

**Comments on Psychology of Police Uniforms
Outline**

**Joint Committee on Transparent Policing and Use of Force Reform
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1. Introduction

1. General approach

1. Empirical research and well-grounded theory
2. Lewin: “Nothing so practical as a good theory”
3. Effects seen in over time in multiple studies with multiple individuals from multiple backgrounds in multiple situations are more likely to be reliably seen in practice in the future.
4. You don’t always get what you want
 1. Better to rely on generally well-established findings and principles than on a few studies in a particular domain.

2. Psychology of Police Uniforms

1. Deindividuation

1. Substantial experimental and observational work in laboratories and in the field over decades.
2. Loss of awareness of the self as consistent across past, present, future
3. Caused by:
 1. Factors that decrease identifiability
 2. E.g., crowds, de-identifying clothing (e.g., masks), darkness
4. Leads to:
 1. Increased susceptibility to situational factors
 2. Increase in non-normative behavior
 3. Increase in aggression when cued by situational factors
 1. By deindividuated individuals
 2. Towards deindividuated individuals
5. Countered by:
 1. Objective self-awareness manipulations
 1. E.g, identifying individuals (e.g., pointing, use of names), personal clothing, lighting, mirrors
6. Practical implications:
 1. Don’t use “highly deindividuating” clothing (e.g., tactical gear, riot gear) when not absolutely necessary
 2. Use individuating clothing and tactics whenever possible

2. Symbols and Cues

1. Weapon cue effect

1. Substantial number of experimental and observational studies (~50)
2. Visible presence of weapon cues aggression
3. Leads to:
 1. Increase in aggression in presence of weapon
 1. People with weapons behave more aggressively
 2. People in presence of unrelated weapons behave more aggressively
 3. People observing person with weapon behave more aggressively towards person with weapon
 4. Practical implications
 1. Don't call attention/display weapon unless/until needed

2. Uniform as a symbol of authority

1. Long societal history; long individual history "this is a police officer, the police officer is your friend."
2. Limited empirical research; more research possible in near future
 1. Favors traditional uniforms, particularly dark blue
 1. Honest, active, competent, helpful, fast, good judgment -- but not warm
 2. Not shared by all groups in the society
3. Practical implications:
 1. Compared to non-traditional clothing, traditional police uniforms may provide immediate positive response from some members of society and negative responses from others
 2. No clear evidence of effect on assault on police officers; resisting arrest, use of force;

3. Group identity

1. Uniforms provide visual symbol of categorization into "us" and "not us"
2. Extensive literature on categorization and effects of categorization, often using visible insignia to identify groups
3. Leads to:
 1. In-group favorability; disfavoring out-groups
 2. Enhanced effect of informal norms (which are often more powerful than formal norms without additional impetuses)
4. Practical implications
 1. To reduce group identity effects when in uniform, need to adopt countervailing tactics (e.g., individuating behaviors)
 2. Changing uniform may be a useful adjunct manipulation to help change attitudes and behavior but unlikely to succeed alone

3. Threat and deterrence

1. Display of weapons and personnel to deter aggression
2. Overwhelming force – threat of force to obviate the need for the use of force
3. Leads to:
 1. Assumed to be effective in inducing fear and compliance if credible threat and clear instructions (compared to what?)
 2. Later likely to lead to anger response to relieve fear
4. Practical Implications:
 1. In normal operations, weapon effect likely to cue increased aggression
 2. In high risk situation, aggression already cued; shift to overwhelming force

4. Summary: Judgment and timing

1. Complex relations between factors;
2. Need intelligent police management to make judgment calls balancing potential counteracting influences given situation
3. Best guesses:
 1. Normal operations – highly individuating uniform clothing and tactics; low profile for weapons
 2. High risk operations – overwhelming force (e.g., armed fugitive apprehension)
 3. Crowd control -- highly individuating uniform clothing and tactics; low profile for weapons; early engagement
 4. Prepare for scalable adaptive response