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### Police and Higher Education: A Necessity or Just a Desire?

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Senior Honors Project

5/6/2019

## Police and Higher Education: A Necessity or Just a Desire?

### **Abstract**

A key issue related to the criminal justice system is if a college education makes a significant impact on an officer's decision making, perception of their job, and desirability by police departments. Little research has been done on police departments in Massachusetts, so interviews were conducted with three high-ranking police officers in Massachusetts. They were selected using a convenience sample and the results were compared to the results of scholarly journal articles. Only some of the interviews and articles show that police officers with a college degree use force less often, they were inconsistent regarding a college educated officer's job perception, and their desirability by police departments is questionable. The study is limited due to the use of a convenience sample. Future research should look at police officers and higher education on a nationwide scale.

### **Introduction & Historical Background**

The idea of whether police officers should be required to have a college education has been debated for decades. Some are worried because as recent issues surrounding officers have come to light, "community opinions towards law enforcement have become increasingly negative due to recent civil disturbances throughout the United States" (Sereni-Massinger, & Wood, 2016). To fully understand this debate and the reasons people still argue in favor, and against, police education requirements in the present, it is important to understand the history regarding police

officers and higher education. Cordner (2016) states that police officers would benefit from having a college education. He explains that the early years of police education was intended to reduce crime and corruption committed by police officers. Rydberg & Terrill (2010) state that many police officers engaged in gambling, prostitution, and would use excessive force on suspects to get them to comply. Cornder (2016) explains that supporters of police education believed that an education would in essence bring order and organization to a police department. By giving them the tools necessary to do their jobs properly and effectively, it was believed that police officers would commit less crimes and would perform better at their jobs. However, actually implementing these polices was slow and mostly ineffective as many police departments didn't incorporate higher education into their requirements. Part of the reason is because it was only a suggestion, with no actual legal backing behind the recommendation (Paoline & Terrill, 2000).

During the 1950's, a college education for police officers would be instituted to prevent misunderstandings between the police officers and minorities (Cordner, 2016). He follows up by explaining that at the time, the majority of police officers were white and there were issues of segregation of the African-American community. This led to urban communities harboring distrust towards police officers, which would result in conflicts erupting during police encounters with urban community members. Cordner (2016) adds that because police officers were more focused on riding in their patrol cars and performing raids, they were more isolated. This caused friction between the police and members of the community because police officers were essentially only interacting with the community when they had to perform traffic stops and investigate crime. This led to many community members feeling like the police were only there to arrest them and make their lives miserable. Taking this into account along with racial tensions

of the era, it is understandable that community members would feel detached from their local police department and harbor distrust towards them.

Cordner (2016) explains that because of multiple riots and protests that occurred during the 1960's, such as the Civil Rights movement, multiple commissions were created by the government. These included "...the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967), the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1968), and a National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals (1973)..." (Cordner, 2016). The purpose of these commissions was to assess and handle any issues relating to civil disobedience and the criminal justice system. The National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals also put forth a recommendation that police officers need to have at least a 4-year college degree, though this policy never went into effect, and the number of police officers with a 4-year degree was estimated to be around one-third at the time of his study.

On the other end of the debate is the argument against police officers needing a college degree to do their job. Cordner (2016) explains that one of the issues with police officers requiring a college education is that findings on the subject are mixed. Since many scholarly journal articles have found different and contrasting results for the benefits of a police education, this has caused many to argue that having such a requirement is unnecessary. Since the basis of the main argument in favor of requiring police officers to obtain a college degree are the benefits it brings, the lack of consistent evidence to support these benefits has led to people arguing against it.

Further complicating the issue, according to Cordner (2016), is the prioritizing the type of learning officers should have before entering the profession. Many argue that both a college

education and police training are very important for an officer to do their job well, but many question if prioritizing a college education would lead to less of an emphasis on training police officers. To combat this, many educational institutions tried to combine both a college education with police training. However, these two programs clashed with each other and became a great source of tension for people on both sides of the argument. Eventually, police training and getting a college degree were separated from each other, and separate schools for police training were established. Since these training facilities were put in place, universities started to focus more on education and less on highly technical skills, as these skills were now being taught in these training facilities. Further contributing to the critic's argument against a college education requirement for police officers is the lack of quality in police education. As quoted in Corder (2016):

Whatever the potential value of higher education for changing the police, police education is now falling short of that potential. The early vision of police reform through higher education assumed that police education would be intellectually rigorous, conceptually broad, and provided by a scholarly faculty. Yet much police education today is intellectually shallow, conceptually narrow, and provided by a faculty that is far from scholarly. Rather than helping to change the police, police education appears to support the status quo, teaching what the police do now instead of inquiring what they could do differently. (Sherman Et The National Advisory Commission on Higher Education for Police Officers, 1978, p. 19).

Corder (2016) uses this quote to illustrate one of the key problems with a police education requirement during the late 1970's and that is the lack of quality in the places that educate these officers. If the institutions that are supposed to be properly educating these officers and getting

them prepared for the job aren't effective, then requiring officers obtain a college degree simply creates an unnecessary barrier that doesn't result in only qualified applicants getting hired. By having a less than stellar education system for police, the only barrier that stops an officer who normally wouldn't obtain college degree from becoming a police officer is time.

Further strengthening the argument against criminal justice programs during the period of the 1960's-1970's is the rise of the criminal justice education program. According to Cordner (2016) and Paoline & Terrill (2000), this program was intended to take over as the dominant form of police higher education and would be the primary way prospective police officers got their college degrees. However, criminal justice education programs came under fire for multiple reasons. One issue is that many of the faculty members weren't full-time, and a significant number of them didn't have a graduate degree. This created an issue where many people seeking a criminal justice degree didn't get taught by faculty who were solely committed to their job as professors, and many of them didn't have the qualifications that would have been demanded of professors teaching many other disciplines. This could have left students with the impression that the school they were attending didn't take the criminal justice program seriously, and thus impacted their motivation to succeed at college.

If true, this would have made it difficult for students to take the program seriously as well. Since the people who were supposed to be professionals in the field didn't take it seriously, then the students would be left with the impression that a criminal justice education shouldn't be taken seriously because the people who they view as experts weren't high quality instructors. Cordner (2016) also explains that a lot of textbooks used in criminal justice programs didn't test the student's analytical abilities and were solely prescriptive. This means that criminal justice textbooks simply told student's solutions rather than giving them a problem and testing their

ability to solve it. This essentially made it so that all criminal justice courses made it seem like there was only one correct way to approach situations, and this left no room for students to think about alternative approaches.

Cordner (2016) also notes that many of the orientations the professors had to go through were experiential. This means the professors were trained on educating their students using a system that was experimental and not necessarily the proper way to train them. Cordner's (2016) main point is that many criminal justice programs weren't intellectually stimulating. Since the purpose of a criminal justice program was to give future officers and educators the tools needed to understand the system and succeed on the job, having it lack intellectual rigor removes the application barrier that it is meant to create. In other words, having an education requirement should thin the number of applications and prevent unqualified people from becoming police officers. By lacking an intellectual challenge, the only barrier a college education has for someone wanting to become a police officer is a four-year time commitment.

As for those who want to become educators, the standards for becoming a professor were really low. Since most of them don't have a graduate degree, then someone who wants to teach criminal justice only needs to put in that four-year time commitment to teach it. As for those who want to go all way and get the highest degree possible, the lack of intellectual rigor would prevent them from being prepared for the criminal justice field. Further contributing to this issue is an argument referenced by Cordner (2016), who quotes the following:

it is clearly not for lawyers, sociologists, or psychologists to develop an intellectually credible version of what police work should be like. This must be left to scholarly policemen just as the analogous task is left to scholarly physicians, social workers, or engineers. (Bittner, 1970, p. 81)

This quote brings up the important issue surrounding those who created the criminal justice curriculum. While they are in positions to create an effective academic curriculum, many of them have never served as police officers or in similar roles before. Because of this lack of experience, fears arose that those teaching the profession wouldn't truly understand the role of a police officer and thus wouldn't provide an effective criminal justice education. Cordner's (2016) main point is that criminal justice educators believed that their own ideas about running a criminal justice program were correct, and because of their essential monopoly on police education, this created a difficult situation where there were few effective higher education programs for police officers. The long and complicated history of police officers and higher education has been debated for decades and is still very relevant today. As a result, the purpose of this study is to see if police officers do benefit from a college education in terms of reducing their use of force and their desirability by police departments.

## **Literature Review**

### **Use of Force**

There are mixed results regarding whether a college education affects an officer's decision to use force. Paoline & Terrill (2000) found a decrease in the use of verbal force by officers who were attending college. This is because the officers have "a greater appreciation or understanding for the underlying coercive nature of varying forms of verbal force (i.e., ordering and threatening suspects)" (Paoline & Terrill, 2000). Since officers understand the impact that verbal force can have on those who the officer is commanding, they refrain from using it and most likely will take a softer approach to handle the situation. Additionally, since officers might have learned valuable oral communication skills while in college, they might use those instead of forceful commands when engaging with members of the community.



However, Paoline & Terrill (2000) only saw a decrease in the use of physical force by officers who had at least a 4-year degree. This shows that only being exposed to a college environment or just taking a few classes isn't enough to cause officers to rely less on force. This suggests that the completion of a four-year degree is essential for an officer to rely less on force because they need all benefits a college degree gives them because that will give them the skills necessary to defuse a situation and avoid using force. Since officers can learn better oral communication skills while at college, it's possible that they understand to avoid using verbal force earlier in their education because that's at the base of their improved communication skills. However, since they most likely need to master those oral communication skills to defuse situations and reduce the likelihood they need to use force, that would explain the research showing that officers who completed their degree are less likely to use force.

Paoline & Terrill (2000) also found that experience on the job would reduce the likelihood that an officer would use verbal or physical force. This creates an issue for people who support a college education requirement. Since one can simply do the job and gain the skills necessary to reduce instances of using force, the need for a 4-year college education requirement seems unnecessary. However, one could also argue that this requirement prevents the hiring of officers who are underqualified and that having officers enter with a college degree will cause them to rely less on force sooner than an officer without that degree.

However, having both a 4-year college degree and experience did not add any benefits beyond having just a college education or experience (Paoline & Terrill, 2000). This is interesting because it shows that an officer only needs one or the other. Since they don't need both, one could argue that a 4-year college degree will give an officer all the skills and knowledge they need to be effective at their jobs. Alternatively, it can be argued that officers

don't need a college degree because they simply need to work on the job for a few years and they will get all benefits a college degree would give them in terms of use of force.

Backing up Paoline's findings is a study done by Rydberg & Terrill (2010), which also found that officers with a 4-year degree or who had some exposure to college are less likely to use force than officers who didn't attend college. Interestingly, a college education had no effect over an officer's decision to make an arrest (Rydberg & Terrill, 2010). This suggests that officers learn about alternative methods to using force while in college, but college doesn't give them the skills to avoid making an arrest. This could be because the use of force is optional and ultimately avoidable in many cases, but an arrest is inevitable in most cases. If an individual has committed a crime, officers usually have no choice but to arrest the individual, regardless of if they are peaceful or not. While a college education doesn't reduce the likelihood of an arrest, it can at least reduce the chances of force being used and lead to a smooth and safe arrest for all parties involved.

However, Rydberg & Terrill (2010) mention that some studies found no difference in the use of force between college educated officers and non-college educated officers. They also mentioned that other studies found that officers with a college degree used force more often. While the exact reasoning for educated officers using force more often is unclear, there is a possible explanation for the reason there is no correlation between education and use of force in other studies.

According to Hine, Porter, Westera, Alpert, & Allen (2018), police officers tend to react to dangerous situations using their instincts rather than their analytical abilities. This means that they don't think their decisions through and weigh their options. This could correlate with the studies that say education has no effect on use of force because if an officer doesn't utilize the

critical thinking abilities they have obtained from getting a college degree, then it's understandable that there would be no difference.

Complicating matters even more is that in Hine et al., 2018 suggests that police training with an emphasis on stress reduction should be implemented to reduce use of force by police officers. Should this suggestion be implemented, there would be a strong argument against requiring a college degree. Since training is already a requirement for an officer, regardless of whether they got a college degree or not, people could argue that a college degree would act as an unnecessary four-year barrier. Since this new training would cover one of the major benefits of getting a college degree, people could argue it shouldn't be a requirement. This would put those who support a college degree requirement in a similar position to the supporters in the Cordner's (2016) article.

Additionally, Lim & Lee (2015) found that officers who have a college degree are less likely to use their weapons during a confrontation, but they also found that an officer is more likely to use force if their supervisor did not have a Bachelor's Degree or higher. Additionally, police officers were less likely to use force if their supervisor was more well-trained (Lim & Lee, 2015). This suggests that part of the issue with police use of force is leadership. If officers are led by a supervisor who has been well-trained for the job or who has an education and has thus acquired the skills necessary to avoid using force, then they will be able to lead officers effectively. By having an effective leader in place who other officers can look up to and follow, then it is possible these officers are less likely to use force because they are being led by someone who they respect and can show them proper alternatives to using force.

### **Persons with Mental Health Issues**

Further, there are mixed findings about education addressing those with mental health issues. LaGrange (2003) found that police officers who have a college degree are more likely to make a psychiatric referral rather than get into a physical confrontation with an individual who suffers from a mental illness. She also found that officers with only some college experience are less likely to make a psychiatric referral compared to those with a college degree. Officers without a college degree were more likely to arrest a person suffering from a mental illness, and many of them would classify them as being on drugs. This suggests that officers without college degrees might not have the knowledge necessary to differentiate between a suspect suffering from a mental illness and one who is on drugs.

Conversely, one study found that there is no difference in the use of force against an individual with a mental health issue (Gill, Jensen, & Cave, 2018). They also found that people suffering from a mental illness are more likely to resist police officers. These findings conflict with LaGrange's study, as it shows that officers don't use force more often against mentally ill people in general, suggesting it is not based on an officer having a college degree. Since mentally ill patients are more likely to resist arrest, it is possible that officer with a college degree could prevent this by using the skills they acquired from their college degree to defuse the situation.

### **Job Performance**

Additionally, the findings suggest that college educated police officers do better at their jobs compared to non-college educated police officers. Roberg & Bonn (2004) found that officers with a college education performed better on the job than those without a college degree. They were given higher evaluation ratings from their superiors, they were more likely to take leadership roles, and they were more likely to get a promotion. Truxillo, Bennett, & Collins (1998) support these findings, saying that officers with a college education have better job

performance ratings and have mastered many skills necessary to get a promotion. He also says that one reason educated officers get more promotions is because they apply the same motivation they had in college to their job and this causes them to perform better. They are also required to take tests while in college, which prepares them for a test taking environment and gives them an edge over non-college educated officers (Truxillo et al., 1998).

Since officers who attend college are pushed to work hard so they can pass their classes, this instills a work ethic in them that can translate to their job as a police officer. Additionally, officers with a degree appear able to adapt to situations and the requirements of the job more effectively. As mentioned in Paoline & Terrill (2000), officers with a college degree didn't have to use force as often because they were given more tools to defuse a situation. This can be translated to their general on the job performance as well, since they appear capable of adapting to the demands of the job. This suggests that earning a college degree gives officers the skill sets necessary to handle many types of police related work and excel at their jobs.

Carlan (2007) found that officers who receive a criminal justice degree felt that they were more prepared for their job than those without a criminal justice degree. While this is solely based on an officer's own opinion, this study shows that officers with a criminal justice degree feel more confident about the value their education brings, which means that the officers themselves believe that a college degree has value. Conversely, Paoline, Terrill, & Rossler, (2015) found that officers with a college degree don't look at their job more positively, and this isn't affected by their major. Despite Carlan's (2007) study showing that officers feel more prepared for their job with a college degree, their overall job satisfaction is unaffected by this, and whether they actually look more positively at their job is unclear.

### **Impact on Minorities**

Interestingly, Roberg & Bonn (2004) state that having a higher education requirement would negatively impact minorities. They referenced studies that found that a large number of minorities would not have been eligible to apply as police officers, and that a significant number of them didn't have a Bachelor's Degrees. This creates an issue because the purpose of a higher education requirement is to ensure that the best candidates are hired as police officers. However, since many minorities are not eligible to become police officers under these requirements, it could be argued that these requirements would be biased against minorities.

Additionally, since police officers want to foster stronger connections with members of the community, excluding minorities from departments could make it more difficult for officers to form connections with community members. This is especially true if the community contains mostly minorities, as they may feel they are not properly represented by their police department. Should community members learn about the higher education requirements that essentially exclude minorities, this could result in them becoming distrustful towards the police.

### **Methodology**

This research was conducted by performing semi-structured telephone interviews with three high-ranking police officers from police departments around Massachusetts. The police officers were selected using a convenience sample. The departments were called and those that answered or called back had interviews setup with them. The departments were briefed on the purpose of the study, were told their options when it came to answering questions and were given the contact information of those involved in the research. One of the departments was given the questions ahead of time at their request. The interviews were conducted in a private area where only the interviewer could hear the officer, and the officer was asked if they had any questions

before the interview began. When the telephone interviews were conducted, the officers were asked multiple questions, found in Appendix A.

After the interview questions, the officers were asked if they had a college degree, and if they wanted a copy of the research once completed. During the interview process, many of them were asked probe questions to elaborate on their answers to get more information from them. Once the interview was completed, the officers were thanked for their time, told the subject of this study, and were asked if they had any final questions or comments. After the interviews were conducted, the results of these interviews were compared to the findings of scholarly journal articles to address the research questions.

### **Research Questions**

- 1. Do officers with a four-year college degree get into fewer situations that are classified as a level two or higher on the Use of Force Model than those without one?*
- 2. Are officers with a four-year college degree more desired by police departments than those without one? If so, why?*

The first research question is asking a question similar to the ones addressed in the Use of Force section of the Literature Review. Its purpose is to determine if police officers get into less situations that require them to use force. The Use of Force Model is the standard model used by police departments nationwide to classify different types of force. A level two on this model involves an officer using basic verbal commands to handle the situation. A level one on this model refers to an officer's presence. Since an officer arriving on scene is inevitable and unavoidable, it was excluded from the analysis of their use of force.

The second research question refers to a police officer's desirability by police departments. Not only does this question seek to see if an officer obtains skills from their college education that can be useful to police departments, but it also seeks to figure out if police departments value these skills. By looking at the particular skills that departments value from a college education, assuming they value any at all, this study can gain a better understanding of the factors that are considered when hiring police officers.

### **Findings**

Of the three police departments interviewed, only one has a college degree requirement, that being an Associate's Degree. The one that requires an Associate's Degree also requires that officers have completed the Special State Police Academy. However, the other two departments have no experience or education requirement, which allows anyone who can complete the Police Academy and pass the Civil Service Exam to join. The majority of the officers at all three departments have a college degree, all three officers interviewed have a Master's Degree, and one of the officers interviewed also had a J.D. One of the officers mentioned that while the majority of their officers have a college degree, most of them get the degree after they are on the job. They noted this is because they want the knowledge and skills that a college degree brings so they can do better at their job.

Over 50% of the officers at one department had a college degree, another had at least 60%, and the other one had over 80%. Only one of the officers interviewed stated that police officers with a college degree use force less often. This was in response to question 5 in Appendix A, where they were asked about the advantages of an officer having a college degree. Two of the officers interviewed stated that police officers with a college education bring benefits such as improved writing skills, and one officer said they get bonus points on the promotion exam. Other



advantages mentioned were the knowledge and education the officers bring, as well as them being more prepared for the police department's promotion exam.

None of the officers saw any challenges with a college educated officer, but none of them directly stated that college educated officers are more desirable than non-college educated officers. One officer did mention that the only challenge is the officer getting the degree, but they did not mention any challenges related to their job performance. Two of the departments mentioned that the Quinn Bill has an impact on officers who were hired. They mentioned that it provided incentives for officers to get a college degree, but it being taken away for a period of time has negatively impacted the number of officers with college degrees who are applying. One officer mentioned that the negative perception of officers on the news is impacting hiring practices, as police officers are being shown in a negative light.

## **Discussion**

### **Effects on Job Performance**

One officer said that officers with a college degree use force less often, which supports the findings by Paoline & Terrill (2000), Rydberg & Terrill (2010), and Lim & Lee (2015). All three departments agreed that a college education brings multiple benefits, but for slightly different reasons. One said that the knowledge and education they bring is an advantage, another said their writing ability, willingness to learn, and greater understanding of culture is an advantage, while the last one said they have better written and oral communication skills. The emphasis on improved writing and oral communication skills supports the findings by Roberg & Bonn (2004) and Truxillo et al. (1998), who said that police officers with a college education perform better at their jobs.

One officer said that officers with a criminal justice degree are more likely to be promoted, and they also get bonus points on the promotion exam, based on degree level. This supports the findings by Roberg & Bonn (2004) and Truxillo et al. (1998), who said that officers with a college degree are more likely to get promoted. None of the officers interviewed said there are challenges with an officer having a college degree, regardless of degree level, aside from the one officer who said getting the degree is a challenge. This suggests that police departments do see value in the skills a college degree brings, and that there are benefits to officers having these skills regarding their on the job performance.

### **College Degree Requirements, Number of Officers with a College Degree, and its Impact**

Further, two of the officers interviewed said that they do not require a college degree, but the third one does have an Associate's Degree requirement. All three departments said the number of officers with a college degree is over 50%. Paoline et al. (2015) states that 45% of the officers they studied had at least a Bachelor's Degree. Additionally, one officer said that all officers of rank in their department have a criminal justice degree, suggesting that officers with a college degree are prioritized for promotions over those who don't have one, despite it not being a requirement to join the department.

Two of the officers interviewed said the officers who apply and get hired wouldn't change if there was a college degree requirement. One said it was because most officers have at least a Bachelor's degree, and the other said it was because they have no writing test. Conversely, the last department said it would, because most officers don't get their degrees until after they join the force. Further adding to this is Roberg & Bonn's (2004) study, which states that having a college degree requirement would make it more difficult for African Americans to join the force, as a high number of them don't have college degrees. This suggests that while some police

departments believe that hiring practices won't be affected, other departments and studies suggest otherwise.

### **Job Perception**

All three departments gave different answers to the question about an officer's perception of their job changing if they have a college degree. One said it differs too much to base it on a college education, but he later said that many people aren't applying to be a police officer due to the negative perception created by the media. Another said they do perceive their job differently because they showed they are willing to be challenged and are dedicated to learning, so they take their jobs more seriously. The last one said that the only difference is they have a broader understanding of the world and they have more experience.

Paoline, Terrill, & Rossler (2015) found that there was little evidence to support an officer with a higher education having a different perception of their job or management. Carlan (2007) found that officers with a criminal justice degree had a more positive outlook towards their job and their ability to perform well in it, such as by understanding the justice system better. This also varied by degree level, with officers with a Bachelor's Degree having a more positive perception than those with an Associate's Degree, and those with a Master's Degree having a more positive perception than both. While there is evidence to suggest that officers do perceive their jobs differently if they get a college degree, the results are too mixed to come to a firm conclusion.

### **Veterans**

One department mentioned that a veteran without a college degree who takes the Civil Service Exam is given priority over a non-veteran with a college degree. For example, a veteran

without a college degree who scores a 70 on the exam is given priority over a non-veteran with a college degree who scores a 100 on the exam. This is interesting because it suggests that police departments value experience more than education. Since someone who works in the military has already gone through rigorous training and is most likely calm under heavy pressure, they essentially have the experience and skills necessary to work as a police officer. Since there are few other ways to get new officers who already have similar work experience, hiring veterans allows them to fill that gap and get individuals who are already prepared for the job. The fact that some departments are willing to give them an advantage over educated applicants on the Civil Service Exam suggests that experience is more valuable to police departments than a college education.

However, it should be noted that a veteran still has to pass the exam to get hired. If they fail the exam, then they will not be given preferential treatment. This could be because police departments value the Civil Service Exam and believe that someone who doesn't pass it fails to meet the necessary qualifications to become a police officer. Alternatively, it could simply be because they aren't allowed to hire someone who fails the exam, so they don't want to get in trouble for hiring them. Regardless of the reason, it is clear that some departments value the experience that a veteran brings more than a college education, and it would be interesting to see if this applies to other jobs that are similar to the role of a police officer.

### **Conclusion**

The results regarding a police officer's decision to use force are inconsistent among the articles and interviews. Some of the articles, such as Rydberg & Terrill (2010), as well as one of the officers interviewed, mention that a college education impacts an officer's decision to use force. However, the majority of the officers interviewed and many of the articles make no

mention of this, and Rydberg & Terrill (2010) reference studies that show a college education has no impact on an officer's decision to use force. Additionally, there are mixed findings on whether an officer with a college degree is desired more by police departments. While the literature and interviews state that they perform better on the job, it also states that veterans are more desired than applicants with a college degree.

Interestingly, the fact that Lim & Lee (2015) found that officers use force less often if their supervisor has a college degree ties into Transformational Leadership Theory. Transformational Leadership Theory is the idea that a leader's actions can inspire the people under them to want to replicate their actions. This usually occurs when a leader goes above and beyond the call of duty or uses their position for the greater good. Many of the leaders who fall under the Transformational Leadership Theory utilize problem solving skills to either change the system, or to take a new approach to their tasks as they realize conventional methods are ineffective. Since officers are less likely to use force if their supervisor has a college degree and many of the skills and ideas described in these leaders are similar to those who have a college degree, it's possible that there is a link between leaders with a college degree and Transformational Leadership Theory.

If this is the case, then it would reveal that officers use less force when their supervisor has a degree because the supervisor has the knowledge and skills that would allow them to not use force as often, and many of the officers serving under them will want to follow in their footsteps. While this would assume that the officers are inspired by their supervisors, this is a possibility because the supervisor's education would inform them about the issues surrounding police work, and they are likely to want to go above and beyond to fix or mitigate these issues.

This would inspire their fellow officers because they would see the supervisor working hard to make the system better, and they would thus follow suit.

### **Limitations**

This study is limited because it used a convenience sample, meaning interviews could only be conducted with police officers who were available. It is also limited because, aside from the interviews, the research only uses data from other scholarly journal articles. Additionally, since officers were interviewed, it is not possible to know if they were being truthful in their responses or if they mentioned all relevant information in the interview. While there is no reason to believe that any of them lied, the possibility that some of them might have simply not mentioned information important to this study is still possible, which would result in the study lacking pertinent information.

### **Directions for Future Research**

For future research, it would be beneficial for researchers to look at these issues on a nationwide scale. Additionally, researchers should conduct studies that breakdown the difference in use of force and employment desirability based on degree levels. Researchers should also see if the age and degree level of the hiring manager at the department affects their opinion on the desirability of an officer with a college degree. Researchers should also see if veterans and people with similar experiences are more desired by departments than those with a college degree. It would also be beneficial for researchers to look at the degrees of supervisors when measuring use of force among college educated officers to see if the supervisor having a college degree impacts an officers use of force, rather than the officer having a degree themselves.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Questions**

1. Does your department have a college degree requirement? (If yes): What are the requirements? Do you require a minimum of an Associate's degree, a Bachelor's degree, or a Master's degree?
2. What percent of officers in your department have a college degree? How many does that translate to?
3. Do you think having a college degree requirement would affect who applies and who gets hired? Why?
4. Do you think officers with a college degree perceive their jobs differently? Does it differ among those with an Associate's degree, a Bachelor's degree, or a Master's degree? Why?
5. What do you think the advantages and challenges are of an officer having a college degree? Does it differ among those with an Associate's degree, a Bachelor's degree, or a Master's degree? Why?