



Department of Criminology Research Series

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“Testing Assumptions about Officers of Color: How Different are they from White Officers?”

Abstract

Longstanding tensions between police and black communities have weakened formal social control in these areas and touched off mass protests (and even riots) after controversial police killings of black suspects. A frequent response to these incidents and the protests that follow them is to call on police agencies to hire more officers of color. The underlying presumption is that minority officers are less likely to use questionable or overtly excessive levels of force against black resistors and will be more skilled at working with individuals and communities of color. These assumptions have not been empirically tested, however, and their accuracy remains unknown. In two recent studies, my colleagues and I attempted to add empiricism to this conversation. First, we examined whether black and white officers use force differently on black and white resistors. Analyses of use-of-force reports from six police agencies revealed that, controlling for suspect resistance and other relevant factors, white officers used higher levels of force against black resistors, while black officers used the same levels of force against both black and white resistors. In the second study, we used officer-survey data from a mid-sized police department in Florida to compare black, Latino, and white officers' attitudes on four dimensions. The purpose was to discern whether officers of color differed from their white colleagues in terms of their role orientations (law enforcement, order maintenance, and community policing) and in the level of cynicism they hold toward citizens.

Friday, Oct. 20, 10:00

Social Science Conference Room 351

Faculty, Staff and Students
are Invited

