Race, Observed Emotional States, and Police Use of Force: Police Interactions as Complex Social Interactions

Rachael Brooks
Research Assistant
Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology
Washington State University

Samantha Bill
Undergraduate Research Assistant
Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology
Washington State University

Research Team:
David Makin, PhD; Dale Willits, PhD; Rachel Bailey, PhD; Bryce Dietrich, PhD, & Wendy Koslicki
Description of the Problem

• Limitations of Previous Use of Force Research
  – Incident Reports: Concerns over data quality
  – Field Observations: Hawthorne Effect

• Klinger (1995)
  – We know very little about how and when police officers use force
  – Violence is best studied as a mixture of individual, contextual, and situational factors
Situating Use of Force at the Microsocial Level

• Use of Force as Microsocial Interactions
  – Better understand the situational and dynamic factors associated with use of force
  – Not merely if force occurred. Rather, how did that force occur, and arguably more importantly, why did force not occur in this incident.
Literature Review

• Holmes and Smith (2008)
  - Race matters because of a dynamic interplay of social and emotional group processes

• Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis (Dollard et al., 1939) – Updated by Berkowitz (1989)
  - Frustration (measured as aversive events) produces aggressive inclinations

  ➔ Frustration – Increased Arousal (E.g., Anger)
  ➔ Aggressive Cues (E.g., Provocation, Weapons)
  ➔ Use of Force (Aggression Response)
Hypotheses

• **Hypothesis 1**: Police encounters involving minorities are more likely to result in police use of force, the faster application of force, higher levels of force, and a longer duration of force used.

• **Hypothesis 2**: Police encounters with higher levels of emotionality are more likely to result in police use of force, the faster application of force, higher levels of force, and a longer duration of force used.

• **Hypothesis 3**: Racial differences in use of force outcome variables are reduced controlling for observed emotional responses.
Methodology

• Unredacted police body-worn camera footage from a police agency in the Pacific Northwest.

• 288 incidents occurring between 2013 - 2016
  - 70 Use of Force incidents
    • Officers required to “tag” incidents in which used force
  - 218 criminal code violation incidents in which force was not used
    • 80 incidents initiated by officer
    • 138 incidents where officer dispatched to the scene
Methodology Continued

• Use of Force Inclusion Criteria
  - The incident must clearly contain use of force against a human
  - The totality of the incident can be ascertained

• Manual Coding of Incidents
  - 55 Incident Variables collected for all videos and 20 Variables collected per Use of Force event
  - Objective and Subjective Coding
  - Initial Coding – Team Coding (Individual)
  - Second Coding – Consensus Coding (New Team)
Variables Included in Study

Independent Variables

• Suspect Characteristics
  – Gender, Race, Ethnicity
• Environment
  – Day/Night, Bystanders Present, Arrest Made
• Officer and Suspect Emotional State

Dependent Variables

• Time to First Force
  – The M:S of the first applied force
• Duration of Force
  – The M:S when force occurs until the suspect is both restrained and under control
• Level of Force
Levels of Force

Level One: Minor Force
• Verbal Threats, Pat Downs, and Firm Grips

Level Two: Medium Force
• Pain Compliance, Holds, and Controlled Pushes

Level Three: High Force
• Uncontrolled Pushed, Strikes, or Impacts

Level Four: Instrument-Based Force
• CED, OC Spray, Use of Bean Bag Rounds, and the Drawing of Firearms
Measuring Emotionality
(Anderson and Bushman, 2002)

Officer and Suspect Emotional State

• 0 = Emotionless (i.e. unexpressive)
• 1 = Low emotional State (i.e. calm)
• 2 = Medium Emotional State (i.e. sobbing, signs of agitation)
• 3 = High Emotional State (i.e. wailing, rage)
Results: Time to First Force
Regression Model Results

• **Hypothesis 1:** Police encounters involving minorities are more likely to experience force and at higher levels of force. - However, after adding additional control variables, race of the suspect is no longer associated with our measures of force.

• **Hypothesis 2:** The observed emotional state of the suspect and officer are associated with our measures of force.

• **Hypothesis 3:** Once we control for observed emotional states, interactions with minority suspects remain different and that difference is not easily explained by the emotions of the suspect.
Results: Other Findings

- **Gender**: Police more likely to use force, faster, and at higher levels against male suspects.
- **Incident Occurring at Night**: Police more likely to use force, fast, and at higher levels for interactions occurring during the night than those occurring during the day.
- **Arrest Decision**: Decision related to whether force is used, when force is used, and the duration of force used.
Limitations

Generalizability
• Data obtained from a single police agency

Combining Race Categories
• Unable to determine differences between different racial and ethnic groups

Manual Coding
• Inter-coder reliability

Omitted Variables
• Location of incident, repeat contacts, alcohol and drug use, officer characteristics
Contact Information

Rachael Brooks
Lab Manager, Complex Social Interactions Lab
Research Assistant, Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology
Washington State University | rachael.brooks@wsu.edu

David A. Makin, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator, Complex Social Interactions Lab
Assistant Professor, Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology
Research Faculty, Washington State Institute for Criminal Justice
Research Faculty, Division of Governmental Studies and Services (DGSS)
Washington State University | dmakin@wsu.edu