

Signaling Diversity: A Study of Recruitment Strategies for Female and Minority Police Candidates

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Abstract—This article explores how the Signaling Theory can be utilized in developing recruitment strategies focused on attracting female and minority applicants to Law Enforcement organizations. In today's climate of negative media attention and scrutiny of police officers, recruiting diverse applicants to the law enforcement profession has never been more critical or difficult. This report identifies how organizations can develop strategies to externally signal and attract diverse applicants to their organization and help increase the number of female and minority applicants. The diversity and demographics of police officer race, ethnicity, and cultural backgrounds is a critical issue for many communities around the world. For law enforcement to further build community trust and perceptions of equity, organizations must utilize the Signaling Theory to demonstrate their commitment and desire for increasing diversity within the organization and industry. Provided in this article are recommendations founded from research findings and extensive literature reviews for managers and executives to use for improving diversity hires and interest within the law enforcement profession. Using these recommendations and the Signaling Theory, law enforcement organizations can help influence and direct the narrative regarding police, race, and how the law enforcement industry desires female and minority officers to join the ranks and improve the profession.

Keywords—Signaling Theory, Recruitment, Female Recruitment, Minority Recruitment, Police, Law Enforcement, Diversity Hiring

I. INTRODUCTION

Law Enforcement (L.E.) officers are citizens from local communities like any other industry or profession. One difference, however, is that the demographic of L.E. officers is significantly under-represented by female and minority officers. On average, when comparing the racial diversity of L.E. officers, ethnic minorities are underrepresented by over 10% [1]. Female officers, on average, represent 12% of police officers [2].

The United States has experienced calls for police reform stemming from recent fatal police interactions with minority community members. Incidents such as the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Michael Brown Jr. in Ferguson have sparked massive civil demonstrations, public unrest, protests, and even riots. These incidents have highlighted racial tensions between communities of color and the police who swore to protect and serve them. In the case of Michael Brown Jr., the Department of Justice (DOJ) [3] was directed to conduct an investigation into the Ferguson Police Department (FPD) over the incident [3]. The DOJ helped to identify several underlying factors at play within the Ferguson Police Department, which had an influence on the incident and subsequent community response. One finding, closely related to the focus of this article, was that the diversity of

the Ferguson Police Department was that only four of the 54 officers (7%), were African American, while the census population of Ferguson's residents was 66% African American [3].

Having such few officers of color within the FPD may have contributed to establishing a community perception that the FPD was not representative of, nor concerned with the African American community issues occurring within the city. The investigation of the FPD helps to illustrate the significant importance of diversity within L.E. organizations, as well as how the Signaling Theory and external message is essential to influence community perceptions and reactions.

The joint investigation of the Ferguson incident between the DOJ and U.S. EEOC [4] found that L.E. agencies with active community-oriented engagement programs and diversity within the L.E. organization have higher levels of community support, increased trust, and improved relations within the community. Employing recruitment strategies focused on improving L.E. diversity is essential for agencies to build trust, equity, and long-term partnerships with resident communities of color.

Since the L.E. profession currently has low levels of female and minority employment within the L.E.

profession, L.E. executives must take a critical review into how individual L.E. organizations are prioritizing and conducting recruitment strategies focused on improving diversity hiring. This article will examine research and provide findings on how recruitment strategies can be developed and improved to increase the number of minority and female applicants by using the Signaling Theory.

The Signaling Theory is the process of presenting or branding job characteristics, the perceived employee-employer fit, hiring expectations/standards, employment benefits, and organizational characteristics associated with an organization [5]. Candidates are influenced by their observations, perceptions, and beliefs of an organization in determining their support, interest, or opposition towards selecting an organization for employment. Using the Signaling Theory, organizations are able to influence and drive candidate interest through attracting, meeting, or exceeding candidate expectations of the agency through interactions, advertisements, and reputation.

The Signaling Theory has had demonstrated value in other applications in matching organizational characteristics with recruiter characteristics and applicant expectations/goals [5]. Using the Signaling Theory can help match applicants with organizations with common goals, cultures, and values. The Signaling Theory can also help to align candidates with careers that support intrinsic motivators, providing high levels of job satisfaction.

Leveraging the Signaling Theory to better understand the perceptions of diverse candidates can allow agencies to improve the external messaging and signals provided to minority and female candidates. By researching and understanding what diverse candidates desire and perceive the L.E. profession to be, organizations can craft external signals to address concerns or highlight attractions to their organization.

The contribution of this research focuses on improving diversity within the L.E. profession, as well as provide L.E. organizations increased knowledge of how to better communicate and connect with their communities. The Signaling Theory not only has application to improving recruitment strategies, but also in other community engagement and safety realms of the L.E. profession.

This paper is structured as follows: Section I provides the Introduction, Section II discusses related works, Section III provides the methodology of the study, Section IV contains the results of the study and discussion of findings, and finally, Section V concludes the report and presents the future scope of research.

II. RELATED WORK

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) is an association of police leadership from across the world which provides L.E. research and recommendations for

improving and forming model policies on a variety of policing topics. Since beginning in 1893, the IACP has published valuable resources for L.E. professionals to help improve the L.E. industry and make communities safer. One area of focus for the IACP is to aid and provide best practices for recruiting female and minority officers. The IACP is highly respected within the L.E. community and is often relied upon for providing model policies or procedures for the profession. One resource published to help recruitment efforts is the IACP Toolkit [6], which identifies the need for agencies to highlight areas of the profession which may have greater appeal to female candidates.

The IACP [6] identified that the standard practice for many departments is to focus on recruitment materials that focus or highlight only the tactical components of the profession. This focus may isolate, or in some instances, reduce the number of interested applicants who seek or prioritize other aspects of the profession as their main goal.

Most of the available literature does not provide recommendations on how to conduct targeted recruitment strategies. There is a lack of research focused on understanding minority perceptions or responses to L.E. recruitment strategies.

In conducting an exhaustive literature review into L.E. recruitment strategies, diversity studies, and research, there is an identified lack of understanding of how diverse applicants perceive, interpret, and respond to the current recruitment strategies used by the majority of L.E. agencies. The related work in the L.E. field lacks a focus on developing a qualitative understanding of what motivates, drives, or prevents female and minority candidates from joining the profession. It is essential that L.E. organizations understand how candidates perceive the agency, the culture, their potential fit, and overall interest in the job. This information on what persuades or deters candidates from applying to L.E. is critical in the development of recruitment strategies, as well as how organizations use the Signaling Theory in branding and presenting their organization.

Statement of the Problem

L.E. agencies face increasing difficulties in recruiting females and minority candidates in joining the police profession. The L.E. industry lacks knowledge of how minority and female demographics perceive, interpret, and respond to recruitment efforts, leaving the recruitment strategies ill-informed in how to effectively reach and attract diverse candidates.

Objectives

The objectives of this report are as follows

- *Identify common perceptions held by female and minority applicants towards L.E.*
- *Provide recommendations for mitigating, changing, or influencing these perceptions*

- *Provide recommendations on increasing the number of diverse applicants interested in joining L.E.*

III. METHODOLOGY

For the Signaling Theory to be utilized in a meaningful way, the organization must first accurately understand and benchmark the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs held by applicants towards the organization. This is a critical first step in understanding how the agency's culture, characteristics, benefits, requirements, and the perceived fit are received. Once the agency has identified how the agency is perceived, the organization can work on utilizing the Signaling Theory to change and influence how the agency externally signals and messages the culture, characteristics, and values to candidates.

Using a qualitative research methodology, researchers can collect data related to research participants perceptions, experiences, interactions, and beliefs as they relate to the recruitment strategies, profession, and individual organization. Collecting this information and applying the Signaling Theory, allows researchers and the organization to determine the efficacy of the recruitment efforts, strategies, and practices. Identifying how diverse applicants perceive and respond to recruitment efforts is essential for organizations to identify when utilizing the Signaling Theory and establishing external signals for attracting candidates to the profession.

Durbin [7] identified the need for qualitative research to be gathered from L.E. applicants to understand better the applicant's perspective and how applicants respond to agency signals. In the research study titled "Recruitment Strategies for Hiring Female and Minority Police Recruits: A Case Study of the Washington State Patrol" Durbin [7] interviewed 13 female and minority applicants on their perceptions and beliefs towards L.E. Using in-depth interviews, Durbin [7] was able to identify how female and minority applicants perceived and responded to many of the commonly used L.E. recruitment strategies.

The qualitative data collected by the Durbin study [7] will be used in this report's examination of how Signaling Theory can be used to develop targeted recruitment strategies utilizing the Signaling Theory. Leveraging the unique perspectives provided by diverse applicants towards one agency, can help identify trends in recruitment strategies and organizational structures and behaviours which may be consistent across L.E. agencies.

External signals such as marketing campaigns, advertisements, web page designs, and community engagements all influence how potential applicants perceive and evaluate an organization. The qualitative research methodology allows researchers to capture this critical data and evaluate how the external signals influence candidate attraction to the profession, as well as provide insight as to how the organization is perceived by community members engaged in the study.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative data collected in the case study conducted by Durbin [7] included six female and seven minority male applicants to the Washington State Patrol, a state-wide L.E. organization. The in-depth interviews included discussions regarding how candidates learned and became interested in the L.E. profession, what organizational characteristics drew them to the agency, as well as what organizational values they perceived to be most important to the L.E. organization. The answers to these interview questions provided critical data in helping to understand how an agency is perceived by diverse applicants, as well as how the agency signals to candidates the values and culture of an organization.

The first perception held by many diverse candidates is that L.E. agencies are not visible or engaged enough in minority communities, specifically during early childhood development. Many of the minority participants of the Durbin study [7] identified never having had interactions with L.E. prior to making a career decision. The lack of proactive L.E. interactions, engagement, and support had a notable influence on how the candidates perceived L.E.'s interest in employing or helping communities of color.

Gender roles and norms are largely influenced by parental familial opinions and teachings in early childhood. Female representation and visibility within the L.E. profession was identified as having significant influence on female candidates' decision on joining the profession [7]. Other research has identified that early childhood encouragement and exposure has significant influence on education and career decisions later in life [8].

Failing to not have meaningful community engagement programs which demonstrate an organizational desire to hire diverse candidates impacts how minority and female candidates perceive the agency. The external signal must demonstrate that women and candidates from every ethnicity and background are celebrated and highly valued within the organization.

The second perception commonly held by both females and minority candidates was a lack of visibility in seeing recruiters or other females or officers of color working within the department. Not seeing the diversity within an organization or programs designed to highlight or promote diversity negatively impacts how females and minorities perceive the organizational culture and the potential fit diverse candidate could expect to have within an agency.

The third common perception among diverse candidates was the lack of engagement or communications with the organization before and during the recruitment and application process. Candidates explained the tremendous amount of anxiety and uncertainty experienced by applying to a L.E. organization as a female or minority. Most candidates (62%) expressed low levels of familial or friends supporting their career decision, leaving applicants

isolated and lacking resources for support and answers to questions [7].

Discussion

The findings of the qualitative research from the Durbin study [7] help to provide commonly held perceptions towards a career in L.E. from female and minority applicants. Using the three identified perceptions, the Signaling Theory can be applied by L.E. agencies to mitigate, change, and influence how diverse applicants perceive and respond to recruitment strategies and the L.E. profession.

The first perceived challenge is a lack of community engagement or visibility within communities of color. Agencies experiencing this perception must examine their policing philosophies and operational practices to determine if the department has sufficient community engagement programs, as well as the efficacy of existing programs. The Community-Oriented Policing (COP) philosophy has been adopted by nearly all large urban police departments since 1997 and continues to provide L.E. benefits by establishing inroads with minority communities, developing advocates, and building trust between the L.E. officers and minority community members [9].

Candidates expressing a lack of visibility by a L.E. organization indicates that community engagement or outreach programs may be non-existent or failing to connect with minority communities. L.E. agencies should establish ongoing review processes and community surveys to determine the effectiveness of community programs. Organizations should benchmark and measure how community members report their satisfaction with, and towards the L.E. organization, allowing the agency to begin the process of analysing and evaluating strategy implications on candidate perceptions.

By establishing communication channels between community members and the police organization, the agency can quickly measure and track how changes to policy, programs, and external signals influence candidate perceptions towards the agency. Candidate data and community feedback allow the agency to modify the Signaling Theory strategy to best address applicant concerns and motivations for wanting to join the L.E. profession.

L.E. organizations should also establish early childhood outreach programs to establish meaningful relationships and interactions with community members from an early age. By creating long-term investments into communities of color, L.E. is able to help establish trust and provide information to help improve community safety. By generating positive interactions with community members in non-criminal or confrontational situations, police officers and minority communities are provided opportunities to have meaningful discussions and recruitment opportunities for future generations.

The second commonly held perception from female and minority candidates was a lack of diversity within the L.E. profession. L.E. agencies experiencing this perception should consider evaluating the diversity demographics of their organization, as well as opportunities for the agency to highlight the diversity within the organization. One strategy to help highlight diversity is to provide visibility for candidates and community members to see the officers of color that are employed by the organization. A recommendation may be to build an external-facing webpage that highlights and celebrates the diversity within the organization. Providing a short biography, photograph, or description of the officers can help establish a strong signal to candidates that the organization values and celebrates diversity.

By highlighting or celebrating the diversity within an organization, the agency helps to signal externally that diversity is valued and that all candidates are welcome. By showcasing female and minority officers employed by the organization, the agency is signalling to diverse candidates that they, too, could be successful and valued by the agency and that they are welcome and encouraged to apply. Providing this external signal to candidates may help the applicant answer their questions of organizational fit, culture, values, and employer expectations, resulting in increased diverse applicants to the organization.

The third commonly reported perception or belief is a lack of communication between female and minority candidates and the L.E. organization during the recruitment and application process. As indicated earlier, female and minority candidates reported low levels of support from family and friends. Only five of the 13 participants from the Durbin study reported having family who supported their decision to join the L.E. profession. With low support systems in place, applicants expressed a strong desire for L.E. agencies to provide continuous communications and the ability to answer questions about the organization and the hiring process. It is essential that L.E. organizations create and maintain meaningful communication strategies between candidates and the agency to help diverse candidates feel valued, supported, and informed about their decision to apply and process in becoming a police officer.

A lack of communication or delays in responsiveness on behalf of the organization was reported by participants of the Durbin study to be perceived as not valued or failure to pass the hiring requirements of the organization. Improving the communication exchange and responsiveness to applicants was regularly identified to be a top recommendation by candidates.

L.E. agencies experiencing this perception must evaluate and establish communication policies and practices which focus on providing applicants the greatest level of information and customer service. Organizations must develop practices where applicants receive timely notifications and adequate organizational information from which they can make informed employment decisions.

Applying the Signaling Theory to the communication strategy is essential in identifying how candidates will perceive their value to the organization and future-fit within the culture. If female and minority candidates perceive that they are not valued in the hiring process by not receiving timely responses or information, they will likely perceive that the organization does not value them as individuals. Therefore, negatively impacting how the applicant perceives their fit into the agency. Conversely, however, if the applicant receives positive communications with ample information and continued outreach by the organization, their perceptions will be positive and that they are valued and wanted by the organization.

The importance of the communication exchange between recruiters, staff, and agency personnel cannot be overestimated. A large majority of candidates expressed that their only interactions with the L.E. agency were from personnel within the hiring department or during the hiring process. L.E. organizations should evaluate and establish clear communication guidelines for all personnel in how to respectfully and professionally engage applicants during the recruitment and hiring process. The external signal generated by support staff and peer officers is potentially the greatest influencer an organization has to attract or deter candidates to the agency.

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

Creating an organizational culture that values diversity and respects all community members is essential to generating the external signal which attracts female and minority candidates. Officer interactions with the public as well as advertisements and external messages, are critical in building an organizational reputation and signal by which candidates evaluate and determine organizational fit and employment interest. By examining community perceptions from applicants and community members, L.E. agencies are able to identify how diverse candidates perceive and respond to recruitment strategies. Understanding the perceptions from diverse applicants is essential in developing meaningful recruitment strategies and the use of the Signaling Theory to improve diversity within the L.E. profession.

Organizations must provide community outreach and engagement strategies which are transparent, well communicated, and designed for long-term operations. The visibility of these programs is essential to establish awareness, trust, and interest in the L.E. profession. Outreach programs must be long-term to demonstrate commitment, sincerity, and overturn decades of negative external perceptions/signals.

L.E. organizations must also highlight and establish mechanisms for celebrating the diversity which exists within their organization, community, and operations. Building a culture of equity and inclusion is essential to help demonstrate externally that diversity is beneficial to the organization and that everyone, minorities and females included, are welcome to join the ranks of the agency.

The future scope of using the Signaling Theory for recruitment strategy development is critical in helping to address the perceptions and concerns between L.E. and communities of color. The L.E. industry faces significant hurdles with recent fatal uses of force incidents involving persons of color. Understanding female and minority perceptions towards L.E. is essential in helping to build community trust, improve relationships with minority communities, and increase the diversity and representation within the L.E. industry.

Utilizing the Signaling Theory can help develop meaningful recruitment strategies between the L.E. profession and the communities being served. By researching, improving, and refining the external signals presented by L.E., the profession can better understand how the public perceives, interprets, and responds to the call to join the L.E. profession. It is imperative that L.E. organizations leverage the Signaling Theory to examine the efficacy of their recruitment efforts, as well as determine how their local community perceives their organization.

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