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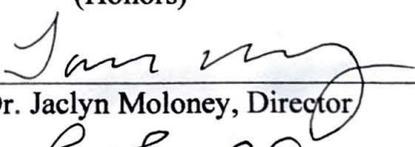
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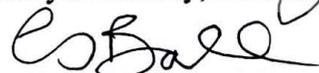
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Police Officers and Personality Characteristics

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### Abstract

In recent years, the public and media have raised their expectations for how police officers should conduct themselves, but the media sometimes only highlight the exceptional situations where officers made an egregious error on national news. Studying personality traits of officers may be one way to gain a more holistic perspective of the average police officer. Empathy and neuroticism were examined in relation to job performance in 66 campus police officers. The findings did not support the hypothesis of a negative relation between neuroticism and job performance and a positive relation between job performance and empathy. However, there was a positive relation between age and impulsiveness on the one hand, and venturesomeness and total years as a law enforcement officer on the other. There was also a negative relation between neuroticism and impulsiveness. Studies of officers' immediate reactions in situations that they encounter while working should be conducted to capture the characteristics of police officers which may prove integral to the job.

*Keywords:* empathy, neuroticism, police officer

### Police Officers and Personality Characteristics

August 14, 2008 - Sergeant Mason and Detective Rittgarn sit in an interview room with Marie, a young woman claiming she was grotesquely assaulted for hours after an assailant broke into her home (Miller & Armstrong, 2015). Sergeant Mason contacts two of her foster mothers and they express some doubt about Marie's story. The Sergeant and Detective switch from patiently listening and interviewing, to employing the Reid Technique of interrogating. This technique teaches various methods of obtaining the information from subjects, including intimidation and pressure to elicit the truth and confessions from the subjects. The concepts in John Reid's book on this technique are widely employed in the law enforcement community (Inbau, Reid, Buckley & Jayne, 2013). Marie buckles under the increased pressure, and makes a public statement recanting the claim that she was sexually assaulted (Miller & Armstrong, 2015).

After leaving the precinct and discussing the situation with the program directors for her housing, Marie returns to Detective Rittgarn, and reasserts her original statement that she was raped, offering to take a polygraph. Rittgarn threatens if she takes and fails a polygraph examination, he will arrest her and will recommend to authorities she lose her sponsored housing. Soon after, Sergeant Mason convinces a prosecutor to bring charges against her for wasting the department's resources, and thirteen days after her assault, she gets a letter in the mail notifying her she's been charged with false reporting (a gross misdemeanor, one step below a felony in seriousness). Marie later appears in court and her attorney negotiates a plea where in return for agreeing to meet a number of conditions, the charge against her will be dropped. Marie goes on supervised probation, pays \$500 in court fees, and is required to attend court-mandated mental health counseling. All the events above took place within six days of the assault, save for

the case the prosecutor brought against her. Marie has no family, no support, no one to turn to. She is alone. The people who claimed to be her protectors questioned her and eventually abandoned her.

Two years later, after three police departments identify and capture a serial rapist, they find the offender's hard drive containing photos he took during the assaults - including a folder of photos of Marie. The foster mothers were wrong. The officers were wrong. Because of their ignorance of what trauma looks like and their lack of empathy they closed the case too early. It ended without a proper investigation and Marie was punished for coming forward. Had the officers acted with empathy, Marie would not only have felt supported and had been spared the second trauma she endured, but it may also have prevented the numerous attacks that followed. The rate of false reports of rape nationally for agencies covering similar communities is only 4.3%, and behaviors such as the ones above illustrate the frequent perception in the community that those who come forward are liars and vindictive.

The media seizes upon such stories both because they highlight that an innocent person was wrongly punished and because investigators failed. Such failures are the exception and not the rule. The officers' failures get attention, not their arrest records. The interactions between law enforcement and the community are evolving. Community expectations of local departments are growing. Police are now expected to solve crimes, catch criminals, help install infant car seats and build positive relationships with community members.

Outside of the media, conversations about attitudes toward law enforcement can be divisive. The media narratives about law enforcement tend to be negative and emphasize police shootings of unarmed citizens. By providing mostly negative stories about law enforcement, the

media predispose members of the public to fear that every interaction with sworn officers will potentially lead to unjustified shootings. Animosity increases even further when considering race (Birzer, 2008).

However, such stories and fears are not representative of the behaviors and successes of police officers across the nation. Hundreds of thousands of officers are exceeding expectations in their various positions. They are recovering missing children, like the 123 the U.S. Marshals Service recovered in one day in Michigan, removing illegal drugs and 9,736 guns from the street between January 2010 to December 2015, and conducting righteous investigations into crimes (Detroit Free Press, 2018; Parsons & Weigend Vargas, 2017). There are statistics, from both from within the police department and nationally, that support the excellence of a majority of police officers, as exemplified by a decrease of 0.8% in violent crime during 2016-2017 (“Law Enforcement Facts”). However, the media have a dominant, if not deterministic, influence on the public’s attitude towards law enforcement. Additionally, particularly in areas of high crime, officers are less able to change attitudes one-on-one through community outreach. Those stories are also less appealing than Marie’s.

Assessing officers’ personality can aid in identifying a common profile of an effective and successful police officer. Illustrating common traits provides insight into how and why officers act the way they do and highlights what they are doing well. That is the aim of this study. To determine whether a common profile of a police officer may be developed by analyzing two personality characteristics: empathy and neuroticism. More specifically, the combination of low neuroticism and high empathy. Based on the experiences a law enforcement officer encounters on the job, these two personality traits have the potential to affect the officers’

behavior even more than their impact on people in other professions. There is some research into how these two personality traits relate to each other, and how they may impact people working in high stress situations. During many consultations with law enforcement officers, these two personality factors were believed to be important to understand in this unique population. By exploring the individual differences in police officers' levels of empathy and neuroticism, it may be possible to obtain a better idea of how officers can best serve their community. This study will summarize previous research on empathy and neuroticism and discuss why they should be considered important personality factors for police officers. Results from an initial exploratory study and conclusions about future research will also be discussed.

### **Empathy**

Being empathetic is important for interpersonal relationships. It is particularly important for law enforcement officers. How might the situation with Marie described above have been different with an empathetic officer? Empathy is often described as the process of placing oneself into another's shoes. Empathy is a part of everyday life and interpersonal interactions. Having higher levels of empathy facilitates more engaging conversation because one is actively concerned with how the other is feeling. Empathy is displayed by asking insightful questions, for no other reason than to learn more about another's feelings. It matters in work relationships, building trust or working through an argument. For example, when Tina sits down and does not answer Anthony's "hello" enthusiastically, this could be his first indication that something is amiss with her. If Anthony is a person with high empathy, he would recognize Tina is upset, and be able to distinguish between the emotions she is feeling. To activate empathic responding, given that empathy is an active process, Anthony would ask Tina how her day has been to get a

better understanding of her emotional state instead of assuming he knows the cause. From the answers to her questions, Anthony would be able to determine her sadness, sense of loss, and disappointment and use those as a guide for how to appropriately respond to her. If Anthony were to focus on the sympathy mindset instead, he would feel badly for Tina and move on.

In the same hypothetical situation, had Anthony been moderately low in empathy, he may still have asked how Tina was feeling. However, the subsequent insightful questions might not have crossed his mind because he was not approaching the conversation as an opportunity to truly learn how Tina was doing. Those low in empathy may react incorrectly to Tina. They could respond inappropriately by ignoring Tina's responses, instead continuing the conversation with information about themselves or their schedule. Having low empathy is not particularly harmful, but it can negatively influence a person's perceptions and prevent the development of strong relationships based on mutual understanding. Low empathy invades other parts of one's life beyond conversations. Empathy facilitates understanding of other people, all other people. It is a mindset that teaches one to be open to understanding someone's actions and motivations, not just reacting to the consequences, and requires a commitment to asking questions continuously. Empathy teaches one to pay attention while communicating and to recognize that there is more to learn. There is no significant disadvantage to having higher levels of empathy, it can only enrich one's life.

Empathy is defined as a "dynamic process that involves cognitive and emotional discoveries about others' experiences" (Main, Walle, Kho & Hapern, 2017, p. 358). Cognition in empathy refers to the process of accurately identifying another's affect, which is a general term to describe mood and emotion, and the emotional element refers to arousing the appropriate

internal feeling to mirror that of the other person (Main et al., 2017). This definition of empathy derives from a social cognitive model of empathy and an extension of concepts (Inzunza, 2015). Some level of empathy is present in, if not crucial to, any relationship, but at its core is seen as an innate trait of an individual. However, by breaking down empathy into its various components, one can learn to improve or strengthen empathy. Therefore, empathy is a personality trait, rather than an innate and immutable quality. To further clarify empathy, it is helpful to differentiate it from sympathy.

**Distinguishing between empathy and sympathy.** For many, sympathy and empathy are two concepts often used interchangeably, but empathy should be treated as a separate characteristic. Empathy differentiates from sympathy to describe a person's feelings as another does while remaining objective. Sympathy is feeling badly for another person, but not sharing the other's emotional experience (Inzunza, 2015; Gerdes, 2011). Empathy versus sympathy can most clearly be understood in terms of grief. For example, Jackie has a friend, Sharon, who recently lost her grandmother. Jackie has not experienced the loss of a close family member, but has lost necklace that was important to her. The two losses are not comparable, but if Jackie has high empathy she will be able to extrapolate how Sharon might be feeling based on her own experience of loss in another context. In the same scenario, if Jackie were to feel only sympathy toward Sharon, she would simply feel badly that Sharon lost her grandmother and comfort her. A higher level of empathy helps to more closely determine the emotional experience of the other person.

Empathy and sympathy may be differentiated through a variety of means. Scientists in the field of social cognitive neuroscience focus on mirror neurons that fire in the observing

individual in a similar brain location as someone who is experiencing the emotion itself and therefore correlates with experiencing empathy (Inzunza, 2015). While the observed individual does not necessarily feel the emotion, the same brain locations are active as if the observed individual were experiencing the emotions themselves. Gerdes (2011) notes that in social work, “empathy-driven actions are empowering, whereas sympathy or pity-driven actions can be at best enabling and at worst destructive to [their] clients” (p. 86). Empathy puts one in a more open-minded mental state that provides the best framework to understand others and take appropriate action. Because one can map the existence of empathy in the brain, one can conclude that it is an active process.

**Empathy is an active process.** With both the cognitive and affective side, experiencing empathy involves multiple steps. Inzunza (2015) includes self-other awareness, perspective taking, and emotion regulation within empathy. Self-other awareness is the ability to differentiate between what another person is feeling differently from one’s own self, and the boundary between self and other must be clear. Acknowledging that one must distinguish one’s response to another’s experience provides a task that one can practice. During an interview, interrogation, or contact with a community member, it is imperative that a police officer be able to pinpoint that the emotions he or she is feeling which are drawn from the other person. Perspective-taking does not denote automatic accuracy to the true feelings another is experiencing. However, perspective-taking is illustrated by the ability to see the situation through another’s eyes, as the other person experiences it. Being able to shift mindsets in the hopes of understanding the other person provides a clear task at which a person can improve. Officers may utilize this when interacting with victims and even perpetrators in the interview room. Emotion regulation

describes the spectrum of emotions one is able to experience, with the ability to respond appropriately as well as delay a reaction if the situation requires it. Police officers who are able to employ emotion regulation will improve on their interactions with the public, and build better relationships by reacting in a supportive manner. Breaking down empathy into subsets of actions illustrates how many actions are involved in experiencing empathy. Empathy is all-encompassing, the subsets all require processing different information with relative speed in order to be effective. Most of empathy is not only reactionary but interactive because one must respond and adapt in real time. This concept has not been explored in depth, and is a rather new research field undertaken by Main et al. (2017).

**Empathy is interpersonal and intrapersonal.** Main et al. (2017)-in contrast to most researchers-argue that empathy is also an interpersonal process, not simply an intrapersonal process. They note the intrapersonal component of empathy includes emotion regulation, self-other differentiation, and contextual variables (Main et al., 2017). Inzunza (2015) posits that empathy includes more than the social cognitive model, but has other facets that should be included as well. These facets incorporate the idea that empathy is an active, interpersonal and intrapersonal process. This study expands on the broader understanding of empathy and its application to police officers. The interpersonal process highlights the influence of the other person. To experience empathy, another person's emotion must be involved. Additionally, it is often a dialogue, not only a sentence or a single emotion. A number of behaviors generate the entire interaction. The emoter must be open and willing to show or describe the emotion he or she is feeling and the observer must identify it (mirroring). Processing and mirroring, encapsulated by affective sharing, should be utilized in certain situations such as a friend

grieving, but avoided in others, such as a fight with a romantic partner. Context matters when correctly employing empathic responding as evidenced by the previous examples. But even in more specific cases of productive affective sharing, certain behaviors will be better served in situations while avoided in others. Someone proficient at affective sharing would be able to identify and behave appropriately. Police officers can utilize this skill when investigating a crime and in an effort to elicit cooperation from a subject's family member. In especially stressful situations, like hostage negotiations, affective sharing helps establish a bond of trust and understanding, potentially diffusing the situation faster.

The back and forth between the emoter and observer generates workable feedback. Main et al. (2017) term the conversation as empathic responding and argue that it is facilitated by a distinct type of curiosity. That is, one who asks for clarification about another's emotion, as opposed to assuming the other's experience. Main et al. (2017) and Inzunza (2015) conclude that empathy is a continuous process of imagining and attempting to accurately perceive another's emotional experience. By maintaining curiosity, officers are able to overcome assumptions they may have made and improve their ability to extract information from victims and perpetrators. As empathic responding occurs instantaneously, officers may utilize the skill in every interaction they have when investigating a case and communicating within their department. Identifying empathy levels can illustrate where on the spectrum officers lie.

**Empathy in different populations.** Empathy plays a variety of roles within different fields. The ability to study empathy in separate fields highlights the flexibility of empathy as well as its far-reaching applicability. One would be hard-pressed to find a social context that had no use for empathy. A high innate empathic ability might sway certain individuals to self-select into

particular fields. For example, someone who empathizes with those feeling pain may decide to become a doctor. On the other hand, once in a certain field, an inability to empathize can hinder success. A social worker with a background in writing policy may not be the best individual for case work. An innate level of empathy may encourage or guide individuals into certain careers fields from the outset.

In a classroom setting, empathy levels can vary by college major. There are higher levels of empathy in the social sciences than business, and both are higher than in technology fields (Courtright, Mackey & Packard 2005; Myyry & Helkama, 2001). Courtright et al. (2005) found that criminal justice and psychology majors' empathy scores decreased over time. These studies provide a baseline of empathy levels for educated individuals entering the workforce.

Additionally, it categorizes certain groups of people as having higher or lower empathy scores.

Those in the healthcare field have dedicated time and effort to understanding empathy's role. For example, empathy's role in bedside manner. One could argue that empathy is vital to have a good bedside manner. Hojat, Vergare, Isenberg, Cohen and Spandorfer (2015) found that empathy facilitates an "optimal physician-patient relationship" (p. 12). Bedside manner can be equated with basic social skills as doctors must help their patients come to terms with a harsh diagnosis or inform a family member their loved one passed away during surgery. Bedside manner is also required in less dramatic scenarios, such as a regular appointment when patients attempt to describe what ails them. Appropriately and effectively relaying news to patients and their families must be important. As doctors gain more experience the longer they practice, it would be expected they attain higher levels of empathy over time, but in fact, it decreases. There is no better way to improve better bedside manner than through the use of empathic responding

(Main et al., 2017). Scientists have tried to determine where along the process of becoming a doctor does one lose empathic understanding. Chen, Hanna, Manohar and Tobia (2017) focused on medical school. Their longitudinal study concentrates on the first few years and found that the dip in empathy was most pronounced during the students' third year of medical school.

Scientists cannot agree on which part of empathy decreases, but Smith, Norman and Decety (2017) found that doctors, over time, were able to improve their perspective taking (cognitive empathy) and their emotion contagion (affective sharing). Therefore, doctors are able to improve their ability to identify the emotion another person was experiencing, the cognitive side of empathy, not the affective side. The same relationship, i.e., a decrease in empathy over time and increased age, may exist in police officers. Hojat et al. (2015) also studied empathy and its influence on burnout in medical students. Having higher levels of empathy helped to prevent burnout. Further studying age and years on the job may give social scientists data to develop strategies to detect and prevent decreases in empathy.

**Empathy and burnout.** For medical students, Hojat et al. (2015) found that high levels of empathy helped prevent burnout. Defining burnout as a “psychological syndrome that includes emotional exhaustion and depersonalization that negatively influences academic and professional accomplishments” (Hojat et al., 2015, p. 12). In the medical field, rates of burnout are high; 50% in medical students, 70% in residents, and 30-40% in physicians. Burnout is as much a part of the medical field as a poor night's sleep. The highly stressful long work hours, challenging case load, and emotional toll in becoming and practicing as a doctor all contribute to burnout. Hojat et al. (2015) posited that empathy and an ability to understand another's emotions, outweigh and drive the individual past the drain and emotional toll of a medical job.

They identified an inverse relationship between empathy and emotional exhaustion.

Consequences of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization increases one's risk of making mistakes and even substance abuse. Therefore, empathy indirectly diminishes the likelihood of medical errors.

**Empathy in police officers.** Empathy has recently begun to be studied in law enforcement officers, mostly in terms of its application to particular parts of the job. Inzunza (2015) highlights the integral role empathy plays in interviewing suspects, community policing, and victim support. Multiple functions within law enforcement require high empathy. Empathy is necessary for building strong relationships with community organizations, within the department and when working in teams. Empathy should be considered when hiring officers and tracked throughout their careers. As the research on empathy in general continues to grow, it is important to see how this personality factor influences law enforcement officers.

**Burnout in law enforcement.** Police officers encounter similar variables and situations in their day-to-day activities as do those in the medical profession. Their shifts are exhausting, they do not get to choose their cases, often investigating murder or gruesome assault cases that all take an emotional toll on the officers. Garbarino, Chiorri, Magnavita, Piattino and Cuomo (2012) studied burnout in officers, and found that some managed to combat depression, anxiety, professional exhaustion, and a loss of empathy. Turgoose, Glover, Barker and Maddox (2017) found a correlation between those with high empathy levels had lower burnout, but only for officers working rape and sexual assault cases, rather than across all law enforcement functions in their departments. There was no relation between empathy and the likelihood of experiencing secondary traumatic stress or compassion fatigue.

Inzunza (2015), who studied the affective side of empathy including emotion regulation, found that emotion regulation is necessary for police officers, as it helps prevent stress and burnout. Those two phenomena are readily apparent in the work of officers and can lead to intense irritability and impaired judgement. Such feelings hinder officers from operating at full capacity. Parks, Mastrofski, Dejong and Gray (1999) argue that positive community interactions help offset the less pleasant interactions such as undercover assignments inside a gang. Further, higher empathy levels lead to more meaningful and positive contact with the community for which officers are responsible and serve. Not only does empathy benefit the community and the police department, but it is also an opportunity for officers to improve in every aspect of their job.

Empathy has been found to improve a number of quantifiable results in officer job performance. For example, Foley and Terrill (2008) found officers who display higher empathy toward victims recover from the trauma of such interactions faster. Oxburgh, Ost, Morris and Cherryman (2015) and Inzunza (2015) looked at interviewing styles, distinguishing between dominant and humane styles. When employing the humane style officers are more likely to empathize and understand why criminals committed the type of crime they did. They found that officers stated they felt more empathy towards suspects after the suspect confessed, and suspects were more likely to confess if the interviewers used the humane style. Officers would do well to consider a softer interview style at the outset because this may speed up arriving at the truth and eliciting confessions rather than having to exhaust emotional and physical resources. It is only to the officer's detriment to remain detached and uncaring. Officers who are able to utilize empathy in their interviewing may attain higher conviction rates because confessions are near perfect

evidence for convictions. Creating better cases for prosecutors will only improve their performance. Through lower neuroticism, officers will manage their instinctual reactions to the crimes suspects might have committed, and can think with active curiosity and understanding as opposed to judgement.

Though empathy has previously been studied in law enforcement officers and others in high stress occupations, the research focuses on specific benefits applicable to a particular part of the job. Oxburgh et al. (2015) notes that officers display different levels of empathy depending on the types of crime committed by the criminals with which they interact. This seems to indicate that empathy can have a contextual component, where individuals feel or behave with differing levels of empathy depending on a particular situation. Unintentional changes in mindset or display of behavior indicates the possibility that a person may intentionally change empathy levels. If one can consciously recognize the level of empathy one employs, this may mean that a person has the potential one has to practice and improve levels of empathy displayed toward others.

**Improving empathy.** Psychologists have tried training empathy, with the goal of improving both the cognitive and affective side of empathy. In previous research, subjects were trained in empathy by watching videos of others expressing pain, or through a videogame where the participants make decisions as the parents of a child with cancer who dies at four (Smith, Norman & Decety, 2017; Chen et al.). Courtright et al. (2005) found an increase of the affective side of empathy scores from undergraduates between their first and second year, illustrating that one's ability to empathize is not static. Chen et al. (2017) trained third year medical students with video games. Chen et al. found a positive and direct relationship between training and improved

empathy scores. Zacker (1972) provided training in empathy and interpersonal sensitivity to police officers, and the officers came to the conclusion the training improved “awareness of the complexities of human behavior,” and they recommended that all officers should receive such training (p. 1004). It changed the officers’ minds about how they approached interviewing and interacting with the community at-large.

**Difficulty of training empathy.** As critical as it is to improve empathy levels in police officers and law enforcement in general, the community and atmosphere within a department or agency does not generally enable openness and sharing of emotional experiences. Many officers believe they are able to display empathic behavior in policing only when their workload is lower or slower. Additionally, officers are not as interested in emotional involvement in cases because their first goal is safety and protection (Parks et al., 1999). Further, many officers associate empathic behavior with being emotional, as opposed to the capacity to recognize the emotions in another person. Empathy’s significant role in providing effective comforting has clear and lasting positive results by providing a better understanding of the victim’s experience, and increase the likelihood of cooperation in the future (Foley & Terrill, 2008). Empathic practices are crucial to identifying potential obstacles and providing comfort to all victims with which officers come into contact.

**Previous scales.** In the studies discussed above, empathy was measured through various scales, interviews, and open-ended questions. Most studies of empathy utilize the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, the Empathy Quotient, the QWACy, and for the medical field specifically, the JSPE is used. Each of the surveys measure varying aspects of empathy. Empathy is a personality factor, but is dispositional and can be strengthened like any other muscle.

**Neuroticism**

Neuroticism is another important personality trait that is related to the emotion regulation aspect of affective sharing in empathy. Neuroticism is one of five personality factors known as the Big 5. Neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness to experience are thought to be the major traits that allow us to broadly explain and measure personality (Goldberg, 1981, 1990; Costa & McCrae, 1992; John & Srivastava, 1999).

Neuroticism measures one's level of emotional stability, mostly with regards to more negative emotions such as anger and depression. The common use of the term "neurotic" does not equate to neuroticism nor emotional stability as psychologists have defined it. Emotional stability or steadiness is reactionary; emotions are a reaction to a situation or event, they do not arise out of nothing. One illustrates one's normal responses to a situation based on one's natural inclinations. Whether persons are quick to exhibit angry responses is apparent when examining their neuroticism score. Someone high in neuroticism driving a car may be quick to yell at the individual who cuts him or her off on the road. Or a parent who receives a telephone call from a teacher about his or her child's poor performance on the last test might punish the child by removing all social activities and technology from the child, despite the fact that the child may need the computer to complete assignments. This parent's reaction would illustrate a high neuroticism score.

In contrast, someone scoring low on neuroticism tends to be less reactionary in general. In the same scenario as described above, a parent lower in neuroticism would deal with the low grade with an open mind, approaching the child with questions to ask, not a punishment to dole out. The parent might ask why the grade was lower than expected and take a step away from his

or her instinctual disappointment or anger. Low neuroticism does not necessarily indicate high control over emotions, though it intuitively correlates. Neuroticism concerns experiencing the emotion and the speed of a controlled, thoughtful response, not the depth of feeling when one does experience the emotion. A person with low neuroticism may still have strong emotional reactions, but they have more control over their subsequent actions when compared to someone high in neuroticism. Previous research suggests there is a positive relation between neuroticism and anxiety, depression, anger, embarrassment, emotional, worry, and insecurity (Ono, Sachau, Deal, Englert & Taylor, 2011).

While being highly empathic may be helpful under stressful situations, being high on neuroticism is considered maladaptive. Among psychologists, neuroticism is considered one's "susceptibility to experience symptoms of psychological distress, develop irrational ideas, demonstrate poor impulse control, and be vulnerable under stress" (Detrick & Chibnall, 2013, p. 373). Those high in neuroticism are less collaborative and less effective at managing high-stress jobs (Ono et al., 2011). Low neuroticism correlates with those who are calm, secure and non-temperamental (Barrick, Mount & Judge, 2001). Neuroticism and the other characteristics of the Big 5 have been studied in a variety of specialized fields.

In law enforcement, neuroticism and conscientiousness are the two factors most often studied. Low neuroticism is related to more efficient task completion in general office jobs (Barrick et al., 2001). Because a majority of police work is case oriented, low neuroticism may be highly beneficial. Neuroticism has been studied in terms of predictive job satisfaction (Miller, Mire & Kim, 2009).

**Neuroticism in officers.** Neuroticism has been studied before in the profile of a police officer. Lau, Hem, Berg, Ekeberg and Torgersen (2006) studied the influence of neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness in some Norwegian officers. They found that the largest influence of the three characteristics was to affect on personality, stress and coping. A lower neuroticism score correlated with a lower perceived sense of stress. This indirectly influenced how officers approached a situation. Lau et al. (2006) found that a higher neuroticism score correlated with a greater frequency of stress experienced and maladaptive coping strategies with a higher neuroticism score, all of which negatively impacted general well-being. Officers who were more susceptible to finding the situations they encounter as stressful had higher rates of burnout, which may potentially contribute to a decision to resign. Garbarino et al. (2012) focused on male special forces and found their scores on the five factors to be higher than the average male population in Italy. Focusing on tasks within the police department, Parks et al. (1999) compared two perspectives of community-oriented policing. They found those who emphasized maintaining order interacted with the disorderly in society, but those who emphasized community building, interacted with ordinary residents and workers. More generally, police chiefs may not have as much contact with community members as an officer with a beat patrol. Depending on the requirements of the particular job, officers may have the luxury of becoming angry, depressed or anxious and not have to reign in their initial reactions when approaching someone on the street.

Detrick and Chibnall (2013) studied the effect of neuroticism on specific skills. Officers low in anxiety, meaning low in neuroticism, displayed higher firearms proficiency scores. Field training officers also identified officers with low neuroticism when describing the personality

characteristics of their best entry-level law enforcement officer. Both illustrate neuroticism's beneficial influence for those displaying low scores. In the same study, the officers with the higher scores self-declared as "very emotionally stable, particularly nonimpulsive and steady under stress" (p. 375). There is the potential for the opposite, high neuroticism scores, to have a damaging influence on officers. Measuring neuroticism scores in college campus police officers will be different because their tasks are community focused, which may illustrate higher levels of neuroticism than a city police officer.

### **Empathy and Neuroticism**

Empathy and neuroticism have each been studied in police officers, but no studies have explicitly studied the two together. Oftentimes, psychologists will include an item tangentially related, like sensitivity in a paper on neuroticism or low anxiety and depression in a paper about empathy. For example, Larmour, Bergström, Gillen and Forth (2015) suppose that law enforcement officers should be more sensitive to the suspect's personality to minimize false confessions. To be more sensitive, empathy is required, and high neuroticism scores predict the levels of suspects' compliance. In another study, Ono et al. (2011) notes that people with higher cognitive ability may comprehend social situations better and settle tension-filled situations more easily. The cognitive portion of empathy would aid in identifying the correct emotion in a social interaction and a low neuroticism score helps to maintain a clear head to diffuse tense situations. Identifying average scores in campus police can shape an understanding of the internal makeup of officers and indicate how they may behave in certain situations.

Not only is it necessary to identify levels of neuroticism and empathy in officers to predict their effectiveness before they are hired and during their careers, but training should be

provided to help improve both. By measuring both traits, a pattern may be found in their empathy and neuroticism traits that may be helpful in predicting their current and future effectiveness. Psychological and cognitive characteristics are already screened in police officers before they are hired.

Ono et al. (2011) looked at the Big Five traits, cognitive ability and emotional intelligence in federal criminal investigators. Ono et al. has come close to utilizing both empathy (emotional intelligence) and neuroticism. They posited that personality and interpersonal skills are more important than cognitive ability for investigators. They defined those with good interpersonal skills as exhibiting low neuroticism and high empathy. For the most part, the crime rates on a university campus are lower than in a city, and community interaction is a higher proportion of campus police duties than for police officers in a city environment. As a result, interpersonal skills are employed more in community policing and should be recognized for campus police. This study aims to expand past interpersonal skills and apply empathy and neuroticism trait aspects of police officers' jobs and characteristics. Current recruitment is targeted towards college campus police departments and will eventually include data from city police departments to compare the two.

Empathy is an internal, interpersonal, and active process (Main et al., 2017; Inzunza, 2015). There are two sides in the chosen model to define empathy: cognitive, i.e., the accuracy and recognition of another's emotion; and affective sharing, i.e., experiencing the observed emotion. Police officers, especially on a college campus require greater use and understanding of empathy because of the often-lower crime rates of murder and burglary, and higher levels of drug use and minor theft, and this suggests a more community-oriented approach (Parks et al.,

1999). Additionally, empathy aids in the recovery from traumatic situations or the high stress of the job because one is able to understand and care about what each survivor endures, and this takes higher precedence than burnout (Hojat et al., 2017). Due to the requirements of the job, the results of the scales should reveal empathy scores that are higher than average.

Neuroticism is recognized as general emotional stability wherein those with a low score are even-tempered and have greater emotion regulation. Low neuroticism would seem to be ideal for police officers because of the high likelihood that they will encounter tense situations and handle delicate cases. Innate low neuroticism and high empathy should be screened by incoming applicants for the police academy, and should be included during basic academy training.

### **The Current Study**

To determine the appropriate variables and recruitment procedure for this study, consultations were conducted with law enforcement personnel and other scientists affiliated with Virginia police departments. It was important that responses could not be attributed to a specific officer or police department, so certain demographic questions had to be omitted or modified in order to maintain anonymity. Following numerous discussions, it was determined that general questions about officers' time in law enforcement and their perceived performance would be acceptable along with measures of neuroticism and empathy. The initial goal was to link official job performance data to empathy and neuroticism scores, however, after consultations with members of law enforcement and the IRB it was determined there would be too much risk of individual participant data being identifiable.

All participants were active, sworn police officers from eight different Virginia college campus police departments. I attempted to recruit officers from city departments as well to

compare campus vs. non-campus police however only one department agreed to participate, but no officer completed the survey. The departments participating all serve college campuses and participate in Virginia Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (VACLEA). Most police chiefs or another administrator of a college campus police department participate in VACLEA. The association meets regularly to discuss policies and practices of campus police departments and hold educational conferences to keep Virginia departments on the same page. The departments varied in the size and the community they serve. The purpose of this study was to provide exploratory research on empathy and neuroticism in police officers. I explored how neuroticism and empathy are related to job performance and demographic variables. I hypothesized that the combination of higher empathy and lower neuroticism would serve as a predictor of job performance, total years in on the job, and age.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

All participants in the study were law enforcement officers (N = 66 participants, 9 females and 58 males). The officers were from seven different college campus police departments in Virginia. All participants were volunteers recruited via email and were not given compensation. Contact information for departments were obtained from the VACLEA's police department institutions list. To participate, sworn officers were at least 20 years of age because of the Virginia State job requirements to be a police officer and completed basic academy training. A potential participant who failed either requirement would not have received the link to complete the survey. Officers were recruited via email and approximately 40% of them completed the survey.

Demographic information was collected in a way that it was not possible to identify individual officers from the data even though participation was anonymous. Age of the officers was varied. There were 15.4% between 20-28 years, 33.8% between 29-37 years old, 21.6% between 38-46 , 15.4% between 47-55 years old, and 13.7% above 55. Forty-eight participants were Caucasian, 1 was Asian, 2 were American-Indian or and Alaskan native, 8 were Black or African-American, and 7 were multiracial. Officers who were white made up 72.27%, those who were non-white made up the other 27.3%. Nine officers out of 66 were Hispanic or Latino/a. Two participants completed high school or have their GED, 24 participants had some college but no degree, 8 participants had an Associate Degree, 24 had their Bachelor's degree and 9 had a graduate degree. Thirty-seven officers were currently assigned to the day shift, 3 to the evening shift, 11 to the night shift, and 9 had a rotating shift with 5 officers that did not work under shifts. Years of experience ranged from 1-39 years total law enforcement experience. For campus law enforcement, years of experience ranged from 1-27 years.

### **Assessments and Measures**

Participants first completed four personality measures: the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), the M5-50, the I-7 Impulsiveness, and the BFI-2. The IRI and I-7 are ideal because they measure both the cognitive and affective portions of empathy. The I-7 also provided three subscales especially connected to a position in law enforcement as the job is inherently risk taking. The BFI-2 was included as a newer and more reliable measure of the Big Five. However, as this study is mostly exploratory research and, the M5-50 was utilized as an older, more time-tested measure.

**Empathy.** The IRI measures empathy as the reactions one has towards another's experience (original Davis, 1983; edited by Pulos, Elison & Lennon 2004). Participants were asked to imagine how well different scenarios describe them on a 5-point Likert scale, 1 = *does not describe me well* and 5 = *describes me very well*. Participants answered 28 items that were divided into four subscales: empathic concern ( $\alpha = .77$ ), perspective-taking ( $\alpha = .68$ ), fantasy ( $\alpha = .69$ ), and personal distress ( $\alpha = .80$ ). Empathic concern, covers "other-oriented" feelings of sympathy and concern for unfortunate others. Empathic concern implies feeling the emotion, or the affective side. An example item from the empathic concern scale is "I am often quite touched by things that I see happen." Perspective-taking scale captures the proclivity of one to take the psychological point of view of others. The fantasy scale captures a tendency to think of oneself among the feelings and actions of fictitious characters in books, movies, and plays. An example item from the fantasy scale is "After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters." The personal distress scale covers feelings of internal anxiety and unease in tense interpersonal settings. An example item from the personal distress subscale is "Being in a tense emotional situation scares me."

Empathy was also assessed using the I-7 Impulsiveness measure. It consisted of 54 'yes' or 'no' questions about various thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in the officer's life (Eysenck, Pearson, Easting & Allsopp, 1985). This measure contained three subscales: venturesomeness ( $\alpha = .66$ ), impulsiveness ( $\alpha = .75$ ), and empathy ( $\alpha = .66$ ). An example of an empathy item is, "Would you feel sorry for a lonely stranger?" Level of venturesomeness indicates a cognizance of risk in a particular behavior and doing so anyway. An example of an item for venturesomeness is, "Would you enjoy water skiing?" Impulsiveness captures a person's choices

and behaviors without prior thought or without realizing the risk involved. An example of an item is, “Do you usually make up your mind quickly?” I-7 Impulsiveness was included in addition to the IRI because, as some psychologists have noted, impulsiveness can be considered as a facet of neuroticism.

**Neuroticism.** Neuroticism was measured using the BFI-2 (Soto & John, 2017) and the M5-50 (McCord, 2002). The BFI-2 has 60 items divided into five subscales for each factor. Only the neuroticism subscale ( $\alpha = .75$ ) was included in analyses. The creators of the BFI-2 use the term Negative Emotionality to describe the Neuroticism factor, but for continuity's sake with the M5-50, both will be referenced as neuroticism. When completing the BFI-2, participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale how much they agreed with each statement, 1 = *disagree strongly* and 5 = *agree strongly*. An example of an item is “Can be tense.”

The officers also completed the M5-50, modeled around the 5-factor model of personality (McCord, 2002). Officers were asked to complete 50-items assessing how accurate a statement was for them on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *inaccurate* to *accurate* and a neutral midpoint. Only the neuroticism subscale ( $\alpha = .71$ ) was included in analyses. An example item is “Rarely get irritated.” The origins of both scales are the same, Goldberg’s IPIP five-factor determination of five total factors. The BFI-2 is a newer and a less tested measure of the Big 5. The M5-50 has been tested and used in wider circumstances and was included to offset the less proven BFI-2.

After completing the personality measures, participants answered demographic questions along with questions giving the details about their law enforcement background (e.g., how many

years have you spent as a law enforcement officer?) and their job performance (e.g., do you feel that your job performance meets expectations?).

### **Procedure**

After consenting to participate in the study, officers completed an anonymous online survey hosted on Qualtrics. Qualtrics is an online platform used to develop and host electronic surveys. Departments were contacted through VACLEA and police chiefs sent out the website link via email. Officers were encouraged to complete all four scales as well as the demographics questionnaire in one sitting. However, if officers could not complete all of it at one time, or if they did not close the browser window, they were able to go back to finish what had not previously been completed. Due to the nature of the Qualtrics link, officers could choose to take the surveys anywhere they had access to the internet. On average, the scales and the demographic questionnaire took 25 minutes to complete. At the end of the survey, participants were debriefed and explained the target characteristics of the study.

## **Results**

### **Descriptive Statistics**

This study focused on the two personality characteristics, empathy and neuroticism. The average for the M5-50 and BFI-2 subscale for neuroticism were  $M = 2.20$  ( $SD = .68$ ) and  $M = 2.34$  ( $SD = .54$ ), respectively. The IRI's subscales are perspective-taking ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = .61$ ), fantasy ( $M = 2.63$ ,  $SD = .63$ ), and empathic concern ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = .65$ ). The I-7's subscales are impulsiveness ( $M = 1.73$ ,  $SD = .183$ ), venturesomeness ( $M = 1.43$ ,  $SD = .19$ ), and empathy ( $M = 1.47$ ,  $SD = .18$ ). The average total years of law enforcement experience was 12.94 ( $SD = 9.63$ ). Those with the day shift made up 56.9%, for the evening shift 4.6%, for the night shift

16.9%, those with a rotating shift 13.8%. Those that were not on a shift schedule was 7.7%.

Officers self-reported whether they fell below, met, or exceeded expectations. All descriptive statistics and analyses were conducted using SPSS 24.

### **Correlations with Empathy and Neuroticism**

Pearson correlations were run to see if empathy and neuroticism were related to age, number of years as a law enforcement officer, and falling below, meets or exceeds expectations for job performance. There was a significant positive correlation between age and I-7 Impulsiveness,  $r(65) = .26, p = .04$ , and I-7-Venturesomeness,  $r(65) = .29, p = .02$ . The I-7 Venturesomeness subscale was also positively correlated with total years spent as a law enforcement officer,  $r(65) = .37, p < .01$ .

The number of years spent as a law enforcement officer was marginally negatively related to IRI Perspective-taking,  $r(65) = -.23, p = .07$ , and IRI Fantasy,  $r(65) = -.23, p = .07$ . Additionally, there was a negative relation between I-7 Impulsiveness and M5-50 Neuroticism  $r(68) = -.51, p < .01$ , and BFI Neuroticism,  $r(70) = -.44, p < .01$ . The IRI Empathy subscale was marginally positively correlated with age,  $r(65) = .22, p = .08$ . As neuroticism increases, impulsiveness decreases. There were no significant correlations with performance and empathy or neuroticism.

### **Analysis of Variance**

A one-way between subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether empathy and neuroticism varied based on shift type, race, and education. Empathy and neuroticism did not vary based on shift (day, evening, night, rotating). ANOVA analyses indicated a significant difference in empathy and neuroticism for education level and race for

some of the subscales. However, when group sample size was inspected, it was determined that the group sizes varied too much and were not large enough to find an effect, therefore meaningful inferences could not be drawn from the ANOVAs and subsequent follow-up analyses to the ANOVAs were not justified. Race and education were both dichotomized based on how most participants identified. Race was divided into white ( $n = 48, 72.7\%$ ) and non-white ( $n = 18, 27.3\%$ ). Education was divided into earning an Associate's degree or lower ( $n = 33, 49\%$ ) and earning a Bachelor's degree or higher ( $n = 34, 51\%$ ). Independent samples t-tests were run to determine if empathy or neuroticism differed between groups for either race or education, but there were no significant differences.

### **Multiple Regression**

In addition to basic correlations, regression analyses were used to isolate the influence of individual variables on the dependent variables of interest. A multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether neuroticism from the M5-50 or the BFI-2 were predictors for I7-Impulsiveness. The overall model significantly predicted impulsiveness,  $F(2, 63) = 12.28, p < .01, R^2 = .27$ . Together, the two neuroticism scores accounted for 27.3% of the variance in impulsiveness of the officers. Individually, the M5-50 neuroticism score was a strong negative predictor of impulsiveness ( $\beta = -.41, t(65) = -2.41, p = .02$ ), but the effect of the BFI-2 neuroticism score on impulsiveness was not significant when controlling for the effect of the M5-50 neuroticism score,  $\beta = -.14, p = .40$ .

A multiple regression was conducted to determine significant predictors for total years in law enforcement. Five predictors were included in the model: both neuroticism from the M5-50 and BFI-2, IRI empathy, IRI perspective-taking, and IRI fantasy subscale. The overall model

significantly predicted total years in law enforcement,  $F(5.59) = 2.40, p = .05, R^2 = .17$ . All five predictors accounted for 17% of the variance in total law enforcement experience. When examining the effect of individual predictors while holding the others constant, perspective-taking,  $t(59) = -2.49, p = .02$ , and fantasy,  $t(59) = -2.35, p = .02$ , subscales were the only two significant predictors. Both perspective taking ( $\beta = -.32$ ) and the fantasy subscale ( $\beta = -.29$ ) negatively predicted years in law enforcement, meaning higher empathy in the form of perspective taking and fantasy predicted less years in law enforcement. M5-50 neuroticism,  $p = .21, \beta = -.24$ , BFI-2 neuroticism,  $p = .25, \beta = .22$ , IRI empathic,  $p = .29, \beta = .14$ , subscales were not significant predictors on their own when controlling for the other variables. The model illustrated that the perspective-taking and fantasy subscales of the IRI negatively predicted total years in law enforcement when controlling for the amount of variance contributed by neuroticism and empathic concern.

Another multiple regression was conducted to determine significant predictors for total years in law enforcement with the I7 empathy scale. Five predictors were included in this model: both neuroticism scores, I7 impulsiveness, I7 venturesomeness, and I7 empathy. The overall model was marginally significant in predicting total years in law enforcement,  $F(5, 59) = 2.35, p = .05, R^2 = .17$ . All predictors accounted for 16.6% of the variance in total years in law enforcement. Venturesomeness,  $t(59) = 3.12, p = .00$ , was the only significant predictor when controlling for other variables. It was a strong positive predictor of years in law enforcement ( $\beta = .38$ ). M5-50 neuroticism,  $p = .32, \beta = -.19$ , BFI-2 neuroticism,  $p = .19, \beta = .25$ , impulsiveness,  $p = .94, \beta = .01$ , empathy,  $p = .65, \beta = .06$ , were not significant predictors on their own. This

means impulsiveness positively predicted total years in law enforcement when controlling for the amount of variance contributed by neuroticism, impulsiveness, and empathy.

To determine significant predictors for age, a multiple regression was conducted including I7 venturesomeness, I7 impulsiveness, I7 empathy, and M5-50 and BFI-2 neuroticism as the predictors. The model significantly predicted age,  $F(5, 59) = 2.39, p = .05, R^2 = .17$ . The five predictors accounted for 16.8% of the variance in age of the officers. Venturesomeness,  $t(59) = 2.22, p = .03$ , was the only significant moderate strong positive predictor ( $\beta = .27$ ). The amount of variance accounted for by the other predictors on their own was not statistically significant (M5-50 neuroticism,  $p = .14, \beta = -.28$ ; BFI-2 neuroticism,  $p = .13, \beta = .28$ ; impulsiveness,  $p = .18, \beta = .19$ ; empathy,  $p = .79, \beta = -.03$ ). This means venturesomeness positively predicted the age of the officer when controlling for the amount of variance contributed by neuroticism, empathy, and impulsiveness.

Two multiple regressions were conducted to determine significant predictors for job performance in officers. The model was not significant when including M5-50 neuroticism, BFI-2 neuroticism, I7 impulsiveness, I7 venturesomeness, and I7 empathy as predictors,  $R^2 = .03$ , or when including M5-50 neuroticism, BFI-2 neuroticism, IRI empathy, and IRI perspective-taking as predictors,  $R^2 = .01$ .

### **Discussion**

Empathy and neuroticism are an integral part of personality. Levels of empathy and neuroticism can determine a person's interactions and relationships with others and how they process the world around them. Empathy has been studied in other fields, like healthcare and college students, and psychologists have attempted to clarify and define its relative importance

and place (Courtright et al., 2005; Myyry & Helkama, 2001). For police officers empathy can help prevent burnout and improve their job performance with certain tasks, like interrogating and arrest records (Inzunza, 2015; Oxburgh et al., 2015). Empathy is crucial to gauge because one can improve empathy, like strengthening a muscle (Chen et al., 2017; Zacker, 1972). Through training, officers can focus to change their mindsets.

Neuroticism is also an important personality trait to understand for those working in law enforcement. The majority of a police officers' job is to respond to the situations by remaining calm and controlling immediate reactions. Neuroticism influences interrogation styles towards suspects, which determines rates of false confessions and arrest records (Larmour et al., 2015). Neuroticism also helps with other skills an officer has to master, like firearms proficiency (Detrick & Chibnall, 2013). Lower neuroticism can improve overall officer mindset and approaches to situations.

This study's goal was to conduct exploratory research with empathy and neuroticism and shift, age, years in law enforcement, years at a campus police department, and education level. I hypothesized that successful experienced officers would be high on empathy and low in neuroticism. The hypothesis was not supported by the data, but there were significant and marginally significant relationships among some study variables. There was a significant positive relation between age and the impulsiveness subscale of the I-7. As age increased, the level of impulsiveness increased. Though this can indicate impulsiveness in dangerous situations that officers encounter, officers may be more impulsive as a result of their experience to react quickly and accurately. Police culture favors more automatic than more controlled responses. This is

especially true for officers who work in areas with high crime because they may not have the luxury of time and measured approaches.

Age was also positively related to empathy. Although this finding was marginally significant, it is likely that there would be an effect if the study was not underpowered. Hojat et al. (2015) found that cognitive empathy increased over time in doctors. Police officers may be able to identify emotions more accurately throughout their career. The nature of law enforcement is to serve the public and help others. This self-selected career path includes a capacity for empathy.

There was a significant positive relation between the I-7 venturesomeness subscale and total years of experience in law enforcement. The items in the scale are indicators of enjoyment or desire to participate in risky behavior. The job of a police officer is inherently risky, therefore those who seek out a job as a police officer tend to be those that enjoy spikes in adrenaline rushes. This relation indicates that officers that have a venturesome personality may stay in their careers longer because of the high-adrenaline nature of the job.

A negative relation between I-7 subscale of impulsiveness and the M5-50 subscale of neuroticism was observed. This finding was surprising because impulsiveness and neuroticism are typically positively correlated, however because everyone in the study was a police officer this relation can be explained by the nature of job. It benefits a police officer to be low on neuroticism and high on impulsiveness because this means they would be emotionally stable but able to make quick decisions.

Following the significant relationships from the correlations, I conducted a multiple regression analysis to further explore the data and relations among the variables. Two relations

were observed that were not captured in the correlations and ANOVAs. IRI perspective-taking and fantasy negatively predicted total years in law enforcement when controlling for neuroticism and empathic concern. In this study, the older the officers were, the less they were able to change perspectives and identify with fictional stories and characters. The relation could be explained by repeated exposure to traumatic situations which increases the cognitive side, or the identification of another's emotional state. But to distance themselves, officers may choose not to place themselves in victims or perpetrators' shoes and over time may potentially lose the ability to do so. Further research is needed to be done to understand why this negative relation exists.

Venturesomeness positively predicted age when controlling for neuroticism, impulsiveness and empathy, meaning officers high in venturesomeness were likely to be older.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

A major limitation of the study was its small sample size that affected the power of the analyses. This also may also have contributed to many of the subscales having low interitem reliability. Many of the scales were around or just below the recommended .70 minimum for Cronbach's alpha. However, previous research has also found relatively low interitem reliability for these measures. For example, Konrath et al. (2011) reported reliability scores slightly higher for the IRI subscales at .71-.77. Eysenck, Pearson, Easting and Allsopp (1985) found reliability scores of the I-7 subscales between .69-.85. It is possible that these constructs are difficult to measure in general, which may make them harder to measure in a specialized population.

In this study, I attempted to recruit participants from city police departments. I hoped to compare empathy and neuroticism in college campus officers versus city officers. City officers serve a different community and require more varied approaches to the crimes that they attempt

to solve. The cases they work and functions they perform are different enough from college campuses police departments that a difference in personality trait level may be measurable. I am continuing with data collection and hope to conduct further research and analysis into this distinction, and to obtain a higher sample of responses to improve reliability scores and correlations.

While using Qualtrics to collect data allowed me to administer the survey across police departments more easily, the web-based nature meant that it was hard to control for a number of variables. Neither location nor how long and when officers took the survey were controlled for. If officers did not close their browser, they could return to the survey at a later time. Taking a break between completing the scales could introduce unknown factors and potentially skew their results to the studies. Officers could have chosen to take the survey before, during, or after work which could bias their responses. An online survey also removes the possibility for officers to ask any questions. In the future, it may improve the study to have officers come into a laboratory environment to complete the survey to ensure their focus on the task and control other variables.

Another limitation to this type of data collection is that neuroticism was only measured through a self-report measure. This is a limitation of neuroticism research in general. Psychologists have measured certain parts of empathy with practical research, like a video game in Chen et al. (2017), but the same has not been done with neuroticism. Neuroticism should be studied to better determine if it can be used as a predictor for specific behavioral problems (Tarescavage, Corey & Ben-Porath, 2015). Certain behavioral problems fall under neuroticism's umbrella, like impulse control, emotion regulation, stress tolerance, avoiding substance use and risk-taking behavior. Noting and improving the neuroticism score can potentially alleviate some

issues affecting performance that officers may either overcome or that may be used by supervisors as a standard for removal (Tarescavage et al., 2015). Conducting an experiment to determine immediate reactions of anger, frustration, sadness and a quick recovery can illustrate more accurate, realistic measures. To measure these experiences in police officers in more daily circumstances may illustrate more accurate levels of neuroticism. It may be beneficial to study dispositional empathy levels in a survey, followed by a potential role-playing or a video game to observe real-time reactions.

The study contains sensitive data because it includes job performance. Officers were asked to self-report job performance. The research question could be better answered with actual performance records from officers, however the difficulty in utilizing these records is similar to using medical records. The data are personal and the challenge to maintain the highest level of anonymity must remain paramount. Future research could improve upon this study by connecting performance records with personality variables like empathy and neuroticism, however, using records from police departments about individual officers presents many challenges.

By understanding the personality traits of police officers it may be possible to gain more insight into why victims like Marie, who was reporting sexual assault and ended up being charged and fined, can be treated so poorly. It is important to know how traits like neuroticism may interact with other traits important to those with jobs in law enforcement, such as impulsiveness. Similarly, interactions between law enforcement officers and all members of the community may improve as a result of training certain personality traits like empathy.

Understanding officers' personality may provide insight into explaining their actions and behavior when performing under pressure.

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