



Minority Recruitment in the Law Enforcement Profession



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Abstract

The paper explores the historical impediments to recruitment of females and minorities through the lenses of the more recent challenges related to negative publicity and police shootings. The importance of diversity is emphasized. In the end, the paper explores ways to improve or increase recruitment of females and minorities in the police profession.

Introduction

This essay is about the recruitment of African Americans and females into the ranks of the police profession. It highlights the importance of minorities in law enforcement and the challenges related to recruitment. In the end, the essay puts the current situation in perspective, with recommendations on how to overcome impediments related to recruitment. Specifically, the essay seeks a candid discussion about the difficulty of recruitment. This difficulty may range from the negative experiences related to a police stop to the recent incidents of police shootings. It becomes clear that the cumulative effect of negative experiences at the individual level impacts efforts to diversify the nation's police force. We believe that the police shootings of unarmed black men negatively impact efforts to diversify the police organization. In other words, the events in Ferguson, Baltimore, Baton Rouge, Tulsa, Charlotte, Dallas, Los Angeles, etc. may have a chilling effect on the recruitment of minority police officers.

Past Problems

There are many reasons for impediments to the recruitment of minorities in law enforcement. In the 40s and 50s, the segregated nature of society and Jim Crow were impediments to real recruitment of minorities. In the 1960s and 1970s, police work was tantamount to "working for the man," as such few minority or oppressed groups applied. In the 80s and 90s (fueled by affirmative action efforts) this perception changed, resulting in greater inclusion of women and people of color. Beyond these

issues, other impediments include the fact that recruiting may seem (in some jurisdictions) an afterthought, with no organized effort, especially when positions had not been filled by the good old boys network Wilson et al. [1]. Today, some criticisms range from the method of recruitment to who is recruiting. It is also been asserted that recruitment teams may not include minority groups or may rely too heavily upon white male patrol officers Wilson et al. [1]. This practice may hamstring police efforts to recruit minorities. For example, some studies by Holzeran and Ihlanfeldt [2], Stoll et al. [3] have demonstrated that black and other minority groups apply for police positions at higher rates when they can personally identify with the police recruiter Wilson et al. [1].

Current Problems

Today, we see renewed tensions and organized protests in the form of the Black Lives Matter movement Brashears [4]. The genesis of the Black Lives Matter movement was the shooting of a young, college bound black male in Ferguson, Missouri; these nationwide protests have also challenged the legitimacy of the militarization of the police. We believe, then, that the challenge for law enforcement is to overcome the optics of the continued shooting of unarmed black men.

Unarmed Shootings or the Ferguson Effect

In a nutshell, Ferguson and other events have been cumulative; the scenes and the negative news coverage have slowed efforts to achieve diversification. The problem then is that few minorities

want to join an organization with a history of racial bias, as suggested by incidents in Ferguson, New York, Baltimore and the cold blooded shooting in North Charleston. The Washington Post reported that in 2015, 34% of all police shootings were of unarmed black men, who comprise only 6 percent of the total U.S. population. Together, these myriad incidents create another Ferguson effect, namely, an apprehension to seek employment within the ranks of the police profession.

A cursory Look at the Literature

Strategies Revisited

Some scholars e.g.; Wilson et al. [1] suggest that it is important to recognize the pivotal role that black and other minority groups play in the recruitment process. Thus, agency promotion and retention programs that include females, blacks, and other minority groups in command positions can provide strong incentives for other minorities to join the ranks of law enforcement. Restated, using female and minority employees in the recruitment process increases the likelihood of successful recruitment. In addition, the literature reveals that recruiting efforts should include conventional and nonconventional locations, such as churches, barbershops and hair salons, etc. Wilson et al. [1] suggest, for example, that hair salons and shopping malls can serve as a source of informal and formal information about employment opportunities. The point here is that police recruiting strategies need to think outside of the box in recruitment events. Concomitantly, recruiting efforts should include people of color, so that potential candidates can see minority police officers in position of leadership. A recent survey e.g., Raganellaa et al. [5] of potential New York recruits revealed that both whites and blacks joined police departments for similar reasons, but blacks more so that whites joined the police for more altruistic reasons. Thus, if recruitment efforts are going to be successful in drawing minority and female recruits in increasing numbers, the department should emphasize the helping aspect of the job, and not just benefits and job opportunity Raganellaa et al. [5]. This observation is especially true for female recruits; the only difference was that female recruits did not seek careers in law enforcement as a last option for a career opportunity, whereas the men in the survey did. By contrast, African American male recruits ranked highly on their list the importance of salary. According to Raganellaa et al. [5] salary was more important for Black males, while opportunities for career advancement was more important for White females, and enforcing the laws of society was more important for Hispanic females. One counter intuitive finding in the literature pertains to salary and efforts to attract females and minorities; the findings suggest that salary (while critically important) may not be insufficient. The literature also reveals that substantial salaries correlate with an increased number of less qualified applicants Raganellaa et al. [5] we consider this last finding inconsequential, but it certainly merits additional research.

The value of diversity

It is critically important to have a police force that mirrors the population served; this has been the objective of law enforcement for some time now. Specifically, Dulaney [6] maintains that the road to successful integration of minorities into the police department has never been easy. Raganellaa et al. [5] argue that the lack of representation of blacks and other ethnic groups is linked to tensions between police and the minority community. The argument put forward is that if more blacks, females and or Hispanics were on the force there might be less fear of the community and fewer shootings of unarmed youths. In addition, others Fuller [7] argue that the primary benefit of a fully diverse department is that it weakens the “code of secrecy” for which law enforcement is known Alexander [8]. Next, when minority group member see others minorities on the police force, it signals inclusion and legitimacy; which is a good thing. It goes without saying that diversity within the ranks of the police force is fundamentally important and that the composition of the police department should reflect the demographics of the community served. We hope that diversity by any means necessary is a step in the correct direction [9-13].

Discussion

As a starting point, strong recruitment efforts should take advantage of the full range of available resources. There should also be recognition that increased salaries alone is not the primary solution to female and minority employment; the findings, once more, suggest that salary while important may not be enough Jordan et al. [14]. We reiterate, the need for traditional and non-traditional strategies to recruitment of all minority applicants, including Asians, Hispanics, and Arabs. Police departments must work harder to convince the public that these shootings are aberrations. Former police Chief David Brown (of the Dallas Police Department) maintains that applicants must be the change they want to see within the police organization. Restated, he maintains that it is not enough to complain, but to join to be a part of the change that one would like to see in the police organization.

Conclusion

It is important to remember that policing is a noble profession and that recent incidents reflect the wrong doings of a small group on the police force. Local police departments must be very candid about this reality. In the end, we trust that police organizations will employ imaginative recruitment strategies that transcend the classroom and reach into institutions that have tentacles in the minority community, like churches and hair salons. The research, for example, reveals that agencies with special and innovative recruitment strategies increase minority hires significantly Jordan et al. [14]. Last to help overcome the bad optics related to unarmed shootings and or the militarization of the police, the other strategy would be to appeal to the altruistic nature of many female and minority applicants.

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