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## Introduction to the Special Issue on Policing: Examining the Role of Testing and Assessment

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE ON POLICING: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF TESTING AND ASSESSMENT

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## ABSTRACT

### KEYWORDS

police, testing, assessment

Prepared in response to the weight and seriousness of social concerns with regard to the state and future of policing, this special issue was developed in order to feature research that examined a wide range of personnel and assessment decisions relating to policing. The focus was broad in scope, welcoming conceptual/theoretical papers, quantitative or qualitative reviews, empirical papers, and think pieces. To address the questions and areas identified in the initial call for papers, six articles are presented covering the themes of individual differences in personnel selection group composition and macro-level influences on policing, and practical recommendations and the future of policing. It is our expectation that these manuscripts will serve as a wellspring for further discussion and consideration of the role of psychology and assessment in improving police departments.

The death of George Floyd at the hands of the police in May of 2020, among other instances of unreasonable use of force by law enforcement officers, brought movements such as Black Lives Matter to the national forefront and reignited debate surrounding the state of policing. Although the Black Lives Matter movement has been around since 2013, the death of Freddie Gray in April of 2015 marked the advent of international prominence for this movement (Ruggs et al., 2016). As a result, recent years have seen increased media attention directed toward what has been seen as instances of unreasonable use of force by law enforcement against unarmed Black citizens (Ruggs et al., 2016).

Since the death of George Floyd in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, calls for criminal justice reform have taken many forms. For example, there have been calls to defund the police and re-allocate these funds to other social services. Others have sought to replace police officers with community-based responders for nonviolent calls. Action has also been taken by elected officials. For example, in Ohio, Governor Mike DeWine announced that he was proposing mandatory psychological exams and increased training for police applicants.

Regardless of the form that these criminal justice reforms eventually take, it is clear that assessment professionals can and should play a key role in improving the initial screening and selection of police applicants, and in developing better methods for screening out applicants and

current officers who demonstrate a propensity for engaging in maladaptive behaviors; race, sex, and other biases; and the unnecessary use of force.

Indeed, the psychological assessment of police has a long tradition. In fact, one of the first articles published in *Journal of Applied Psychology* by Terman and associates (1917) was on police testing in San Jose, California. Currently, psychologists make use of assessments in consulting with police departments during preemployment merit testing, preemployment individual assessment, clinical assessments, fitness-for-work evaluations, and annual psychological testing. Despite the many contributions of applied psychologists to forensic, police, and criminal psychology, a relatively small portion of the police psychology literature has addressed the topic of the use of psychological tests and measures in efforts to improve police officer performance, although we will note here two important resources: the fine meta-analytic based book by Michael Aamodt (2004), *Research in Law Enforcement Selection*, and the *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, published by the Society for Police and Criminal Psychology.

In response to the weight and seriousness of social concerns with regard to the state and future of policing, and

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given the *Personnel Assessment and Decisions*' role as the official journal of the International Personnel Assessment Council, we saw a need to develop a special issue where psychologists would contribute their perspectives and research on relevant topics dealing with police psychology. Our call for papers (Doverspike et al., 2020) asked authors interested in publishing in this special issue to consider questions regarding the state of policing and possible contributions of the psychological profession.

The goal in assembling this special issue was to feature research that examined a wide range of personnel and assessment decisions relating to policing. The focus was broad in scope, welcoming conceptual/theoretical papers, quantitative or qualitative reviews, empirical papers, and think pieces. To address the questions and areas identified in our initial call for papers, we have curated six articles, which are presented here in this special issue of policing.

### Description of the Submission and Review Process

Initially, prospective authors were asked to submit a letter of intent, along with a 250-word abstract. The proposals were then reviewed for overall quality, relevance, and fit with the purpose of this special issue. Potential contributors whose letters of intent were approved were then invited to submit a full manuscript. All subsequently submitted manuscripts were then peer reviewed. Each submitted manuscript was considered by two to three peer reviewers. In many cases, a number of revisions were then submitted for additional consideration. As noted above, the articles were not limited to empirical pieces. Regardless of the type of article, the submitted manuscripts were evaluated based on:

- consistency with the call or intent of the special issue;
- usefulness to and accessibility for a practitioner audience, especially those in the public sector or who work with police departments;
- response to, answer, or providing empirical data with regard to meaningful practical questions;
- leading to or drawing conclusions that could be defended based on the research base or empirical evidence;
- and not making unwarranted claims or present arguments based solely on personal opinion.

Empirical manuscripts were also judged based on the adequacy of the methodology and the competence with which any statistical analyses were carried out. As noted above, this process resulted in six accepted articles.

### Articles and Overarching Themes

Although the topics covered by the manuscripts in the special issue were quite diverse, we identified three overarching themes that united subsets of the manuscripts featured in this issue. First, two papers explored the role of individual differences and how those differences can inform

personnel decisions for law enforcement officers. Second, although their approach varied considerably, the next two papers tapped into group composition and macrolevel influences on organizational attraction and the selection of law enforcement leadership. Finally, the last two manuscripts provided a review and theoretical perspective on the current state of police, focusing specifically on the mechanisms for in-group formation and police misconduct, as well as the efficacy of the current state of police training programs. A brief overview of each manuscript and their relevance to the emergent themes are presented hereafter.

### Theme 1: Individual Differences in Personnel Selection

The first two manuscripts are united in their examination of the role of individual differences. The first paper examines the relationship of what may be considered traditional individual differences (e.g., personality) and performance (Winterberg et al., 2022), whereas the second paper examines an alternative to traditional assessments by exploring the relationships among cultural competence, police misconduct, and performance (Reichen et al., 2022).

Winterberg, Tapia, and Brummel (2022) present several interesting findings to support the use of workplace personality to improve law enforcement selection. In an examination of the personality and value characteristics that the police and public rate as desirable for police performance, racial minorities endorsed more negative attitudes of police overall, but they found no meaningful differences in desired police characteristics between police and the public or between racial minority and majority participants. Next, the authors examined multiple criterion-related validity studies in similar jobs via meta-analyses and synthetic validity analyses to identify several personality predictors of police performance. Finally, the authors examined personality and value differences between police incumbents and applicants. The results suggest that incumbent officers scored significantly lower on desired characteristics and higher on undesired characteristics than applicants, and that several personality indicators were relevant across samples, predictive of performance, and unlikely to cause adverse impact.

Noting the widespread prevalence of pathology, personality, and integrity-related construct assessments in the selection of police officers, the manuscript by Reichen, Jackson, Frame, and Hein (2022) explores the feasibility of the assessment of cultural competence in police officers. This study examined the extent to which an agency's change to their first ever Black chief executive officer (CEO) would affect cultural competence of the officers as well as incidences of misconduct. Results showed that scores on the cultural competence element of an in-basket simulation used for promotional assessments were not predictive of supervisor-rated performance or incidences of misconduct. Next, although cultural competence of the officers did increase after the change in command, misconduct was not

impacted by the change to the agency's first Black CEO. Although the authors did not find support for their hypothesized relationships, their study sheds light on how researchers and practitioners may better assess cultural competence in order to build consensus in future studies and practices relating to cultural competence in policing.

### ***Theme 2: Group Composition and Macrolevel Influences on Policing***

Whereas the first two manuscripts focus on the influence of individual differences, the next two papers take a different approach by examining macrolevel factors such as signals regarding the gender diversity of organizations and how the political ideology of individuals and makeup of an area affect perceptions of job-related qualifications on personnel assessments and decisions for the election of a sheriff. Although these two papers differ considerably in their approach, they are united by the fact that they consider the influence of group or organizational-level phenomena on the attraction and selection of individuals.

The first manuscript, by [DePatie, Sachdeva, Shahani-Denning, Grossman, and Nolan \(2022\)](#), examines the effectiveness of various targeted recruiting techniques in attracting women to professions dominated by men. Specifically, their research examines how incorporating pictorial representations and statements signaling gender diversity with acknowledgement tactics in recruiting materials can influence women's attitudes toward organizations. Their results demonstrate that women were most attracted to organizations when recruiting materials included high gender diversity signals coupled with the explicit acknowledgement that there is currently a lack of gender diversity. In this way, the demographic composition of organizations may serve as a signal to prospective applicants that ultimately influences their attraction to the organization.

The second manuscript under this theme, authored by [Panton, Nolan, and Rigos \(2022\)](#), tests the extent to which the tenets of person–environment (P–E) fit theory generalize to personnel selection for sheriff. Although elections may not be considered a traditional form of personnel selection, it involves a process through which candidates are evaluated and perceptions of these candidates are influenced by psychological phenomena. Their results suggest that voters form unique perceptions of sheriff candidates' person–job and person–organization fit, and that these perceptions are influenced by partisan beliefs about policing that vary within and across political parties. In fact, perceptions of both forms of fit meaningfully influence personnel assessment and decisions (i.e., voting), and voters are approximately 40% more likely to endorse candidates with lower job-related qualifications when they share their political affiliations. These findings largely support the generalizability of P–E fit theory to personnel selection for elected

positions and offer insight into how organizational scientists might aid the hiring of officials who are willing and able to institute police reform initiatives that reflect the needs of their communities. Speaking to the macrolevel implications of this manuscript, communities that are predominantly partisan one way or another are thereby more likely to rely on political similarity in the selection of sheriffs rather than job-related qualifications. Taken together, both manuscripts under this emergent theme highlight factors that extend beyond the individual level.

### ***Theme 3: Practical Recommendations and the Future of Policing***

The final two manuscripts in this special issue are united in that they are not empirical papers but provide an examination of the current state of policing, specifically focusing on organizational justice to understand police misconduct and improve personnel systems, and police training program recommendations to address issues of excessive force, bias, and discrimination. First, [Busby, Thornton-Lugo, Parker, and Strah \(2022\)](#) provide a theoretical perspective that illuminates how experiences of fairness may trickle down from the top of police departments to the bottom but may not be extended beyond the walls of the department and on to citizens. By integrating trickle-down models of organizational justice ([Masterson, 2001](#)) with the group engagement model ([Tyler & Blader, 2003](#)), the authors suggest that experiencing organizational justice may foster strong perceptions of ingroup identities among police officers and detrimental outgroup biases toward citizens. In line with their theoretical perspective, [Busby et al. \(2022\)](#) then discuss how various factors within personnel systems, including job analysis, selection, training, and performance management, may mitigate the negative effects of ingroup identification in police organizations.

In the second paper, [Den Houter and Brooks \(2022\)](#) provide a review of the current state of police training and offer recommendations for improving police training programs. Their review shows that police academies tend to utilize a stress-based training model, which is characterized by intense physical and psychological demands, and emphasize training on use of force. In recent years, police departments have also increasingly utilized implicit bias training to address issues of bias and discrimination in police–civilian interactions. Drawing from the training and development literature, [Den Houter and Brooks \(2022\)](#) recommend adjustments to the current training model to address issues of excessive force and alternative training content that may help address issues of bias and discrimination.

### **Thank You to Authors and Reviewers**

First, we would like to thank Scott Highhouse for encouraging us to pursue this special issue. Since the begin-

ning, Scott's shepherding of this journal has provided an invaluable service to the field.

We would like to thank all the authors who submitted letters of intent and papers, even if they did not make it into the final published issue. The field needs additional, focused theory and empirical studies in the area of police psychology; as a result, we would like to encourage researchers to continue to advance our knowledge of how to improve police work and service.

Of course, the creation of this special issue would not have been possible without individuals volunteering their valuable time to review articles. We extend our sincere thanks to all the anonymous reviewers.

### Conclusion

In sum, the topics and approaches represented in this special issue are diverse and speak to a plethora of issues relating to the role of assessment in policing. We hope that the six manuscripts presented in this special issue inspire new lines of research and serve as a resource for scientists and practitioners seeking to improve personnel decisions relating to police. It is our expectation that these manuscripts will serve as a wellspring for further discussion and consideration of the role of psychology and assessment in improving police departments. With that said, the issues faced by today's police departments span well beyond the scope of psychology alone and will require integrative, interdisciplinary work from many disciplines and realms of influence.

We welcome the submission of additional papers for consideration in a second part of the special issue and for consideration as a full-length article to be published in a standard volume of the journal. Ultimately, we expect that this body of work will continue to grow in coming years and are optimistic about the role of psychology and assessment in the future of the field.

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