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Editorial

Where is the Evidence for Racial Profiling?

Racial profiling, the use of the race or ethnicity of an individual as the sole criterion for police contact, strikes at the heart of the legitimacy, integrity, and spirit of the American criminal justice system. Racial profiling is a violation on multiple levels of analysis (e.g., procedurally, Constitutionally, ethically, and morally) because it shatters the notion that there is equal protection under the law and equal enforcement of the law. The *Journal of Criminal Justice* has served as a major vehicle for racial profiling research and debate, and the current editorial is intended to extend that debate further.

Although a general sentiment of equality is central to the racial profiling doctrine, it unfortunately likely results in a belief that there is equality across racial and ethnic groups in terms of criminal offending, criminal victimization, and criminal justice system contact. This is empirically untrue. For example, homicide data from the *Federal Bureau of Investigation Supplementary Homicide Reports, 1976–2005* indicate that young African American males account for homicide victims at levels that are 10 to 20 times greater than their proportion of the population and account for homicide offenders at levels that are 15 to 35 times greater (also see, Eitle, 2009). Imbalances for other serious violent crimes, such as armed robbery are similarly sharp.

Upon contact with the criminal justice system, there is also evidence for racial effects. In terms of police contacts, there is evidence that non-whites are more likely to be disrespectful toward police (Dai, Frank, & Sun, 2011; Engel, 2003), more likely to behave in a suspicious manner toward police (Johnson, 2006), have more negative attitudes about police (Brick, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2009; Flexon, Lurigio, & Greenleaf, 2009), are significantly more likely to report that police acted improperly during traffic stops (Allen & Monk-Turner, 2010), and have lower satisfaction with police (Huebner, Schafer, & Bynum, 2004) compared to whites. Conversely, whites have better appraisals of procedural justice and police legitimacy (Wolfe, 2011) than nonwhites, and similar effects are also found by race/ethnicity among law enforcement officers (De Angelis & Kupchik, 2009). In addition, compared to whites, African Americans are significantly more likely to recidivate (Baglivio, 2009; Wehrman, 2010) and there are racial and ethnic differences for reporting crime to police (Rennison, 2010), being stopped by police (Miller, 2009), likelihood of arrest (Tapia, 2010), and criminal justice ideology (Hurst & Nation, 2009).

In an important study, Lee, Steinberg, and Piquero (2010) found that African American adolescents with a stronger sense of ethnic identity perceived more police discrimination than their peers with reduced ethnic identity. The importance of their study relates to the salience of perceptions about the police specifically and the criminal justice system generally, and how these perceptions vary by racial status. Indeed, a sizeable amount of the extant literature on racial profiling is perceptual (Buckler & Unnever, 2009; Jordan, Gabbidon,

& Higgins, 2009; Reitzel, Rice, & Piquero, 2004). Of course, perceptual reality and empirical reality do not always converge, and for an issue as important as racial profiling, it is critical that future research offer research designs that provide reliable and valid estimates of the extent of the racial profiling problem. Otherwise subjective and objective evidence for racial profiling is conflated, which would be logically tantamount to suggesting that fear of crime and crime are the same.

Race plays an important role in an array of social issues and public policies designed to address those issues (Birzer & Birzer, 2006; Helms, 2009; Higgins, Gabbidon, & Martin, 2010; Jordan, Fridell, Faggiani, & Kubu, 2009). This is especially true in criminal justice. Nothing in this editorial is particularly new as prior researchers have discussed many of the empirical, analytical, and conceptual issues and limitations of the racial profiling doctrine and racial profiling research (cf., Becker, 2004; Engel & Johnson, 2006; Gabbidon, Craig, Okafo, Marzette, & Peterson, 2008; Kowalski & Lundman, 2007; Lundman, 2010; Schafer, Carter, & Katz-Bannister, 2004; Tillyer & Hartley, 2010; Tillyer, Engel, & Wooldredge, 2008). A fair and just criminal justice system is central to the United States, and I am enthusiastic about touting the accomplishments of the justice system (DeLisi, 2010). My hope is that the next generation of racial profiling research will show additional improvement toward the declining significance of race.

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