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Structural Racism in the Federal Workplace:
An Intersectional Approach to Examining Race-Based Discrimination in Law Enforcement

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Law enforcement has historically been an institution resistant to both women and racial minorities, evident by decades of research on workplace discrimination in local policing. Missing, however, from this research are the workplace experiences of minority officers in federal policing, a growing domain in law enforcement scholarship. This article examines perceived encounters of race-based discrimination and its subsequent outcomes to reporting behavior between White and minority officers. Findings suggest that all minority race or ethnic subgroups except one (e.g., Black/African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, multi-racial, and Hispanic/Latino officers respectively) were more likely to perceive experiencing race-based discrimination in comparison to White officers, although only three of the minority subgroups (e.g., Black/African American, multiracial, and Hispanic/Latino officers, respectively) were more likely to report the unlawful conduct. Likewise, comparisons between officers of color found that Black/African American women were more likely to perceive experiencing race-based discrimination in comparison to men of color.

Introduction

Despite executive, legislative, and judicial efforts across the past 60 years, law enforcement continues to be an institution resistant to both women and racial minorities, evident by decades of multidisciplinary research on workplace discrimination[1] in the police force (e.g., Bolton 2003; Haarr and Morash 2013; Hassell and Brandl 2009; Jollevet 2008; Pogrebin, Dodge, and Chatman 2000; Sklansky 2006; Wilson and Wilson 2014). While much of the scholarship has focused on the experiences of female and minority officers in local policing, there has been an upward trend on capturing the workplace experiences of sworn officers in the federal domain—the largest employer in the United States—in particular, female officers (or agents) in federal law enforcement (e.g., Yu 2020, 2022a). Missing from this growth in federal inquiry are the workplace experiences of minority officers regardless of gender, such as Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Native American persons. Given that minority representation has been rising over the past few decades (Brooks 2019; Reaves 2012; Reaves and Hart 2001), capturing these workplace experiences are important because the federal government espouses to be the model employer yet "racial discrimination is the norm in U.S. society, despite rhetorical commitments to equal oppor-

[1] The EEOC (2022a) describes workplace discrimination as "unfair treatment and harassment by managers, co-workers, or others in [the] workplace, because of [one's] race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, disability, age (age 40 or older), or genetic information." Likewise, workplace discrimination includes retaliation when an applicant or employee "complained about job discrimination or assisted with a job discrimination proceeding, such as an investigation or lawsuit" (EEOC 2022a).

tunity and the principles of affirmative action" (Berry-James et al. 2021, 9).

For instance, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC 2022b) received 20,908 formal complaints alleging race-based discrimination in FY2021 alone.[2] Likewise, over half a century of policing and public administration research has documented countless occurrences of race-based discrimination in the police force, although many officers do not appear to report these unlawful encounters (Riccucci and Saldivar 2014; Yu 2022a), further masking the magnitude of the problem. Therefore, examining race-based discrimination requires a meaningful understanding of structural racism in the policing culture and its occupational outlook. In addition, intersectionality is a practical and complementary framework for portraying the workplace experiences of minority officers because it "recognizes that systems of power such as race and gender do not act alone to shape [one's] experiences but rather are inextricably linked and simultaneously experienced" (Burgess-Proctor 2006, 31). Accordingly, the current study aims to gain more insight on the workplace experiences of minority officers in federal law enforcement, to include gender disparities between men and women of color.

Using a sample of sworn federal officers employed by a large federal department ($N = 4{,}106$), this study examines perceived encounters of race-based discrimination and its subsequent outcomes to reporting behavior between White officers and minority officers. However, recognizing that officers of color are not a homogeneous group, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) model between White officers and each minority race or ethnic subgroup, respectively (e.g., Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and multi-racial) are generated to accurately distinguish the workplace experiences of all officers of color. Likewise, gender comparisons between men and women of color are made. This approach supports the reality that each minority race or ethnic subgroup do not convey the same workplace experiences as White officers or other minority subgroups (Breslin, Pandey, and Riccucci 2017; Lee 2020; Nelson and Piatak 2021; Yu 2022a). Thus, the purpose of this study is to answer the following research questions. First, how often do federal officers perceive experiencing race-based discrimination in the workplace? Second, are there differences between reports of perceived racial discrimination among White officers and the various minority race or ethnic subgroups? Third, if they do experience race-based discrimination, do they report the unlawful encounter? If no, why not? If yes, were they satisfied with the outcome? Finally, do women of color experience higher degrees of race-based discrimination than men of color?

These questions are important for several reasons. First, as the largest employer in the country, race-based discrimination has not been fully examined in the federal sector for law enforcement personnel. Thus, scholarship must develop a deeper understanding of the structural racism that permeates traditionally White occupations such as policing and its impact on minority employees and public organizations. Second, the recent directives of Executive Order 13985 (January 20, 2021)—*Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government*—and Executive Order 14035 (June 25, 2021)—*Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce*—demands a workforce where all employees are treated with respect, and where "all employees should receive fair and equitable treatment in all aspects of personnel management" (5 U.S.C. 2301(b)(1)(2)). Finally, incorporating the intersectionality of race and gender provides a more comprehensive examination of the experience minority officers encounter with race-based discrimination and their decision to report or not report the unlawful conduct.

[2] The EEOC (2022c) describes race-based discrimination as involving any facet of employment unfavorably, including "hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoff, training, fringe benefits, and any other term or condition of employment," because of an applicant or employee's race. In addition, race discrimination includes "personal characteristics associated with race, such as hair texture, skin color, or certain facial features" (EEOC 2022c). Likewise, racial harassment is a mode of race-based discrimination and includes "racial slurs, offensive or derogatory remarks about a person's race or color, or the display of racially offensive symbols [that] is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision" (EEOC 2022c).

This article proceeds with an overview on structural racism and intersectionality to explain why racism still exists in law enforcement. Second, data and methodology are introduced, followed by empirical results. Finally, this article concludes by offering discussion, practical and theoretical implications for the findings, and limitations of this study.

Structural Racism

Over the past 60 years, one of the most notable changes in law enforcement is its racial and ethnic diversity. The nearly all-White policing institutions of the 1950s and 1960s have given way to varying increases in minority officers due to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as well as numerous consent decrees from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to remedy past injustices (Sklansky 2006). One of the most prominent consent decrees involved the Alabama Department of Public Safety (i.e., Alabama Highway Patrol) in *United States v. Paradise* (1987). Previously, the District Court in *Paradise v. Allen* (1972) issued a hiring quota (i.e., one qualified Black trooper for every White trooper hired until the force reached 25% Black troopers) and an order to refrain from further discriminatory practices upon learning that for nearly four decades, the Alabama Department of Public Safety had systematically excluded every Black applicant from employment as state troopers. Furthermore, the District Court imposed two affirmative promotion plans in 1979 and 1983 upon learning that Black troopers were not allowed to advance due to unfair promotion exams. The District Court would require that at least 50% of all promotions to corporal and above must be given to Black troopers if qualified Black troopers were available. The Circuit Court would later affirm the District Court's decision in 1985, and the Supreme Court would uphold the race-based promotion plan in 1987. By 2016, the Alabama Highway Patrol would have the 12th most diverse state policing agency in the country, despite upholding a police force that remains 82.9% White (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2020).

While this is just one example of the structural racism—that is, "a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity" (The Aspen Institute 2021)—that has been on display in policing, federal law enforcement agencies appear to fare better than its state and local counterparts regarding minority representation. For example, during the latest census of law enforcement personnel prepared by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 37.9% of all federal law enforcement officers are non-White, in comparison to just 16.1% of all state highway or patrol officers and 28.5% of all municipal police officers, mostly attributable to an increase in the percentage of Asian and Hispanic/Latino federal officers during the past couple of decades (Brooks 2019; Bureau of Justice Statistics 2020; Hyland and Davis 2019). Although this may appear encouraging at first, studies on workplace discrimination have shown that improved rates of minority representation within an organization are also associated with higher degrees of race-based discrimination (Alteri 2020; Rubin and Alteri 2019), truncating the careers of otherwise qualified minority candidates regardless of intergovernmental level (Bolton 2003; Gau, Paoline, and Roman 2021; Jollevet 2008; Schroedel et al. 1994; Wilson and Wilson 2014).

For example, in 2018, the United Black Police Officers Association, the Hispanic National Law Enforcement Association, and 12 minority police officers filed a lawsuit against the Prince George's County Police Department, a disproportionate White police force—that is, the population is 12.3% White, yet 45.3% of all sworn officers are White (Bureau of Justice 2020; Census Bureau 2021)—asserting a work environment pervaded by race-based discrimination and retaliation (Wainman 2021). Furthermore, in 2019, the Department of Justice filed a lawsuit against the Baltimore County Police Department, another disproportionately White police force in Maryland—the population is 55.8% White, yet 82.3% of all sworn officers are White—alleging race-based discriminatory practices on entry-level procedures by grounding hiring decisions on exams that were not job related, which disproportionately excluded minority (i.e., African American) applicants (Bureau of Justice 2020; Census Bureau 2021; Shalal and Landay 2020). Both lawsuits would later reach settlements of $2.3M and $2M, respectively, to include reform initiatives for both police departments (Shalal and Landay 2020; Wainman 2021).

Up to this point, nearly all the research on race-based discrimination in policing has focused on Black/Afri-

can American officers, with Hispanics/Latinos, Asians, and other minority subgroups receiving very little to no consideration (e.g., Carter 1986; Gallardo 2020; Gau, Paoline, and Roman 2021; Holder, Nee, and Ellis 2000; Schroedel et al. 1994; Yu 2022b). While there is basis for this targeted approach—for example, criminal justice reform initiatives such as President Johnson's *Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice* (1967) and President Obama's *Task Force on 21st Century Policing* (2015) were both enacted during periods of crisis between the police and the Black communities, respectively and concentrated on improving racial diversity in the police force with Black/African American officers (Skogan 2018)—race-based discrimination can extend to all race or ethnic subgroups, although research found that racial minorities were more likely to perceive workplace discrimination than White employees (Alteri 2020; Bradbury, Battaglio, and Crum 2010; Lee 2020; McCord et al. 2018; Ortega et al. 2012; Triana, Del Carmen, and Pieper 2015; Yu 2022a). For example, Carter (1986) and Gallardo (2020) reported in their studies on Hispanic police officers' workplace environment that race-based discrimination was prevalent throughout the department's recruitment, hiring, and promotion practices and this negatively impacted non-White officers.

There are two streams of scholarship in response to this shift on racial and ethnic demographics. The first is that the nature of policing and its White occupational culture have remained mostly intact (Bolton 2003; Demeester and Lamagdeleine 2016; Gaynor 2018; Jollevet 2008; Sklansky 2006). Findings from independent audits demonstrate that the culture is so engrained and standardized within the profession that most law enforcement organizations are unaware that unconscious (and conscious) bias even exists in their departments or agencies, adversely impacting the recruitment, promotion, and retention processes of most police organizations, including from those whose senior leaders are proactively trying to revamp the culture (Bolton 2003; Jollevet 2008; National Coalition of Law Enforcement Organizations 2016). This bias inhibits a truly equitable workforce and impedes progress toward achieving racial equity in public organizations. It is revealed at every phase of the employment process and is an acknowledgment of what Gooden (2014) calls a "nervous area of government." This form of structural racism is described as "discrimination in contract" because it refers to the "standardization of racial bias through public structures" (Gooden 2014, 11).

Sklansky (2006, 1211) further claims that "officers of all backgrounds are assumed either to [assimilate and] make peace with the White [and] masculine ethos of policing or have difficulty lasting" in what is commonly referred to as the blue brotherhood, while many White male police officers continue to resist efforts at desegregation, as well as diversity training efforts designed to eliminate discrimination both in and outside the organization (Bolton 2003; Conti and Doreian 2010; Demeester and Lamagdeleine 2016; Jollevet 2008; Wilkins and Williams 2008). In addition, scholars argue that minority officers "are socialized by the organizations they work in and adopt behaviors and preferences that are consistent with [White] organizational goals, thereby minimizing the influence of their own personal values [and] racial identity" (Conti and Doreian 2010; Gooden 2014; Wilkins and Williams 2008, 656). These oppressive efforts by White actors continue to exploit and marginalize those individuals who are negatively socially constructed to maintain state-sanctioned injustices that impact organizational justice and equity (Gaynor 2018; Gooden 2014). Furthermore, Heckler (2017, 176) suggests that "Whiteness is a part of the institutional setting of public organizations" to maintain White supremacy by devaluing the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities. As a result, minority officers are overwhelmingly deployed to neighborhoods of color, denied positions that lead to career advancement, held victim to racial jokes and slurs, and are subject to harsher punitive actions in comparison to White officers (Bolton 2003; Gau, Paoline, and Roman 2021; Jollevet 2008; Schroedel et al. 1994; Sklansky 2006; Wilson and Wilson 2014).

Thus, structural racism is entrenched in the blue culture because the police culture is White culture (Bolton 2003; Bolton and Feagin 2004; Demeester and Lamagdeleine 2016; Holdaway and O'Neill 2004). Hence,

> White culture is held together by informal relationships and associations through which information is disseminated that is critical to advancement in the system. The network provides mentoring and entrée into line positions that are necessary for advancement. This informal system is a barrier to the advancement of minority police officers in several

> ways. First, it is racist. When Blacks complain about racism they are sanctioned and punished. When pressured about discrimination, White officers engage in self-pity and claim 'reverse discrimination.' Blacks who point out racism are vilified and retaliated. Second, police culture is exclusionary. By excluding minority officers, Whites have an advantage in job assignments, promotions, and advancement. Ironically, once African American officers are promoted into executive positions, they are normatively constrained from developing networks among African Americans and mentoring promising African American talent. They tend to become isolated from other African American officers and are admonished that their responsibilities are for the entire police force, whereas White executive officers are not so constrained. (Jollevet 2008, 18)

Furthermore, in one of the most expansive studies on the continuing barriers in law enforcement, Bolton (2003) found that structural racism and systematic barriers also impacted the career longevity of Black officers. Specifically,

> These barriers have both attitudinal and organizational dimensions and vary in form from subtle to covert to overt. [The] racial attitudes of many White officers create hostile working environments ripe with resentment and intimidation. These racial attitudes shape the organizational structure of police agencies to the extent that White officers are more numerous than their Black counterparts and/or disproportionately fill supervisory and command positions. Many [Black officers] lament a lack of support networks, feel unable to turn to police unions for remediation and often consider opting for early retirement due to continual conflict and stress. Many [Black officers] feel that the reason White officers are not used to Black officers, do not particularly want them in policing and do not know how to address and form a conversation with them is due to persistent patterns of racial segregation in the USA. Because White and Black people are largely separated from intimate contact with each other, officers understand that much racism is not conscious and intentional but rather unconscious and unintentional. Racial attitudes seem customary, right and inoffensive, reflecting the socialization of White officers that has shaped their worldviews. (Bolton 2003, 389)

Unfortunately, it does not appear much has changed in the past couple of decades. More recently, racial tension both internally and outwardly have been heightened by several tragic events that spurred and renewed the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement (Agho 2022), as well as the latest *#StopAsianHate* or *#StopAAPIHate* movements brought on by the recent killing spree in Georgia and the COVID-19 pandemic (Yu 2022b). In addition, four years of the Trump administration normalized racism and bullying (Ruiz, Edwards, and Lopez 2021). This included Trump's attack on Kimberlé Crenshaw, one of the foremothers of critical race theory, which is a long-standing "body of legal scholarship [that is] ideologically committed to the struggle against racism, particularly as institutionalized in and by law" (Bell 1995, 898). The bullying empowered state and local political leaders and government officials to overtly dismiss the current and historical experiences and needs of minority employees and citizens. For example, although Trump's "Equity Gag Order" (i.e., Executive Order 13950 which banned federal departments and agencies, contractors, and grant recipients from conducting training and programs that address systematic racism and sexism) has since been rescinded by President Biden (Executive Order 13985), a total of 16 states have recently signed into legislation bills restricting education on race in classrooms or state agencies, with another 19 states actively considering similar bills or policies (Alfonseca 2022).

The second stream of scholarship in response to this shift on racial and ethnic demographics suggest that police officers are far more disjointed than in previous decades, weakening both the solidarity and informal insularity of the White culture and changing its internal dynamics (National Coalition of Law Enforcement Organizations 2016). Sklansky (2006) describes these organizational effects into three categories: 1) one-on-one interactions (e.g., changing the negative attitudes and behavior of other sworn officers around them), 2) rival trade groups (e.g., membership in professional associations that represent the interest of minority officers such as the Hispanic American Police Command Officers Association (HAPCOA), the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), and the National Asian Peace Officers' Association (NAPOA),

just to name a few), and 3) social fragmentation (e.g., the decline of the monolithic White police culture). Though these changes can generate positive impact, they can also convey "division, distrust, and resentment, not only between White officers and minority officers, but also between . . . Black officers and Latino officers, Latino officers and Asian American officers, and so on" (Sklansky 2006, 1232).

Despite these two opposing views in the literature, most scholars and practitioners believe the monolithic White culture prevails in today's law enforcement institutions, resulting in both unintentional and intentional discriminatory practices. While there are no prior studies that have exclusively examined race-based discrimination in federal law enforcement, those current and early experiences by minority officers in local policing may draw parallels. In addition, according to the 2010 Merit Principles Survey performed by the Merit Service Protection Board, Black/African American employees reported the highest levels of discrimination in the federal government at 8%, followed by Asian employees at 5.5%, Hispanic/Latino employees at 5%, and Whites who reported the lowest levels of discrimination at 2.2% (Alteri 2020). Accordingly, this study expects minorities by their respective race or ethnic subgroup to have differences in experiencing race-based discrimination in comparison to White officers. Thus,

> **Hypothesis 1**: Minority officers by their respective race or ethnic subgroup are more likely to perceive experiencing race-based discrimination in comparison to their White counterparts in federal law enforcement.

Likewise, since the enactment of the Notification and Federal Anti-Discrimination and Retaliation Act of 2002 (i.e., No FEAR Act), the reporting behavior of employees who experience workplace discrimination has generated renewed attention in the literature (e.g., Alteri 2020; Lee and Yu 2020; Reese and Lindenberg 2005; Riccucci and Saldivar 2014; Rubin and Alteri 2019; Yu 2022a; Yu and Lee 2020). This topic continues to be important because as mentioned previously, the EEOC (2022b) received 20,908 formal complaints alleging race-based discrimination in FY2021 alone, the third most frequently charged basis of unlawful conduct in the workplace next to retaliation- (34,332) and disability-based (22,843) accusations. Yet, these figures are beyond any unsuccessful (or dissatisfied) direct filing required by a federal applicant or employee with their federal agency pursuant to the *Federal Sector Equal Employment Opportunity Complaint Processing Procedures* (29 CFR Part 1614) and does not include charges filed with state or local Fair Employment Practice Agencies (EEOC 2022b), likely underreporting the actual number of race-based allegations.

However, a body of literature also suggests that law enforcement officers do not report workplace discrimination due to fear of retaliation or stigma, a unique occupational code of silence, or agency inaction upon receiving an allegation (Chaiyavej and Morash 2009; Collins 2004; Ivkovic, Haberfeld, and Peacock 2018; Jollevet 2008). To illustrate, in a recent study on reporting behavior, 85.5% of sworn officers chose not to report the unlawful encounter, yet officers of color, specifically Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino officers respectively, were more likely to report workplace discrimination in comparison to White officers (Yu 2022a). Although the study captured the reporting behavior of female officers who experienced sex-based discrimination, there are likely similar parallels with race-based discrimination. Accordingly, this study expects minorities by their respective race or ethnic subgroup to have differences in reporting behavior in comparison to White officers. Thus,

> **Hypothesis 2**: Minority officers by their respective race or ethnic subgroup who perceive experiencing race-based discrimination are more likely to report workplace discrimination in comparison to their White counterparts in federal law enforcement.

Intersectionality

Finally, intersectionality is a practical and complementary framework for portraying the workplace experiences of minority officers because "there are implications for using broad categories such as 'people of color' rather than looking at subgroup differences in terms of specific racial or ethnic categories and their intersections with gender when trying to understand the nuances" of the workforce (Blessett et al. 2019, 284). In addition, intersectionality "is a disruption of the norm [and] public administration as a field must develop a willingness to embrace inclusive perspectives, ideologies, and

methodologies" when combating discrimination by state actors and institutions (Blessett, 2020, 4). Whilst intersectionality typically examines other social and individual variables such as age, class, education, religion, sexual orientation, and tenure to interact with race and gender (e.g., Acker 2006; Alteri 2020; Gaynor 2018; Hamidullah and Riccucci 2017; Hassell and Brandl 2009; Holvino 2010; Luna 2016; Potter et al. 2018), this article will focus primarily on race and gender in its approach.

The framework was pioneered by Crenshaw (1989) in her evaluation of anti-discrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and anti-racist politics that erased the experience of racial minorities, especially Black/African American women. She contends that "the intersectional experience [of race and gender] is greater than the sum of racism and sexism [and] any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black [or other minority] women are subordinated" (Crenshaw 1989, 140). This is particularly relevant with the target population of this study, who as mentioned previously have historically been resistant to both women and racial minorities (see Rief and Clinkinbeard 2020; Yu and Lee 2020). However, this article would be remiss to examine intersectionality without mentioning bell hooks, a prominent scholar in her own right, who also suggests that oppression such as racism and sexism "are interrelated and inseparably connected to each other through [various] interlocking webs of oppression" (Biana 2020, 13, citing hooks 1984). Her writings are rooted deeply in second-wave feminism, an era that sought space for non-White feminist thought with consideration of race-related subjectivities (Burgess-Proctor 2006; Collins 2000; Harnois 2005; Yu 2022a; Zinn and Dill 1996). Both theorists suggest that the duplicative disadvantages of being both a woman and a member of a race or ethnic minority brought about heightened adverse experiences exacerbated by their individual race or ethnic background (Crenshaw 1989; hooks 1984).

In addition, intersectionality creates inequalities and systematic disparities in work organizations (Acker 2006). Women and men of color have historically been "confined to the lowest-level jobs or excluded from the most powerful (White [and] male) organizations that were central in shaping the racialized and gendered class structure of the larger society" (445). For example, as mentioned previously, policing institutions were virtually all White until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and women were explicitly excluded from most police departments until the subsequent enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 (Felkenes and Schroedel 1993; Sklansky 2006). As a result, the incursion of racial minorities and women into law enforcement was met with great hostility and their respective differential treatment in the workplace (Acker 2006; Bolton 2003; Burgess-Procter 2006; Hassell and Brandl 2009; Holder, Nee, and Ellis 2000; Jollevet 2008). However, different orientations produce diverse experiences (Feeney and Camarena 2021; Gaynor 2018; Yu 2022a). For example, White female officers will experience the workplace differently than White male officers. Likewise, Black/African American officers will experience the workplace differently than other minority officers, and those at the intersection (e.g., women of color) will have a different orientation than both White female officers and minority male officers, respectively.

Consequently, women of color would likely encounter higher degrees of workplace discrimination in comparison to men of color, as well as White women (Breslin, Pandey, and Riccucci 2017; Dodge and Pogrebin 2001; Feeney and Camarena 2021; Haarr and Morash 2004; Hamidullah and Riccucci 2017; Hsieh and Winslow 2006; Lee, Robertson, and Kim 2020; Nelson and Piatak 2021; Yu 2022a). Accordingly, this study expects women of color to have differences in experiencing race-based discrimination in comparison to men of color. Thus,

> **Hypothesis 3**: Women of color are more likely to perceive experiencing race-based discrimination in comparison to men of color in federal law enforcement.

Data and Methods

To test these hypotheses, this study draws its sample from sworn officers employed by the largest cabinet employer of all full-time law enforcement officers in the federal domain (Brooks 2019). An online Qualtrics survey was sent to all potential research participants nationwide in 2021 and was open for 35 days with a reminder email sent mid-study. The survey link was password protected and sent by a senior representative from the Office of the Secretary describing their collaboration on the research study and encouraging maximum voluntary participation. In addition, to minimize self-selection bias, all po-

tential research participants were guaranteed anonymity and ensured their data would be statistically summarized with the responses of others and would not be attributable to any single individual. These efforts yielded an overall 11.9% response rate, an acceptable rate of return for an organizational survey of its size. Furthermore, research participants had the option to skip any question they felt uncomfortable answering. Thus, cases where participants omitted questions containing the primary research variables (e.g., race or ethnicity, gender, and experiencing race-based discrimination) were excluded from the current study, resulting in a final sample size of $N = 4{,}106$. Finally, due to the sheer magnitude of data collected in this broad organizational survey, questions outside the scope of the current study were not included in this article and will be discussed in separate papers.

Independent Variable

The primary independent variable in this study was *race* or *ethnicity*. Each race or ethnic subgroup—White (59.2%), Black/African American (6.3%), Hispanic/Latino (23.7%), Asian American (2.7%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.6%), American Indian/Alaska Native (1%), and multiracial (6.4%)—was coded and analyzed as a nominal variable. In this study, multiracial was defined as two or more races, a standard classification typically used by the Census Bureau (2021). In addition, gender identity (0 = male [78%]; 1 = female [22%]) was interacted with race or ethnicity to provide a more accurate examination of workplace experiences. Though other classifications of gender identity were collected in this study (e.g., transgender male and transgender female), they were excluded from further analysis due to their small sample sizes, respectively.

Dependent Variables

The primary dependent variables were (1) *experiencing* race-based discrimination and (2) *reporting* race-based discrimination. They were coded as binary variables and operationalized by asking the following question: "I experienced race-based discrimination at my agency" (0 = no [80.6%]; 1 = yes [19.4%]). To mitigate individual bias, the definition of race-based discrimination was contained with the survey question.[3] If research participants answered yes to experiencing race-based discrimination, they were presented with a follow-up question (i.e., "Did you report it?" [0 = no (75.9%); 1 = yes (24.1%)]). To drive discussion and uncover new themes, if research participants answered no to the previous question, they were given another fixed-choice follow-up question (i.e., "Why did you not report it?") with a selection to "write-in" an option not listed. Participants also had the ability to select more than one option. In total for those participants who did not report the matter, these included: 1 = retaliation (26.6%); 2 = nothing would be done (41.8%); 3 = ruined reputation or unwanted attention (28.9%); 4 = difficulty in proving alleged offense (1.2%); 5 = confronted alleged perpetrator (0.4%); 6 = unaware of reporting process (0.4%); and 7 = unbothered by the alleged race-based encounter (0.6%). If research participants answered yes to reporting the alleged encounter, they were provided an alternative follow-up question (i.e., "Were you satisfied with the official outcome?" (0 = no [94.7%]; 1 = yes [5.3%]) to measure procedural justice (i.e., fairness in the process that resolve disputes). See Tables 1 and 2 for a descriptive summary of the primary variables.

Analysis

A one-way ANOVA model between White officers and each minority race or ethnic subgroup respectively was generated to accurately distinguish the workplace experiences of all officers. Likewise, a supplemental ANOVA model was generated to differentiate the experiences between men and women of color. The SPSS® software platform was employed for all analyses.

Findings

Tables 3 and 4 provide the results on a one-way ANOVA and post hoc test between White officers and minority officers, regardless of gender. The post hoc comparisons using the Tukey-Kramer test found there were statistically significant differences in response between White officers and five of the minority race or ethnic sub-

[3] In the survey instrument, race-based discrimination is defined as the practice of letting a person's race unfairly become a factor when deciding who receives an initial job offer, promotion, training opportunity, job assignment, compensation, or other employment benefit.

Table 1. Descriptive Summary Statistics

	Experienced Race-Based Discrimination		Reported Race-Based Discrimination		If Reported Satisfied w/Outcome	
	No (n = 3,309)	Yes (n = 797)	No (n = 603)	Yes (n = 191)	No (n = 180)	Yes (n = 10)
White	2,103	329	283	43	42	1
Male	1,651	283	247	33	32	1
Female	452	46	36	10	10	0
Hispanic	765	207	144	63	60	3
Male	599	163	112	51	48	3
Female	166	44	32	12	12	0
Multiracial	195	68	47	21	19	1
Male	146	51	32	19	17	1
Female	49	17	15	2	2	0
Black	120	140	93	47	42	5
Male	80	88	65	23	19	4
Female	40	52	28	24	23	1
Asian	81	31	21	10	10	0
Male	60	25	18	7	7	0
Female	21	6	3	3	3	0
AI/AN	28	15	10	5	5	0
Male	22	12	9	3	3	0
Female	6	3	1	2	2	0
NH/PI	17	7	5	2	2	0
Male	16	6	4	2	2	0
Female	1	1	1	0	0	0
Total %	80.6%	19.4%	75.9%	24.1%	94.7%	5.3%

Table 2. Why Officers Did Not Report

	n	%
Nothing would be done	472	41.8%
Ruined reputation or unwanted attention	326	28.9%
Retaliation	300	26.6%
Difficulty in proving alleged offense	14	1.2%
Unbothered by the alleged race-based encounter	7	0.6%
Unaware of reporting process	5	0.4%
Confronted alleged perpetrator	4	0.4%

Note. Officers were able to choose more than one response; % will not equal 100 due to rounding.

groups, suggesting that Black/African American officers (54%), American Indian/Alaska Native officers (35%), Asian officers (28%), multiracial officers (26%), and Hispanic/Latino officers (21%), respectively were more likely to perceive experiencing race-based discrimination in comparison to White officers (14%), partially supporting hypothesis 1. There was no statistically significant difference in response between White officers and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander officers (p = .419).

Regarding reporting behavior, there were statistically significant differences in response between White officers and three of the minority race or ethnic sub-

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA for Experiencing and Reporting Race-Based Discrimination

	SS	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*Sig.*
Experiencing race-based discrimination (N = 4,106)					
Between groups	42.079	6	7.118	48.662	**.000**
Within groups	599.589	4099	.146		
Total	642.297	4105			
Reporting race-based discrimination (n = 794)					
Between groups	6.628	6	1.105	6.280	**.000**
Within groups	138.427	787	.176		
Total	145.054	793			

Note. Significant items are in bold.

Table 4. Post Hoc for Experiencing and Reporting Race-Based Discrimination

	n	*M (SD)*	*M Diff.*	*Sig.*
Experiencing race-based discrimination (N = 4,106)				
Reference group				
White	2,432	.14 (.342)		
Comparison groups				
Hispanic	972	.21 (.410)	-.078	**.000**
Multiracial	263	.26 (.439)	-.123	**.000**
Black	260	.54 (.499)	-.403	**.000**
Asian	112	.28 (.449)	-.142	**.003**
AI/AN	43	.35 (.482)	-.214	**.005**
NH/PI	24	.29 (.464)	-.156	.419
Reporting race-based discrimination (n = 794)				
Reference group				
White	326	.13 (.339)		
Comparison groups				
Hispanic	207	.30 (.461)	-.172	**.000**
Black	140	.34 (.474)	-.204	**.000**
Multiracial	68	.31 (.465)	-.177	**.027**
Asian	31	.32 (.475)	-.191	.192
AI/AN	15	.33 (.488)	-.201	.536
NH/PI	7	.29 (.488)	-.154	.962

Note 1. Multiracial=two or more races; AI/AN=American Indian/Alaska Native; NH/PI=Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.
Note 2. Significant items are in bold.

Table 5. One-Way ANOVA for Minorities Experiencing and Reporting Race-Based Discrimination

	SS	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*Sig.*
Experiencing race-based discrimination (n = 1,674)					
Between groups	22.374	11	2.034	10.739	**.000**
Within groups	314.787	1662	.189		
Total	337.161	1673			
Reporting race-based discrimination (n=468)					
Between groups	3.038	11	.276	1.283	.231
Within groups	98.158	456	.215		
Total	101.197	467			

Note. Significant item is in bold.

groups, suggesting that Black/African American officers (34%), multiracial officers (31%), and Hispanic/Latino officers (30%), respectively were more likely to report workplace discrimination if they perceived experiencing race-based discrimination in comparison to White officers (13%), partially supporting hypothesis 2. There were no statistically significant differences in response between White officers and Asian officers (p = .192), American Indian/Alaska Native officers (p = .192), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander officers (p = .962), respectively.

Likewise, Tables 5 and 6 provide the results on a supplemental one-way ANOVA and post hoc test between men and women of color. The post hoc comparisons found there were statistically significant differences in response between several combinations of minority subgroups interacting with gender. First, there were statistically significant differences in response between Black/African American male officers and three minority female subgroups. However, Black/African American male officers (52%) were more likely to perceive experiencing race-based discrimination in comparison to Hispanic/Latina officers (21%), multiracial female officers (26%), and Asian female officers (22%), respectively, rejecting hypothesis 3. There were no statistically significant differences in response between Black/African American male officers and Black/African American female officers (p = 1.000), American Indian/Alaska Native female officers (p = .982), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander female officers (p = 1.000), respectively.

On the other hand, there was a statistically significant difference in response between Black/African American female officers and three minority male subgroups, suggesting that Black/African American female officers (57%) were more likely to perceive experiencing race-based discrimination in comparison to Hispanic/Latino male officers (21%), Asian male officers (29%), and multiracial male officers (26%), respectively, partially supporting hypothesis 3. There were no statistically significant differences in response between Hispanic/Latino male officers and Hispanic/Latina officers (p = 1.000), multiracial female officers (p = 1.000), Asian female officers (p = 1.000), American Indian/Alaska Native female officers (p = 1.000), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander female officers (p = .999), respectively.

Likewise, there were no statistically significant differences in response between Asian male officers and Hispanic/Latina officers (p = .937), multiracial female officers (p = 1.000), Asian female officers (p = 1.000), American Indian/Alaska Native female officers (p= 1.000), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander female officers (p = 1.000), respectively. Similarly, there were no statistically significant differences in response between multiracial male officers and Hispanic/Latina female officers (p = .933), multiracial female officers (p = 1.000), Asian female officers (p = 1.000), American Indian/Alaska Native female officers (p = 1.000), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander female officers (p = 1.000), respectively. Moreover, there were no statistically significant differences in response between American Indian/Alaska Native male officers and any of the minority female officers, as well as between Native Hawaiian/

Table 6. Post Hoc for Minorities Experiencing Race-Based Discrimination (n=1,674)

	n	M (SD)	M Diff.	Sig.
Reference group 1				
Black male	168	.52 (.501)		
Comparison groups				
Hispanic female	210	.21 (.408)	.314	**.000**
Black female	92	.57 (.498)	-.041	1.000
Multiracial female	66	.26 (.441)	.266	**.002**
Asian female	27	.22 (.424)	.302	**.040**
AI/AN female	9	.33 (.500)	.190	.982
NH/PI female	2	.50 (.707)	.024	1.000
Reference group 2				
Hispanic male	762	.21 (.410)		
Comparison groups				
Hispanic female	210	.21 (.408)	.003	1.000
Black female	92	.57 (.498)	-.351	**.000**
Multiracial female	66	.26 (.441)	-.044	1.000
Asian female	27	.22 (.424)	-.008	1.000
AI/AN female	9	.33 (.500)	-.119	1.000
NH/PI female	2	.50 (.707)	-.286	.999
Reference group 3				
Asian male	85	.29 (.458)		
Comparison groups				
Hispanic female	210	.21 (.408)	.085	.937
Black female	92	.57 (.498)	-.271	**.002**
Multiracial female	66	.26 (.441)	.037	1.000
Asian female	27	.22 (.424)	.072	1.000
AI/AN female	9	.33 (.500)	-.039	1.000
NH/PI female	2	.50 (.707)	-.206	1.000
Reference group 4				
Multiracial male	197	.26 (.439)		
Comparison groups				
Hispanic female	210	.21 (.408)	.049	.993
Black female	92	.57 (.498)	-.306	**.000**
Multiracial female	66	.26 (.441)	.001	1.000
Asian female	27	.22 (.424)	.037	1.000
AI/AN female	9	.33 (.500)	-.074	1.000
NH/PI female	2	.50 (.707)	-.241	1.000
Reference group 5				
AI/AN male	34	.35 (.485)		
Comparison groups				
Hispanic female	210	.21 (.408)	.143	.828
Black female	92	.57 (.498)	-.212	.386
Multiracial female	66	.26 (.441)	.095	.997
Asian female	27	.22 (.424)	.131	.991
AI/AN female	9	.33 (.500)	.020	1.000
NH/PI female	2	.50 (.707)	-.147	1.000
Reference group 6				
NH/PI male	22	.27 (.456)		
Comparison groups				
Hispanic female	210	.21 (.408)	.063	1.000
Black female	92	.57 (.498)	-.292	.168
Multiracial female	66	.26 (.441)	.015	1.000
Asian female	27	.22 (.424)	.051	1.000
AI/AN female	9	.33 (.500)	-.061	1.000
NH/PI female	2	.50 (.707)	-.227	1.000

Note 1. Multi-racial = two or more races; AI/AN=American Indian/Alaska Native; NH/PI=Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.
Note 2. Significant items are in bold.

Pacific Islander male officers and any of minority female officers. Finally, post hoc comparisons were not employed with reporting workplace discrimination between officers of color interacting with gender because the findings from ANOVA were not statistically significant.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although the findings in this study were not a complete surprise, they continue to demonstrate the barriers minority officers experience in the workplace. It sought answers to several research questions unique to federal law enforcement, resulting in both practical and theoretical implications to policing and the field of public administration. First, how often do federal officers experience race-based discrimination in the workplace? And are there differences between reports of perceived racial discrimination among White officers and the various minority race or ethnic subgroups? Unfortunately, almost one-fifth (19.4%) of the officers in this study encountered perceived instances of race-based discrimination, suggesting that law enforcement executives and leaders in the federal domain have more work to do in this area if they hope to be the model employer that the federal government espouses to be. While past research had found varying degrees of reverse discrimination allegations (e.g., Jollevet 2008; Riccucci and Saldivar 2014), with this study being no exception, all minority race or ethnic subgroups in the current study were more likely to perceive experiencing race-based discrimination in comparison to White officers, though only five out of six subgroups were statistically significant. While most of the policing literature has understandably focused on Black/African American officers, the significant differences in response between other minority race or ethnic subgroups in this study and White officers indicate the need for expanding the dialogue on workplace experiences beyond one specific group, especially since Asian and Hispanic/Latino officers represent the greatest increase among all minority groups in federal law enforcement (Brooks 2019).

Furthermore, creating an inclusive workplace environment has never been more pressing than it is today, underscored by highly visible campaigns such as *#MeToo*, *#BlackLivesMatter*, *#StopAsianHate*, and other historic movements for racial and immigrant justice. Although workplace discrimination has long been regarded as a significant barrier to creating such environments (Berry-James et al. 2021; Lee 2020; Oliver 2017; Rubin and Alteri 2019; Yu and Lee 2020), law enforcement executives and leaders must continue to aggressively root out the inherent structural racism embedded in the policing culture that serve as barriers to equal opportunity, an undeniable responsibility that has not yet been fully realized. Furthermore, "by advancing equity across the federal government, [agencies] can create opportunities for the improvement of communities that have been historically underserved," (Executive Order 13985) which further echo the principles from the Social Equity Manifesto (developed by a group of scholars at the Minnowbrook at 50 conference) that calls upon the field of public administration to "engage in intentional, [sustained], active, and ethical efforts to serve and safeguard all people, especially the most vulnerable in society" (Blessett et al. 2019, 296–297).

Likewise, this article focused on reporting behavior to determine if federal officers who perceived experiencing race-based discrimination reported the encounter. If no, why not? If yes, were they satisfied with the outcome? Consistent with past research, a vast majority (75.9%) of the officers did not report the unlawful conduct through official channels for several reasons. For one, they believed nothing would be done by the agency and accepted the unlawful conduct as part of the organizational culture in law enforcement. However, culture had different meanings for different race or ethnic groups. For example, while many White (male) officers claimed reverse discrimination as the new culture in federal policing due to diversity efforts on the part of the agency, minority officers attributed their views of agency inaction to the old yet monolithic White culture that reigned supreme for decades. Likewise, officers feared a ruined reputation (or unwanted attention) that might impact future opportunities, as well as retaliatory actions by their supervisor and peers had they reported the discriminatory act. Despite reality to both viewpoints, law enforcement executives and leaders must do more to promote an inclusive culture.

For those officers who did report the unlawful encounter, again, all minority race or ethnic subgroups in this study were more likely to report race-based discrimination in comparison to White officers, although only three subgroups were statistically significant (i.e., Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American, and multiracial). However, a resounding margin (94.7%) were

not satisfied with the outcome, which further corroborates why so many officers believed nothing would be done and did not report initially. The current study did not expand upon this line of inquiry beyond this one question. However, future research should continue this stream of study and examine the reporting process for procedural justice (or injustice).

Finally, the last question from this study sought to determine if women of color experienced higher degrees of race-based discrimination than men of color. Employing the framework of intersectionality, the responses were mixed by reference group and significance. Specifically, only Black/African American female officers were more likely to perceive experiencing race-based discrimination in comparison to men of color, namely Asian male officers, multiracial male officers, and Hispanic/Latino male officers. In comparison, only Black/African American male officers were more likely to perceive experiencing race-based discrimination in comparison to Hispanic/Latina officers, multiracial female officers, and Asian female officers. This suggests that subgroup differences of race or ethnicity interacting with gender portrayed a more accurate depiction of the experience officers encounter in federal policing. On the other hand, women of color might struggle to determine whether instances of race-based discrimination were actually related to race, gender, or a combination thereof. Therefore, questions specifically about race-based discrimination might be difficult to report using an intersectional perspective and may explain the limited support for hypothesis 3. Unfortunately, the current study is unable to further address these variances. Thus, future research should continue this stream of scholarship to explain the differences between men and women of color within racial or ethnic subgroups.

Despite the counterargument, these findings have theoretical implications because oppositional frameworks such as intersectionality incorporate "a wider array of knowledge into the discipline [and can] influence administrative actions, particularly as information is situated within the real-world context of public administrations research and practice" (Blessett 2020, 2). Therefore, this article responds to the call to expand beyond traditional perspectives (such as representative bureaucracy) and integrate other theoretical frameworks such as intersectionality because it embraces differences and multiplicity in the workplace beyond the standard male-female or White-Black orientation (Blessett 2020; Breslin, Pandey, and Riccucci 2017).

Likewise, these findings have theoretical implications to the study and opposition of structural racism because eliminating race-based discrimination needs to remain at the forefront in public administration scholarship when examining the inequities of the administrative state (Agho 2022; Alexander and Stivers 2020; Blessett 2020; Demeester and Lamagdeleine 2016; Gooden 2014; Lee 2020; Yu 2022a). If not, the "legitimacy of the administrative state [will] constantly be threatened by systems of domination that seek to marginalize people" from underserved communities in the public workforce (Blessett 2020, 1). In addition, according to Berry-James et al. (2020, 5), the field of public administration is at a "reckoning [to] step up to the plate" because "structural racism and anti-Black racism have become embedded practices impacting outcomes in the economy, housing, education, healthcare, environment, criminal and juvenile justice, politics, transportation, and more," leading to racial inequities across public organizations such as federal law enforcement. As the fourth pillar of public administration (i.e., equity), scholarship must continue to advance the effects of racism and discrimination in the workplace to promote change and awareness.

Despite the importance of these findings, they are not without limitations. First, the current study represents those federal officers from one cabinet organization. This limits the sampling frame and may not be generalizable to all federal officers or law enforcement agencies. However, as stated previously, they are the largest cabinet employer of all full-time law enforcement officers in the federal domain (Brooks 2019). In addition, the sample was overrepresented by both women and racial minorities apart from Black/African American officers in comparison to current employment figures (Brooks 2019). Thus, caution should be taken when interpreting these results. For example, 22% of the officers in this study were women, although they comprise just 12% of female officers in this department and 13.7% of all women in federal law enforcement (Brooks 2019). Likewise, 40.8% of the officers in this study were non-White in comparison to 37.9% of all racial minorities in federal law enforcement, with the largest

discrepancy in overrepresentation occurring among those who identify as Hispanic or multiracial (Brooks 2019). This is not a complete surprise due to the primary mission of the department. On the other hand, 5.6% of the officers in this study were Black/African American in comparison to 6.1% within this department and 10.5% among all Black/African American officers in federal law enforcement (Brooks 2019). The latter is particularly relevant because their underrepresentation may mask the magnitude of race-based discrimination in the department and the field. Despite the over- and underrepresentation by the independent variables, this study remains one of few in public administration scholarship that captures intersectionality using gender and more than two ethnic or racial subgroups.

Third, the proportions of officers from Asian American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native subgroups were relatively small in this study and became smaller and less statistically significant when parsed into gendered subgroups. However, despite their small sample sizes respectively, their inclusion is important as most studies omit these race or ethnic subgroups. When data becomes available, future studies might consider oversampling these subgroups to achieve a more accurate inclusive intersectionality approach. Fourth, the perceived encounters of race-based discrimination do not necessarily express actual instances of proven workplace discrimination and may be subject to personal bias. However, examining perceived discrimination is an appropriate mode of study because it provides a complete picture of workplace practices and "can help scholars identify pressing issues of workplace discrimination and potential remedies to them in a way that supplements the study of [proven] discrimination" (Lee 2020, 3). Furthermore, while this study focuses on a particular occupational workgroup, it has far-reaching implications for other federal workgroups advancing inclusion and equity across the federal government. Despite these limitations, this study reveals that all law enforcement agencies have room for improvement regardless of intergovernmental level and must hold themselves accountable to a discrimination-free environment.

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