

BILL BLACKWOOD
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS

BLACK SUPERVISORS IN POLICE SETTINGS: RACIAL PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

A RESEARCH PROJECT PAPER
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE GMI DESIGNATION

BY
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Supervision of non-black employees by blacks has frequently been a tenuous situation to say the least. The setting and institution can make the circumstances that much more difficult (or easier) given policy, training, and the general emphasis placed on good race relations by top managers. Management, whether it is in the private sector (corporate America) or the public sector (government - federal, state or local), brings special sets of problems. They are different sets, but problems, nevertheless. Add to this mix police officers and now you are looking at more than motivation, production schedules, and quality controls which are the usual concerns of profit-seeking organizations. You are now factoring in administrative directives that must flow in both directions and must be adhered to by all, as well as the ethical behavior of the officer in his or her professional environment.

Public scrutiny and political pressure, coupled with the concerns officers have for themselves and their families' well being, moves supervision in this arena to new heights. Society, as a whole, has many problems and when those problems are brought to bear in the work place it can make work and the working atmosphere unpleasant for all involved. An understanding of the "social and behavioral characteristics of the policing environment and the structure and process on which it is based becomes imperative for all levels of management." (Reuss-Ianni, p.126)

While management in the police setting brings its own set of concerns, the Black supervisor is faced with even greater problems.

These problems are often overlooked or discounted by white superiors. But, to continue to ignore this aspect of race relations in the work place is to do so to the detriment of the entire police organization.

The decision to examine race and supervision in this paper was stimulated by present attempts at settling a lawsuit over past promotion practices that all but overlooked Blacks and Hispanics within

the Houston Police Department. For purposes of this study, I chose to look only at Black supervisors and the problems they encounter when supervising non-black police personnel, be they classified or civilian. Some of the questions this study will address are:

Whether or not Black supervisors feel racial prejudice is a problem within their department?

Are racial slurs directed at Black supervisors by subordinates and/or superiors?

Is there reluctance/resistance to follow the lead of Black supervisor's (race, gender, ineptness, combination)?

If there is such reluctance, what is the perceived basis of it?

What measures were employed to reprimand insubordination to racial prejudice?
By the Supervisor? By the Department?

Have preventative measures been instituted to stem racially prejudicial attitudes and behavior?

Are higher level superiors supportive of Black supervisors and their actions, or do they appear to condone such behavior?

"Prejudice always involves feelings and a system of more or less outspoken stereotyped beliefs" (Saenger, p.3). In order to measure the extent of prejudice directed toward black supervisors by their non-black subordinates a survey instrument was specifically developed. The police departments targeted for the study were serving metropolitan areas located across the United States having large pockets of ethnic diversity in both their communities and police staffs. In many cities it is mandated that an effort be made to have the police department and other government agencies reflect the ethnic makeup of the community. With this in mind, these departments were selected because of the city's population, size of the department or ethnic mix of supervisors. Available time and monetary constraints also influenced the scope and design of the project. Another important factor which influenced the choice of participating departments was the author's familiarity with some

of the Black supervisory personnel in the agencies. This knowledge gained their participation in the project as well as their willingness to share opinions and points of view.

In addition to the survey instrument, a few in-person and telephone interviews were conducted to gain additional insight on prejudicial attitudes in police work. In all instances these interviews were conducted with officers no longer serving in a supervisory capacity or on active duty. These interviews, as well as the survey respondents, were assured that all responses would be treated in a confidential manner.

Survey respondents represented eight police departments which varied in size and geographic location. These eight departments were:

Houston Police Department
Los Angeles Police Department
New York Police Department
New Orleans Police Department
Birmingham Police Department
Metropolitan District of Columbia Police Department
Hutchinson Police Department
Forest Hills Police Department

One hundred survey questionnaires were mailed to ranking members of these police departments. All of the questionnaires were addressed to Black supervisors both male and female in the various agencies. Eighty percent of the survey instruments were returned. Four interviews were conducted, two in person and two by phone. Responses from the surveys were tabulated and results are incorporated in the following discussion and shown graphically in Attachment I. Comments from the phone and in-person interviews, while not tabulated, were insightful and aided the interpretation of data.

"There is the tendency to evaluate the person not as an individual but as a member of his group, as well as the belief in the inferiority of all its members" (Saenger, p.3). When people are of this opinion, then they tend to overlook individual differences. In this day and age, can we presume that racial prejudice is long gone but, realistically, it is "alive and well" throughout our society. Does this mean that we are holding police officers to a higher standard than we hold the remaining community? It does because society holds them to a higher standard.

Without exception, every survey response stated that racial prejudice is prevalent in their department. Ninety percent felt that, to a great extent, it was due to general societal attitudes and condoning it by the power structure. If it is present in society as a whole can you not expect it to manifest itself in the work place? Therefore, predisposition plays a definite role in racially prejudicial attitudes. However, once manifested in the work place, peers see racial prejudice going on and often socialization of this behavior takes place. When these two forces, i.e., society and the institutionalized power structure, are in place you can expect a reinforcement of negative ideas and behavior.

Does this affect productivity in a unit? Certainly it may. In most instances if the Black supervisor does not intervene at the point when this behavior first begins to surface, other employees may be pulled into the situation based upon racial loyalty, and this may subsequently cause polarization in the work force along racial lines. According to this survey, over fifty percent of the respondents felt that a rift along racial lines had a definite impact on productivity in their unit.

Ten percent of the respondents definitely knew that racial slurs had been made about them. One respondent, in particular, indicated that racial slurs had been written on walls and on his vehicle. However, almost forty percent stated that they had overheard remarks with racial overtones made

in reference to them. Another respondent stated that when interoffice mail arrived for Blacks in the department, the word "nigger" was written on the front of the envelope. Also, upon investigation by the respondent, no one admitted knowing who had written on the envelope.

The methods used by subordinates to undermine the Black supervisor's authority or effectiveness took various forms. Eighty percent reported occurrences where a white supervisor of the same rank was asked how an incident should be handled, as though the Black supervisor did not know what he/she was doing. Sometimes the white supervisor had less time in rank, but was still sought out for answers to questions. The subordinate went no further if the answer was the same or similar to the one given by the Black supervisor. When incidents of this nature take place if not properly handled they can undermine one's effectiveness with remaining subordinates, regardless of race.

Forty-four percent of the respondents identifying resistance from subordinates stated that white males tended more often to go over a Black supervisor's head, or tended to drag their feet when given assignments. A sergeant stated "somehow whites resent being given directives by Blacks, especially if they are Black males". Not all manifestations are as overt as the instances previously noted. Some incident reports were less obvious and were apparently done in an attempt to keep the Black supervisor off balance and unaware of what was being done to them. For example, one respondent reported that in an instance when a direct order was given to a white subordinate, the subordinate chose not to carry out the order for several days, instead of immediately.

In almost every instance the white female was never as aggressive toward either the male or female black supervisor. This is not to say that the non-black females never demonstrated prejudicial attitudes. [Sometimes it came out among the rank and file of her squad or unit.] White females may

attempt to transfer to a white supervisor.

As a pro-active approach to preventing negative racial behavior, some supervisors scheduled sensitivity training. This was viewed as a step toward properly addressing the problem. Once a reactive approach was needed and disciplinary action warranted, counseling tended to be the first remedy used. However, when negative approaches were used, i.e., suspension, change of assignment and transfer, it put others on notice that this supervisor will not tolerate this behavior. Twenty percent of the survey respondents stated that this technique tended to cause the behavior to openly subside and then stop altogether.

In the areas of support from upper management for reprimands and notification of impending racial behavior problems, only thirty-seven percent said they felt their supervisors were unaware of any impending problems of this nature. The remaining sixty-three percent felt the higher level superior knew about the adverse behavior, but said nothing and apparently did not intend to take action unless confronted.

In reference to reprimands, forty-four percent of the respondents reported having to reprimand a subordinate for displaying prejudicial behavior. One Black lieutenant reported that the approval for reprimand by superiors was "on the surface, but with no substance to it." The Lieutenant reported being in this situation on more than one occasion. In describing the circumstances he said, "my supervisor appeared not to condone the subordinate's behavior, but was quite indifferent to it, and acted as if was an accepted part of life on the job."

Ninety-nine percent of all female supervisors responded that they were treated differently, specifically harsher, than their Black male counterparts. They felt that the prejudice they encountered most often was gender rather than racial. However, there were still instances that had racial

overtone. All the female supervisors, save one, felt they had been subjected to prejudicial attitudes from their subordinates and received little or no support from higher authority. Several female respondents stated that they felt betrayed by female supervisors, in that these females in authoritative positions were not aggressive in correcting or addressing prejudicial behavior. However, one female supervisor stated "she felt she was fortunate to never have had this problem at all in her career." She did state, however, that there is prejudice in her department. Unlike the female supervisor that stated "she had observed a lesser degree of resistance from younger male officers" (Triplett [1976], p.10), that was not the sentiment reported in this study. Males were seen as far more overt in their resistance to Black females than they are to Black male supervisors. This condition supports the premise that Black female supervisors have to deal with two forms of prejudice in the work place, i.e., gender and racial.

All survey respondents agreed that prejudice and the "good ole boy system" are still at work in their police agencies. These factors can be seen in the "hiring, training, promotional system and job assignments that help to fuel prejudice," according to a male lieutenant. When you still have entire divisions with no minorities assigned, and have a history of keeping them out of those units, then equity in treatment and opportunity are unknown unless they come as a by-product of litigation.

Survey results suggest that in all departments Black males in higher ranks, i.e., chief, commissioner, assistant chief, deputy chief or deputy commissioner seemed somewhat insulated from any prejudicial resistance or racial slurs. Several respondents stated that at this level they are sheltered from such behavior because of the many management layers between them and the "troops." The subordinates that top management interacts with may be intelligent enough not to outwardly display prejudicial behavior. They know that they must at least outwardly appease the source of their

promotions and monetary awards. However, Black female supervisors represent some exception to this trend. Females still appear to have those problems and at the same rate and extent. Somehow their rank had not insulated or protected them as in the case of their male counterparts.

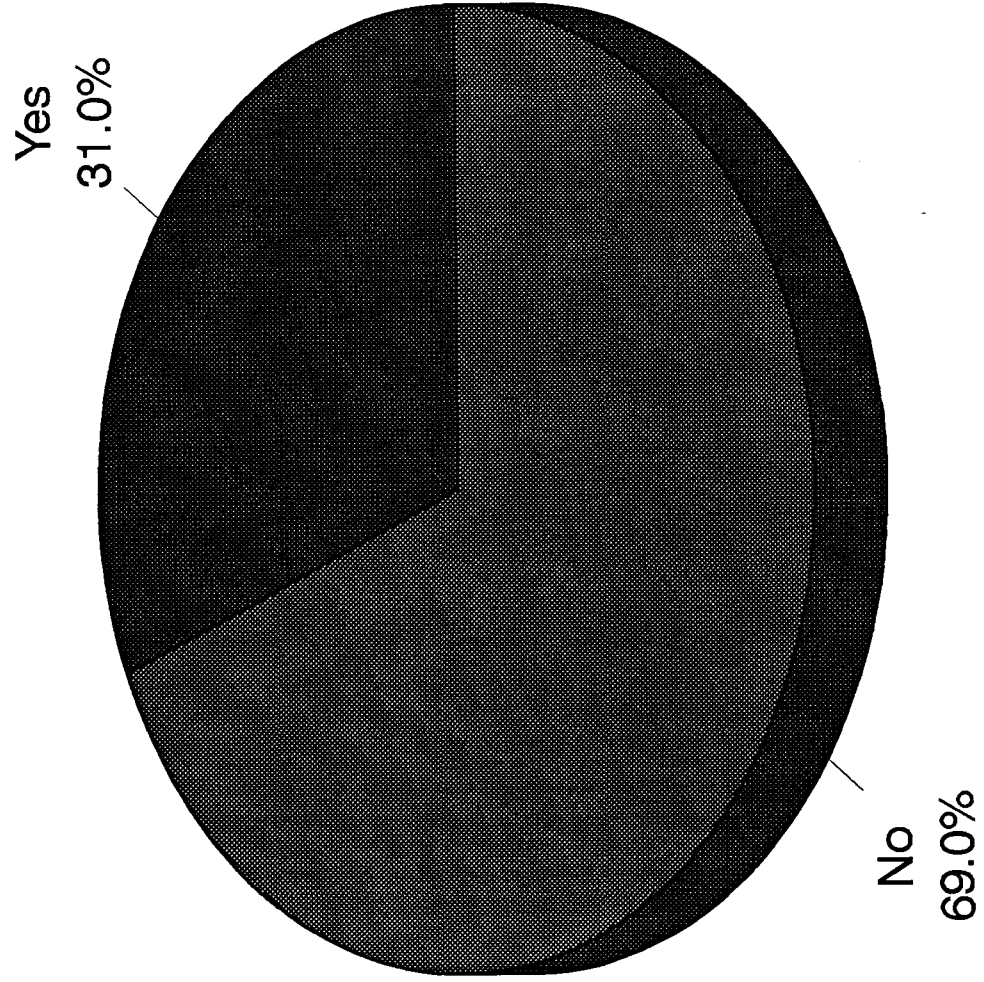
A surprising result of the interviews was the emergence of a special situation presented to Black female supervisors. It was only after my interviews with P.E. Triplett, author of "Women in Policing", that this angle surfaced. Triplett reported that a Black female, twenty year veteran, in the rank of Captain once told of being passed over for an assignment in which she would have represented her department on an executive search committee. She was passed over despite being requested by name by the search committee. The Black female was never notified that she had been asked for and passed over. No reason or explanation was ever given for not being sent, but she knew the "good ole boy system" had surfaced again. This female discovered that she had been passed over only when one of the search committee members requesting her inquired why she had not at least acknowledged their invitation.

One of the respondents stated that "prejudice is prevalent and tolerated from the lowest rank to the highest. There is a code of silence which says - see no evil, hear no evil - unless forced to do so. Prejudice is only acknowledged and action taken when the evidence cannot be denied. It is this attitude towards prejudice that encourages those inclined to exhibit the behavior to do so without fear of retribution. Therefore, according to a respondent, "it is imperative upon all right thinking persons to challenge racism whenever it is encountered." One general observation based on some of the statements in the open-ended comment section of the survey was that in many instances, the situation may have been more intolerable than indicated by the statistics.

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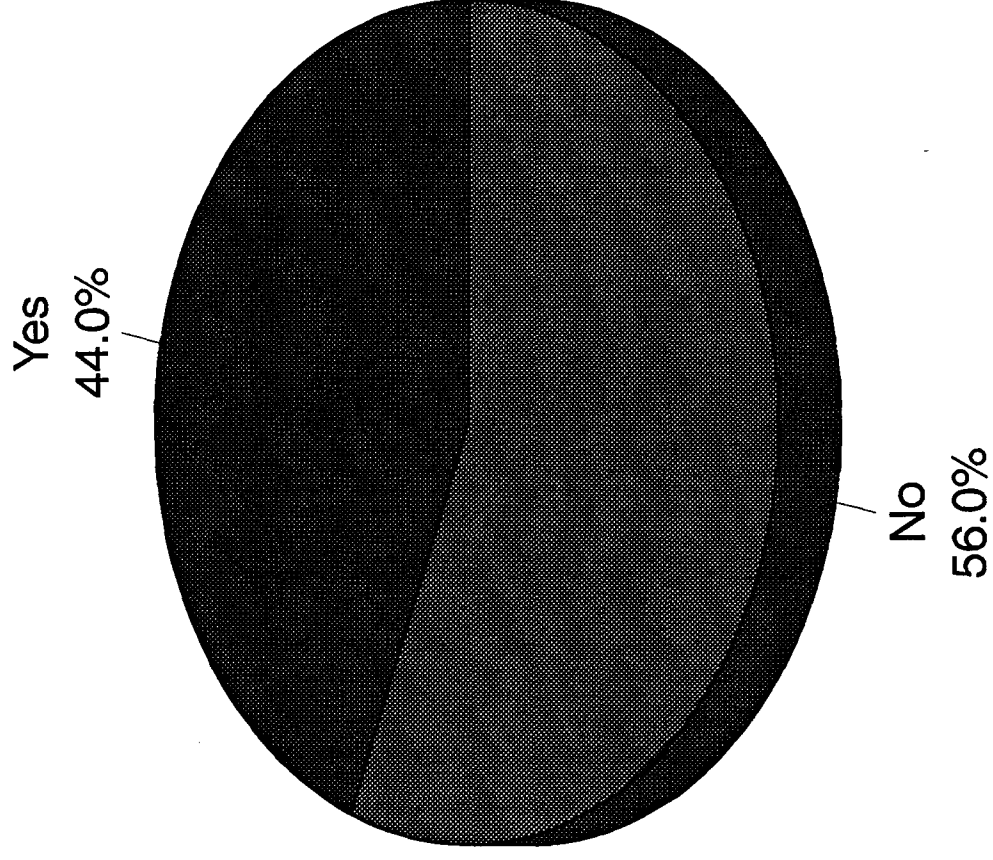
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Racial Slurs



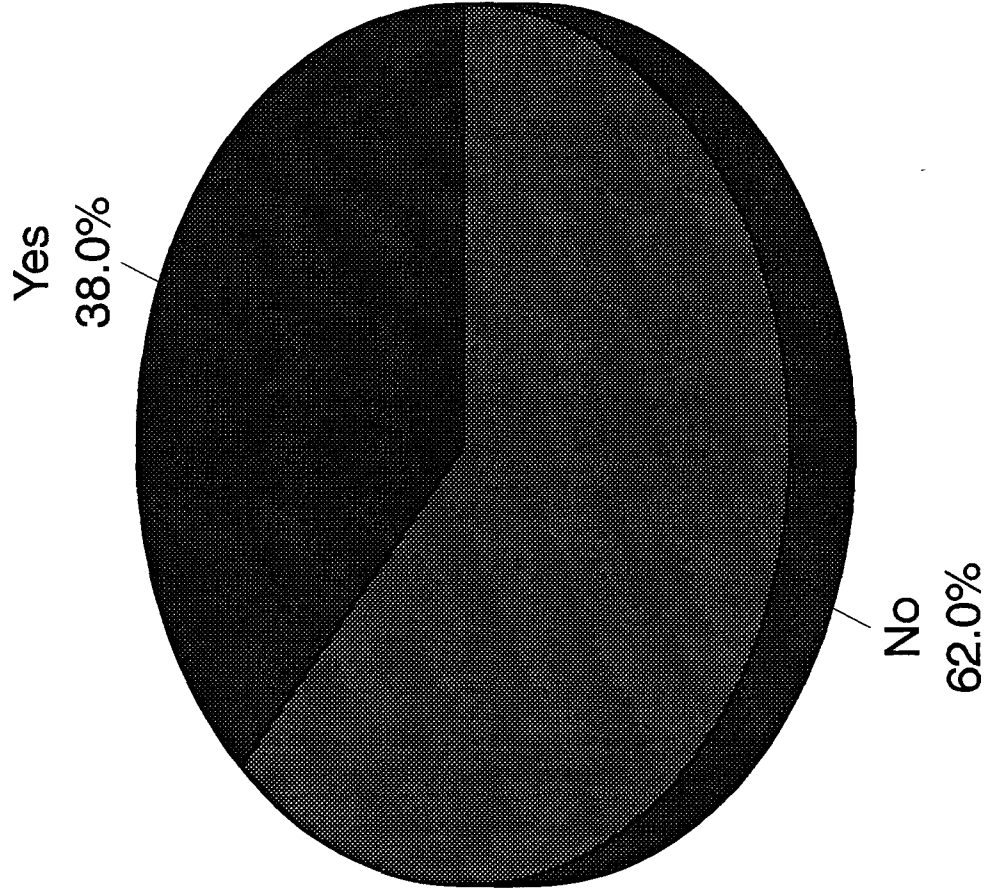
Have you ever heard racial slurs?

Resistance From Subordinates



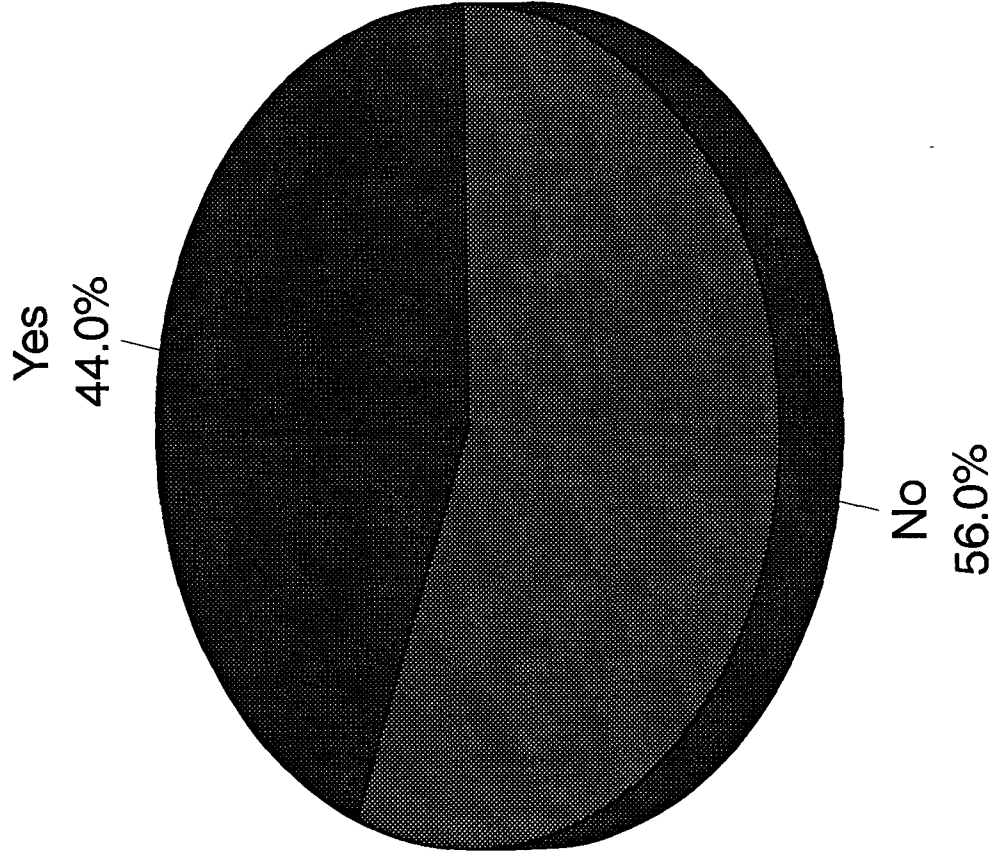
Have you ever noticed resistance in subordinates?

Directives Challenged



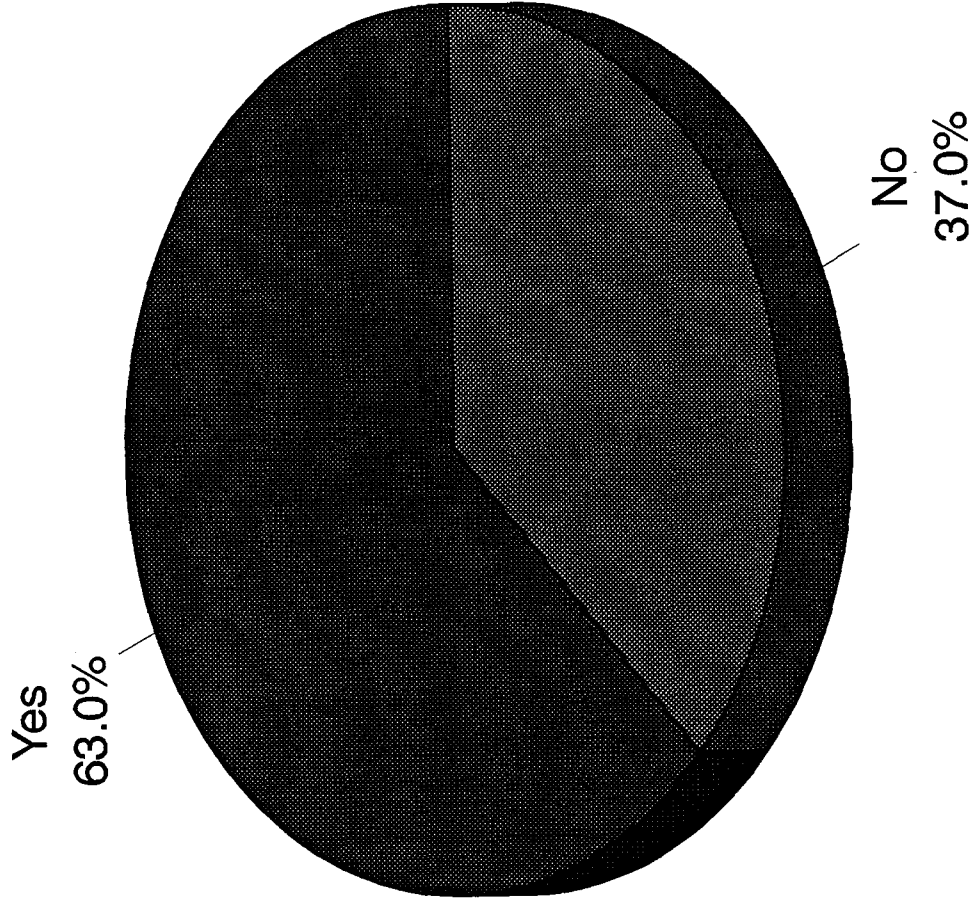
Have your directives ever been challenged?

Reprimands



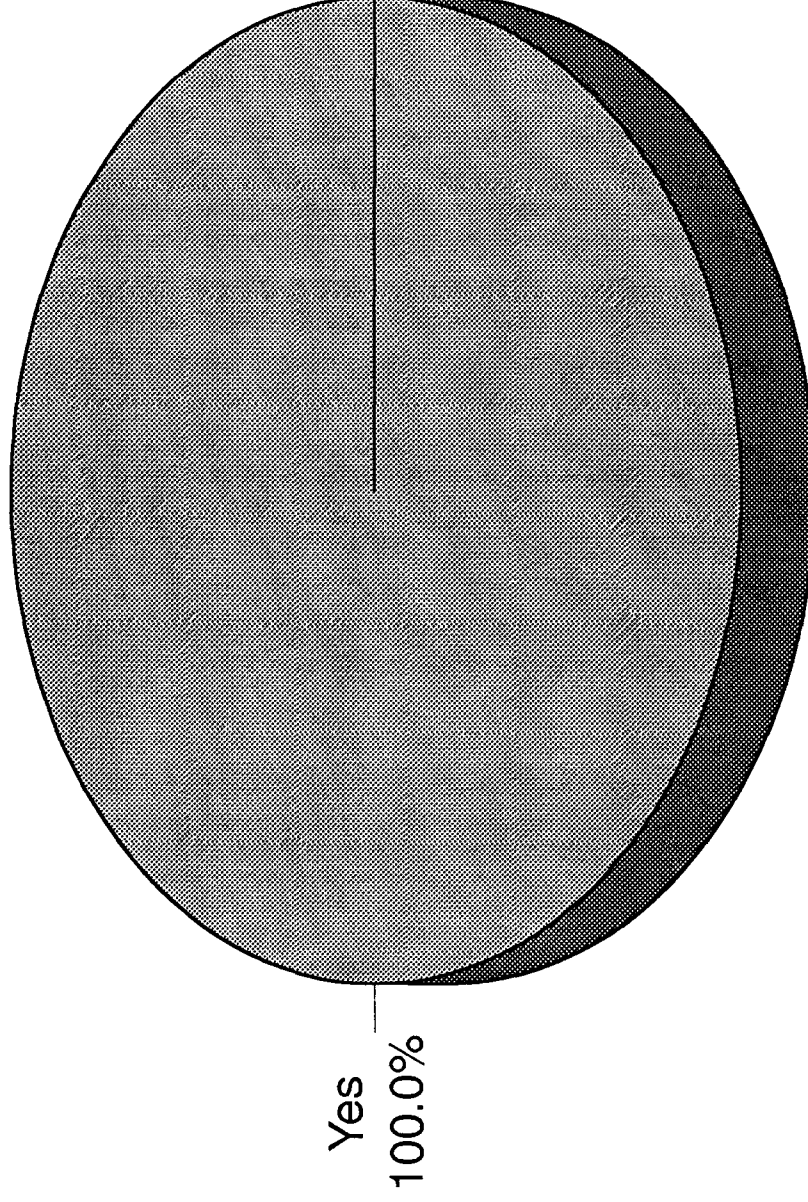
Have you had to reprimand subordinates for openly displaying prejudice toward you?

Superiors and Prejudice



Are superiors aware of prejudice behavior?

Prejudice In The Department



Is there prejudice in your department?

A MEASURE OF DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT OF BLACK SUPERVISORS

Please feel free to elaborate on any response. If additional space is needed please use a separate sheet and identify questions accordingly.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name of Police Department:

Number of Years in Law Enforcement:

Your Rank and/or Title:

Classified/Civilian:

Number of Years in present position:

Sex: Male:_____ Female:_____

Total number of persons under your supervision:

1. Ethnic Breakdown: White____ Hispanic____ Asian____ Black____ Other____

2. Sex: Male:_____ Female:_____

3. Ranks:

4. Civilian: Administrative (Professional)_____ Clerical_____

1. Do you know of any racial slurs directed toward you or about you from any members of your department? Yes_____ No_____

If so, have they been from subordinates_____ supervisors_____, both_____.

2. Have you noticed any resistance or reluctance in your subordinates in performing their task? Yes_____ No_____

A. If so do you think this reluctance/resistance was due to prejudice, ineptness, or both:

B. If "A" was due to prejudice, do you feel that it had a negative impact on the effectiveness in supervising your remaining staff?

Please comment:

3. Were you directives ever challenge by your non-Black subordinates: Yes_____ No_____

A. If so, were they challenged more by male or female non-Black subordinates?

B. Do you feel the difference was prejudice due to race____ sex____ personal (prior conflict or personality conflicts), or a combination of the above: (which combination,

if any) _____

C. Which force do you feel was the strongest if there was a combination at work:

4. Do you feel or have you observed that your non-Black subordinate staff (male and/or female) treated your supervision differently than they treated your white counterpart's supervision?
Yes _____ No _____

If so, please comment:

5. Have you had to reprimand an employee for openly displaying prejudice behavior toward you and your authority? Yes _____ No _____
- A. Were white females as overt in their display of prejudice behavior as their white male counterpart? Yes _____ No _____
- B. If so, were upper levels of management supportive of your actions? Yes _____ No _____
- C. What measures did you use as punishment? (i.e., suspension, extra assignment, change of assignment, etc.)
- D. Did it appear to you that your supervisor condoned the prejudice behavior displayed by your subordinates? Yes _____ No _____

Please comment:

6. Have you taken measures to address the prejudice behavior of your subordinates in your area of supervision: Yes _____ No _____
- A. If so what measures were taken? (i.e., transfers, sensitivity training, etc.)
- B. Did the acts of prejudice by your subordinates eventually subside or stop altogether?
Yes _____ No _____
- C. If the acts did stop how long a period of time did it take for them to stop?
7. Were your superiors aware of prejudice behavior by your subordinates toward you prior to your bringing it to their attention? Yes _____ No _____

If so, did they voluntarily address it with you? Yes _____ No _____

8. Overall, approximately what percentage of your non-Black staff would you say displayed prejudice behavior toward you?
9. Do you feel that prejudice is prevalent in your Police Department?

If so, please comment If not, was it ever evident?

FOR QUESTIONS CALL 713-247-5510; FAX RESPONSES TO 713-247-5512 BY MARCH 17, 1993.

Detail # _____

I

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

**BLACK SUPERVISORS IN POLICING SETTING:
RACIAL PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED**

**A RESEARCH PROPOSAL
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
MODULE III**

**BY
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OCTOBER, 1995

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to document some of the racial prejudice encountered by Black Supervisors in a police setting when supervising non-black employees regardless of sex.

This research is important because it documents incidents of prejudice that has been encountered by supervisors throughout all ranks. Starting with first line supervisors, sergeants, and continuing to the last line of supervision, chief/commissioner. The documented incidents are important because racial prejudice is still prevalent throughout our society today. Therefore, it must still be studied, written about, and discussed until every aspect of it disappears from society.

This study will assist those persons working in a police settings responsible for improved police service delivery to our communities. Only education will change attitudes through sensitivity training and exposure to different ethnic cultures to remove barriers to racial understanding for all police personnel. Strides have been taken in Houston's Police Department to improve the quality of our new police personnel by requiring hiring educational standards than had been necessary in the pass. Opportunities are afforded those already employed to receive exposure to additional academic studies both on and off duty. Something as important as the eradication of prejudice from the ranks should be a primary responsibility of the upper echelons of policing since excellence throughout the ranks is an important goal.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The major sources I have utilized in researching literature took the usual avenues. A search of the three (3) major libraries in the City, the public library, Texas Southern University, and both campuses of University of Houston proved to have the usual information on supervision. However, none of it devoted any significant amount of material to problems Blacks faced in the work place. The police setting narrowed the field. Periodicals on policing were in print but availability was limited. I was able to obtain two issues by mail from the author of one article who was generous enough to lend me her copy.

The Houston Post newspaper was also utilized. At this point in my research, I decided to specifically develop a survey instrument tailored to this subject matter. Once the instrument had been developed, before distribution, it was critiqued by law enforcement professionals and individuals in this academic field of testing.

STATEMENT OF PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

There are three methods I used in conducting my research. I have used the traditional method of research of searching for information on the topic and reviewing the literature.

I conducted a survey of eight metropolitan police departments throughout the United States.

I also conducted face to face interviews with retired professionals no longer actively working in the field of law enforcement, but who are still interested and aware of present and future trends.

PROPOSED TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preliminary outline for the Table of Contents follows:

- I. Introduction
- II. Methodology/Data Information
- III. Presentation of Survey Results
- IV. Interpretation and Analysis of Results
- V. Conclusion