When is the officer not seen as safe?

Assessing civilian biases regarding police officers with IATs

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Background

- Policing in America has become increasingly politicized and divisive
- The killing of George Floyd was a significant event in Minneapolis
- This study analyzes racial biases between and among White and POC civilians when appraising police officers based on the officer's race and status as a police officer (compared to a civilian).
- **How do variations in officer and civilian races affect appraisal?**

Hypotheses

- White police officers will be preferred over Black officers and White civilians
- Black civilians will not be preferred over Black officers and White civilians

Methodology

- 50 total participants: 28 White participants and 22 POCs (participants of color)
- Participants were male, 18 years or older (M = 22.12, m = 19), and residents of Minneapolis, MN or attended the University of Minnesota
- POCs and White participants were asked to take four Internal Association Tests (IATs) (Figure 1)
- The IAT asks participants to categorize information to the left and right using the E and I keys on their keyboard. A category is randomly assigned to the left and right (e.g. White men on the left and White officers on the right). Words will also be categorized into the left and right categories based on if they are positive or negative words (e.g. positive words on the left and negative words on the right). Participants simultaneously ordered images and words in these left and right categories. Eventually one category swapped sides (e.g. the left categories of White men and positive words changes to White men and negative words), but the procedure remained the same. Participants were judged based on the speed and accuracy of their responses.
- **IAT conditions: White officer versus White civilian, Black officer versus Black civilian, White officer versus Black officer, and White civilian versus Black civilian.**
- One sample t-tests analyzed biases among races
- Welch two sample t-tests analyzed biases between races

Results

<u>White officer versus White civilian</u> (Figure 2)

- POCs were not significantly biased towards either group
  - M = -0.1171, SD = 0.3871
  - $t(21)$ = -1.4184, p = 0.1707
- White participants were significantly biased towards White civilians over White officers
  - M = -0.2604, SD = 0.3067
  - $t(27)$ = -4.493 , p = 0.0001189, d = -0.8491
- There were no significant differences between races
  - $t(39.373)$ = 1.4214, p = 0.1631

<u>White officer versus Black officer</u>

- POCs were significantly biased towards White officers over Black officers
  - M = 0.2235, SD = 0.3482
  - $t(20)$ = 2.941, p = 0.008078, d = 0.6418
- White participants were significantly biased towards White officers over Black officers
  - M = 0.2962, SD = 0.4094
  - $t(27)$ = 3.8276, p = 0.000697, d = 0.7234
- There were no significant differences between races
  - $t(46.192)$ = -0.6704, p = 0.5059

<u>White civilian versus Black civilian</u>

- POCs were significantly biased towards White civilians over Black civilians
  - M = 0.1859, SD = 0.3576
  - $t(19)$ = 2.3246, p = 0.03133, d = 0.5189
- White participants were significantly biased towards White civilians over Black civilians
  - M = 0.2689, SD = 0.4132
  - $t(27)$ = 3.4433, p = 0.001889, d = 0.6507
- There were no significant differences between races
  - $t(44.219)$ = -0.7427, p = 0.4616

<u>Black officer versus Black civilian</u>

- POCs were not significantly biased towards either group
  - M = -0.173, SD = 0.5139
  - $t(20)$ = -1.5428, p = 0.1386
- White participants were not significantly biased towards either group
  - M = -0.0905, SD = 0.3553
  - $t(27)$ = -1.3478, p = 0.1889
- There were no significant differences between races
  - $t(33.701)$ = -0.6313, p = 0.5321

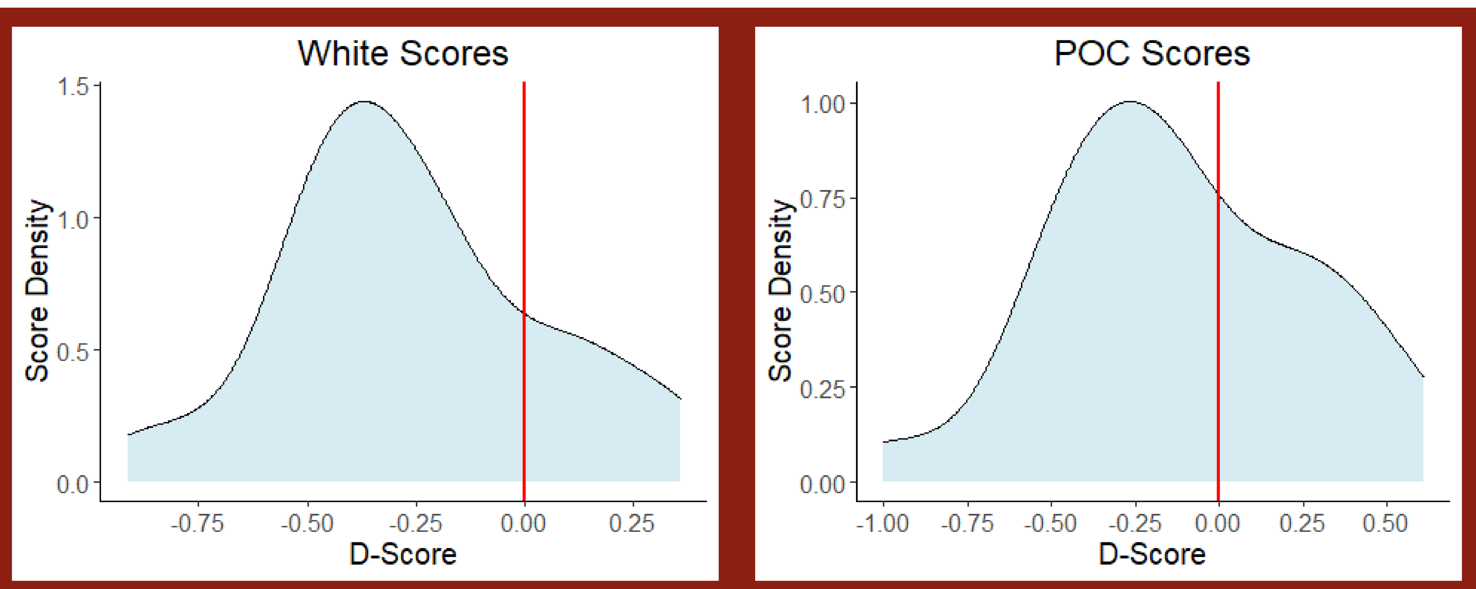

Figure 2. White participants' and POCs' results from White officer versus White civilian condition

Discussion/Limitations

- The most surprising result was that White participants were highly biased against White officers, but POCs were not significantly biased. This could reflect the idea that White individuals are very critical of White officers due to the killing of George Floyd and have formed strong negative biases against them. POCs not having a significant preference could reflect the idea that being an officer affords no changes in biases, and officers are considered the same as citizens in terms of preferences.
- There were no biases when appraising Black individuals, which is surprising given that there was an expected bias towards police officers over citizens. This could reflect the idea that an individual's status as an officer does not provide them with changes in appraisals/biases; officers and citizens were considered roughly the same in terms of preference. However, this indifference in appraisals only applied to Black officers, demonstrating again that biases regarding officers are modulated by the officer's race.
- Both participant groups showed a bias for White individuals over their Black counterparts, which follows what was expected. Individuals are commonly biased in favor of hegemonic groups, so this result was not surprising.
- **The race of officers/civilians and participants affected appraisal and performance on the IATs**
- These findings indicate that citizens in Minneapolis, MN have biases regarding police officers and their race. Black officers had significantly less biases associated against them compared to White officers, and these biases could have formed due to the killing of George Floyd. Research in this domain should continue as it is important to determine how *citizens* feel about how policing should function in this country. The data currently demonstrates that White officers are not necessarily appraised with favorable biases, and it is important to assess whether these biases are consistent in other locations around the United States.
- **Limitations**
  - Sample size was small and not balanced between groups.. Furthermore, most participants were college students. Needs replication in a more representative population.
  - Only Black and White individuals were contrasted. More racially diverse stimuli should be presented for the non-White stimuli to reflect the diverse races of the POCs.
  - The White civilian stimuli had more variation than the Black civilian stimuli (Figure 3). This led to an unequal representation of civilians and could have influenced participants' reaction speeds and accuracy.
  - IATs were the only method of measurement used for assessing racial biases. Including other measures (e.g. surveys or interviews) to ascertain racial biases would help confirm the findings found here.

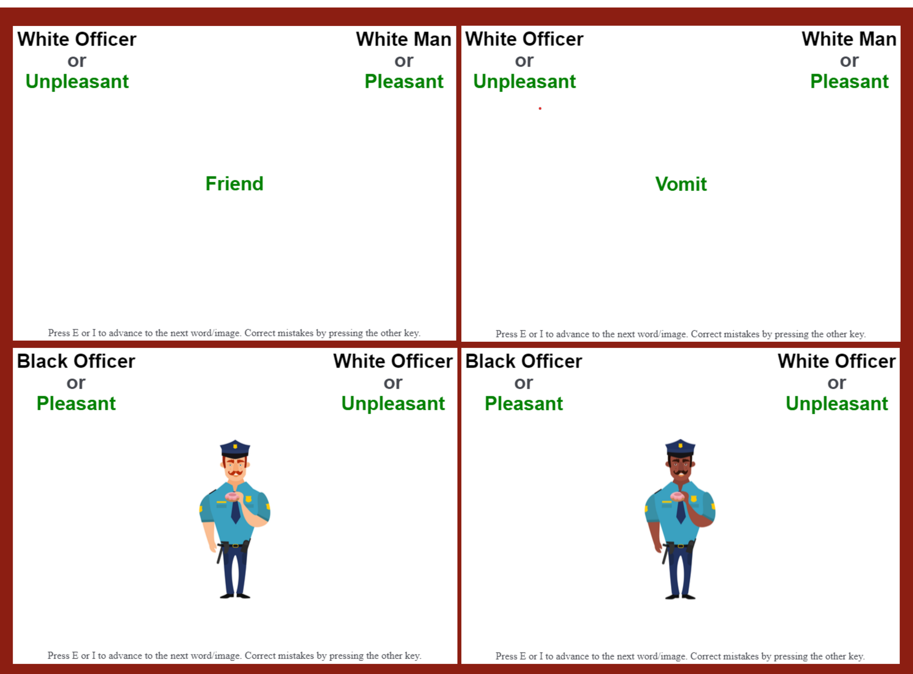

Figure 1. Samples of IAT stimuli

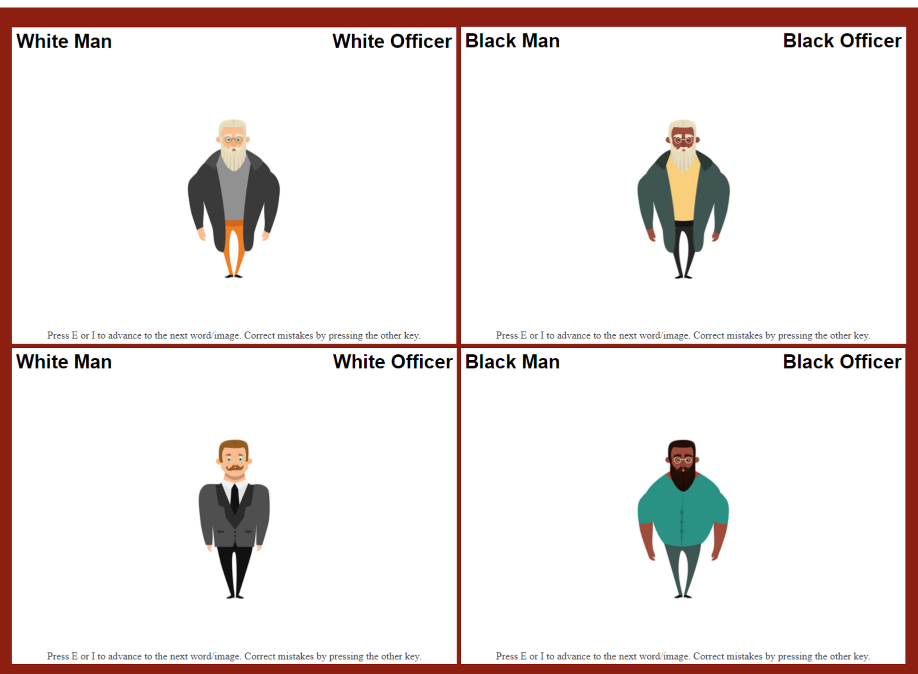

Figure 3. Civilian Stimuli

Acknowledgements/References

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