

5-2012

Racial Profiling is Not Specifically Always Black or White

Samantha Ollie
Lindenwood University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/psych_journals



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ollie, Samantha (2012) "Racial Profiling is Not Specifically Always Black or White," *Undergraduate Psychology Research Methods Journal*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 14 , Article 12.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/psych_journals/vol1/iss14/12

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Psychology, Sociology, and Public Health Department at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Psychology Research Methods Journal by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact phuffman@lindenwood.edu.

Racial Profiling is Not Specifically Always Black or White

Samantha Ollie¹¹

The following paper outlines different views of racial profiling. Racial profiling is painted in various lights due to the ambiguity and the magnitude that surrounds this concern. Accusations seem to be on every news headline, but how do we as a public know who was in the right and who was in the wrong and how can he or she prove the true intention of any given situation? Both pros and cons from each side, of an average citizen of the United States of America and also from the law enforcement personnel that live to serve and protect those citizens and the highest law of our land, The Constitution of the United States of America are stated and analyzed. A data analysis study is presented from the village of Caseyville, Illinois.

We have all heard expressions about first impressions, “Within five seconds one knows if one will be interested in what another has to say,” and also including, “Within seven seconds, one can make 21 assumptions about someone else.” Sadly for some, that first impression might not even take as long as five seconds. In today’s society, should we really be allowed to assume anything about anyone? The existence of racial profiling has been an ongoing debate within the law enforcement defenses for centuries, and still remains a hot topic. Walker, Spohn, and Delone (2012) defined racial profiling as “the use of race as an indicator in a profile of criminal suspects, with the result that drivers are stopped entirely or in part because of their race or ethnicity and not because of any illegal activity.”

Racial profiling has been an issue, because currently it is just that, an issue. Racial profiling is an issue that has no simple problem-solving technique or an answer that one could just possibly “Google.” One should not be content with a simple answer and should not find

¹¹ Samantha Ollie, Department of Criminal Justice and Department of Psychology, Lindenwood University.

Correspondence about this article should be addressed to: Samantha Ollie, Department of Criminal Justice and Psychology. E-mail: sko602@lionmail.lindenwood.edu

comfort in the black and white letters that form words on any random internet page. An issue has sides, sometimes multiple sides, and every side is very opinionated and has a story to tell. Every side also believes that his or her side is the right side because of his or her own certain reasons. An issue of this magnitude has no simple fix or solution because it is not a simple concern and should not be treated as so.

Police personal are trained to judge any situation in its complete entirety. Even when making the initial decision to pull any offender over, it simply would be impractical to anticipate a good stop (warranted and reasonable) based solely on skin color. After the first contact has been made, researchers have noted “that a considerable amount of police officer discretion is exercised after the stop has taken place” (e.g., Brown, 1981; Davis, 1971; Goldstein, 1960). Then once again, the totality of the circumstances shifts so the officer can judge and even anticipate his and the offenders perception of the situation. Many other factors are now introduced. Engel and Calnon (2004) determined many factors go into an officer’s decision to cite a driver, search the vehicle, arrest the individual or the degree of use of force reached, if necessary. But this conclusion is light on the very initial stop and why the officer chose this one particular individual over the next. Officers are trained to take in all factors and to judge what will happen next at this point in the stop. Race may or may not be included at this point in time. Attitude, age, overall quality of life, and overall neighborhood attitudes towards police all might play roles in how police initiate contact with a person of interest (Walker et al., 2012).

Racial profiling should not be approached or apprehended as a single question of existence or non-existence, because there is not a yes/no or black/white way of describing, analyzing, or proving what, how, and to what degree this phenomena may or may not be taking place. “The Supreme Court itself often adopts a contextual, or totality of the circumstances,

approach to analyze the reasonableness of an individual search under the Fourth Amendment, and the Court allows race to be used as one factor among many in order to pursue a compelling state interest under Equal Protection doctrine when a governmental policy has a disparate impact on minorities” (Pickerill, Mosher, & Pratt, 2009). The same can be said for traffic violations themselves, including initial stops made by the police. Police do not seem to be singling out minorities based on that one factor alone, but might play a role in the totality of the circumstances (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993). For example, if a particular city shows stopping a minority group would lead to a higher hit rate after considering many factors, a city police officer might choose one vehicle over the next to stop. Hit rates themselves have multiple levels for different stages of any police encounter depending on demographics of a particular area.

Ambiguity surrounds even the very definition of racial profiling. No two societies have the same understanding or operational definition of racial profiling because every region and even every community might or might not experience this phenomenon and even the familiarity in different variations in the degree it may or may not be addressed.

Method

Materials and Procedure

Demographic information, for example such as age, ethnicity, gender, and overall population was obtained through state and federal census information on the state of Illinois. Traffic records and race information was collected from www.dot.il.gov and paper reports held at Caseyville Police Department. In the Illinois Traffic Stop Study, police agencies report the demographic information of the year’s total number of people dealt with, including traffic stops to the Illinois Department of Transportation. No identifying information was received such as names or social security numbers.

Lindenwood University Undergraduate Psychology Research Journal [Spring 2012] 182

Data from the last few years was converted into a chi-squared analysis in such manor to include looking at the demographic information and comparing how the percentages of ethnic groups (driving population) has changed over the years and also ethnic groups were compared to each other to rationalize a majority and minority population within the village of Caseyville, Illinois. Effects form a chi-squared analysis showed no immediate relationship.

Results

When comparing the percentage stops, caucasian drivers were consecutively pulled over at a higher rate that all minority drivers combined. This analysis correlates with the population of Caseyville, indicating that police are not solely basing a first contact on race or ethnicity of the driver. Tables like the ones below (table 1, table 2 and table 3) were used to analyze and categorize data into pre-stop and post-stop data. Tables 1, 2, and 3 are a reprehensive example of all the tables prepared from the years of 2008 all the way up until the year of 2010.

Table 1: Caseyville Police, Illinois Traffic Stop Study, 2010

Stops (Overview)		
	Caucasian Drivers	Minority Drivers
Percentage Stops	53.6	46.4
Duration (Mean/Median)	19/8	23/10
Estimated Minority Driving Population	70.73	29.27
Ratio		1.59
Total Stops	1190	1030

Table 2 : Caseyville Police, Illinois Traffic Stop Study, 2010

Reason for Stop (Pre-Stop)				
	Caucasian Drivers		Minority Drivers	
Moving Violations	659	55.38%	515	50%
Equipment Violations	370	31.09%	298	28.93%
Licensing / Registration Violations	161	13.53%	217	21.07%
Total	1190		1030	

Table 3: Caseyville Police, Illinois Traffic Stop Study, 2010

Outcome of Stop (Post-Stop)				
	Caucasian Drivers		Minority Drivers	
Citation	595	50%	580	56.31%
Written Warning	137	11.51%	60	5.83%
Verbal Warning / Stop Card	458	38.49%	390	37.86%
Total	1190		1030	

Discussion

Even though, no significance was found, and based on driving population, instead of actual demographic information the numbers were nearly equal thought the board. So much time and money is spent going into these studies and takes many resources for police agencies just to

Lindenwood University Undergraduate Psychology Research Journal [Spring 2012] 184

collect, transcribe, and report this data that one might question if it is worth the time and money spent. The answer is yes. By utilizing this collection of data, the state of Illinois can report that racial profiling should not be a subject of debate because it is not an issue.

Racial profiling will always be a hot topic among law enforcement and the general public. As long as good people, with the best intentions are hired as police personal and they are equipped with the high morals and the best training available, this issue will stay in within the confounds of Illinois law. This is the reason police personnel are evaluated and assessed so rigorously before getting hired at any agency. Pre-employment includes but is not limited to: multiple personality evaluations, multiple psychological tests, polygraph assessment, various psychical and agility test, and also a background screening for use of good judgment and overall excellence of a moral standing. All of these criteria are assessed on a case by case basis and are screened by multiple individuals. This process helps ensure that police officers are becoming police officers for the right reasons.

Ideas for any future studies might include comparing two different cities with the same actual demographic statistics and analyzing the driving population over a longer period of time.

References

- Brown, M.K. (1981). *Working the street: Police discretion and the dilemmas of control*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Bursik, R.J., Jr., & Grassmick, H.G. (1993). *Neighborhoods and crime: The dimensions of effective community control*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Davis, K.C. (1971). *Discretionary justice: A preliminary inquiry*. Urbana, IL: Univ. of Illinois Press.

Engel, R., & Calnon, J. (2004). Examining the influence of drivers' characteristics during traffic stops with police: Results form a national survey. *Justice Quarterly* 1, 49-90.

Goldstein, J. (1960). Police discretion not to involve the criminal process: Low visibility decisions and the administration of justice. *Yale Law Journal*, 69, 543-588.

Illinois Department of Transportation. (2012). Featured programs: Illinois Traffic Stop Study & Results. <http://www.2.dot.il.gov.rpa2007/splashscreen.aspx>

Pickerill, J.M., Mosher, C., & Pratt, T. (2009). Search and seizure, racial profiling, and traffic stops: A disparate impact framework. *Law & Policy*, 31,1.

Walker, S., Spohn, C., & Delone, M. (2012). *The color of justice: Race, ethnicity, and crime in America*. 5th ed.. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.