

September

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Breaking Down Bias

Root Causes and Solutions for Reducing Police Misconduct.

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By the Future Justice Lawyers of Chicago

The silent struggle of police brutality runs rampant across the country. George Floyd's murder, a story familiar to many, is one of the primary examples of the continued struggle to end police brutality. "George Floyd was a Black man whose videotaped death under the knee of a white police officer sparked mass protests in 2020, including some of the largest street demonstrations in U.S. history." Floyd's death is one of the many that occur annually in relation to police brutality. Establishing systems that find ways to eliminate the current perpetrators of police brutality, which include a lack of training, little diversity within police departments, and the system of quotas. Proposed solutions to these current issues include, but are not limited to, increasing training and its quality in order to counter the existing issue, eliminating quotas in their entirety, and, in turn, creating a system which requires police officers to reach a minimum number of hours of community outreach which does not tie directly to policing.

The current training offered to fight inherent bias and misconduct is few and far between, and it is seen as having little effect in solving the issue. In a study by Calvin Lai, a Washington University professor, he found that when police officers received bias-reduction training, they said they felt more enlightened afterward, but the training didn't lead to major improvements in the field. Given that standard bias-reduction training shows little to no effect, this suggests the need for change in this area. At their core, these classes are ineffective. Furthering the point, in an article written by Dr. White, he states, "First, most programs aren't designed to reduce implicit bias *per se*; they're designed to make individuals aware of prejudices they may hold." These programs are rarely effective due to their structure. If officers feel they don't hold implicit bias, breaking it down becomes nearly impossible. Establishing classes that offer different incentives is needed to see the change that these lessons attempt to make. These classes are completely ineffective when the real issue lies in the structure of individual police departments.

Many police departments consist of a majority of white, male, and non-minority counterparts, which has vast effects on the number of arrests and degree of misconduct seen across communities. Throughout the history of extensive police forces, the discrepancies between the number of police officers of color compared to white counterparts are extremely apparent. Jeremy M. Wilson and Clifford A. Grammich, a well-known professor and researcher, note, "In 1993, more than three-fourths of full-time sworn employees of local US police departments were white males (Reaves, 1996). In 2016, nearly two-thirds of full-time sworn

officers were white males (Hyland and Davis, 2019).” These primary differences among police officers in these forces may reflect differences in how the two groups choose to police within their areas. However, when the focus is concentrated in recent years, as conflict between civilians and police has continued to arise, the disparities between the way police officers of color versus non-minority officers have chosen to police are made much clearer. In a study by Rose Huber, a researcher at Princeton University, she highlights the correlation between an officer's race and how they choose to police. They focused primarily on the Chicago area and specifically observed how minority officers conducted stops and arrests in comparison to their non-minority colleagues. More specifically, the study notes that, “They found Black officers made substantially fewer stops, arrests, and uses of force per shift than white officers, reductions equal to 29%, 21%, and 32% of average white officer behavior citywide. The findings are similar for Hispanic and female officers, though the differences are more modest.” In any environment where significantly more stops are made than in others, it opens the door to increased misconduct and abuse of power. A more diverse police department is needed to prevent more Americans from falling victim to misconduct.

Often, the increase in stops is due to a focus on police-mandated quotas. Requiring a set number of stops or arrests creates opportunities for misconduct when officers dispute the validity of the stops. Departments use quotas to incentivize officers to make more stops or arrests as part of their contracts and to receive their salaries. In a research paper by Griffin Edwards and Stephen Rushin, published in the Iowa Law Review, they discuss how these quotas exist in many police departments. In the paper, they directly state, “...numerous examples of supervisors implicitly or explicitly threatening officers with disciplinary action if they failed to meet specific “activity” thresholds.” The level of punishment, in which police officers' jobs are put at stake merely for missing specific quotas, creates more opportunity for misconduct to occur due to an increase in stops, many of which may not have been valid in the first place. These cases of unfair stops are extremely prevalent in the field. During an arrest, an officer by the name of Zachary Abbate pulled over a man, accusing him of not stopping at a stop sign. Abbate proceeded to arrest him on multiple charges. A lawsuit was filed under the pretense of an unwarranted stop. It later became apparent that the primary reason for the stop was quotas. Given how common these cases are across a variety of settings, it's clear the quotas do more harm than good. This isn't just

a facade; it is an issue affecting many civilians and the stops they face. However, solutions can be implemented to dismantle these systems at their core.

Increasing training and improving its quality will equip cops with the skills needed to break down bias, reducing misconduct by helping them recognize the biases they may hold. In an article, researcher Ted Gregory discusses new training innovations using a system called Sit-D. Designed to create immersive experiences for cops, it allows them to experience these scenarios through virtual reality. Creating training experiences that simulate a more realistic environment can drastically reduce bias compared with a classroom approach to learning and training. Even though the training wasn't directly focused on breaking down racial bias, it states, "trained officers recorded 11% fewer arrests of Black civilians and a 28% reduction in discretionary arrests of Black subjects. Arrests of subjects of all other races were essentially unchanged." According to the NAACP Criminal Justice Fact Sheet, it states, "A Black person is five times more likely to be stopped without just cause than a white person." The difference in numbers between white and black people, and how frequently they are getting stopped, highlights the importance of having training that is able to directly or subconsciously decrease the number of times that police are stopping them. Increasing training nationally and focusing on its quality can reduce unnecessary stops and, in turn, lower the chance of misconduct. Other measures can also limit unsubstantiated police stops.

Limiting the use of quotas will allow for fewer unsubstantiated traffic stops, in turn reducing misconduct among police officers. According to an article written by Nathaniel Bronstein, "Police department activity quotas reduce police officer discretion." Quotas are seen as reducing the judgment police officers need, which goes against one of the most fundamental requirements of being a police officer. Dismantling this system, which has been shown to be drastically ineffective, would return proper judgment to officers and help prevent misconduct cases. In general, there has been more pushback on quotas. Edwards and Rushin highlight more recent pushback from departments using quotas, mainly because the system is unnecessary. Pushing further and requiring a national ban on quotas would likely drastically decrease misconduct and the misuse of quotas. The evidence being offered heavily alludes to the removal of quotas being highly key in the reduction of violence and mistreatment from police departments.

One key intervention is establishing policies that require police officers to complete a certain number of community service and outreach hours to serve communities they may be biased against. To learn more about the non-profit and community outreach, I interviewed Nathan Stanton, founder of a non-profit named Forgive Us and a community engagement partner with Care Access. When asked about the community outreach he has done, he states, “The majority of my work the last 20 years has been with folks on the street. From leading a program called PADS (Public Action to Deliver Shelter) to a recently started nonprofit called Forgive US, which is an organization dedicated to fostering racial unity through creative events.” When further asked in the interview in what ways the work he has done has shaped his held bias against certain groups, he answered, “Yeah, although it can be difficult to work in communities that are frequently forgotten when it comes to resources, it has been rewarding. It is a place where the smallest gestures have the biggest impact...My faith has informed my heart and has taught me that the meek and humble are the ones who inherit the goodness of the Earth.” Giving your time to communities not only remains extremely valuable to dismantling bias, but quickly becomes a rewarding act in many aspects of your life. Requiring these types of hours for police officers will get to the root of the problem, and it could even provide more incentive.

The key underlying issues that exist with many police departments that lead to increased numbers in police brutality include a lack of intensive training in the subject matter, the racial and gender based disparities within the force, and the existence of quotas. Eliminating these underlying issues reduces risk, but creating systems like improved training and required community volunteering directly addresses them. Finding effective solutions to misconduct is tied to the current state of policing. Reducing bias is simple in theory, but complicated when no effective strategies are in place. Finding these solutions will not only change how police departments function, but may also alter how communities view the police as a whole. Implementing policies that address the root of the issue will allow meaningful change, especially in the long run and for the future of policing in America as we know it.

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