



FAIR AND IMPARTIAL POLICING

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY TRANSFORMS LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

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Fairness and impartiality are the hallmarks of policing in a democratic society. In 1829, Sir Robert Peel wrote, "the police preserve public favour by absolute fair and impartial service to the law." His words are particularly poignant today as police organizations, internationally, face the challenges of providing safe, effective and just police services to the diverse communities they serve.

Biased policing — whether actual or perceived — threatens the relationship between police and community members. Without the demonstration of fundamental fairness and transparent impartiality, police risk not only the trust and confidence of the communities they serve but also the loss of the values that underlie a democracy.

ADDRESSING BIASED POLICING

Law enforcement professionals, community members, and academics continue to engage in vigorous discussions about racial/ethnic-biased policing. Much of this discussion has been based on an assumption that rampant and perhaps deeply ingrained racism in police produces biased policing.

Accusations of "widespread racism" among police are unproven and have inevitably led to defensive responses on the part of law enforcement. Police leaders who have heard that biased policing results from "widespread racism" within the profession may be disinclined to acknowledge a problem and therefore disinclined to initiate potential reforms. Similarly, officers who have heard the "racist police" characterization may deny the existence of biased policing and their involvement in it (Fridell, 2008).

THE SCIENCE OF HUMAN BIAS

While some biased policing is caused by intentional discrimination, research points to another mechanism producing biased behaviour. Social psychologists have shown that biases are normal human attributes — even well-meaning people, who consciously ascribe to non-prejudiced beliefs and attitudes, have unconscious or "implicit biases."

One implicit bias that has particular relevance for policing is the automatic or implicit association between minorities and crime (Eberhart, et.al., 2004). Over six de-

CADES of research has identified this implicit bias linking minorities and crime even in people who test as "non prejudiced" and are otherwise "consciously tolerant." This association has shown impacts on both perceptions and behaviour.

The good news from this extensive research is that people who are aware of their implicit biases can reduce or eliminate their impact on behaviour (Dovidio, et.al. 2000). Additionally, a 2007 study by Correll indicated that police training can reduce the impact of unconscious bias on behaviour.¹

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICE TRAINING

A broader conceptualization of biased policing — one that acknowledges the existence of human biases, even in well-intentioned individuals — is not only more accurate in conveying the causes of biased policing, but also reduces police defensiveness. Such a perspective acknowledges that the vast majority of police personnel are well-meaning and dedicated to serving all citizens with fairness and dignity. Despite their good intentions, their behaviours may still manifest



biased policing or give rise to the perceptions of it. Like humans in every profession, these officers may not be fully cognizant of the extent to which race/ethnicity impact their decision-making or the behaviours that may give rise to citizen perceptions of bias.

A law enforcement organization that acknowledges the potential impact of implicit bias on police behaviour would want training that addresses the following five things: makes personnel aware of implicit biases; gives personnel skills to counteract their implicit biases; helps first-line supervisors understand how to identify biased policing in their subordinates, early and effectively; assists law enforcement executives in developing organizational policies that promote fair and impartial policing; and engages law enforcement executives and community leaders in collaborative learning to produce fair and impartial policing.

The Fair and Impartial Policing Training Program (FIPTP) is a science-based training program that applies the social psychological research on human bias to police policy and practice. Four separate, complementary curricula encompass the FIPTP:

- Recruit academy/patrol officers
- First-line supervisors
- Training-of-trainers²
- Command/community leaders³

Each curriculum presents the science of human bias, focusing not just on racial/ethnic bias, but also on gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation/identity and religious biases. The training design is comprehensive: it engages officers as "research participants" — vividly demonstrating what the science tells us about how humans process perceptions and associations; it challenges officers to question the quick conclusions they might draw about individuals with whom they interact; and it allows officers to practise the skills that will result in safe, effective and just policing.

Supervisors also learn to identify and respond to bias in their subordinates and reflect upon how bias might manifest in their own work. They can address how difficult it is to identify biased behaviour and discuss the importance of supervising to promote fair and impartial policing.

The training-of-trainers course is designed to allow teams of highly experienced instructors to learn the substance and train-

ing methods of both the recruit/patrol officers and supervisors curricula. The command/community leader training empowers participants to implement a comprehensive agency program to produce fair and impartial policing.

"YOU'VE GOT TO BE CAREFULLY TAUGHT"

To paraphrase Oscar Hammerstein II's lyrics from South Pacific, "you've got to be [carefully] taught to be unafraid of people whose eyes are oddly made, or people whose skin is a different shade." While implicit associations take a lifetime to develop and are difficult to reduce or eliminate, people can learn to implement controlled (unbiased) behavioural responses that override automatic (biased) associations.

The Fair and Impartial Policing (FIP) perspective changes the way we think about bias and helps policing professionals and their agencies promote safe, effective and just policing as envisioned by Peel and in the finest traditions of policing in a democratic society. ■

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¹ Allport and Postman, 1947; Correll, et. al. 2002; Devine, 1989; Duncan, 1976; Greenwald, Oakes and Hoffman, 2003; Payne, 2001; Sugar and Schofield, 1980; Eberhardt, et. al. 2004.

² The Recruit /Patrol Officers, First-Line Supervisors and Training-of-Trainers' curricula were developed by the University of South Florida and Circle Solutions, Inc. with funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, cooperative agreement # 2010CKEXK015.

³ The Command/Community Leaders curriculum was developed by Fair and Impartial Policing, LLC.

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