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Police Quarterly 2009 12: 408
DOI: 10.1177/1098611109348473

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What is This?
An Examination of the Workplace Experiences of Police Patrol Officers: The Role of Race, Sex, and Sexual Orientation

Kimberly D. Hassell1 and Steven G. Brandl1

Abstract
Reform efforts in many police departments have diversified the workforce, especially with regard to race, sex, and sexual orientation. Research, however, has demonstrated that the assimilation of these officers has not been problem-free. Using data collected from a large, municipal police department, this article examines the workplace experiences of patrol officers and a potential consequence of those experiences: stress. We find that being female and being a racial/ethnic minority brings with it substantially different experiences on the job compared to male and White officers. Our findings also confirm previous research that workplace climate has an effect on workplace stress.

Keywords
police climate, workplace experiences, police stress, women in policing, racial/ethnic minorities in policing

Introduction
Historically, policing has been an occupation represented primarily by White males. Over the last several decades however, a fundamental reform effort undertaken in police departments across the country has been to diversify the workforce, especially

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with regard to race, sex, and, most recently, sexual orientation of officers (National Research Council, 2004). To a large extent, these efforts have been prompted by equal opportunity law, in particular the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the 1972 Equal Employment Opportunity Act, affirmative action policies, and court orders (Alozie & Ramirez, 1999; Lewis, 1989).

Aside from the legal mandates, many arguments have been offered espousing the benefits of a more diverse police workforce. For example, it has been suggested that diversity in the workforce encourages tolerance in interactions with a diverse citizenry, that it encourages different styles of policing, promotes trust and fairness in policing, that it encourages citizen support and cooperation with the police, and that diversity encourages multiple viewpoints and ideas on how to go about doing “good” police work (e.g., see National Research Council, 2004; Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993).

Although police departments have increased the representation of racial minorities and women, research has demonstrated that the assimilation of these officers into workplace cultures has not been problem-free (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Martin, 1994; Pike, 1985; Texeira, 2002). Indeed, a potentially significant impediment to the creation of a well-functioning diverse workforce is that individuals, or groups of individuals, may receive (or perceive) unequal treatment at work, in spite of equal employment opportunity laws. Unequal treatment may lead to many negative outcomes, including employee turnover, productivity and performance declines, absenteeism, and even civil claims, not to mention the individual consequences for workers (e.g., Anderson, Litzenberger, & Plecas, 2002; Brown, Cooper, & Kirkcaldy, 1996; Crank, Regoli, Hewitt, & Culbertson, 1995; Haarr & Morash, 1999). Perceptions of inequality at work may also be a major factor that deters some people from seeking employment in the occupation in the first place (Peak, 1997).

To create and maintain a diverse workforce that is hospitable, it is necessary to first be aware of officers’ workplace experiences and problems. With this understanding, interventions may be developed to address these issues. In this article, we report the results of analyses that extend our understanding of the relationship between officers’ characteristics and workplace experiences and we examine a potential consequence of negative workplace experiences. Specifically, we address three fundamental questions: First, do officers (considering differences in sex, race, and sexual orientation) have the same workplace experiences? Second, do officers differ in terms of their reported workplace stress? And third, do officers’ characteristics and/or workplace experiences influence officer stress?

In answering these questions, we address some of the shortcomings evident in prior research on the issue. Often, studies that examine the workplace experiences of officers are based on national or cross-departmental surveys and the corresponding data are analyzed without regard to differences across these departments (e.g., Morash & Haarr, 1995). Although formal police organizational structures tend to be similar (Crank, 2003; Maguire, 2002), the informal structures and organizational cultures of police departments tend to vary markedly (Hassell, 2006; Paoline, 2003). As a result, for example, White officers in predominately non-White police departments may have
substantially different workplace experiences and problems than White officers in predominantly White police departments. Simply stated, data collected from national studies, or studies including multiple departments, may mask important department-level variation (National Research Council, 2004). In this study, we focus on the experiences of officers in a single police department.

In addition, many studies that examine the workplace experiences of police officers focus on either racial or sex differences (Bolton, 2003; Collins, 2004; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Dowler, 2005; National Center for Women and Policing, 2002; Peak, 1997; Texiera, 2002; Wells, Wells, & Alt, 2005) and only a few studies examine the experiences of gay and bisexual officers (Belkin & McNichol, 2001; Bernstein & Kostelac, 2002; Buhrze, 1996; Burke, 1994; Leinen, 1993; Miller, Forest, & Jurik, 2003). In this study, we examine all three characteristics: race, sex, and sexual orientation. To the extent possible, we examine interaction effects among these characteristics as they may relate to workplace experiences and problems. Finally, unlike most other studies that have examined the workplace experiences of officers, we examine the relationship between officers’ workplace experiences and a potential consequence of those experiences: stress. By extending the research in these ways, we cast additional light on the workplace experiences of police officers and the consequences of those experiences.

**Police Organizational Climate and Workplace Problems**

To understand the behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions of police officers, one must be cognizant of the organizational context in which officers work. An important dimension of this context is the climate of the organization. Climate refers to the patterns and the nature of interactions among organizational members. It is how the context of the organization is actually perceived, experienced, and interpreted by its members. It affects members of the organization. As Dennison (1996) explained, “Climate refers to a situation and its link to thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of organizational members. Thus, it is temporal, subjective, and often subject to direct manipulation by people with power and influence” (p. 644). A climate characterized by negative interactions among members may create workplace problems for (some) members (Morash & Haarr, 1995). Workplace problems are negative and may have detrimental consequences, such as dysfunctional levels of stress and poor job performance.

**The Workplace Problems of Police Officers**

Research consistently shows that racial/ethnic minorities in policing experience workplace problems that differ from the problems of their White counterparts (Bolton, 2003; Dowler, 2005; Haarr & Morash, 1995, 1999; Peak, 1997). Morash and Haarr (1995) found that for racial/ethnic minorities, the sense of being “invisible” increased their occupational stress; the stigmatization based on appearance was related significantly to
increased levels of stress. Haarr (1997) found that African Americans were more likely to report feelings of social distance than other officers.

More recently, Bolton (2003) examined the workplace experiences of Black police officers and found that there is a shared perception among Black officers that systematic barriers exist in agencies that limit their advancement and affects career longevity. Black officers reported lack of support networks and constant conflict and stress. Moreover, many of the Black officers interviewed explained that they were exposed to racial jokes, cartoons, name-calling, slurs, rudeness, and petty harassment. Dowler (2005) also found, in his study of 1,104 police officers in the Baltimore Police Department, that Black officers were more likely to perceive criticism from peers. We could find no published studies comparing the workplace experiences of Latino officers with officers of other races.

Research has also shown that women in policing encounter workplace problems that differ from men (Wexler & Logan, 1983). In particular, research shows that the most unique problem facing women in law enforcement is sexual harassment while on the job (Collins, 2004; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; National Center for Women and Policing, 2002; Texiera, 2002; Wells et al., 2005). A study undertaken by the City of Los Angeles found that policewomen experience sexual harassment at higher rates than other female city workers (City of Los Angeles Commission on the Status of Women, 1992; Texeira, 2002, p. 527). Not only did policewomen experience greater levels of sexual harassment but they also experienced the most extreme cases of overt harassment (City of Los Angeles Commission on the Status of Women, 1992). Studies also reveal that women police officers are more likely than male officers to encounter higher levels of overt hostility and other negative social interactions on the job including negative attitudes of male officers, exposure to tragedy and trouble, group blame and rumors, exposure to profanity and sex jokes, and stigmatization due to appearance (Balkin, 1988; He, Zhao, & Archbold, 2002; Janus, Janus, Lord, & Power, 1988; Martin, 1980; National Center for Women and Policing, 1998; Timmins & Hainsworth, 1989).

Studies have also suggested that female officers’ experiences vary by race and ethnicity (Collins, 2004; Martin, 1994; Morash, Haarr, & Gonyea, 2006; National Center for Women and Policing, 2001; Texeira, 2002; Zhao, Herbst, & Lovrich, 2001). In one of only a few studies of African American policewomen’s experiences, Texeira (2002) found that African American women felt that harassment by their peers and supervisors was the most difficult force for them to overcome. Sexual harassment was also a problem; however, these women perceived that, “they are [sexually] harassed not because they are women but because they are African American women” (p. 525). Haarr and Morash (2004) also found that African American women were subjected to higher levels of sexual harassment than White female officers.

In addition, Texeira (2002) discovered that African American male officers were not always sympathetic of Black women officers; the harassment by African American male officers included verbally threatening and demeaning behaviors and was more covert than the harassment by White male officers. This finding is similar to...
Martin’s (1994) finding that Black males use their masculinity to align themselves with the dominant majority of White males while extricating themselves from Black female officers. In addition, Pike (1985) found that White policewomen distance themselves from Black policewomen as a means of aligning themselves with the White majority. Dodge and Pogrebin (2001), in their study of Black female officers, found that many Black men are deliberately unsupportive of Black women due to their own minority status. Alozie and Ramirez (1999) argued that members of racial/ethnic groups in general found their greatest competition to be with White females. In essence, research suggests that race and sex are negotiated statuses in police organizations, with women who are racial/ethnic minorities falling at the “bottom of the police occupational stratification structure” (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001, p. 552; Martin, 1994; Pike, 1985; Texeira, 2002).

Homosexuality differs from sex and race/ethnicity as a status in that homosexuality is not ascribed: Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals can choose to hide their sexual orientation (Burke, 1994; Leinen, 1993, p. 2; Miller et al., 2003). The empirical research, although scant, indicates that openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual officers face differential treatment on the job (Bernstein & Kostelac, 2002; Buhrke, 1996; Burke, 1994; Leinen, 1993; Miller et al., 2003). Research shows that gay, lesbian, and bisexual officers who choose to remain “closeted” do so due to fear of reprisal, fear of rejection, offensive jokes, pranks, and overt harassment and discrimination (Buhrke, 1996; Leinen, 1993; Miller et al., 2003).

Consequences of Workplace Problems: Stress

A significant amount of research has examined stress among police officers. Not surprisingly, much of this research has come to the conclusion that policing is a stressful occupation (Dantzter, 1987; Eisenburg, 1975; Goodman, 1990; He, Zhao, & Archbold, 2002; Kroes, 1985; Liberman et al., 2002; Loo, 1984; Morash, Haarr, & Kwak, 2006; Reese, 1986; Selye, 1978; Violanti, 1985). Although the police role and responsibilities accompanying those roles (i.e., exposure to physical danger, observing human depravity, etc.) is stressful, research indicates that many stressors originate from within the police organization (Liberman et al., 2002; Haarr & Morash, 1999; Jaramillo, Nixon, & Sams, 2005; Morash & Haarr, 1995; Toch, 2002). Some of these internal organizational stressors include role ambiguity, role conflict, lack of supervisor support, lack of group cohesiveness and lack of promotional opportunities (Anderson et al., 2002; Jaramillo et al., 2005). Research has also uncovered that the stress inherent in the climate of law enforcement organizations is exacerbated by social factors such as race/ethnicity, sex, and sexual orientation (Collins & Gibbs, 2003; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Ellison, 2004; Ellison & Genz, 1983; Greene & Carmen, 2002; Haarr & Morash, 1999; Morash, Haarr, & Kwak, 2006; Morash, Kwak, & Haarr, 2006; Teahan, 1975).

Prior research suggests that workplace stress is a consequence of negative workplace experiences. High stress levels among law enforcement officers has been linked to job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, “burnout,” premature retirement and attrition, and
other work performance problems (Anderson et al., 2002; Brown, Cooper & Kirkcaldy, 1996; Crank et al., 1995; Gaines & Jermier, 1983; Territo & Vetter, 1987) in addition to physical and psychological ailments (Anderson et al., 2002; Liberman et al., 2002; Wester & Lyubelsky, 2005).

Method

Study Site

The peculiarities and dynamics of the police organization affect officers’ workplace experiences (Hassell, 2006; Martin, 1990). Accordingly, it is important to provide details regarding the setting of this study. As of 2004, the year in which data for this study were collected, the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD) employed 1,923 sworn officers (i.e., police officers, detectives, sergeants, lieutenants, etc.). Approximately 16% of sworn officers were female, 67% were White, 21% were African American, and 10% were Hispanic. Structurally, the department was divided into seven geographic districts; each district led by a Captain. The department was organized in a traditional manner with a typical command structure. Collective bargaining applied to all civilian and sworn employees.

In 2004, the department was led by a White female police chief, the department’s first female chief. At the time the data were collected, she had been in office for approximately 9 months. Prior to her appointment at the end of 2003, an African American male held the position of chief. He served as chief from 1996 to 2003, rising through the ranks from patrol. By many accounts, there was a contentious relationship between officers in the department and the chief. For instance, near the end of his term, a lawsuit was filed against him by 17 White male officers who alleged that he discriminated against White male officers in the promotional process to the rank of captain. Ultimately, these officers were awarded over US$2 million in damages. In addition, internal investigations during this chief’s tenure increased from approximately 250 in 1996 to more than 1,200 in 2000. His tenure as chief has been referred to by many in the department as a “reign of terror,” whereas the appointment of the new chief in 2003 was viewed as a “breath of fresh air.”

According to the 2000 census, Milwaukee is the 19th largest city in the country with a population of 596,974. The largest proportion of the workforce in Milwaukee is involved in industrial manufacturing (22%). Fifty percent of the city’s population is White, 37% is African American, and 12% is Hispanic or Latino. The median household income is US$32,216, with just over 21% of persons below the poverty level. Approximately 55% of housing units in the city are renter occupied. Nearly 30% of the population is under the age of 18 and nearly 40% is 24 years of age or younger. Overall, Milwaukee residents are more likely to be younger and less well-off economically compared to national averages. The violent crime rate in Milwaukee is slightly higher, and the property crime rate is slightly lower than cities of similar size.
Data

The data for this study were collected using questionnaires administered to all police patrol officers employed in the Milwaukee Police Department in 2004. The questionnaire was administered during mandatory in-service training sessions held at the MPD training academy during July and August of 2004. Prior to the administration of the survey, officers were shown a videotaped introduction to the survey that included information about the purpose of the project, the confidential and anonymous nature of the data, and instructions for completing the questionnaire. Once the respondents completed the questionnaire, they were instructed to place their questionnaires in the provided unmarked envelopes and to deposit them in the designated box. Of the 1,388 police patrol officers who attended the training (all the patrol officers in the department), 1,191 completed the questionnaire (86.8% response rate).

The questionnaire used in this study was a modified version of the one used by Morash and Haarr (1995). For this study, the draft by Morash and Haarr (1995) was reviewed by several members of the MPD (including the Chief), the Milwaukee Department of Employee Development, and the lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender group within the department. As a result of these reviews, several questions were added, several were deleted, and numerous wording changes were made. The final questionnaire consisted of 63 questions. Space was provided on the questionnaire for additional comments if officers wished to provide any. Most of the questions asked respondents about their own experiences at the MPD within the last year. The questions related to a comprehensive array of workplace experiences, demographic information, stress, and the likelihood of leaving the MPD in the near future. Similar to Morash and Haarr (1995), the questions that related to workplace experiences varied in their referent; that is, some questions asked about experiences in relation to coworkers, some asked about experiences in relation to supervisors, and some asked generally about “people at work.” All questions that related to workplace experiences used a Likert-type scale where respondents were asked to indicate whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, agreed or strongly agreed with the statements.

Variables

Officer characteristics. Five individual-level officer characteristic variables were included in the analyses: race (White/non-White; White/African American/Latino/a); sex (male/female); sexual orientation (heterosexual/gay, lesbian, bisexual); educational level (completed high school/completed some college/completed college or more); and length of service (in years).

Workplace experience. As noted, the questionnaire asked about a comprehensive array of workplace experiences. Through factor analysis, seven statistically distinct groups of questions about workplace experiences were identified. In addition, two questions were included in the analyses to tap two additional workplace experiences (see Table 1). The workplace experience variables include (a) lack of support/influence/
feedback, (b) lack of opportunity, (c) negative physical abilities, (d) uniform/equipment, (e) victim of theft/vandalism, (f) ridicule, setup, invisibility, (g) sexually offensive behaviors, (h) perceptions of bias, and (i) vulgar language/jokes. Each index was additive and standardized (i.e., values for each question were tallied and divided by the number of questions in the index). As a result, for each respondent, each workplace experience measure could assume a value of 1 to 4, with 1 being the most positive and 4 being the most negative. Given the coding scheme, higher scores on the indexes represent workplace problems.

**Police workplace stress.** Workplace stress was measured as an index of four items (α = .935). Respondents were asked (a) if they experienced unwanted stress from their job, (b) whether the amount of unwanted stress from their job has had a negative effect on their physical well-being, (c) whether the amount of unwanted stress from their job

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**Table 1: Workplace Experiences**

- **Lack of support/influence/feedback:** Measures the sense that the respondent has little or no ability to influence or change the way work is performed and a lack of recognition of good work (five items, α = .662)

- **Lack of opportunity:** Measures the respondent’s sense that opportunities for promotion and preferred assignments are limited compared to coworkers (two items, α = .492).

- **Negative physical abilities:** Refers to the respondent’s sense that people at work underestimate the respondent’s physical abilities to do the job (one item)

- **Uniform/equipment:** Measures whether the respondent thinks that the equipment and uniform is not well-suited for his/her needs (one item)

- **Victim of theft/vandalism:** Refers to whether the respondent had personal property vandalized or stolen at work (two items, α = .673)

- **Ridicule, setup, and invisibility:** Measures the sense that people at work set the respondent up for mistakes and dangerous situations, ridicule the respondent for mistakes at work, make offensive comments about respondent’s looks and do not recognize respondent’s presence (nine items, α = .870)

- **Sexually offensive behaviors:** Measures whether people at work make unwanted advances for romantic, physical, and sexual relationships with or without threats and exposure to pornography (seven items, α = .940)

- **Perception of bias at work:** Measures of the sense that there is bias at work against people of respondent’s sex, age, race, ethnic group, and sexual orientation (five items, α = .888)

- **Vulgar language/unwanted comment:** Measures unwanted comments about homosexuality, gay, and lesbian persons and language that is deemed vulgar and offensive (nine items, α = .928)
has had a negative effect on their emotional well-being, and (d) whether unwanted stress has had a negative effect on their job performance. In the questionnaire, these questions were prefaced with the statement “Unwanted stress is defined as stress as a result of those offensive behaviors and/or conduct mentioned in the previous questions.” As with the workplace experience indexes, the stress index was additive and standardized with higher scores indicating greater stress.

Results

The sample for this study includes 1,191 police patrol officers (see Table 2). Of the responding officers, approximately 80% are male; approximately 62% are White, 22% African American, and 11% Latino. Defined by race and sex, nearly 50% of the officers are White males, 17% are African American males, 10% are Latino females, 13% are White females, 5% are African American females, and just over 1% are Latina females. Just over 3% of the sample identified themselves as being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The mean number of years that officers were employed in the department is 9.45, with a range of less than 1 year to 32 years. The overwhelming majority of officers had either some college, or completed college, or more. Even though our sample is relatively large and the MPD is relatively diverse, some of the subgroups of our critical variables of interest (i.e., sex by race and sexual orientation) are relatively small. Given the purpose of the study, however, in most of the analyses we examine differences across these subgroups.

As noted below, the unstable estimates that may result from relatively small subgroup sample sizes, as well as the lack of statistical power in relatively small subsample sizes, need to be considered in interpreting the results of the analyses. Due to the nature of the data, we use ordered logistic regression, which is required for ordinal data where there are more than two outcomes. There were no issues with multicollinearity; all variance inflation factor scores were under 2.

Table 3 shows the aggregate responses for each of the workplace experiences and for the item that represents the potential consequences of negative workplace experiences. Once again, higher scores represent more negative workplace experiences and greater stress. As seen in Table 3, the workplace problem most frequently experienced by officers is “lack of support/influence/feedback” and the least commonly experienced problem is “sexually offensive behaviors” (sexually offensive behaviors is the least commonly experienced problem for men and women).

To examine differences in officers across the workplace experiences of interest, we estimate nine regression equations (Table 4). In each equation, the workplace experience is the dependent variable; the primary independent variables of interest are race, sex, and sexual orientation. Race and sex are defined in terms of five dummy variables: whether officers are African American males, Latino males, African American females, or Latina females; for the analyses that are presented in tables, White male officers serve as the comparison group. Sexual orientation is defined as a single dummy variable (heterosexual/gay, bisexual, or lesbian). Education (high school/
some college/college degree or more) and length of service (in years, logged) are included as controls.

Table 4 shows the results of these analyses. Although little of the variance in any workplace experience is explained by race, sex, or sexual orientation (or by education and length of service for that matter), all of the equations are significant. In addition,
race and sex show several significant and differential effects across workplace experiences. In particular, African American male officers report significantly more negative workplace experiences than White male officers on 5 of the 9 dimensions (i.e., lack of opportunity, other officers underestimating their physical abilities, being a victim of theft or vandalism at work, perceptions of bias, and perceptions of vulgar/offensive language) and more positive experiences on only one dimension (i.e., uniform/equipment). Latino male officers report more negative workplace experiences than White male officers on 3 of the 9 dimensions (i.e., lack of opportunity, other officers underestimating their physical abilities, and perceptions of bias). White female officers report more negative workplace experiences than White male officers on 4 dimensions (i.e., negative physical abilities, perceptions of sexually offensive behaviors, perceptions of bias, and perceptions of vulgar/offensive language), African American female officers report more negative workplace experiences than White male officers on 8 of the 9 dimensions (negative uniform is the only dimension on which White male officers and African American female officers are similar), and Latina female officers report more negative experiences than White male officers on five of the nine dimensions (i.e., lack of support, negative physical abilities, perceptions of sexually offensive behaviors, perceptions of bias, and perceptions of vulgar/offensive language). In short, it appears that the workplace experiences of African American female officers are most unlike the workplace experiences of White male officers, followed by African American male officers, Latina female officers, and White female officers. The workplace experiences of Latino male officers are most similar to those of White males. With regard to sexual orientation, gay, lesbian, and bisexual officers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace experiences of officers</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<td>2.52</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>1-4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1171</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative physical abilities</td>
<td>1181</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative uniform/equipment</td>
<td>1178</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of theft/vandalism</td>
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<td>2.00</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>1-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ridicule/setup</td>
<td>1151</td>
<td>1.75</td>
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<td>1-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexually offensive behaviors</td>
<td>1162</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of bias</td>
<td>1161</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>1-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceptions of vulgar language/jokes</td>
<td>1162</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>.56</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<td>Stress from Experiences</td>
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<td>.82</td>
<td>1-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Still at MPD in 1 year</td>
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<td>1.14</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>1-4</td>
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<td>Still at MPD in 5 years</td>
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<td>1.51</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>1-4</td>
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Notes: Missing data excluded from table.
### Table 4. Ordered Logit Regression Analyses of Workplace Experiences

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<tr>
<th>Regressors</th>
<th>Lack of support</th>
<th>Lack of opportunity</th>
<th>Negative physical abilities</th>
<th>Negative uniform</th>
<th>Victim of theft</th>
<th>Ridicule/setup</th>
<th>Sexually offensive behavior</th>
<th>Bias</th>
<th>Vulgar language</th>
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<td>African American male</td>
<td>-.29 (-1.90)</td>
<td>.69** (4.40)</td>
<td>.46** (2.83)</td>
<td>-.64** (-3.55)</td>
<td>.63** (4.02)</td>
<td>.17 (1.14)</td>
<td>.19 (1.13)</td>
<td>1.85** (11.25)</td>
<td>.66** (4.40)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino male</td>
<td>.09 (.47)</td>
<td>.50* (2.54)</td>
<td>.54** (2.64)</td>
<td>-.44* (-1.96)</td>
<td>-.01 (-.03)</td>
<td>.24 (1.28)</td>
<td>.21 (1.00)</td>
<td>.67** (3.32)</td>
<td>.36 (1.85)</td>
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<td>White female</td>
<td>.06 (.33)</td>
<td>-.04 (-.20)</td>
<td>.95** (5.06)</td>
<td>-.08 (-.40)</td>
<td>.13 (.72)</td>
<td>.25 (1.43)</td>
<td>.82** (4.42)</td>
<td>.95** (5.44)</td>
<td>.60** (3.32)</td>
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<tr>
<td>African American female</td>
<td>.59* (2.28)</td>
<td>.56* (2.15)</td>
<td>.84** (3.10)</td>
<td>-.07 (-.22)</td>
<td>.86** (3.5)</td>
<td>.56* (2.15)</td>
<td>1.23** (4.76)</td>
<td>2.34** (8.72)</td>
<td>1.53** (5.62)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latina female</td>
<td>.95* (2.0)</td>
<td>.63 (1.34)</td>
<td>1.35** (2.68)</td>
<td>.20 (34)</td>
<td>.77 (1.61)</td>
<td>.55 (1.17)</td>
<td>1.54** (3.06)</td>
<td>2.29** (5.10)</td>
<td>2.29** (4.60)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation</td>
<td>-.07 (-.20)</td>
<td>-.47 (-1.28)</td>
<td>.34 (.90)</td>
<td>-.19 (-.47)</td>
<td>.22 (.66)</td>
<td>.29 (.84)</td>
<td>.40 (1.13)</td>
<td>.35 (1.01)</td>
<td>2.40** (6.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.06 (.66)</td>
<td>.09 (.94)</td>
<td>.13 (1.27)</td>
<td>-.10 (-.89)</td>
<td>.06 (.59)</td>
<td>.25** (2.60)</td>
<td>.25* (2.38)</td>
<td>.16 (1.70)</td>
<td>.23* (2.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of service</td>
<td>.14* (2.13)</td>
<td>-.20** (-2.86)</td>
<td>-.16* (-2.21)</td>
<td>-.06 (-.73)</td>
<td>.20** (2.91)</td>
<td>-.05 (-.68)</td>
<td>.17* (2.32)</td>
<td>.01 (1.18)</td>
<td>.18* (2.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LR X²</td>
<td>18.08*</td>
<td>35.27*</td>
<td>49.47*</td>
<td>15.56*</td>
<td>39.68**</td>
<td>15.47*</td>
<td>57.22**</td>
<td>195.69**</td>
<td>120.26**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Entries are unstandardized coefficients with z-scores in parentheses.

*p < .05, **p < .01.
report significantly more negative workplace experiences than heterosexual officers on only one dimension: perceptions of vulgar language.

To examine differences between other groups of officers, separate regression analyses were conducted (to save space, these results are not tabled). Analyses that include only male officers and use African American officers as the comparison group show that Latino male officers and African American male officers are significantly different on only two of the nine workplace experiences (i.e., victim of a theft or vandalism and perceptions of bias); on both dimensions, African American male officers report more negative experiences than Latino officers.

Parallel analyses were conducted with female officers, first using White female officers as the comparison group. Here, African American females differed significantly from White females on 5 of the 9 dimensions (i.e., lack of support/influence, lack of opportunity, victim of theft/vandalism at work, perceptions of bias, and perceptions of vulgar language); on each dimension, African American female officers report more negative experiences than White female officers. Latina female officers had significantly more negative experiences than White female officers on three workplace experiences (i.e., lack of support, perceptions of bias, and perceptions of vulgar language). When African American female officers were used as the comparison group, Latina officers did not differ from African American female officers on any of the nine workplace experiences.

Within each workplace experience, the differential effects of race and sex are also worthy of highlight (see Table 4). Specifically, African American female officers and Latina female officers (but not White female officers or any male officers) report significantly more negative experiences regarding “lack of support/influence” in the organization compared to White male officers. Officers who are White and/or male perceive an ability to influence or change the way work is performed in the organization more so than officers who are minority and female. Regarding “lack of opportunity,” officers who are Latino and African American males or African American females perceive fewer opportunities for promotion and preferred assignments compared to White male officers; Latina and White females do not differ from White male officers in this regard. As for “physical abilities,” all race/sex groups report their physical abilities to do the job as being underestimated compared to White males. Here, being any “minority” (defined in terms of sex or race) carries with it more negative experiences. The only other workplace experience where this same pattern holds true is with “bias” relating to the officer’s sex, race, age, ethnic group, or sexual orientation.

As for officers’ experiences with “uniform and equipment,” African American and Latino male officers report differences compared to White male officers; their experiences with uniform/equipment is actually more positive than White male officers. With regard to being a “victim of a theft or vandalism,” African American officers (male and female) report significantly more negative experiences compared to White male officers; the experiences of Latino officers (male and female) and White female officers do not differ significantly from White male officers on this dimension. African American females experience ridicule and report being set up more often than White males.
As for “sexually offensive behaviors” at work, not surprisingly, all female officers (White, Latina, and African American) report more negative experiences than White male officers. African American and Latino male officers do not differ from White male officers in this regard. Finally, as for vulgar and offensive language, all race and sex groups, with the exception of Latino males, report significantly more negative experiences compared to White males; gay, lesbian, and bisexual officers report significantly more negative experiences compared to heterosexual officers.

In summary, White male officers have the most positive workplace experiences. However, for male officers, “minority” status is not uniformly negative; Latino males have substantially similar (although not the same) workplace experiences as White male officers. This is not the case for African American male officers who clearly have substantially more negative experiences than White male officers. For female officers, the same general pattern holds true, although it appears less pronounced; at the very least, it is fair to say that there are more differences between White female officers and African American female officers than there are between White female officers and Latina female officers, although the extent of these differences is greater with male officers than with female officers. In addition, as noted, the differential effects of race and sex, and sexual orientation are evident in the individual workplace experiences. Some workplace problems are largely a minority female phenomenon (i.e., lack of support), some are a minority phenomenon (i.e., lack of opportunity), some are an African American phenomenon (i.e., victim of theft/vandalism), some are an African American female phenomenon (i.e., ridicule and setup), some are an issue to just female officers (i.e., sexually offensive behaviors), some are largely a nonissue (i.e., negative uniform), whereas others appear to be largely universal problems (i.e., vulgar language, underestimates of physical abilities) compared to the experiences of White male officers.

To examine differences among officers in terms of reported stress, we estimate two regression equations. As for stress, it is seen that all race by sex officer groups report significantly higher levels of stress than White male officers, with the exception of White females and Latino males who do not differ significantly from White males in this regard. Additional analyses (not tabled) reveal that African American females report significantly higher levels of stress than White female officers and Latino male officers but not African American male officers or Latina female officers. High levels of stress appear to be primarily a phenomenon among African American officers and Latina female officers. In addition, it is seen in Table 5 that length of service has a significant impact on reported stress levels; officers with more years of service report greater stress than officers with fewer years of service.

The next set of regression analyses examines the impact of workplace experiences as well as officers’ background characteristics (as controls) on workplace stress (see Table 5). With regard to the workplace stress equation, it is seen that race and sex do not directly affect workplace stress. However, of the nine workplace experiences that are included in the equation, seven are significantly related to stress (lack of opportunity and negative physical abilities are the lone exceptions). Higher levels of lack of
Table 5. Ordered Logit Regression Analyses of Workplace Stress: Officer Characteristics and Workplace Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regressors</th>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American male</td>
<td>0.40*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino male</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White female</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American female</td>
<td>0.80**</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina female</td>
<td>0.99**</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of service</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support/influence/feedback</td>
<td>0.83**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abilities</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative uniform</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft/vandalism</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridicule/setup</td>
<td>1.40**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually offensive behavior</td>
<td>-0.59*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bias</td>
<td>0.46**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language/jokes</td>
<td>0.67**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $R^2$</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LR $X^2$</td>
<td>40.80**</td>
<td>418.20**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Entries are unstandardized coefficients with z-scores in parentheses.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

support/influence, negative feelings toward uniforms and equipment, theft/vandalism at work, ridicule and setup, bias, and vulgar language result in increased levels of workplace stress. Sexually offensive behaviors are also statistically related to stress.
but the relationship is again counterintuitive; officers who perceive greater levels of sexually offensive behaviors at work report lower levels of stress. In short, the results show that sex and race directly affect workplace experiences (Table 4), workplace experiences directly affect stress (Table 5), but sex and race do not directly affect workplace stress (Table 5).

Conclusion

At the outset of the study, we asked three research questions. First, we asked whether different groups of officers (considering race, sex, and sexual orientation) have similar workplace experiences. This study clearly shows that different subgroups of officers have different experiences within the police department. Generally, those officers who have the greatest representation in the organization (White, male, heterosexual) have the most favorable workplace experiences while those individuals who have the least representation (minority, female, gay/bisexual) have the least favorable workplace experiences. The study also shows that most subgroups of officers share many of the same concerns/problems (i.e., lack of support/influence/feedback); although, these problems are more frequently experienced by members of some groups than by others. More specifically, our analyses indicate that with regard to workplace experiences, being female and being a racial/ethnic minority brings with it substantially (but not uniformly) different experiences on the job compared to male and White officers. Black females experience a greater number of workplace problems compared to all other race/sex combinations. Black males and Latino females also experience more workplace problems than White males, Latino males, and White females.

The most common workplace problem experienced by officers was lack of support/influence. The least common workplace problem was sexually offensive behaviors; this pattern holds for both male and female officers. This finding is interesting as most research on workplace experiences of female officers suggests that sexual harassment and/or sexually offensive behaviors on the job are widespread problems. One recent study on the dynamics of sexual harassment among female police officers, on the other hand, noted that many policewomen indicated that they had not experienced sexual harassment (Somvadee & Morash, 2008). In that study, some women did not view sexual attention as severe enough to warrant harassment while others considered it a price of fitting in. Many of the women studied did not consider sexual harassment a “problem” because they handled the inappropriate language and/or behaviors within the workgroup with many male colleagues backing down and even apologizing. It could be that the female officers we studied also handled sexually offensive behaviors within the workgroup, which could have empowered the women. This may explain the negative relationship between our measurement of sexually offensive behaviors and stress. Clearly, additional research is needed to clarify the dynamics of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Second, we asked whether officers differ in terms of their reported workplace stress. Again, our data indicate that both race and sex, separately and in interaction, are
important considerations in understanding these relationships. In particular, Black female officers experience the greatest amount of stress but all race/sex combinations experience greater levels of stress than White male and female officers, and Latino male officers. Finally, we asked whether officers’ characteristics and/or workplace experiences influence officer stress. Officers of varying races/ethnicities, sexes, and sexual orientations do not have greater levels of stress based solely on their ascribed characteristics. On the other hand, our findings confirm previous research that workplace climate has an effect on workplace stress (Morash & Haarr, 1995). In other words, although race, sex, and sexual orientation do not directly influence stress, they do so indirectly. Nearly all of the dimensions of workplace climate considered here were related to workplace stress, which clearly highlights the importance of the immediate working environment in dealing with stress.7

Police managers can change the workplace climate through management, supervision, training, and mentoring. Clear policy statements, proper supervision, well-controlled investigations, and just use of sanctions will assist in this regard. Through training and reinforcement, police managers must communicate to officers that negative workplace experiences are not necessarily the equivalent of hurt feelings. In the written comments provided on the questionnaire, several officers made reference to hurt feelings being part of the job. According to one officer, “there seems to be too much time devoted to feelings . . . we have a tough job—do it or get out . . . too many people whine about things not being fair” In addition, research suggests that formal mentoring programs may reduce workplace stress (Hassell & Archbold, 2009). Work experiences do not have to be negative and unfair, especially as it relates to groups of individuals. The negative workplace experiences investigated in our study are not experienced randomly by a few individuals; they are experienced by certain groups of officers—primarily groups based on race and sex (and sexual orientation to a lesser degree).

Similarly, officers need to understand the power of words. The language of the workplace reflects the nature of the workplace. This is most evident with responses to the questions contained in four of the workplace experience indices: ridicule/setup, sexually offensive behaviors, perceptions of bias, and especially vulgar language/jokes. For some officers and supervisors, it might just be the way that cops talk, but it must be understood that negative/vulgar language creates an atmosphere of disrespect and exclusion (Fine, 1987). For those uncomfortable or offended with such language, it signals that the workplace is not their workplace and that they are outsiders. In these instances, language results in more than just hurt feelings; language is an expression of power that dissects the work environment, reducing solidarity and generating a negative workplace climate where stress can have deleterious effects for the department and communities it serves. Again, training and supervisory reinforcement can affect the language used in the workplace.

Finally, the issues that appear to be of most concern to personnel—lack of support/influence and lack of opportunity—may be the most difficult to address. In the written comments, many officers voiced frustration regarding these matters. For example, one
officer wrote, “I think patrol officers who do their jobs should be able to have input as to how things are done.” Another officer added, “the best changes can be made by listening to the officers who do the job.” Police departments have traditionally emphasized the command and control approach to management; however, some officers clearly expect to participate in decision making. Supervisors should seek input from patrol officers regarding day-to-day procedures and provide positive feedback about their work when appropriate. We also recommend that officers be given more discretion to identify and initiate responses to problems/incidents. Such initiatives may go a long way in improving perceptions of the workplace climate, as long as personnel from all subgroups have equal participation and representation.

Although the findings of this study are important, they are not without limitation. The major weakness of this study is the relatively small sample sizes of certain subgroups (i.e., African American and Latina females; gay/lesbian/bisexual officers). Unfortunately, in most departments, these subgroups are undersized. Although our samples of these subgroups are small, we felt the benefit of including the interaction terms outweighed validity threats. As Daly and Tonry (1997, p. 208, italics in original; See also Holcomb, Williams & Demuth, 2004, p. 884) argued, “the most interesting analytical and political questions center on the intersections of race and gender, not merely the separate categories of ‘Black,’ ‘White,’ ‘male,’ and ‘female.’” Although it is important to note that the conclusions are tentative, the findings uncover the significance of investigating not only the interaction effects between sex and race but also the importance of moving beyond the use of a broad “non-White” category in criminal justice research. In this department, White, Latino, and African American officers have different workplace experiences. Furthermore, being female makes one vulnerable to negative workplace experiences; being female and a racial/ethnic minority, particularly an African American female, makes one even more vulnerable. The inclusion of sexual orientation as a variable of interest is also important as contemporary police departments seek to further diversify. In addition, we have restricted our analysis of the workplace experiences of officers to a quantitative analyses; an ethnographic study would further enhance our understanding of the working climate within the department. Future research should continue to investigate and clarify the relationship between race, sex, sexual orientation, and workplace climate in police organizations. The creation of well-functioning and diverse police departments may depend on it.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interests with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

Funding

The authors declared that they received no financial support for their research and/or authorship of this article.
Notes

1. The larger study consisted of a survey of all police department personnel including detectives, supervisors, command staff, and civilians.
2. To help protect respondents’ anonymity, certain identifying questions were not asked (e.g., work location, shift).
3. The purpose of these analyses is to examine the differential effects of the critical variables of interest on workplace problems, not to explain variation in workplace problems. As a result, the variance explained by each of the equations is of tertiary importance.
4. Although sample size concerns are relevant in these analyses, it is instructive to note that none of the other probability values for the White female and Latina female officer comparisons were less than .26.
5. Although sample size issues are also relevant in these analyses, it should be noted that none of the differences between Latina female officers and African American female officers approached a conventional level of statistical significance (i.e., the smallest probability value was .36).
6. Once again, our intent is not to explain variation in the dependent variables of interest but only to assess the impact of the included independent variables on the dependent variables.
7. Although the purpose of this study was not to identify the consequences of workplace stress, other research documents well the emotional, mental, physical, and performance-based toll stress has on officers and the department (e.g., Anderson et al., 2002; Anshel, 2000; Liberman et al., 2002; Webb & Smith, 1980; Wester & Lyubelsky, 2005).

References


**Bios**

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