact that police officers have with members of different ethnicities, the more they will be able to understand and relate to their problems and concerns. Although not all contact is healthy and beneficial, these circumstances can lead to unfavorable outcomes. Preconceived biases and stereotypes may impact the amount of contact students are willing to initiate and may lead to confirmation of previously held beliefs. For this reason, colleges and universities should implement courses aimed at reducing stereotypes and biases, positively influencing healthy contact and improved relations. Prior to an individual being hired as a police officer, contact with many different demographics while attending college and earning a bachelor's degree can

prepare them for the wide range of citizens that they might encounter throughout their career. Thus, furthering their development of real-world scenarios and improving their ability to make fair decisions.

CHAPTER 5

UNACCOUNTED ISSUES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

To create a successful country, controlling and deterring criminal activity is necessary. In the United States, this is accomplished by deploying police officers to enforce laws and regulations among citizens. Throughout the history of the United States, the deterrence of criminal activity has greatly improved, transforming from volunteer-based systems to organized agencies with employed officers. This professional police front has modernized to many social standards, yet the education requirements of officers have not been upgraded as expected, though many researchers, political figures, and police members have advocated and studied the need for improvement.

In recent years, the United States has made headlines concerning police violence, ranking third in fatal police violence and first in fatal police shootings (Hirschfield, 2023; Jones & Sawyer 2020). Additionally, the United States ranked first in citizens killed by police officers per ten million people and experienced one thousand one hundred individuals' deaths because of police officers in 2020 (Jones and Sawyer, 2020). Decisions that officers make in these tense situations can be directly linked to prior experiences learned through academy training methods. On average, police training programs take eight-hundred forty hours to complete (Reaves & Trotter, 2017). However, only twenty-one of those hours is spent on use of force tactics. According to Lally and colleagues (2010), twenty-one hours is not nearly enough to create habits that would allow officers to refer to prior training experiences, resulting in unfair decision making and undesired consequences.

As of 2021, over 1.1 million individuals were in the U.S. prison system, of which African Americans represented 32% of the total population (Carson, 2021). While African Americans

represent a large portion of the prison population, disparities can also be seen in who the police

encounter. Hetey & Eberhardt (2018) find in Oakland, California, African Americans are

disproportionately targeted by police officers in relation to the demographics that make up the

city. The practice of targeting minority groups by police officers can be found nationwide. Data

compiled from twenty-seven studies shows that minority suspects are 30% more likely to be

arrested, shot, or killed (Kochel, Wilson & Mastrofski, 2011; Robinson, 2017).

Through higher education, students can partake in diversity and inclusion trainings.

These trainings aim to teach students anti-racism beliefs. Future police officers can equip

themselves with the necessary skills to lessen the disproportionate levels of police targeting by

learning to make fair, unbiased decisions. In addition to diversity and inclusion trainings, college

students are exposed to a wide range of demographics. The simple exposure to a range of

different demographics can be linked to the contact theory. Increasing the amount of contact

between two different groups provides insight into different values, beliefs, cultures, issues, and

provides individuals with an understanding of differences (Forbes, 2004). These experiences

may allow individuals to better understand those who look different or hold contrasting beliefs

and values, leading to enhanced decision making from future officers when in contact with

individuals of diverse backgrounds.

According to the Haerpfer and colleagues (2022) of the World Values Survey, 31% of

Americans expressed little to no confidence in the police. This distrust may lead to unfavorable

outcomes for both police and community members. As seen in previous years, the deaths

George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Bothom Jean greatly shocked the public, resulting in

protests, calls to defund police agencies, and an overall change. To regain the trust of community

members, proper education and training standards must be implemented, sharing the details of

these heinous interactions with hopes officers learn from these mistakes to prevent history from repeating itself.

While higher education can teach the history of policing and other classroom-based learning, the decision making preparation of an officer is greatly attributed to their academy's training, and for many locations, further development is solicited. Currently, police training programs hold strong ties to military training styles (Birzer, 2003), and have seen little to no change since 1986 (Bradford & Pynes, 1999). The 21st Century Task Force Report (2015) recommends that as the job of policing continues to expand in its responsibilities, the training in which officers receive needs to coincide with what officers will experience on a day-to-day basis. This can be accomplished through self-directed learning, known as the adult education theory of andragogy (Birzer, 2003). By developing problem solving skills, communication skills, and a sense of independence, recruits will be better equipped to make fair decisions in the field.

Members of the 21st Century Task Force Report hold the notion of today's police officers being trained and highly skilled in alliance with operation standards (21st Century Task Force Report, 2015). Granted, the goal of policing is more than being effective and efficient, but also fair and just. The improvement of training techniques can guide officers by these conventions. De-escalation techniques are one of the many trainings that an officer could receive, cultivating their skills for tense moments with violent or resistant subjects. This method has been deemed effective by allowing officers to consider a range of options and choose the one that has the most desirable outcome for all parties involved (Engel, Corsaro, Isaza, & McManus, 2020).

Another strategy proven effective includes procedural justice policing which has shown the ability to reduce citizen complaints by 10% (Wood, Tyler & Papachristos, 2020). By placing emphasis on values such as respect and transparency towards citizens, officers can personally

connect with members of their community, resulting in fair treatment of the communities'

officers serve (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015; Wood, Tyler, &

Papachristos, 2020).

Additional training recommendations include the use of the iPREP program, which

emphasizes the physiological reactions of the body when under stress. iPREP teaches officers

how to properly conserve energy, prepare the body for situations requiring increased

performance, increase their mental focus and visualization techniques, and implement controlled

breathing exercises proven to improve the systematic nervous system while in stressful situations

(Anderson and Gustafsburg, 2016). By implementing this style of training in academies, police

officers can be relied upon to logically respond, even in tense, high pressure situations when the

body is under stress.

Overall, the decisions made by police officers on a daily basis can be attributed to officer

discretion, a vital tool when performing the job of policing (Hawkins, 1992). While new officers

have very little experience in the field, there is usually no supervisor present when on patrol,

leaving them to make decisions as they see fit (Bittner, 1990). Since decision making is heavily

influenced by previous experience, implementing a four-year degree education minimum and

proper training methods can provide officers with sufficient expertise to serve their communities,

regardless of their level of experience.

Pending future research and a collective analysis of officer education, it is with hopes

measures will be taken to ensure the schooling and training of law enforcement align with the

requirements and expectations of the job. Though a four-year-degree will not solve all issues

within the criminal justice system, it may aid in achieving improved decision making among

officers and fair treatment within communities.

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