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The Professional Appearance of Police Officers: Does visible body art effect perception?

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Justice Management

by

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Abstract

The current climate of policing is dangerous and is steadily becoming unpopular as a profession. As a result, police recruitment across the United States has decreased in recent years. In combination with this new climate of policing, the hiring standards for agencies across the United States remain stricter than many other professions, resulting in departments struggling to recruit quality officers. Police agencies nationwide typically operate with one or more vacant positions. Personal appearance policies are still in place in many agencies, and these may be serving as a barrier to the recruitment of qualified candidates. Agencies nationwide are holding tight to an antiquated but established definition of professionalism as it relates to the appearance of their uniformed officers. Previous research has indicated many agencies have an appearance policy discouraging visible body art (VBA), such as tattoos and body piercings. However, the pool of individuals presently most likely to apply for law enforcement jobs are college students and Veterans, which is also the group most likely to have tattoos or visible piercings. The purpose of this study was to identify whether or not the standard for professional appearance is changing and has adapted to include individuals with VBA being viewed as just as professional as those individuals without VBA. This study found no significant differences in the way law enforcement officers with VBA were viewed when compared with law enforcement officers without VBA.

Keywords: tattoos, police, recruitment, visible body art

The current climate of policing is dangerous and is steadily becoming viewed as a stigmatized profession. One study completed by Chatterjee and Ryan (2020) stated, “Stigmatized professions are those where physical, social, and/or moral taints are applied. Stigma theorists hold that stigma is socially communicated and changes over time” (p. 606). The study conducted by Chatterjee and Ryan (2020) focused on the role of media coverage in stigmatization, specifically regarding policing, and found that, “over the 5-year time period, the examined tone became increasingly negative and less neutral” (p. 609). In 2014, with the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, a growing anti-police sentiment began emerging nationwide, reaching a pinnacle with the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020 (University Michoacana de San Nicolás, 2020, para. 15). Public opinion of law enforcement slid to a 22-year low in 2015, according to a recent Gallup poll (Tuccille, 2019). As a result, a growing number of police officers nationwide have resigned; cities such as Atlanta, GA, Buffalo, NY, and Minneapolis, MN have seen double-digit resignations of officers since May 2020 (Maxouris, 2020). These resignations come at a time when agencies are struggling to operate fully staffed, many already having looming vacancies; a study by the Police Executive Research Forum, reported, “a decrease in applications, early exits and higher rates of retirement” (Barr, 2019, para. 2). Agencies who participated in the study also concluded a 63% decrease in individuals applying for police officer positions as well as experiencing difficulties hiring minorities and women (Barr, 2019, para. 3).

In 2019, 66 percent of police departments nationwide reported a decline in the number of applications received (Tuccille, 2019). In combination with the climate of policing, the hiring standards for agencies across the United States have traditionally been stricter than

those of most other professions; as a result, departments are struggling to recruit potential officers. Wilson and the RAND Corporation (2010) stated:

The militaristic nature of police work, with its emphasis on hierarchy and normality, and the sacrifices that officers must make, from maintaining certain appearances (e.g., no beards or tattoos) to erratic schedules and long shifts, to placing themselves in harm's way, also likely discourage applicants. (p. 15)

In an effort to increase recruitment and hiring, many police agencies have begun eliminating various hiring standards. Some agencies no longer require specific education requirements upon initial hire, while others are forgiving candidates' past drug offenses, such as marijuana use (McKelvey, 2017). "The movement is part of a broader recognition that the difficulty in recruiting police is not just a result of low pay and battered morale—the so-called Ferguson Effect—but of numerous obstacles thrown up by politicians or police themselves" (Weichselbaum, 2019, para. 3).

Even with the removal of some hiring standards, others still exist which may have a potential detrimental impact on an agency's ability to cast a wide net for recruitment. One standard, which is still widely accepted by many police departments, is the "no visible body art (VBA)" policy. Agencies cited the perception of unprofessionalism as reason officers were not allowed VBA in uniform. VBA is defined as body art that cannot be readily concealed, including tattoos on the arms, legs, hands, neck or face. However, the current populations most likely to apply for police officer vacancies are veterans born between 1977 and 1994 (generations X, Y, and Millennials), whom are prime candidates for policing positions (McMullen & Gibbs, 2019). As it stands, this policy may be inhibiting police departments from having access to a wider pool of qualified applicants.

Problem Statement

The acceptance of VBA by society is changing (Mironski & Rao 2019). As recent as the early 1990s, VBA was not as prevalent in mainstream society as it is now. Dennis Rodman, best known for his position on the world champion Chicago Bulls basketball team, was one of the first individuals widely visible in the media spotlight to have VBA. “One of the things that made him stand out — except of course for his brightly-colored and ever-changing hairstyles — was the myriad of tattoos he had on his entire body” (Songco, 2020, para. 2). However, more recently, professional athletes, musicians, celebrities, and even politicians are now displaying VBA. It could be theorized that in present day, the absence of VBA on athletes and musicians at professional sporting events or music concerts may be viewed as more shocking than their presence. Scavuzzo (2020) identified several current and former politicians with VBA, such as Prime Minister of Malta, Joseph Muscat, and Justin Trudeau of Canada who have tattoos on their arms. This has been a rather rapid change over the last two decades. However, appearance policies in police agencies nationwide remain generally the same as they did decades ago. As law enforcement agencies struggle to maintain manpower and fill vacancies, strict dress codes and appearance policies may be hindering agencies’ ability to fill positional vacancies.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to two-fold: (1) to identify how the general public views police officers with visible tattoos in uniform and (2) to help fill the gap in the literature regarding police professionalism and tattooing. This study has potential to influence recruitment practices for police agencies that may be suffering from personnel shortages; the prime pool of applicants for agencies, based on age, is mostly individuals who are statistically more likely to have tattoos, i.e. male, veterans.

Literature Review

The articles discussed in this review focused on the decline in police recruitment as well as how the presence of visible tattoos in the workplace has been traditionally viewed as less professional. The articles reviewed for this study also highlight an emerging trend concerning how tattoos are accepted within society. While several articles discuss the presence of VBA and professionalism, limited literature examines police perceptions of VBA in the workplace. Even more limited is how it effects police officer candidate recruitment or the public perception of police officers. The scant previous research can be divided by four general themes: generational differences in the acceptance of VBA, VBA policies and police recruitment, humanizing the badge, and previous studies and their implication for this study.

Generational Differences in the Acceptance of Body Art

The generational trend regarding the presence of VBA is apparent. The Harris Poll administered a survey in 2016 which found, “Whereas just 13 percent of Baby Boomers (defined as age 51 to 69) and 10 percent of “Matures” (age 70 or more) report having at least one tattoo, 36 percent of Gen Xers (age 36 to 50) and 47 percent of Millennials (age 18 to 35) have tattoos, and 37 percent of Millennials report having more than one” (Shannon-Missal, 2016).

Identifying the possible stigma attached to those with tattoos may offer an explanation as to the reason VBA is accepted differently between generations. “Traditionally, the tattoo became the badge of an adventurous life; it has also been used for centuries to mark prisoners and criminals. Outlaws and inmates in many cultures often elect to mark themselves with designs that document their crimes, sentences, and beliefs” (Brady, 1993:1). Because of this, Baby Boomers and Matures may be more inclined to negatively view those with VBA. These preconceived notions are widely accepted, however, further research should be conducted on how, “Hiring managers,

specifically, are imputing these negative associations onto visibly tattooed job applicants” (Timming, 2015: 62). However, VBA has become far more mainstream among individuals who do not fall into the category of outlaw, criminal, or prisoner. In fact, an estimated 21-29 percent of Americans have at least one tattoo (Mehta, 2018).

Employment aside, changes in the acceptance of VBA seems to be evolving within society. Blair (2007) cited a study conducted by Brown, Perlmutter, and McDermott (2000), which highlighted three changes in the tattoo industry, which likely facilitated the popularity of tattoos among society. These changes were a wider variety of ink, the entry of skilled artists into the field, and the mainstream popularity of celebrity tattoos (p. 40). Media has played an enormous role in the social acceptance of tattoos. In the early 2000s, television shows like *Miami Ink* and *Inked* highlighted the artistry behind VBA, as well as the type of individuals who were getting VBA. These shows became so popular that several spin offs were created as the demand for tattoos by these featured artists increased. Artists on these shows, such as Kat Von D, emerged as celebrities, expanding their skill set into other entities such as the cosmetic industry. As a result, cities across the United States have hosted conventions dedicated solely to the recognition of tattoos and their creators, as well as creating opportunities for individuals to receive tattoos. This shift in culture has helped move individuals with VBA from the fringes of society into more mainstream culture.

As the presence of tattooed individuals have increased, so has the reasons behind receiving tattoos. As previously discussed, historically, tattoos identified a select group of individuals such as sailors, criminals, etc. However, the reasons behind receiving tattoos are no longer to mark world travels or criminal status. In modern day, tattoos are being used as marks of expression. Kang and Jones (2007) highlighted that, “While no single explanation accounts for

the increasing popularity of tattoos, researchers find that people use tattoos to express who they are, what they have lived through, and how they see themselves in relation to others and to their social worlds” (p. 42).

Although the prevalence of VBA in society has seemingly increased, the perception of individuals with VBA varies. In 2018, Broussard and Harton conducted a study in which college students and community members were shown images of both men and women with tattoos as well as the same images in which the tattoos had been removed. The study concluded that individuals with tattoos, especially women, “were rated as stronger and more independent, but were rated more negatively on other character attributes than the same target images with the tattoos removed” (p. 521). In general, women with tattoos were viewed as less attractive with seemingly more negative qualities than women without tattoos or men without tattoos. Another study conducted in 2007 by Swami and Furnham indicated that women with VBA, “were rated as less physically attractive, more sexually promiscuous and heavier drinkers than untattooed women, with more negative ratings with increasing number of tattoos” (p. 343). The previously mentioned studies indicate that while tattoos are increasingly tolerated in society, various stereotypes and perceptions surrounding those who have VBA may not be as progressive as the increasing presence of VBA.

Although considered a reflection and cross section of society, law enforcement has been seemingly resistant to the acceptance of VBA. Understanding the concept of professionalism and how it differs between generations is critical in determining why various appearance policies are still in place today. McMullen and Gibbs (2018) conducted a study cataloging the tattoo policy of police agencies nationwide and concluded that “Due to the increase in commonality of tattooing, police policies prohibiting tattoos may be discordant with society’s ideals for

appearance, which could foster a gap between the police and the citizens they protect” (p.409). Similarly, Williams, Thomas and Christensen (2014) explored the irony of social work as a profession that celebrates human diversity and cultural competence, but which has standards of perceived professionalism that discourage VBA, specifically tattoos.

Several articles reviewed in this study discuss the generational differences as they relate to tolerance of VBA; an identified trend revealed that the younger generations were not only more tolerant of body art in professional settings but also more likely to have VBA themselves. These findings are particularly relevant for this study because they indicate that the concept of professionalism, as it relates to appearance, is changing. However, the standards of professionalism within many agencies nationwide are not evolving with the emerging societal views. This may be attributed to the generational gap between police administration and their patrol officers. Police administrators tend to be senior officers who started their careers in eras less accepting of VBA, whereas new recruits are generally younger and have grown up with more tolerant views of VBA. In a letter to the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), the Executive Director, Chuck Wexler, stated, “The country is facing a looming crisis in the hiring of police officers. Agencies continue to rely on hiring standards that were created decades ago, for a different philosophy of policing and a different generation of police officer candidates—even while many cities are having trouble finding enough suitable candidates to keep up with retirements and fill vacant positions” (Morison, 2017, p.V).

Visible Body Art Policies and Police Recruitment

A study by the RAND Corporation explored the declining numbers of police officers in 2010 and noted appearance standards as a potential threat to recruitment (Wilson, Dalton, Scheer & Grammich, 2010). Similarly, McMullen and Gibbs (2018) found young adults and military

veterans to be the primary pool for police recruitment, while also identifying these two populations as being the group most likely to have VBA. Understanding the entirety of police recruitment is vital to comprehending how something as small as changing appearance standards may boost numbers of applicants and recruits. According to the PERF, “Much of the debate over tattoos boils down to basic math: as more Americans are getting and displaying tattoos, the pool of job applicants who are tattoo-free or who can easily cover them is shrinking quickly” (Morison, 2017, p.51).

McMullen and Gibbs (2018) conducted a study that found that the majority of state police agencies have an appearance policy for VBA. This study stated that northeastern states had the highest percentage of “no visibility” clauses, while fewer southern state agencies had “no visibility” clauses. These results are significant because they found that the states with “no visibility” policies also happen to be the states with a high percentage of young veterans, men and, non-Hispanic white citizens. The Police Federation even appealed to agencies nationwide to reconsider their policies, stating, “We are concerned that if tougher policies on visible tattoos are adopted, the police service risks missing out on recruiting a generation of able, talented and committed officers just because they are inked” (Police Federation, 2020, para. 2).

Humanizing the Badge

With the current and persistent anti-police sentiment, it seems as though the divide between law enforcement officers and citizens has never been greater. Law enforcement agencies are scrambling to evaluate and update policies, which are not conducive to the current reform climate. The concept of “Humanizing the Badge” has gained traction among law enforcement agencies in an effort to strengthen relationships between police officers and the communities they serve. The idea of “humanizing the badge” essentially works to help citizens

view law enforcement officers as people, with human emotions, problems and experiences. It seeks to paint a picture that law enforcement officers are no different from the individuals in the community they serve, striving to eliminate the “Us v. Them” mentality. However, it seems impossible to humanize police officers when their uniform stands as a barrier to common ground.

Quill (2016) conducted a study on the effects of the presence of a police uniform and community relations, stating:

Clothing can help determine a person’s gender, social status, occupation, or even if the individual is a person of authority. The police uniform is no exception, and police officers are not exempt from these judgments. In fact, this psychological and sociological phenomenon plays an important part in the public perception of the police. In today’s modern society, the use of military equipment and military uniforms by police departments has negatively influenced the perception of the police as a group of men and women who serve and protect the members of their communities (p. 2).

Arguably, uniforms are an essential part of policing. The police uniform indicates a position of authority, which enables officers to carry out their duties, and it helps identify first responders in the community. How then, do agencies humanize the individual wearing the essential uniform? One possible answer is to allow officers in uniform to display VBA.

As previously mentioned, the number of tattooed individuals in society is on the rise. Tattoos serve as a form of expression for those who choose to use their body as a canvas. Looking at an individual’s tattoos may help give insight as to what is important to that individual or their interests. Allowing VBA in uniform has the potential to humanize the individual in that uniform by giving citizens insight into their interests, beliefs and, backgrounds, possibly

fostering common ground between the police officer and the citizen. The Police Federation (2020) calls for the need to modernize policies regarding VBA in uniform, asking agencies to “embrace diversity and widen the talent pool it recruits from” (“PFEW Call For” section, para. 1). The Police Federation (2020) further stated agencies, “need to be more open-minded, giving communities a police service that reflects today’s society” (“PFEW Call For” section, para. 1).

Previous Studies: Implications for this Study

The previous work has provided several notable takeaways for this study. First, understanding opposing views for what is considered professional in the workplace is critical to understanding how VBA, specifically tattoos, influence employees and employers. Second, identifying the population most likely to choose policing as a career is also the population most likely to have VBA; this helps foster discussion of possibly changing traditional views of professional appearance and a better understanding of how VBA is increasingly tolerated and accepted in society.

Conceptual Framework

The idea of professional appearance is not derived from an actual definition. Understanding how the idea of professionalism became linked to appearance, with specific regard to law enforcement, is important for this study. In law enforcement, professionalism does not have a specific definition. Since the inception of the modern day police force, attempts have constantly been made to mold policing into a profession rather than simply a job.

The historical context of policing in the United States originates from England in the early 1800s. Sir Robert Peel, who is referred to as the “Father of Modern Policing,” is credited with founding the first accredited police force in London, known as the Metropolitan Police Force. In an effort to legitimize the Metropolitan Police Force, Sir Robert Peel, “identified

several principles that he believed would lead to credibility with citizens including that the police must be under government control, have a military-like organizational structure, and have a central headquarters that was located in an area that was easily accessible to the public. He also thought that the quality of men that were chosen to be police officers would further contribute to the organization's legitimacy" ("The History of the Police", Sage Publications, p. 4). This was the first attempt to codify policing as a profession. The President's Commission (1967) and the National Advisory Commission (1973) later identified general ideas and theories of professionalism as applied to law enforcement, which are still widely accepted, such as, "rigorous admission standards, higher education, public acceptance, specialized training, ethical behavior, and a general commitment to community service" (Schneider, 2009, p. 3).

Law enforcement is a paramilitary organization that adopted several themes from the military branches over past decades. Some of these themes include the concept of uniformity, drill and ceremony, and rank structure. The adaptations of a uniform to signify uniformity within an organization, which includes specific grooming standards, is just one of many. Currently, all governing documents of the wear and appearance of the uniform for each service branch reference appearance as an element of professionalism. Army Regulation (AR) 670-1 (2014) specifically states, "The Army is a profession. A Soldier's appearance measures part of his or her professionalism"(p. 1). Therefore, it is safe to assume that the military as well as historical policing practices may have established a possible baseline where the idea of professionalism and appearance coincide with uniformity and law enforcement, and what needs to be understood in order to complete this study.

Limited research exists on this subject of the perception of VBA on uniformed officers. McMullen and Gibbs (2018) conducted a study comparing the existence of appearance polices in

police agencies nationwide. The study concluded that all 50 states have polices that address visible tattoos on police officers; however, it did not reach a correlation linking appearance policies with positional vacancies. The study by McMullen and Gibbs (2018) also looked at the possibility of supply and demand influencing appearance policies in larger cities. Specifically, bigger cities have a larger pool of applicants to choose from; therefore, they are able to be more selective of candidates and enforce their appearance policies. However, this theory does not address why smaller agencies are continuing to enforce appearance standards regarding VBA, when the pool of eligible applicants is significantly smaller.

Method

Data was collected from two institutions: the University of Nevada, Reno in Reno, Nevada and Great Basin Community College in Elko, Nevada. This study was conducted using a 2x2x2 factorial design. The factors considered were male versus female, presence of VBA versus no VBA, and the type of scenario depicted—officer conducting a traffic stop v. Fourth Amendment scenario. Four possible versions of the same survey were created and each version was randomly selected for participants using a downloadable QR code. Each version of the scenario contained both the traffic stop scenario as well as the Fourth Amendment scenario, and a male and female officer (*see Appendix B*). Each scenario was accompanied by an image, which depicted a law enforcement officer, either male or female, testifying in court to the written scenario presented (*see Appendix C*). In an effort to eliminate other possible variables, the individuals in the images shown were similar in weight, height, and race. The difference in each version of the survey presented was whether the police officer in the picture presented was male

or female and whether they had VBA or no VBA. The order was counterbalanced to control for primacy and recency effects. The four versions were divided as such:

TABLE 1
Study Version and Scenario Construct

	Scenario A	Scenario B
Version 1	Male Traffic Violation VBA	Female 4 th Amendment No VBA
Version 2	Female 4 th Amendment VBA	Male Traffic Violation No VBA
Version 3	Male 4 th Amendment No VBA	Female Traffic Violation VBA
Version 4	Female Traffic Violation No VBA	Male 4 th Amendment VBA

After participants viewed each scenario, they were asked to answer a series of questions based on the scenario presented and the image that accompanied it; each scenario had the same set of questions (see Appendix D). Participants were instructed to judge the police officers in each image based solely on what they observed in the image and the details that were provided in the scenario. Once the two scenarios and accompanying questions were completed, participants were asked to answer several standard demographic questions (*see Appendix E*).

Participants

Participants consisted of college students, both males and females, over the age of 18. This study utilized a convenience sample, which allowed easy access to numerous study participants. However, despite access to a large pool of respondents, this sample method did not offer much diversity within the respondent population.

Data Collection

The study was created and administered through Qualtrics. The use of Qualtrics provided an easy to use platform to create the study and collect the associated data. Using this platform, respondents were directed to the study by scanning a QR code provided by their instructors. Qualtrics randomly selected which version of the survey to present to each respondent, however settings were activated to ensure each version of the survey was as evenly distributed as possible through out the total number of respondents. The study remained open for approximately 10 days. At the end of the 10 days, the study was closed and the data was transferred to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and coded for analysis using SPSS.

Results

This study sought to test the hypothesis that uniformed law enforcement officers with VBA were viewed as professional as uniformed law enforcement officers without VBA. Table 2 illustrates some of the demographics reported by each respondent, separated by each version of the study presented. Not incorporated in this table was the respondents' highest educational level completed, as well as whether the respondents had family members who are/ were Veterans or whom are/were law enforcement as these demographics did not appear to hold statistical significance for this study.

TABLE 2
Demographics of Respondents by Each Version of the Study

Version 1						
Total Number of Respondents		16				
Percentage of Male Respondents		63%				
Percentage of Female Respondents		37 %				
Mean Age of Respondents*		21				
Political Affiliation		Conservative- 75% Liberal- 25%				
Veteran Status		Veteran- 0% Non-Veteran- 100%				
Law Enforcement (LEO) Status		LEO- 0% Non-LEO- 100%				
Visible Body Art		56% NVBA 44% VBA				
Cultural Affiliation by Percentage						
Asian or Pacific Islander	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Native American or Native Alaskan	White or Caucasian	Multiracial or Biracial	Other
6.25	6.25	6.25	0.00	75.00	6.25	0.00

Version 2						
Total Number of Respondents				13		
Percentage of Male Respondents				46%		
Percentage of Female Respondents				54%		
Mean Age of Respondents				23		
Political Affiliation				Conservative- 50% Liberal- 50%		
Veteran Status				Veteran- 17% Non-Veteran- 83%		
Law Enforcement (LEO) Status				LEO- 33% Non-LEO- 67%		
Visible Body Art				67% NVBA 33% VBA		
Cultural Affiliation by Percentage						
Asian or Pacific Islander	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Native American or Native Alaskan	White or Caucasian	Multiracial or Biracial	Other
0.00	0.00	25.0	0.00	66.67	8.33	0.00

Version 3						
Total Number of Respondents				13		
Percentage of Male Respondents				46%		
Percentage of Female Respondents				54%		
Mean Age of Respondents				25		
Political Affiliation				Conservative- 46% Liberal- 54%		
Veteran Status				Veteran- 0% Non-Veteran- 100%		
Law Enforcement (LEO) Status				LEO- 15% Non-LEO- 85%		
Visible Body Art				46% NVBA 54% VBA		
Cultural Affiliation by Percentage						
Asian or Pacific Islander	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Native American or Native Alaskan	White or Caucasian	Multiracial or Biracial	Other
7.69	0.00	7.69	0.00	76.92	0.00	7.69

Version 4						
Total Number of Respondents				17		
Percentage of Male Respondents				47%		
Percentage of Female Respondents				53%		
Mean Age of Respondents				23		
Political Affiliation				Conservative- 65% Liberal- 35%		
Veteran Status				Veteran- 0% Non-Veteran- 100%		
Law Enforcement (LEO) Status				LEO- 0% Non-LEO- 100%		
Visible Body Art				59% NVBA 41% VBA		
Cultural Affiliation by Percentage						
Asian or Pacific Islander	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Native American or Native Alaskan	White or Caucasian	Multiracial or Biracial	Other
5.88	0.00	29.41	11.76	47.06	5.88	0.00

Note: *Version 1 had two respondents whose ages were 47 and 67. These outliers were not calculated in the mean of the respondents for this version of the survey in order to avoid skewing the average.*

For each scenario question presented, respondents answered on a Likert scale to generate a forced response. To analyze responses, this study used cross tabulation with a Chi-Square Test analysis for each question asked in the scenarios. An ANOVA Table was then used to determine the significance both between groups and within. For each scenario question presented, respondents answered on a Likert scale to generate a forced response. To analyze responses, this study used cross tabulation with a Chi-Square Test analysis for each question asked in the scenarios. An ANOVA Table was then used to determine the significance both between groups and within. Each ANOVA Table produced a p-value far greater than 0.05, indicating no statistical significance.

The lowest p-value produced was .135. This value was produced on the ANOVA Table for the study as a whole and presented on the question of whether the Officer's actions were justified; however, this value was still well above 0.05. Table 3 illustrates the mean results as well as the significance for each question for the study as a whole. Table 4 illustrates the mean results as well as the significance for each question per each scenario independently. Respondents who observed scenarios in which the law enforcement officer was without VBA averaged a 3.25 mean as opposed to the respondents who observed scenarios in which the law enforcement officer had VBA a 3.09 mean, a difference of less than .2.

TABLE 3
Mean Result by Question for the Entire Study

Entire Study Visible Tattoos		Were the Police Officer's actions appropriate?	Was the Police Officer's behavior appropriate?	Did the Police Officer appear competent?	Did the Police Officer appear honest?	Did the Police Officer appear professional?	Do you believe the Police Officer's actions were justified?	What should be the decision of the judge?	What should be the outcome of the case?
No	Mean	2.98	3.05	3.12	3.23	3.25	1.68	1.61	1.56
Yes	Mean	2.89	3.16	3.26	3.21	3.09	1.81	1.60	1.61
Total	Mean	2.94	3.11	3.19	3.22	3.17	1.75	1.61	1.59
Sig		.510	.480	.219	.892	.248	.135	.850	.572

TABLE 4
Mean Result by Question for Each Scenario

Traffic Stop Scenario Visible Tattoos		Were the Police Officer's actions appropriate?	Was the Police Officer's behavior appropriate?	Did the Police Officer appear competent?	Did the Police Officer appear honest?	Did the Police Officer appear professional?	Do you believe the Police Officer's actions were justified?	What should be the decision of the judge?	What should be the outcome of the case?
No	Mean	3.07	2.93	3.14	3.14	3.18	1.68	1.68	1.61
Yes	Mean	2.90	3.17	3.31	3.28	3.14	1.79	1.52	1.52
Total	Mean	2.98	3.05	3.23	3.21	3.16	1.74	1.60	1.56
Sig		.364	.285	.339	.494	.840	.335	.222	.503

4 th Amendment Scenario Visible Tattoos		Were the Police Officer's actions appropriate?	Was the Police Officer's behavior appropriate?	Did the Police Officer appear competent?	Did the Police Officer appear honest?	Did the Police Officer appear professional?	Do you believe the Police Officer's actions were justified?	What should be the decision of the judge?	What should be the outcome of the case?
No	Mean	2.90	3.17	3.10	3.31	3.31	1.69	1.55	1.52
Yes	Mean	2.89	3.14	3.21	3.14	3.04	1.82	1.68	1.71
Total	Mean	2.89	3.16	3.16	3.23	3.18	1.75	1.61	1.61
Sig		.984	.880	.460	.339	.146	.256	.334	.131

Discussion

This study found no significant differences in the way law enforcement officers with VBA were viewed when compared with law enforcement officers without VBA. Together with professionalism, respondents were also asked about other attributes such as competency and honesty as well as the appropriateness of the officer's actions and behavior based on the scenarios presented. The results of these questions produced relatively the same output as the professionalism question, that is, no significant difference in the way the officers with VBA were viewed as opposed to the officer without VBA.

In addition to the data analysis for the study as a whole, data was also analyzed per each scenario. When the traffic stop scenario and Fourth Amendment scenarios were analyzed independently, neither showed any significant findings. The same was true when respondents with VBA were compared to those without VBA, no statistically significant differences were noted. Other analyses could have been conducted, however, given the limited number of respondents and the lack of significant differences within the larger group, finding statistically relevant difference with these smaller groups was highly unlikely.

The lack of statistical significance in this study could be attributed to the increase presence of VBA within mainstream media, suggesting that VBA is becoming more widely accepted among the general population. In addition to media coverage, the age of respondents for this study fell within the age groups most likely to have VBA, with just under half of the respondents reporting having VBA themselves.

Limitations of this Study

This study was conducted at two different locations; however, it contained relatively the same demographic of respondents, college students who ranged in ages 18-24, with various outliers periodically. In addition to only sampling college students, the majority of respondents who completed the survey classified themselves as conservative Caucasians. Future research should rely on a more diverse sample and include individual that are not in college. Another limitation of this study was its sample size; this study was small in scope, with approximately 70 participants. This could be viewed as an insufficient sample size for statistical measurement. Additionally, this study only considered two possible scenarios that law enforcement officers encounter regularly and did not encompass the wide variety of work they perform. For example, a scenario that depicts a law enforcement officer with VBA performing life saving measures on an individual may elicit a different set of responses than those offered in this study. Similarly, a scenario depicting a law enforcement officer with VBA arresting an individual may also offer different responses than those in this study. Another potential limitation of the study was the way it was administered. By using a QR code, respondents were forced to complete this study using their cellular phone. This brings up the question as to whether respondents were clearly able to see the VBA present on the law enforcement officers presented in each scenario. Lastly, this

study lacked a validity test. Respondents were never asked if they observed VBA in the photos and if so, in which photo the VBA was located.

Conclusion

This study examined societal perceptions of VBA on law enforcement officers for the purpose of understanding how those perceptions could affect policy reform for police agencies nationwide. The findings of this study are limited, but provide a good start to understanding more about this subject. This study is small in scope; thus further research should be conducted to understand societal perceptions of VBA, especially as it relates to the concept of professionalism in larger, urban areas. Future research should also be expanded to include a wider demographic, specifically regarding age, geographic location, cultural background and social economic standing. In addition to a broader range of respondents, in the future, this study should include a computer-based link to ensure respondents are clearly able to discern the presence or absence of VBA in the photographs as well as include a validity check to ensure the VBA was observed and noted in the photos.

Society is ever evolving and change is necessary to ensure modern practices are embraced and implemented as normal operating procedures. As tolerance and acceptance for VBA increases, it is necessary to ensure policies are modernized to include law enforcement officers who are representative of the population they police. Now more than ever, methods to bridge the emerging cultural divide between society and law enforcement must be pursued. Something as simple as allowing VBA while in uniform could open the recruitment pool to those individuals most likely to seek a career in law enforcement such as Veterans as well as provide a

way forward for police agencies and public relations while offering little to no monetary cost to the agencies themselves.

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APPENDIX A

IRB EXEMPTION LETTER

University of Nevada, Reno

Research Integrity
217 Ross Hall / 331,
Reno, Nevada 89557
775.327.2368
www.unr.edu/research-integrity

DATE: March 31, 2021

TO: Matthew Leone, PhD

FROM: University of Nevada, Reno Institutional Review Board (IRB)

PROJECT TITLE: [1688709-1] The Professional Appearance of Police Officers: Does visible body art effect perception?

REFERENCE #: Social Behavioral

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

REVIEW TYPE: Exempt

DECISION DATE: March 31, 2021

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption Category # 2

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An IRB member has reviewed this project and has determined it is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations. Please note, the federal government has identified certain categories of research involving human subjects that qualify for exemption from federal regulations. Only the IRB has been designated by the University to make a determination that a study is exempt from federal regulations. The above-referenced protocol was reviewed and the research deemed eligible to proceed in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Federal Regulations on the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46.104) and University policy.

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Reviewed Documents

- Advertisement - Cassie Opening Letter MCL Edits.docx (UPDATED: 03/30/2021)
- Application Form - Exempt IRBFlex Min Risk No Federal Support MCL.docx (UPDATED: 03/30/2021)
- Consent Form - Cassie Consent Form MCL Edits.docx (UPDATED: 03/30/2021)
- Protocol - Wyllie Study Protocol MCL Edits.docx (UPDATED: 03/29/2021)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Wyllie VBA.jpg (UPDATED: 03/30/2021)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Gowan VBA.jpg (UPDATED: 03/30/2021)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Wyllie No VBA.jpg (UPDATED: 03/30/2021)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Gowan No VBA.jpg (UPDATED: 03/30/2021)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Cassie Scenerio and Questions MCL Edits.docx (UPDATED: 03/30/2021)
- Training/Certification - Wyllie, Cassie gp 1 CITI 03.10.20.pdf (UPDATED: 03/30/2021)
- University of Nevada, Reno - Part I, Cover Sheet - University of Nevada, Reno - Part I, Cover

Sheet
(UPDATED: 03/30/2021)

If you have any questions, please contact Nancy Moody at 775.327.2367 or at nmoody@unr.edu.

Sincerely,



Richard Bjur, PhD
Co-Chair, UNR IRB
University of Nevada Reno



Janet Usinger, PhD
Co-Chair, UNR IRB
University of Nevada Reno

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Nevada, Reno IRB's record.

APPENDIX B
STUDY SCENARIOS

Scenario A: Traffic- Tail Lamp Violation per NRS

Please read the following Nevada Revised Statute concerning vehicle tail lamps. Then read the scenario presented and answer the subsequent questions based on the information provided and the photo.

Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 484D.115 “Tail Lamps” states:

1. Except as otherwise provided in [chapters 484A to 484E](#), inclusive, of NRS and [NRS 486.261](#), every motor vehicle, trailer, semitrailer and any vehicle which is being drawn at the end of a train of vehicles must be equipped with at least two tail lamps mounted on the rear, which, when lighted as required by this chapter, emit a red light plainly visible from a distance of 500 feet to the rear, except that vehicles manufactured before July 1, 1969, must have at least one tail lamp if they were originally equipped with only one tail lamp.
2. Only the tail lamp on the rearmost vehicle of a train of vehicles need actually be seen from the distance specified.
3. On vehicles equipped with more than one tail lamp, the lamps must be mounted on the same level, as widely spaced laterally as practicable and at a height of not more than 72 inches nor less than 15 inches.
4. Every passenger car, bus and truck under 80 inches in overall width must be equipped with a lamp so constructed and placed as to illuminate with a white light the rear registration or license plate and render it clearly legible from a distance of 50 feet to the rear.
5. All such lamps must be wired to be lighted whenever the headlamps or auxiliary driving lamps are lighted.
6. The provisions of this section do not apply to towable tools or equipment which is being towed during the hours of daylight.

A police officer is driving their clearly marked patrol vehicle on Virginia Street (a main artery of the city) in Reno, Nevada, when they observe a vehicle approximately 40 to 60 feet in front of their patrol car, with one license plate lamp inoperable. It is approximately one hour after the sun has set. The police officer makes the decision to initiate a traffic stop on the vehicle. The driver of the vehicle pulls his vehicle into a relatively empty parking lot. The police Officer places their patrol car behind the vehicle, in typical fashion and contacts their dispatch to inform them of their whereabouts. The police officer approaches the vehicle and politely introduces themselves and their reason for the stop. The police officer advises the driver that one of his license plates lights is out. The driver of the vehicle appears irritated that the police officer stopped him for an out of service license plate light. The police officer explains to the driver that as per the Nevada Revised Statute, motor vehicles are required to have all wired lights on the vehicle operable whenever headlamps and auxiliary lights are lighted (paragraph 5). The police officer politely asks the driver for his driver’s license, registration and proof of insurance; the driver provides all the requested documents to the police officer. The police officer returns to their patrol vehicle and contacts dispatch. The police officer requests a records check of the driver, which returns a

relatively clean driving history however, the driver, has had two prior citations issued for equipment violations. The police officer makes the decision to cite the driver of the vehicle for the inoperable license plate lamp. The police officer approaches the vehicle and re-engages the driver. The police officer gives the driver the citation and explains how he can pay the ticket or appear in court to contest the ticket. The driver of the vehicle appears annoyed but agrees to sign the citation at which time the driver is free to leave. The police officer clears from the traffic stop.

Approximately one month later, the police officer receives a subpoena to testify in court for the citation she issued in the above-mentioned incident. In the accompanying photo, the police officer is testifying to the details of this case.

The driver's defense is 1) his vehicle is equipped with two license plate lights, and one was clearly working, which is adequate to read the license plate at night, and 2) many modern vehicles have a single license plate light, so a single light is adequate, therefore there was no offense.

The police officer maintains that the law requires that all lights be working on a motor vehicle operated in the state of Nevada, and the ticket was justified.

Scenario B: Fourth Amendment Search and Seizure

The Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution states:

“The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.”

In order to respect the rights of United States citizens, law enforcement must operate within the confines of the United States Constitution, in addition to Federal, State, and local laws as well as established case law, to guarantee lawful conduct during criminal investigations. With regards to the Fourth Amendment, in order to conduct a search or seizure of an individual’s home or vehicle, probable cause must exist for a warrant to be issued, or consent from the individual can be given to search their effects. It is important to note that although consent can be given, it can be taken away at any time and law enforcement must cease in their search if the individual revokes consent. If consent is revoked, but probable cause still exists, law enforcement may seize the individual’s car or exclude them from their home in anticipation of a search warrant.

A police officer is driving their clearly marked patrol vehicle on Virginia Street (a main artery of the city) in Reno, Nevada, when they observe a vehicle in front of his patrol car, swerving between the lane lines. The police officer believes the driver of the vehicle is possibly under the influence. The police officer makes the decision to initiate a traffic stop on the vehicle. The vehicle pulls off into a relatively empty parking lot. The police officer pulls their patrol vehicle behind the driver in typical fashion and contacts their dispatch center advising their location. The police officer also advises they believe the driver of the vehicle may be under the influence and requests a second officer for backup. The police officer then makes their way to the driver’s side of the vehicle and observes one male occupant, in the driver’s seat. The driver of the vehicle rolls his window down and the police officer introduces themselves and their reason for the stop. The driver of the vehicle vehemently denies being under the influence of any type of substance. The police officer asks the driver of the vehicle for his license, registration and proof of insurance, which he provides without issue. The police officer walks back to their patrol vehicle and contacts dispatch for a driver history check. Dispatch returns a relatively clean driving record; however, the police officer observes five previous incidents in which the driver has been involved with the possession of drug paraphernalia or possession of illegal narcotics. The police officer exits their vehicle and explains to the driver their reason for the stop and states that although the individual’s driving pattern was erratic, he observed no obvious signs of intoxication. The police officer then asks the driver of the vehicle, “Sir, may I have permission to look around your vehicle?” The driver nodded his head in a manner, which would indicate, “yes.” The police officer looks in the windows of the car, using their flashlight to search for any type of narcotic paraphernalia such as tinfoil, pipes, baggies, scales, etc. The police officer does not find anything in the cabin of the vehicle. The police officer then yells to the driver of the vehicle, from the back of the car, “Pop your trunk!” The driver pops the trunk, without saying anything. The police officer observes a large plastic bag, wrapped several times with duct tape, which appears to contain a white crystalline substance. The police officer decides to detain the driver and using a presumptive narcotics test kit determines that the bag contains

methamphetamine. Based on the results of the presumptive narcotics test, the police officer makes the decision to arrest the driver of the vehicle and impound the car.

Approximately one month later, the police officer receives a subpoena for a preliminary hearing to testify in court for the arrest in the above-mentioned incident. In the accompanying photo, the police officer is seen testifying to the details of this case.

The defendant maintains that the search of the trunk was not lawful because he never gave permission to look in the vehicle, only around the vehicle, and that he only opened the trunk because the officer ordered him to do so.

The police officer maintains that popping the trunk constitutes permission, and that they requested, not ordered, the driver to open the trunk.

APPENDIX C

PHOTOGRAPHS USED IN SCENARIOS

Photo 1: Male/ No VBA

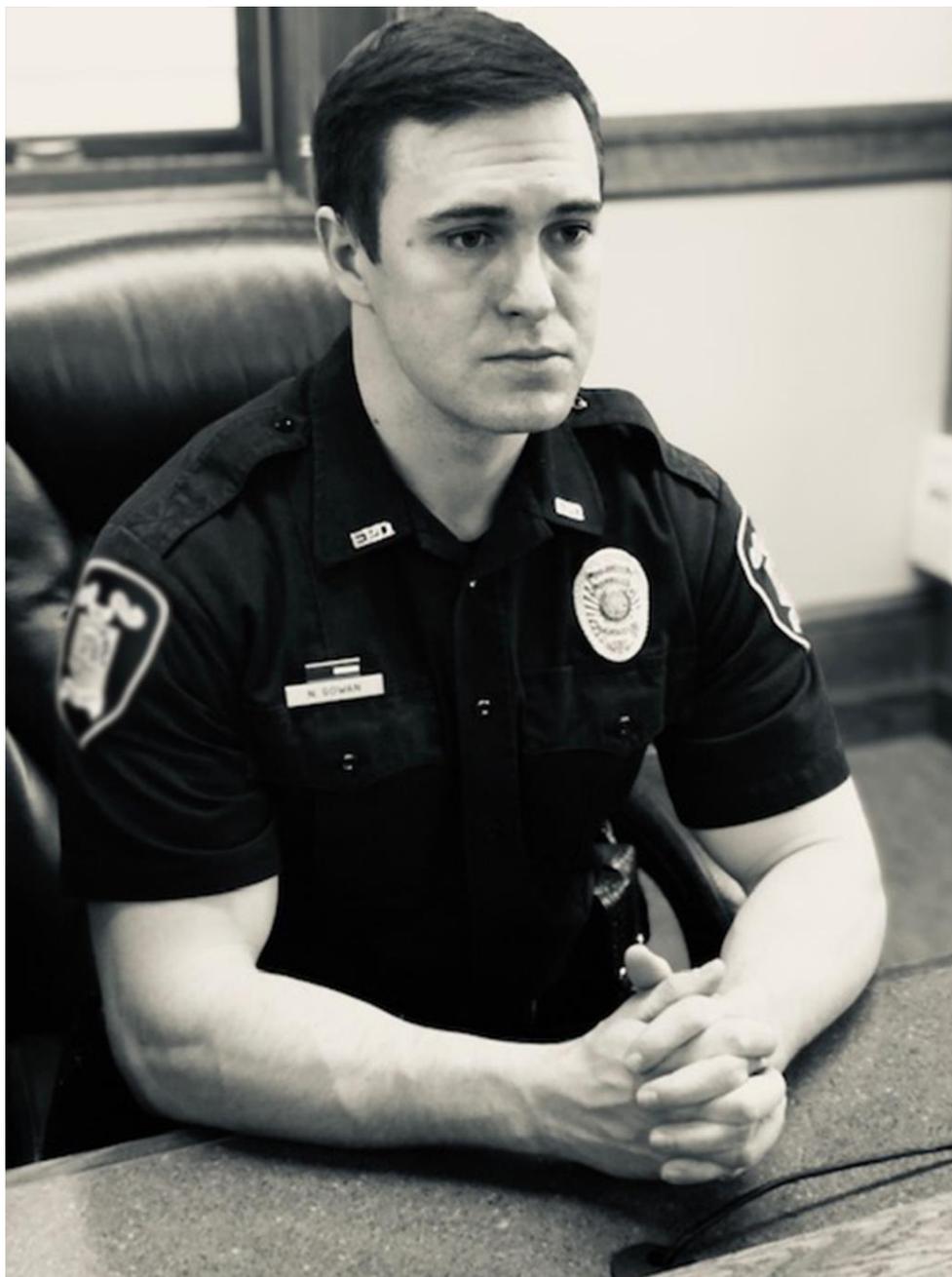


Photo 2: Male/ VBA

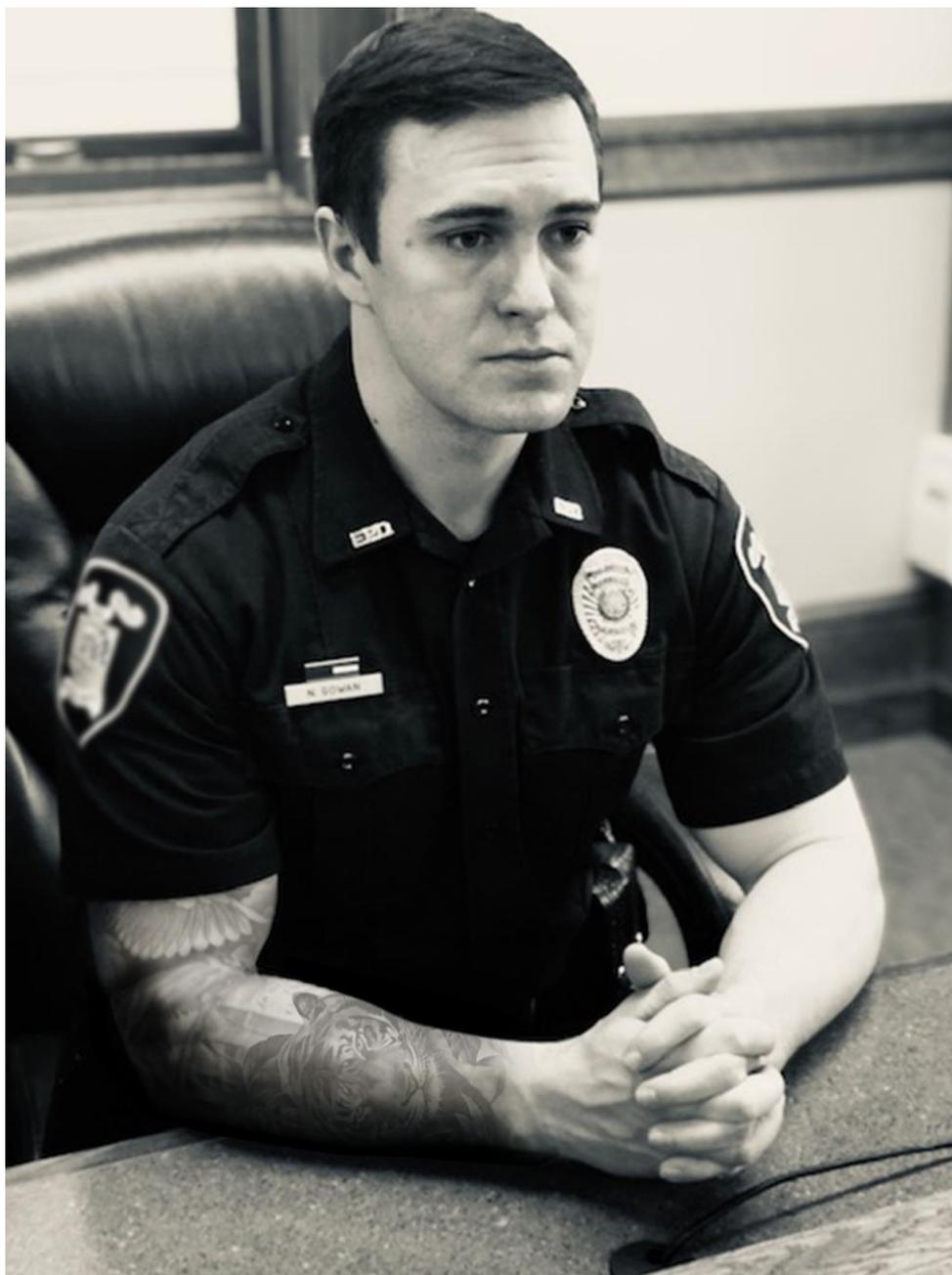


Photo 3: Female/ VBA



Photo 4: Female/ No VBA



APPENDIX D

SCENARIO QUESTIONS

1. Were the Police Officer's **actions** appropriate?
Very Inappropriate
Inappropriate
Appropriate
Very Appropriate
2. Was the Police Officer's **behavior** appropriate?
Very Inappropriate
Inappropriate
Appropriate
Very Appropriate
3. Did the Police Officer appear **competent**?
Very Competent
Competent
Incompetent
Very Incompetent
4. Did the Police Officer appear **honest**?
Very Honest
Honest
Dishonest
Very Dishonest
5. Did the Police Officer appear **professional**?
Very Professional
Professional
Unprofessional
Very Unprofessional
6. Do you believe the Police Officer's actions were **justified**?
No
Yes
7. Based on the Police Officer's actions and the facts of the case, what should be the **decision of the judge**?
The case should be dismissed
The case should move forward for trial
8. Based on the Police Officer's actions and the facts of the case, what should be the **outcome of the case**?
Guilty
Not Guilty

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. What is your sex?
2. What is your age?
3. What category best describes you?
 - Asian or Pacific Islander
 - Black or African American
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Native American or Alaskan Native
 - White or Caucasian
 - Multiracial or Biracial
 - Other: (Please Specify)
4. What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?
 - High School Diploma or GED
 - Some College (No Degree)
 - Associate's Degree
 - Bachelor's Degree
 - Master's Degree
 - Professional Doctorate/ PhD
 - Other: (Please Specify)
5. How would you characterize your political beliefs?
 - Very Conservative
 - Conservative
 - Liberal
 - Very Liberal
6. Are you a Veteran?
 - Yes/ No
7. Are you in law enforcement?
 - Yes/ No
8. Do you have Veteran family members?
 - Yes/ No
9. Do you have family members in law enforcement?
 - Yes/ No
10. How many tattoos do you have?
 - 0
 - 1-3

4-6
6-9
10 or More

11. If you were wearing a short sleeve shirt and shorts, would your tattoos be visible?
Yes/ No

12. Do you have piercings?
0
1-3
4-6
6-9
10 or More

13. Are your piercings visible to the public?
Yes/ No