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# WHAT CAN GO WRONG WHEN EVERYTHING IS RIGHT? USING ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE TO UNDERSTAND POLICE MISCONDUCT AND IMPROVE PERSONNEL SYSTEMS

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## ABSTRACT

### KEYWORDS

organizational justice, police, selection, trickle-down, group engagement, social identity

Despite decades of attention paid to police reform, cases of officer misconduct still continue to plague policing organizations. Assuming that organizations may still experience such officer malfeasance even when attempting to pursue best practices, we aim to explore how things can go wrong when everything else seems right. Specifically, we rely on trickle-down models of organizational justice, group engagement, and social identity to articulate how otherwise desirable organizational outcomes may produce detrimental outgroup biases. Based on our theoretical premise, we articulate specific changes that can be made to personnel systems that may avoid such officer misconduct in policing contexts.

“Police kill a Latino man in California, admit he didn’t have gun” – [Gueverra, 2020](#)

“Texas cop fatally shoots black woman in her own home during welfare check, police say” – [Miller, 2019](#)

“Minnesota officer charged with manslaughter for shooting Philando Castile during incident streamed on Facebook” – [Berman, 2016](#)

In 2021, increased attention has been paid to the ways in which police officers respond to unarmed citizens, especially those from historically marginalized groups. For example, the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd have garnered national attention and outrage. In March of 2020, Louisville officers entered the home of Ms. Taylor—an aspiring EMT—on the suspicion the home had been used by another person to ferry packages related to the drug trade. Ms. Taylor and her boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, believed they were the victims of a break in, as they heard no announcement made by the police, and Mr. Walker reported that he fired a gun in self-defense. Police responded in kind. Breonna Taylor was struck five times. According to

a coroner, she likely perished a minute after being shot. No drugs were found in the home ([Oppel et al., 2021](#)).

In May of 2020, Ms. Taylor’s case received more attention as the perceived deterioration in relations between police officers and marginalized citizens was thrust to the forefront of the national and even global stage with the unjustified killing of George Floyd. Police had been called because Mr. Floyd purportedly used a counterfeit \$20 bill. For nearly 10 minutes, a Minneapolis police officer pinned Mr. Floyd down by kneeling on his neck, which was not an authorized use of force technique. Mr. Floyd exclaimed, “I can’t breathe” multiple times. Mr. Floyd was pronounced dead later that evening ([Arango, 2021](#)). Mr. Floyd’s murder was documented by body cam and bystander footage, which resulted in weeks-long protests all over the world that shined a spotlight on the need to swiftly reform policing in America.

As the headlines at the beginning of this section illu-

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minate, there are significant and persistent issues with how police officers interact with unarmed marginalized citizens that make the cases of Ms. Taylor and Mr. Floyd emblematic of a concerning trend rather than one-off errors in judgment. Due not only to the attention paid to police misconduct but also to the negative and at times violent response by police to protests calling for reform (e.g., Black Lives Matter or BLM), there has been a growing public perception of a spiraling deterioration in the relationship between police departments and marginalized citizens (Barrett & Welsh, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2020; Quinnipiac University, 2021). The complexity of the relationship between police departments and marginalized citizens has continued to perplex law enforcement leaders as they work to find ways to improve relations. This complexity is further compounded by marginalized citizens placing less trust in police due to past experiences of police misconduct, racial profiling, and racial disparities in overall police behavior (Cochran & Warren, 2012; Nadal & Davidoff, 2015).

Indeed, state legislatures across the United States are renewing their energy and attention on formulating new laws aimed at reforming police departments in hopes of curtailing the level of violence used when interacting with citizens. The death of Ms. Taylor resulted in the ban of no-knock warrants in Louisville (Oppel et al., 2021), whereas the death of Mr. Floyd has provoked a civil rights investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (Arango, 2021). As a means of police reform, lawmakers are creating policies that limit the amount of force police officers can use (Stoughton et al., 2021), require that body cams are worn by all police officers (Adams & Mastracci, 2019), revisit the idea of qualified immunity that is afforded to sworn police officers (Duckett, 2016), or even strip police officers involved in misconduct of their Peace Officer Standards Training (POST) certification and licensure to work as a police officer within the United States (Goldman & Puro, 2001). Although the effort to reform police departments is renewed, it is not entirely new. Police reform has been a hot topic for decades, with conversations regarding police reform emerging in the 1960s (Bazelon, 2020) if not earlier; yet decades of discussion, investigation, and reform have yielded very little change with regard to how police officers interact with citizens (see O'Brien et al., 2019), particularly those from historically marginalized groups.

*Bad apples* are a few unsavory individuals that can drive the unethical behaviors within an organization (Trevino & Youngblood, 1990), such as an employee that slightly overcharges customers and pockets the money. Bad barrels are unknown factors within an organization's culture that cause otherwise good employees to turn into bad apples. Such factors include, for example, peer pressure from other employees to sell a car that is a known lemon to an unsuspecting customer for the sake of making a hefty commission. (Trevino & Youngblood, 1990). Regardless of the

organization or industry in question, bad apples and bad barrels can lead to unwanted outcomes for the organization. Any time an organization is involved in wrongdoing, it can be troublesome for the organization's stakeholders. However, when organizations such as police departments are involved in wrongdoing, it can be especially worrisome for all involved because the consequences can be grave (Muzio et al., 2016).

Without a doubt, we are witnessing encounter after encounter where interactions between police officers and marginalized citizens escalate from routine stops for low-level infractions to deadly outcomes (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017). To explain these unfortunate outcomes, people have relied on narratives ranging from these types of occurrences being rare to police intentionally using more excessive force when interacting with marginalized citizens (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). Regardless of the reasons for the deadly outcomes, the questions remain the same. Those questions are, how can an organization charged with upholding laws, behaving in a fair and ethical manner, and serving and protecting everyone be perceived as treating marginalized citizens tougher than their non-marginalized counterparts? Are police departments overrun by bad apples or, even worse, bad barrels? These are important questions, particularly since police departments are "integral parts of the institutional system of checks and balances which should prevent corruption" (Muzio et al., 2016, p.143) and not engage in corruption and wrongdoing.

If given the benefit of the doubt—that decades of reform have produced some changes (e.g., community policing, increase in mental health practitioners on the force)—why does the public still observe so much going wrong? Many of the ideas on police reform focus on modifying current organizational policies or standard operating procedures. We believe, though, that much of this is done on an ad-hoc basis in response to inciting incidents (e.g., the abandonment of no-knock warrants in response to the death of Ms. Taylor). We therefore believe that an approach grounded in industrial-organizational psychological theory may provide a stronger basis for both understanding *why* things continue to "go wrong" in policing contexts and *how* personnel systems can be leveraged to improve them.

Currently, there is a plethora of research that shows the perception of injustice can lead employees to engage in behaviors such as workplace deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2003), counterproductive work behaviors (Kelloway et al., 2010), or workplace sabotage (Ambrose, et al., 2002). Within the context of policing, the perception of an unjust police department can lead to officers engaging in more police misconduct and violating expected police norms (Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). Undoubtedly, police officers carry a tremendous weight on their shoulders, as they are expected to protect and serve their citizenry, they are entrusted to abide by all laws, and they represent the very meaning of justice

within the communities that they serve. In order for police officers to execute their duties and responsibilities in a fair and equitable way, they must view their police department as a fair organization.

When police officers view their departments as fair, this can lead them to feel more committed to the department and its goals (Aryee et al., 2007), officers can become more productive as they exercise their duties within their communities (Ostroff, 1992), and, more importantly, officers can enjoy an improved relationship with their “customers”—the citizens within their communities (Masterson, 2001). Yet, even in the presence of justice, there are still police officers that engage in police misconduct (Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). To date, there has been very little research that examines how strong enactment of organizational justice within police departments can still allow, and in fact facilitate, misconduct toward citizens (Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). Therefore, to address this gap, we turn to trickle-down justice models and the group engagement model of organizational justice.

We specifically articulate a theoretical perspective grounded in trickle-down justice (Masterson, 2001) that illuminates how fairness may not extend beyond the walls of police departments—especially when ingroup/outgroup dynamics are considered. Building on this perspective, we then suggest adjustments to police departments’ personnel systems that, after empirical validation, may prove an effective means to limit these ingroup/outgroup dynamics and therefore mitigate police misconduct while interacting with citizens. We must note that *misconduct* throughout this paper will pertain to any deviant, undesirable, or erroneous behavior that—consistent with Wolfe and Piquero (2011)—may result in formalized sanctions such as “filing a formal complaint, an internal affairs investigation, or departmental disciplinary charges,” (p. 333). As such, we rely on an organizational justice and a trickle-down model to understand when misconduct may occur and how job analysis, selection, training, and work design may prevent such an outcome.

Furthermore, we argue that the group engagement model (Tyler & Blader, 2003) and trickle-down models more broadly (see Wo et al., 2015) fit the policing context because officers are part of a unique culture. Police culture, commonly referred to as the “blue family,” has been defined as “a set of values, attitudes, and norms that are widely shared among officers, who find in the culture a way to cope with the strains of their working environment” (Paoline et al., 2000, p. 575). In other words, police officers rely on each other to get them through the highly stressful tasks with which police officers deal. Westley (1970) further characterized police culture as one in which police officers are extremely loyal to each other, rely on secrecy among themselves, and generally distrust anyone who is not part of this strong ingroup. Becoming a member of this police cul-

ture typically occurs when a new police officer attends a police academy and during field training. It is “at these times [that] senior officers teach new recruits the shared norms and values of the police culture, both formally and informally, on and off the job,” (Rose & Unnithan, 2015, p. 281). Moreover, within a policing context, the chain of command consists of police supervisors at the top of the chain down to street level officers at the bottom of the chain. The upper level of the chain of command typically consists of a police chief, police major, police captain, police lieutenant, and police sergeant.

Each of the higher levels of command have varying degrees of power and control over the officers below them. Specifically, “officers at the lowest rank receive their orders from (and report to) the next layer of hierarchy (composed of sergeants, for example) and this second layer receives its orders from the next layer (e.g., lieutenants) and so on” (King, 2003, p. 209). Police organizations are therefore “a tightly woven environment” (Skolnick, 2005) in which close and frequent interactions (that would be necessitated by any trickle-down model) take place. Moreover, the pervasive culture of loyalty and closeness will result in strong ingroup identity. A trickle-down model based on a group engagement perspective should therefore improve our understanding of police officers’ interactions and misconduct with citizens.

Our theoretical perspective makes a number of contributions to the literature. First, this work is both timely and important in that it addresses growing societal concerns regarding the perception that when it comes to how police officers respond, fair treatment by police officers is either not extended or is only extended to certain citizens. Although this perception is very salient today, this phenomenon has been under study for decades. Williams and Murphy (1990) argued that the response strategies that police departments used when responding to calls dealing with minority citizens were different from those response strategies used when dealing with other citizens. Furthermore, the difference in response styles may have been driven by “the idea that minorities have fewer civil rights, that the task of the police is to keep them under control, and that the police have little responsibility for protecting them from crime within their communities” (Williams & Murphy, 1990, p. 2). We contend that this way of thinking could make it much easier for some police officers to feel that they can “get away” with mistreating or withholding fair treatment from marginalized citizens. As such, our work therefore aims to provide a theoretical grounding for predicting and assessing when this kind of misconduct will take place and how to address it using personnel systems.

Second, from a theoretical perspective, we contribute to extant research on trickle-down models of organizational justice by examining why organizational justice does not always trickle down. Though this discussion could apply to

a wide variety of organizations, our conversation will focus on the dynamic between police officers and the citizens they have been sworn to protect and serve. The existing research has argued that when employees perceive fairness, they are likely to extend that fairness to the organization's customers (Masterson, 2001), but this research does not consider the possibility that fairness may not be extended to external stakeholders in all instances. By incorporating the group engagement model into a policing context, we provide a more thorough understanding of how trickle-down effects may stop short of reaching marginalized citizens. Moreover, by incorporating social identity and how this plays a role in setting boundaries between ingroup members (i.e., police officers) and outgroup members (i.e., citizenry), we expand upon the trickle-down effects literature to show the instances in which some police officers may fail to extend fairness to citizens even though they themselves have experienced fair treatment.

Third, we also offer practical and useful assessment and appraisal guidelines that police administrators may be able to use to make better personnel assessments, decisions, and systems. Although the personnel systems of many police systems are extensive (Cochrane et al., 2003), police administrators cannot afford to ignore any opportunities to select, train, and manage performance in ways that will minimize ingroup/outgroup dynamics among officers and citizens (and thus we argue, mitigate officer misconduct). With this paper, we provide a theoretically grounded set of practices and tools that police administrators may be able to use to hire officers who can and enable offices to extend fairness to every citizen.

### Organizational Justice and Trickle-Down Theories

Trickle-down models of justice (Masterson, 2001; see also, Wo et al., 2015) reflect the processes by which experiences of fairness in organizational settings can cascade from higher to lower levels.<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, trickle-down models argue that the experiences of individuals at these higher levels translate into similar experiences for their subordinates. According to Wo and colleagues (2015), three theoretical perspectives have emerged in trickle-down research: social learning theory (e.g., Ambrose et al., 2013), social exchange (e.g., Masterson, 2001), and displaced aggression (see Hoobler & Brass, 2006). Social learning theory perspectives on trickle-down justice, according to Wo and colleagues (2015), are predicated on the idea that workers learn appropriate means of treating others from their superiors (see Bandura, 1977). As such, if superiors treat subordinates fairly, subordinates will mimic that behavior. Social exchange theory perspectives (see Blau, 1964) similarly provide the expectation that subordinates will enact similar behavior to that which they receive but rather as a consequence of indirect reciprocity for their own

fair treatment (Wo et al., 2015) rather than mimicry. Finally, displaced aggression—which can be thought of in terms of the “kick the dog” phenomenon (Marcus-Newhall et al., 2000)—pertains to trickle-down effects that emerge when subordinates cannot respond in kind to their superiors for unfair treatment. More effectively driven than the previous mechanisms (Wo et al., 2015), displaced aggression similarly would predict similar treatment for subordinates when superiors treat them poorly. As such, though the mechanisms vary, each of these perspectives argues that the treatment experienced by persons higher in the organizational hierarchy is replicated in how those individuals treat others below them in the hierarchy.

However, these models and their corresponding empirical support (e.g., Ambrose et al., 2013; Homburg & Stock, 2004; Masterson, 2001; Mawritz et al., 2012; Mayer et al., 2009; Rafferty et al., 2010; Wo et al., 2015) suggest that fairness should trickle outside of the organization (i.e., beyond those formally employed by the organization) to other stakeholders such as clients and customers. Masterson (2001), for example, examined how professors' perceptions of fairness within their departments and colleges impacted students' ratings of the professors' fairness. They found that indeed professors' own experience of fairness trickled down to students. Empirical research examining customer outcomes more broadly has found that employee experiences of justice lead to better customer evaluations (Maxham et al., 2008), including customer perceptions of fairness (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003). Pertaining to police contexts in particular, research has shown that police officer perceptions of fairness within their organization lead to greater perceptions of trust in the community they patrol (Carr & Maxwell, 2018) and more positive perceptions of the public (Myhill & Bradford, 2013). Research by Wolfe and Piquero (2011) similarly suggests that greater perceptions of organizational justice led to fewer acts of misconduct.

As noted earlier, what trickle-down models fail to account for is when the trickle stops. In other words, what theoretical rationale might exist for fairness to have its limits? Of course, the displaced aggression approach would

1 For decades, justice researchers concerned themselves with how employees perceived fairness in outcomes (i.e., distributive justice; see Adams, 1965), procedures (i.e., procedural justice; Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975), interpersonal interactions (i.e., interpersonal justice; Greenberg, 1993), and information shared (i.e., informational justice; Bies & Moag, 1986). Herein, we do not confine our discussion of justice to these facets and instead discuss justice broadly so that our theory may be applied within multiple contexts of an organization and can be used to predict a broad range of behaviors. We do note that much of the empirical work we examine references one of the specific justice facets listed. Further, although our theory is not confined to distributive, procedural, interpersonal, or informational justice, it can certainly be applied to these specific justice dimensions.

articulate that unfair treatment within the organization begets unfair treatment outside of the organization. In such a situation, the excising of “bad apples” and “bad barrels” would be fairly straightforward. However, as we postulated before, it is possible for an organization to get “everything right” but still have cases of officer misconduct. What processes and/or factors explain this? To answer this, we turn to the group engagement model.

### The Group Engagement Perspective on Trickle-Down Justice

The group engagement model describes how organizational justice influences group-based identity and subsequent engagement on behalf of the group (Tyler & Blader, 2003). Tyler and Blader (2003) rely on the social identity mediation hypothesis to explain this effect. Generally speaking, Tyler and Blader argue that justice judgments provide positive feedback to group members.<sup>2</sup> The positive feedback from justice judgments engenders a number of beneficial outcomes as it relates to identity judgments. These identity judgments consist of pride, respect, and identification with the former two influencing the latter. Justice judgments not only provide an indication of the status of the group itself (e.g., pride)—as higher status groups presumably provide better treatment—but also an indication of how much the group respects and values the individual as a member of the group (see also Tyler & Lind, 1992). These, in turn, lead to greater identification with the group, wherein identification refers to “the degree to which people cognitively merge their sense of self and their evaluations of self-worth with their judgments of the characteristics and status of their groups,” (p. 354). When strong identity judgments have been cultivated, they will lead to a stronger investment in and cooperation with the group. In other words, individuals will become more engaged in their group in order to continue to cultivate that positive identity and as well as maintain the social structure that allows the positive identity to exist (i.e., the group). To summarize, fair treatment from a group leads to more positive identity-based judgments—including group identification—that led to more engagement and investment in the group.

The group engagement model has generally been supported in empirical work. He and colleagues (2014) demonstrated that the effect of procedural justice on employee engagement was mediated by organizational identification—a specific form of identification that relates to perceptions of “oneness” with the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Michel and colleagues (2010) similarly found that during a time of organizational change the impact of procedural justice on affective commitment to change and values–congruence fit was mediated by organizational identification. Blader and Tyler (2009) also showed a significant relationship between procedural justice and organizational citizenship (discretionary) behaviors that was fully mediated by the extent to which employees’ social identity was tied to their work group.

Similarly, meta-analytic structural equation modeling suggests organizational identification is a significant mediator of the relationship between justice and organizational citizenship behaviors directed toward the organization (Rupp et al., 2014). Extending this work even further, Dunford and colleagues (2015) found that observing *others’* fair treatment also encouraged greater organizational identification and subsequent cooperation.

Applying the group engagement model to trickle-down effects, Tyler and Blader’s (2003) premise should still hold; namely, a group member who is treated fairly will engage and cooperate with the group by virtue of the identity-based judgments they cultivate based on their fair treatment. Cooperation with, engagement in, and contributions to the group may therefore take many forms, as the predictions of the group engagement model refer to behavioral engagement broadly. It may therefore stand to reason that further acts of fairness—as something generally viewed as beneficial for group members, especially from the group engagement perspective—may emerge in response to experiences of fairness due to identity-based processes. In short, justice may trickle-down through the mechanism of justice enactors’ group identification. Van Houwelingen and colleagues (2017) have provided some tentative evidence for this trickle-down mechanism. These scholars examined trickle-down effects in light of justice recipients’ relational-interdependent self-construal, with self-construal representing a construct closely related to identification with a group (though participants were asked about the extent to which they defined themselves through the relationship with their *supervisor*). Results indicated that participants endorsing higher self-construal with their supervisor were significantly more likely to enact (in)justice toward their subordinates in accordance with the (in)justice they themselves received. As such, though evidence is limited, there may be theoretical and empirical evidence to expect trickle-down effects due to identification within organizations.

### Limits to the Trickle

As noted above, the cultivation of a positive ingroup identity via organizational justice is likely to produce positive benefits for the organization to which a person belongs. Generally, organizational justice has been shown to lead to outcomes such as job satisfaction, job performance, more

<sup>2</sup> Though Tyler and Blader (2003) focus on procedural justice judgments, we contend that any experience of justice is likely to impact the way in which an individual perceives their group as all experiences of fairness can tap into relational concerns (see Cropanzano, Byrne et al., 2001; Cropanzano, Rupp et al., 2001).

OCBs, and fewer CWBs (e.g., Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001, 2013; Rupp et al., 2014). More specific to the cultivation of a strong ingroup identity, research on organizational identification has shown that strongly identifying with one's employer is positively related to commitment to the organization, satisfaction with the organization, fewer intentions to quit, and extra-role behavior (Riketta, 2005). However, consistent with predictions in the group engagement model, the beneficiary of these downstream effects of identification are the organization itself—the source of the individual's positive social identity. Will the benefits cultivated by a strong group identity, however, extend to those who are not members of that group? In other words, will positive experiences within a police department translate to citizens outside the police department?

Drawing from the group engagement perspective, the behaviors that result from fairness should benefit the group that is the source of that fairness. Tajfel and Turner (1986) noted that groups “provide a system of orientation for *self-reference*: they create and define the individual's place in society...they define the individual as similar to or different from, as ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than, members of other groups,” (p. 16). As such, these researchers noted that group membership relates to self-esteem, in that our group membership has a direct implication for our perceptions of self-worth and personal value. The ingroup—the one to which a person belongs and their identity is tied (see Allport, 1954)—is therefore more frequently favored and valued than other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; see also Sherif, 1956).

The extent to which we derive a positive identity from our group, however, is not contingent on perceptions of our ingroup solely. Rather, the evaluation of one's group is done in relation to other groups. Outgroups—all those who do not fall into the central social core of our ingroup—do not enjoy the favor bestowed upon the ingroup (see Schrijver et al., 1994), as biases against them will inevitably manifest in behaviors or actions (Allport, 1954).<sup>3</sup> These biases—or stereotypes—are widely known, learned and reinforced through socialization and basic cognitive tendencies, and can influence people's attributions, judgments and behaviors toward outgroup members (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996). Social stereotypes and prejudice can shape the perceiver's responses to outgroup members outside of their awareness, without intent, and even if the perceiver does not endorse the stereotypes as true (e.g., Devine, 1989). For example, negative racial stereotypes can have devastating consequences for minority group members in encounters with the police. Stereotypes of Black American men as criminal or aggressive specifically may influence people's perceptions of Black men as hostile or threatening.

Indeed, Tajfel and Turner (1986) suggest that the mere belonging to a group is enough to provoke discrimination toward an outgroup as a means to protect and/or enhance

group standing and therefore social identity.<sup>4</sup> As such, members of a group may seek to differentiate, derogate, or deride other groups in an attempt to elevate and protect their own (e.g., Goette et al., 2012; see also, Sidanius et al., 2004). Taken into consideration with the group engagement model (Tyler & Blader, 2003), this perspective may therefore suggest that group engagement manifests in negative attitudes and unethical behaviors toward an outgroup as a means of preserving and protecting identity. As such, fairness may not be extended by individuals within an organization to those outside of the organization due to the potential threat it poses to the group. Their strong ingroup identification cultivated by fairness may, however, ironically result in unethical behaviors meant to preserve the group. In short, there may be a limit to the trickle.

On the attitudes and perceptions front, research has shown that the support of affirmative action policies, for example, was driven in part by the extent to which such policies negatively impacted the ingroup rather than the positive impact it could have on the outgroup (Lowery et al., 2006). Outgroup bias even extends to the perceptions of outgroup behaviors, wherein research has shown that identical violent behaviors are seen as more aggressive and intentional when performed by an outgroup member as opposed to an ingroup member (Schrijver et al., 1994).<sup>5</sup> Similarly, supervisors have also been shown to attribute poor performance of outgroup members to internal causes while also not attributing positive performance to internal causes (Campbell & Swift, 2006). In terms of observable behaviors, Platow and colleagues (1999) found that sports fans engaged in more charitable giving to volunteers who wore clothes matching the team that the individual was supporting. Paladino and Castelli (2008) showed that individuals engaged in faster avoidance behaviors with the outgroup as compared to the ingroup, whereas Loh and colleagues (2010) showed that members of a work ingroup were more likely the targets of cooperation and trust than work outgroup members. Research from a negotiation context has also shown that negotiators are more likely to lie to outgroup members as opposed to ingroup members (Glac et

3 Jetten et al. (1996) did provide some evidence that group norms of fairness could produce less discrimination in allocations to outgroups. However, the norm of fairness was explicitly connected to behaviors toward the outgroup (or ingroup, depending on the condition). As such, it is possible that fairness norms *could* lead to fairness toward outgroups *if* they are explicitly characterized as such.

4 There are multiple avenues to maintain positive social identity according to Tajfel and Turner (1986). These include leaving a group, changing the outgroup that one is engaging in a comparison with, or direct social competition. It is the latter that produces bias and discrimination, which is the focus of our paper here.

5 It is relevant to note that not all empirical work supports the link between identification and outgroup bias. Rather, Duckitt and Mphuthing (1998) found that attitudes toward outgroup members predicted identification more strongly than the reverse.

al., 2012).

Across many of these studies, organizational identification has been shown to contribute to unethical behaviors specifically. Out of a desire to protect their positive group image, employees may rationalize and engage in unethical behaviors (Martin et al., 2014). In addition to generalized unethical behavior, organizational identification may also have an impact on immoral or unethical behavior that explicitly benefits an organization (i.e., unethical pro-organizational behavior, or UPB; Umphress et al., 2010). Supporting this potential link, Effelsberg and Solga (2015) as well as Kong (2016) found that organizational identification was positively related to UPB. Researchers have also linked organizational identification, UPB, and psychological entitlement. Lee and colleagues (2019) showed, for instance, that psychological entitlement had a positive impact on UPB that was stronger when organizational identification was higher.

Returning to our context of interest, researchers in the legal and policing sphere have acknowledged the potential for a “double-edged sword” of fairness. Typically focusing on procedural fairness, these researchers argue that fairness may produce overcompliance in employees. MacCoun (2005) specifically argued that procedural justice can produce numerous positive benefits but runs the risk of being leveraged by organizations for the purpose of controlling others. Indeed, researchers have acknowledged that organizational identification can serve to warp our sense of ethics and morality (Moore & Gino, 2013), and, as Martin and colleagues elaborated (2014), “[I]ndividuals strongly identifying with their organization may be more likely to cognitively rationalize unethical behavior, especially when it is done to better the collective” (p. 308). This argument has been examined by Bradford and colleagues (2014). They noted that “[i]f officers ‘over-identify’ with their organization...they may be more likely to follow instructions or policies that are normatively undesirable and detrimental to the public they are meant to serve” (p. 116).

In policing contexts, other researchers have noted that officers can “view citizens as a problem to be circumvented or overcome, rather than as partners in a collaborative project to maintain law and order (Reiner, 2010). If an officer feels resentment toward citizens, he or she might choose to intentionally ignore the roles of service and order maintenance and heavily endorse law enforcement and crime-fighting instead,” (p. 46, Liu et al., 2018). Similarly, Sargent and colleagues (2017) drew on the group value model—a cousin of the group engagement model—to argue that procedural justice may cultivate “feelings of identity, belonging, and self-worth” that will encourage compliance within policing contexts (p. 350). Ideally, as these authors later note, this would lead to trickle-down effects wherein procedural fairness within the policing organization extends to citizens. Though Bradford and colleagues (2014) did not

find a significant mediating effect for organizational identification, they did find that procedural justice had a positive effect on “soft” and “hard” compliance wherein the former represents generalized discretionary compliance and the latter represents blind adherence to authority. Sargent and colleagues (2017) found similar effects in their results.

### Summary

Studies involving trickle-down models have consistently shown that behaviors not only trickle down from the top of organizations to the bottom but also beyond the walls of the organization and onto its customers. However, we contend that extant research on trickle-down models fail to identify and explain situations in which there may be limits to the trickle. This is particularly the case when the group engagement model is integrated with trickle-down models. As such, we argue that within the context of law enforcement, police officers are a close-knit “blue family” that relies on each other to help navigate difficult situations that are both stressful and dangerous. Indeed, members of the “blue family” trust each other with their lives.

Our review demonstrates, moreover, that people across numerous contexts tend to categorize themselves and others into groups and place more value on their ingroups compared to outgroups. Research suggests these ingroup/outgroup dynamics comprise relatively enduring cognitive and behavioral patterns that characterize human experiences, which are particularly likely to emerge in situations where the outgroup represents a threat to one’s ingroup—as can be the case between police officers and community members with whom police officers interact. Importantly, our theoretical review further suggests that experiences of justice within a workplace can exacerbate these dynamics by fostering strong perceptions of work (ingroup) identities among police officers. Particularly when police officers potentially view citizens as members of the outgroup and as problems to circumvent (Reiner, 2010). Furthermore, we argued this very ingroup/outgroup perception can potentially limit the trickle within police departments.

Understanding how our theoretical perspective can be applied to potentially improve police organizations becomes challenging as we argue that ingroup-based attitudes and behaviors of officers are extensions of typical human behavior. Furthermore, the fact that organizational justice can exacerbate ingroup identification does not warrant enacting less justice in police organizations given the negative effects of doing so (both in terms of various work outcomes and the ethical implications). Rather, we believe that such natural though nevertheless negative tendencies of group formation and positive organizational experiences can be curtailed using appropriate interventions. Echoing this, previous research has demonstrated that additional factors show promise for incorporation into personnel systems to mitigate the relationship between ingroup identification and



negative behaviors toward community members (e.g., Efeldsberg et al., 2014; Johnson & Umphress, 2019). Indeed, Allport (1954) notes that the existence of an outgroup does not necessitate the expression of prejudice and subsequent harmful prejudice-motivated behaviors. Although an outgroup may produce animosity, it is possible for individuals to develop tolerance or appreciation for outgroup members. Our theoretical orientation therefore leads us to specifically consider the employee characteristics and contexts that may lead to an engagement in police misconduct based on salient ingroup identification as cultivated by organizational justice, and how personnel systems can be leveraged to mitigate these negative effects.

### Implications for Personnel Systems

Below, we discuss the factors that are likely to mitigate the negative effect of ingroup identification among police officers within personnel systems focusing specifically on job analysis, selection, training, and performance management via work design. Given the context of our discussion, we focus on factors that are directly relevant to the issue of ingroup/outgroup dynamics specified by the group engagement model (Tyler & Blader, 2003) and group identification (i.e., social identity theory; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and are—when appropriate—measurable.

#### Job Analysis

A job analysis is the systematic definition of the important tasks and work contexts that comprise a job and the characteristics necessary to complete the job successfully (Morgeson et al., 2019). Because it scientifically investigates what successful performance of a job requires, job analysis forms the basis for valid and fair personnel systems. Therefore, job analysis is an important step to developing legally defensible personnel systems (Gutman et al., 2010). Many police departments seem to recognize the importance of job analyses, as 82% of police departments have reported conducting a job analysis (at a median frequency of every three years) or using job analysis data collected by other sources (Cochrane et al., 2003).<sup>6</sup>

Mitigating negativity in ingroup/outgroup interactions between police and community members begins with a job analysis that carefully defines the performance domain for officers and the characteristics associated with excellence in performing these behaviors. Reducing outgroup bias beginning with a job analysis can be explicitly achieved by focusing (at least part of) a job analysis on behaviors that comprise (un)successful interactions with community members in different scenarios. In turn, researchers could investigate which selection tools, training techniques, and work design interventions predict the performance dimension of appropriate interactions with community members (with special attention paid to the consistency of this treat-

ment across citizens from different demographic groups).

Additionally, defining this dimension of police performance carefully may, in itself, reduce biased-driven behaviors among officers. That is, by focusing job analysis on tasks and behaviors that are oriented toward community relations, the performance domain for officers also becomes more explicit and clearer. This is particularly critical as biases are most likely to operate when ambiguity is high. As noted by Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) in their work on aversive racism: “[d]iscrimination will occur in situations in which normative structure is weak, when the guidelines for appropriate behavior are vague or when the basis for social judgment is ambiguous” (p. 8). Though these scholars articulate arguments related to racism in particular, we contend that the principle articulated in their work holds more generally; namely, that ambiguity provides opportunity for bias to impact behaviors. Clarity in job expectations surrounding interactions with the community in situations where biased treatment of civilians often occurs, therefore, may serve as a protective factor against such bias.

We are unaware of any published job analyses that specifically aim to identify which common officer behaviors constitute mistreatment in interactions with community members or the characteristics of officers who successfully avoid these behaviors. However, some projects have begun to define the police officer job in terms of the characteristics required in our modern society wherein community relations are valued. In a Department of Justice report (specifically, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services), a forum comprising 50 experts, within the field of policing, identified characteristics necessary for police officers in our modern society, including integrity, service orientation, empathy, communication and human relations skills, self-control, team orientation, and problem-solving skills (Morrison, 2017).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Morrison (2017) reported that, historically, there are two categories of officer responsibilities viewed as important: the “warrior” (where officers prioritize and value enforcing the law by responding to and restricting the negative behaviors of community members) and the “guardian” (where officers prioritize and value working with community members). As such, the performance domain of officers seems to have an established history of consisting, in part, of community-oriented practices and behaviors. Some forum participants even stated that police organizations should focus on selecting appli-

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that 43% of the 355 police departments invited to take part in the study did so, meaning self-selection could influence these results (e.g., those with less rigorous personnel practices may have been less inclined to participate in this study).

<sup>7</sup> Other job analyses have reported additional necessary characteristics such as decision making, discretionary judgement, emotion regulation, stress tolerance, community relations, physical ability, and safety (cf. Ruggs et al., 2016).

cants based on characteristics associated with guardian responsibilities as opposed to warrior characteristics, as these participants believed warrior characteristics and behaviors are more trainable (see also McLean et al., 2020 for definitions of warrior and guardian duties along with evidence that these two perspectives are not necessarily opposing). Although an interesting proposition, this assertion would require empirical validation. In extending these efforts to more systematic job analyses, police departments would be able to provide clarity regarding performance expectations as they relate to community interactions.

Completing such job analyses will face practical concerns that will need to be addressed. For example, the different types of interactions between police and community members may be enormous. Reducing different interactions with community members into broader categories may not be appropriate as police officers must interact with community members in a wide variety of situations and contexts, which may vary greatly on important characteristics such as dangerousness. However, the effort of creating baseline expectations for similar situations and subsequently evaluating the consistency of treatment deemed appropriate across civilians in these situations is necessary. Such challenges might be partially addressed through some of the resources that a police context can offer. For example, many police departments provide the opportunity to use the relatively novel data source of body cameras, which would provide a means to evaluate how police officers interact with community members across many different situations.

In total, once the successful behavior of police officers (i.e., appropriate treatment of community members) is fully defined via a job analysis, the next step is to select officers who are most likely to enact this successful performance behavior and implement training and performance management programs that lead to this behavior.

## Selection

Extant selection systems of many police departments are fairly extensive. That is, 91% or more of police departments reported using background investigations, medical exams, interviews, application blanks, and psychological assessments; 88% and 80% of police departments reported using drug tests and physical tests, respectively; 65% of departments reported administering a polygraph test; and 46% to 50% of police organizations reported using a civil service exam or recommendation letters (Cochrane et al., 2003). Cochrane and colleagues (2003) further reported that a sizable proportion of police departments (27%) use unspecified selection tools, demonstrating the potential for a relatively high level of variance in selection systems across departments. Although this data was published almost 20 years ago, the continued use of many of these tools is evidenced by descriptions of the selection process across noteworthy police departments.<sup>8</sup> Kaplan's Police Exams

Prep manual for 2020 to 2021 also advises that police officer applicants should be prepared for a wide variety of assessments: cognitive ability tests (tests that include content such as reading comprehension and mathematics/logic); the Frontline National Test (which appears to include, in part, a situational judgement test that assesses many factors including observation skills, communication skills with diverse populations, and ethical behavior and also a cognitive ability test component); physical tests/preliminary medical reviews; psychological exams (e.g., MMPI-2); polygraph tests; and interviews.

Although the precise content of many of these assessments is unclear due to a lack of standardization, research has demonstrated the general predictive validity of many of these selection tools on police officer performance (Aamodt, 2004). Research has also demonstrated the general predictive validity of many of these assessments across occupations (e.g., cognitive ability tests (.51), structured interviews (.51); Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).<sup>9</sup> Police departments should have validity evidence for each specific assessment used in their selection process. For example, it is not enough to argue that that interviews predict officer performance when interviews can vary widely in their content and manner of application.

## *Configuring a Selection System With Outgroup Bias in Mind*

We recommend that police departments understand the extent to which each knowledge, skill, ability, and other characteristics (KSAOs) measured in their selection assessments predict the job performance dimension of consistent, appropriate interactions with community members, specifically. If police departments find that these KSAOs cannot be successfully developed through the organization's training program, then it might be reasonable for departments

<sup>8</sup> The Chicago Police Department (<https://home.chicagopolice.org/bethechange/chicago-police-officer-recruitment/>), New York Police Department (<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/careers/police-officers/po-hiring.page>), and Los Angeles Police Department (<https://www.joinlapd.com/there-are-seven-steps-application-process>) websites list their current selection processes, which include assessments such as written tests, background investigations, medical examinations, psychological examinations, drug screens, physical tests, and wellness evaluation reports. Other job analyses have reported additional necessary characteristics such as decision making, discretionary judgement, emotion regulation, stress tolerance, community relations, physical ability, and safety (cf. Ruggs et al., 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Schmidt and Hunter (1998) also found that integrity tests were an important predictor of job performance across occupations (.41). Although we did not find evidence that police departments use integrity tests, it is possible that many police departments assess the construct of integrity or related constructs. For example, one of the skills the Frontline National Test assesses is ethical behavior (Kaplan Test Prep, 2020).

to prioritize assessments measuring these KSAOs so that applicants who do poorly on these assessments cannot compensate with high scores on other assessments that are not related to this performance dimension.

Any assessments we offer, as an addition to current selection systems in pursuit of fair treatment across all citizens, are speculative given the foundational job analysis work and subsequent validation studies that need to be completed to justify their use. However, based on the evidence we do have as well as our theoretical perspective, a few selection tools seem promising for future investigation. First, for selection systems that do not include such assessments already, assessments that directly measure applicants' discriminatory attitudes, ability to engage in ethical behavior, and ability to treat community members appropriately and consistently are all promising constructs that may predict the job performance dimension of interest. These can be measured using methods such as interview questions or situational judgement tests. For example, some police departments have reported attempting to directly measure job applicants' community-oriented knowledge, skills, and abilities by presenting scenarios and evaluating the extent to which responses align with these community-oriented behaviors (Morrison, 2017).

However, although these assessments would tap into applicants' community-oriented knowledge and skills at the time of the application process, we have neither theoretical nor empirical reasons to believe these skills and abilities would predict how employed officers would treat outgroup members after they developed a strong organizational ingroup identity over the course of time. Therefore, we suggest per our theoretical perspective, a selection system that attempts to identify (and systematically validate) the characteristics that will mitigate the influence of strong group (i.e., organizational) identity may also minimize the potential for negative behaviors toward outgroup members among officers. Personality constructs seem to provide the most promising means of fulfilling this goal.

Before discussing these personality constructs and corresponding scales, we briefly touch on the personality assessments commonly used in policing contexts already. The most commonly used standardized psychological assessments in police forces have been the Minnesota Multiphasic Psychological Inventory (MMPI, MMPI-2, or MMPI-3) and the California Psychological Inventory (CPI; Cochrane et al., 2003; Kaplan Test Prep, 2020). The MMPI and its successors concentrate on assessing clinical constructs (e.g., depression, antisocial behavior; Graham, 1993, 2006), whereas the CPI is aimed at assessing "normal" personality constructs (Gough, 1956). Research has suggested that there are not consistent, strong correlations between most of the MMPI scales and officer performance or discipline problems (cf., Lough & Von Treuer, 2013).

According to Lough and Von Treuer (2013), extant re-

search on the CPI generally mirrors the pattern of evidence for the MMPI with some studies suggesting its predictive validity and others failing to find support. They do note, however, that meta-analytic evidence from Aamodt (2010) suggests the CPI scales of *intellectual efficiency*, *capacity for status*, and *tolerance* significantly predict performance or disciplinary problems.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, an examination of the CPI tolerance scale (i.e., individuals with permissive, accepting, and nonjudgmental social beliefs and attitudes) in particular suggests it may comprise a personality construct that could predict which officers will demonstrate a mitigated relationship between ingroup identification and negative treatment of outgroup members. However, this supposition is speculative at best. A review of the other subscales in either the MMPI or the CPI does not reveal any constructs that are likely to serve as individual differences that could mitigate the relationship between ingroup identity and mistreatment of outgroup members.

Evidence does indicate that individual differences—in other words, factors upon which persons can be evaluated and selected—can influence the relationship between group identification and unethical behaviors broadly. For example, the relationship between organizational identification and UPB is particularly strong when employees' moral identity is low (Johnson & Umphress, 2019) and when employees have a strong disposition toward unethical behavior or a low disposition toward ethical behavior (Effelsberg et al., 2014).

Similarly, Naseer and colleagues (2020) showed that the impact of organizational identification on UPB was mediated by psychological entitlement, an effect that was stronger when manipulative personality was high. Thus, the accurate assessment of these constructs during selection appears promising for mitigating the effect of ingroup biases on intergroup interactions.

Though the aforementioned traits may be useful for assessment and validation in a police selection system, we focus on one important (and easily measurable) individual difference that could predict officers' engagement in problematic behaviors based on their group membership: social dominance orientation (SDO). SDO—which emerges from social dominance theory (Sidanius et al., 2004)—refers to a "general desire for group-based dominance," (p. 848; see Appendix for a popular SDO scale). This desire manifests in ways that are germane to a discussion of ingroup/outgroup dynamics, particularly ingroup bias. For example, Sidanius and colleagues (1994) found that ingroup identification predicted bias in favor of the ingroup through

10 Fewer police departments report using personality tests capable of assessing the Big Five personality constructs (Cochrane et al., 2003; e.g., 16 PF Questionnaire; Cattell & Mead, 2008), though several of these personality facets (extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness) have demonstrated predictive validity in police contexts (Detrick & Chibnall, 2006; Barrick & Mount, 1991).

differential intergroup evaluations and social distance. However, these effects were qualified by SDO, which led to significantly stronger effects of ingroup favoritism when SDO was high. Other research has shown a direct effect of SDO on ingroup identification, suggesting that it may serve to directly rather than indirectly affect identification (Levin & Sidanius, 1999). Research by Amiot and Bourhis (2005) also suggested that SDO could have a direct effect on discrimination, which in turn had an impact on identification when outcomes were positive. As such, incorporating SDO into a selection system may be beneficial if the desired outcome is to predict outgroup bias and related police officer misconduct. Of course, none of the research presented here is within the police context, so empirical validation would be imperative to ensure that the use of SDO as a selection tool is both legal and fair.

### ***The Use of Implicit Association Tests in Selection***

Before we move on, we must acknowledge that our discussion of bias raises the question of the extent to which a measure of implicit bias (i.e., subconscious biases; see Nosek et al., 2002) itself should constitute an assessment within a selection context. We have reservations about doing so, both in light of our theoretical perspective and in terms of the limitations of current measures. We do acknowledge that implicit biases are widely held. A review of Implicit Association Test (IAT) results from 2.5 million people on Project Implicit found that 68% of participants showed an implicit pro-White bias on a race IAT (Nosek et al., 2002). This means that the majority of participants were able to match positive words with images of White faces and negative words with images of Black faces more quickly than on trials where the categories were reversed (i.e., negative words with White faces and positive words with Black faces). Given that implicit biases are widely held in society, including a measure of implicit bias in a selection system would require thoughtful consideration and careful validation in terms of appropriate decisions based on the scoring provided.

However, as we note earlier in this section, low initial biases would not prevent officers from developing biases as they cultivate a stronger identification with the organization. Research by Alessandri and colleagues (2020) has supported this contention, demonstrating that personality and even identification and socialization in a policing organization can change over time. As such, it is possible that a pre-entry IAT or other measure of bias would possess low predictive validity—particularly for predicting mistreatment of community members long term, especially those identifying as members of historically marginalized groups—as identification shifts and grows. Further, IAT scores are relative (Uhlmann et al., 2012). They are standardized measures of participants' difference in reaction time speed on congruent trials (where Black faces are paired with unpleasant words

and White faces are paired with pleasant words) versus incongruent trials (where Black faces are paired with pleasant words and White faces are paired with unpleasant words; Greenwald et al., 2003).

Due to these scores being relative, one cannot determine whether an individual's strong implicit bias score is driven by strong positive implicit associations toward White people or strong negative implicit associations for Black people. Furthermore, IAT scores are not normed nor do they have meaningful cutoffs for use in selection (Uhlmann et al., 2012). Finally, prior research has shown that implicit bias measures can be faked by motivated and knowledgeable participants. Because the IAT score is relative, participants can reduce their IAT score by slowing down responding on the congruent trials (Fiedler & Bluemke, 2005). Finally, the IAT would need to show evidence of high reliability in order to be appropriate within a selection context (Gatewood et al., 2015). We therefore believe that although existing measures of implicit bias are useful in research and training contexts, we argue these concerns listed above outweigh any potential benefit to be gained from incorporating them into a selection system. In short, more work is needed before measures of implicit bias are appropriate for use in selection in policing.

To summarize, there is some promise in adapting extant selection systems to better predict police misconduct by the inclusion of individual differences, such as SDO. However, we concede that changes to selection alone are unlikely to fully mitigate police mistreatment due to ingroup/outgroup dynamics. Thus, steps should also be taken within training and performance management to further dampen these effects.

### **Training**

In addition to job analysis and selection, providing training to officers designed to curtail biases and discrimination either generally, or based on ingroup identification specifically, may prove to be beneficial in combatting police officer misconduct. Consistent with our theoretical framing, research has shown that even in very minimal ingroup conditions (i.e., when a group has been created based on arbitrary or relatively meaningless criteria, such as preferences for art), people tend to extend greater benefits to ingroup members and to have more positive implicit associations about ingroup members than outgroup members (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2001; Tajfel et al., 1971). Indeed, stereotypes and prejudices can shape perceiver's responses to outgroup members outside of their awareness, without intent, and even if the perceiver does not endorse the stereotypes as true (e.g., Devine, 1989). Thus, mitigating biased behavior based on the stereotypes officers hold about the outgroup (i.e., community members) remains an important concern to be addressed in personnel systems with the aim of reducing officer misconduct toward marginalized groups.

Although many simple prejudice reduction strategies do not have lasting effects on implicit bias (Lai et al., 2016), interventions that provide people with tools to avoid bias in their own lives appear promising (e.g., Su, 2020). Todd and Burgmer (2013) found that perspective taking strengthened positive associations between the self and the outgroup. Given that ingroup bias may be at play in police organizations, it may be relevant to strengthen ties to the outgroup through training as a means to curtail misconduct. Devine and colleagues (2012) similarly examined the effectiveness of a multifaceted intervention for reducing implicit bias across 8 weeks. Their intervention provided participants with information about implicit bias, its negative consequences, and strategies for avoiding bias in their own lives. Compared to a control condition, the intervention significantly reduced implicit racial bias across the longitudinal study.

Furthermore, participants in the intervention condition showed increased concern about discrimination and personal awareness of bias across the study compared to control participants. A replication of the above study found that the intervention led to greater concern about discrimination that increased participants' sensitivity to the biases of others and increased their tendency to label these biases as wrong compared to the control condition (Forscher et al., 2017). In a subsample, recruited 2 years later, participants who had received the intervention were more likely to confront prejudice in an online forum than participants in the control condition. Although they did not replicate the original reduction in implicit bias, as implicit bias declined in both the control and experimental conditions, this intervention appears to be a promising way to encourage people to regulate their own biases and to reduce the pernicious effects of bias. Providing evidence of the potential importance for bias training on mitigating the negative effects of justice (through increased organizational identification) in police organizations specifically, Sargent and colleagues (2017) showed that a training intervention designed to address racism, sexism, and bias in the workplace reduced the impact of procedural justice on hard compliance (i.e., blind adherence to authority). As such, bias training may be particularly effective in curtailing the negative impact of the theoretical processes we argue could be at play in predicting police officer misconduct.

### Performance Management Through Work Design

Performance management often refers to how performance can be assessed, feedback given, and goals and incentives set to alter employees' on-the-job behaviors in the manner desired by the organization (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). However, this typical approach to performance management often carries the assumption that employees can recognize the flaws in their previous performance and enact change. Incorporating our theory—that the mistreatment of

outgroup members is commonplace human behavior driven by strong ingroup ties and corresponding biases that may be difficult to detect—instead requires that organizations consider how the job and work environment are designed to foster desired performance (Morgeson et al., 2012; Parker et al., 2001).

Work design generally refers to how the characteristics of a job can strongly influence employee attitudes and behaviors (Morgeson et al., 2012). Thus, a work design perspective allows organizations to consider how to improve employee outcomes by changing the job itself rather than the employees within the job. Given our theoretical perspective, altering the characteristics of the job may reduce the extent to which employees are likely to rely on or be influenced by stereotypes and implicit biases. Of course, there are often contextual constraints on the extent to which a job can be redesigned (Morgeson et al., 2010). For example, police officers are called upon to respond to emergency situations at any given moment. However, police departments may still be able to find ways to alter the job to mitigate the negative effect of job characteristics on officers. We elaborate on the processes that contribute to heuristic processing likely to result in bias and some of the mechanisms that can be leveraged to address them through work design below.

### Job Characteristics, Work Design, and Ingroup/Outgroup Biases

People are likely to apply stereotypes in their evaluations, judgments, and actions toward others in situations that promote heuristic processing because they function as cognitive shortcuts (Kunda & Spencer, 2003; Macrae et al., 1994). In other words, stereotypes are more readily used when the situation encourages or demands more superficial processing of information. A number of factors promote heuristic processing, including cognitive load, mood, fatigue, time constraint, and threats to well-being. Each of these factors has important implications for the work of police officers.

When a stereotype has been activated, cognitive load increases the likelihood that the stereotype will be applied and influence subsequent reactions (e.g., Gilbert & Hixon, 1991; Govorun & Payne, 2006; Kunda & Spencer, 2003). For example, Van Knippenberg and colleagues (1999) found that under high levels of cognitive load, negative stereotypes about a criminal defendant led to higher ratings of guilt, harsher punishment recommendations, and better memory of incriminating evidence against the defendant than if positive stereotypes were made salient. In contrast, the stereotypes of the defendant did not influence judgments or memory for the case under low cognitive load. Although stereotypes can be applied effortlessly (Macrae et al., 1994), avoiding stereotype application is often effortful (per our discussion of the value of training). In fact, even persons with low levels of prejudice can be prone to relying

on stereotypes when they lack the resources or ability to monitor for bias (Devine, 1989).

Importantly, some justice behaviors (e.g., enacting rules and procedures consistently and in an unbiased manner) are cognitively burdensome for justice actors (Johnson et al., 2014), meaning justice actors may have trouble enacting these behaviors when their cognitive resources are low. The number of stimuli to which police officers often must simultaneously attend (and associated tasks they must perform), makes it likely that they are often operating under a high cognitive load. Some examples of the complex behaviors police officers may be required to simultaneously complete are driving, attending to auditory communication from dispatch and other officers, attending to visual communication from dispatch and other officers (e.g., instant messages), responding to communications, and attending to the environment to proactively evaluate signs of threats to the community (e.g., signs of a drunk driver). As such, considerations of cognitive load seem to be particularly salient for the work of police officers and the impact it may have on biased processing while on the clock.

Beyond cognitive load, circumstances that limit executive function (e.g., fatigue, stress, time constraint) can reduce the ability to regulate bias and avoid applying stereotypes. Bodenhausen (1990) found that participants who completed a judgment task outside of their circadian functional peak (e.g., self-described morning people who completed the task at night or self-described night owls who completed the task in the morning) were more likely to apply social stereotypes on the task than participants who completed the task during their circadian functional peak (e.g., self-described morning people in the morning). It is necessary that officers are on duty at all times, meaning many officers might be assigned shifts that are diametrically opposed to their optimal functioning period. Additionally, police departments vary in the length of shifts assigned to officers. Although a study found no negative effects of extending an 8-hour workday to a 10-hour workday (i.e., allowing a compressed work week schedule), the results did indicate that officers that worked 12-hour shifts reported feeling more fatigued and less alert at work compared to the officers in the 8- and 10-hour conditions (Amendola et al., 2011).

Furthermore, stereotype application is more likely under high time pressure, likely because it limits the ability to regulate bias (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991; Macrae et al., 1994). When time pressure is low and people are motivated to avoid stereotypic responses, stereotypes are less likely to be applied (Krieglmeyer & Sherman, 2012). The importance of this for the police context is clear, as officers are often responding to emergencies and potentially dangerous situations, requiring quick reactions. Thus, stress and factors that limit an officer's executive function could limit the extent to which police officers are able to mitigate their

reliance on biases.

Affective experiences can similarly impact heuristic processing. Moods in particular can promote or hinder stereotype application (e.g., Schwartz & Clore, 1996). Positive moods signal that the environment is safe. As a result, heuristic and top-down processing are likely. In contrast, negative moods signal that something is wrong in the environment. Thus, systematic, bottom-up processing is necessary to appropriately deal with a potential problem. Incidental happiness, or a general positive mood, can therefore increase the likelihood that stereotypes will be applied compared to a neutral or sad mood. However, the nature of heuristic processing under various affective states is complicated by evidence that suggests that negative affective states can also increase stereotyping. Experiencing fear and anger in intergroup contexts can facilitate stereotyping. Fear increases perceivers' judgments of risk and plans for precautionary behavior (Lerner et al., 2004). Anger predicts increased blame and attributions of responsibility toward social targets (e.g., Keltner et al., 1993).

Furthermore, participants induced to feel anger (vs. a neutral mood) showed more negative automatic evaluations of outgroup members on measures of implicit prejudice (DeSteno et al., 2004). In policing contexts, the intense and often alarming nature of the situations many police officers encounter suggests they are likely to suffer from higher levels of negative emotions on the job, which has been shown to lead to consequences such as burnout (Basinska et al., 2014). These negative emotions may also encourage the activation of biases and stereotypes among police officers. Though the apparent solution may be to decrease the potential for police officers to experience negative affect either through work design or training (Hülshager et al., 2015), such an intervention must be done with the consideration that positive affect may not encourage deep processing as well. As such, based on current research, we are skeptical that attempts to mitigate officers' use of heuristics through influencing affect would prove successful. To this end, we suggest that any such interventions seeking to influence heuristic use by altering affect should receive extensive empirical validation.

### Putting It All Together

Within this paper, we suggest multiple levers by which police organizations may be improved to curtail police misconduct, particularly with members of the community. Recall that our orientation is predicated on the notion that even when police organizations do everything "right" (e.g., treat persons with fairness), police officer misconduct still may occur due to strong ingroup identification and subsequent outgroup biases. In that spirit, we note that doing everything right in changing a personnel system must be done thoughtfully as unintended consequences can nevertheless occur. First, careful validation of any change is critical to

ensure fairness, accuracy, and legality. For example, as we noted in our discussion of incorporating the IAT into selection systems or leveraging work design to impact affective experiences, these tools or levers may possess unintended negative consequences on selection or performance management, respectively. Police organizations must therefore be judicious in implementing any changes by collecting data and evaluating the actual impact of such changes to ensure their validity as well as their impact on unintended negative consequences.

Second, the reform of a personnel system must be done not as a piecemeal effort but rather as multiple parts of a whole that feed into and impact one another. Bias training interventions, for example, may be more or less effective depending on people's own values (e.g., internal motivation to respond without prejudice; Plant & Devine, 1998) and individual differences (e.g., social dominance orientation, Lindsey et al., 2019; Pratto et al., 1994). In other words, the impact of training may depend on the traits upon which a person is selected for a position. Improving multiple components of personnel systems in tandem by addressing issues of ingroup identification and corresponding outgroup bias may more successfully reduce officer misconduct compared to disparate and disjointed approaches. As such, by striving for validity and cohesion within a personnel system, meaningful changes can be implemented within a policing context that will reduce officer bias and misconduct.

### Summary

In line with our theoretical perspective, we offer above examples of future research that can build a foundation that will aid police organizations. Although such research would require great investment, the benefits would include the potential to make sustainable progress in addressing a problem that has lingered over decades—misconduct within the modern police force that is disproportionately directed at marginalized citizens. For example, we suggest job analysis research considering the role of interpersonal interactions with citizens from all backgrounds across all relevant types of situations, so that appropriate performance in this domain can be established and measured systematically. Additionally, selection research can explore whether theoretically relevant predictors (e.g., social dominance orientation) can predict which officers become more likely to engage in misconduct against marginalized citizens over time. Training research can also continue to work toward understanding how bias training can most effectively mitigate mistreatment in police departments. Finally, work design research can investigate how components of the police officer role can be modified to decrease the extent to which officers need to rely on superficial information processing.

### Conclusion

Overall, the enactment of justice at all levels in an organization influences various important employee attitudes and behaviors. Indeed, the research we review demonstrates that the manner in which justice trickles down in organizations is complicated. Although experiencing organizational justice often results in employees, in turn, enacting justice, our theoretical perspective suggests justice may heighten organizational identification and therefore ingroup–outgroup distinctions. This process therefore increases the likelihood employees—such as police officers—will mistreat outgroup members (e.g., community members). Viewing police mistreatment from this perspective allows us to acknowledge common intergroup behaviors and discuss practical ways to minimize intergroup dynamics and behaviors via personnel systems. In that spirit, we suggest several avenues for advancing research on this topic within selection, training, and performance management/work design literatures. Though we do not believe this perspective to be an exhaustive treatment of how organizational experiences may have unintended consequences on police officer misconduct, we do believe it provides a unique insight into how things can go wrong when all else seems right.

We argue this perspective has the potential to push efforts to mitigate police mistreatment forward substantially. We integrate extensively studied and accepted theories from both the organizational justice and social psychological literatures to propose a framework through which police personnel systems may be examined, researched, and improved. We argue that approaching the problem of police mistreatment from this theoretical framework allows proactive augmentation of police systems, based on established theories of human behavior. This has more promise for long term impact than do narrowly developed interventions created post-hoc to address specific problems that have arisen. Such research also has the potential to extend beyond the police context to any occupations where employees interact with outgroups over whom they may have power.

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## Appendix

### Social dominance orientation (Sidanius et al., 1994)

1. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.
2. In getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups.
3. It's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others.
4. To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups.
5. If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems.
6. It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.
7. Inferior groups should stay in their place.
8. Sometimes other groups must be kept in their place.
9. It would be good if groups could be equal.
10. Group equality should be our ideal
11. All groups should be given an equal chance in life.
12. We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups.
13. Increased social equality.
14. We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally.
15. We should strive to make incomes as equal as possible.
16. No one group should dominate in society.

*Note:* Items 9-16 should be reverse coded. The response scale was *very negative* (1) to *very positive* (7).