Effects of police ethics training on ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation

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Abstract
Police administrators are looking for concrete pathways to fight the phenomenon of (ethnic) prejudice among members of the police force. Surprisingly, few studies have assessed the effectiveness of existing police ethics training programs on prejudice and social dominance orientation. Therefore, we assessed the impact of a 1-day training called the Holocaust, Police, and Human Rights (HPH) program on the attitudes related to ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation of 223 members of the Belgian police. Analyses of three-wave panel data indicate that HPH training reduced ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation. For ethnic prejudice, the reduced effects were maintained after 1 month in the follow-up study. However, the effect of training on prejudice was weaker for police officers who were more often exposed to victims and perpetrators of crime. No lasting effect of HPH training was found for social dominance orientation.

Keywords
ethics training, ethnic prejudice, police officers, social dominance orientation

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Introduction
George Floyd’s death provoked Black Lives Matter protests around the globe against police misconduct related to (ethnic) prejudice. The existing literature shows that Black men in the United States are twice as likely to be killed by the police during their lifetime than White men (Edwards et al., 2019). Concerns regarding police misconduct stemming from prejudice are prominent in Europe as well. Amnesty International (2020) recently reported that policing during the COVID-19 pandemic in 12 European countries exposed a pattern of racial and ethnic bias. Ethnic minorities and marginalized groups were disproportionately affected by lockdown measures.

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across Europe; they were more likely to be subjected to violence, discriminatory identity checks, and penalties for violations of COVID-19 restrictions (Amnesty International, 2020).

In Belgium, the context of the current study, stories concerning police officers’ potentially prejudiced behavior regularly appear in the news. In September 2020, newspapers reported on an investigation by Belgium’s federal police regarding racist remarks and glorification/encouragement of violence expressed by their active and retired members as they commented on protests against racism and police brutality and related subsequent arrests (“Racist Insults by Police,” 2021). In early 2021, another report emerged on the prosecution of 30 Antwerp police officers for racism against their colleagues expressed in a WhatsApp group (Lyons, 2021).

Indeed, (ethnic) prejudice appears to be a widespread phenomenon among police officers (Gatto & Dambrun, 2012). Besides the direct harm that prejudice causes to victims, prejudice among members of the police force may also undermine the public’s trust in the police as an institution. Not surprisingly, policymakers and police departments are under pressure to combat prejudice and are looking for concrete pathways to achieve this goal. Police administrators expect pre- and in-service training to provide police officers with the necessary skills to deal with diversity and consequently reduce prejudice among officers. Given the importance of the topic, it is surprising, as Skogan et al. (2015, p. 320) succinctly put, that “we know virtually nothing about the short- or long-term effects associated with police training of any type.”

Therefore, this article reports on the impact of a 1-day training program titled the Holocaust, Police, and Human Rights (HPH) program on police officers’ attitudes regarding prejudice, especially ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation. This training program, created in 2014, was held at the Holocaust Remembrance Museum in Belgium (Spruyt & van Droogenbroeck, 2018). The HPH training was adapted to members of the Belgian police and focused on the causes and mechanisms of collective violence and the role of police officers in such events. Through interactive examples from their own work experience, former police officers served as trainers. This training aimed to emphasize the individual obligation to act when encountering misconduct by fellow officers. We evaluated the immediate (after 1 day) and long-term (after 1 month) effects of this training on ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation based on three-wave panel data gathered from 223 Belgian police officers who participated in the program.

This study contributes to the literature in two ways. First, studies exploring the effects of police training on police attitudes and behaviors remain scarce (but see Engel et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2020; Owens et al., 2018). Our study contributes to the literature by investigating the role of in-service training in reducing police prejudice and by examining the potential effects of training through emotional or cognitive pathways. Second, most experimental studies on intergroup relations are lab-based and aim for high internal validity, thus raising questions about possible generalizability. In contrast, our field study has high ecological validity since we examined actual police officers participating in a well-established training program continuing since 2014.

Intergroup Attitudes: Social Dominance Orientation and Ethnic Prejudice

In this study, we assessed the effect of training on intergroup attitudes and, more specifically, on prejudice. Prejudice is generally defined as unjustified negative attitudes and/or feelings toward (members of) social groups (Crandall & Stangor, 2005). It is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by intraindividual, interpersonal, macroinstitutional, and societal factors (Dovidio et al., 2010). Social identity theory is a framework for understanding intergroup dynamics, including the psychological underpinnings of prejudice (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It posits that people have a natural tendency to categorize themselves and others into groups. The social identity approach posits that a portion of our self-concept is
derived from the perceived membership of relevant social groups (Hogg & Reid, 2006). When social identities are salient, individuals tend to favor in-group members over out-group members, and see themselves (and other group members) less as individuals and more as interchangeable exemplars of the group prototype. In this process, within-group similarities, intergroup differences, and stereotype-consistent attitudes and behaviors are emphasized. It is well established that when social identities are salient and in-group preferences arise, it can lead to prejudice toward out-group members. Although prejudice can be oriented toward a wide range of groups, ethnic prejudice has attracted much scholarly attention, especially when it concerns prejudice among police officers.

Previous literature indicates that people who harbor prejudice are more likely to choose a career as police officers (i.e., self-selection) and, in turn, are more likely to be selected by police departments (i.e., institutional selection; Gatto et al., 2009; Sidanius et al., 2003). It is reasonable to assume that this link originates from an authoritarian climate associated with professions that encounter dangerous situations in their work life. This applies to sectors such as the army, firefighters, or the police, which operate under a strictly hierarchical regime. The expected submission to hierarchy and compliance with orders (which follows from the organizational necessity of a hierarchy in command) is likely to be associated with authoritarianism. In other words, prejudiced people tend to endorse obedience and authoritarian aggression, which is one of the reasons why they choose a career in law enforcement and are selected for such jobs by their agencies. Hence, the (self-) selection of police officers in policing is biased toward authoritarianism. Authoritarianism is a well-known and substantial predictor of intergroup prejudice (e.g., Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Pratto et al., 1994; Whitley, 1999). Adorno’s classical F-scale, often used to measure authoritarianism, was originally intended as a covert measure of racism (Ray, 1988).

Police officers also become socialized with negative intergroup attitudes and ideological beliefs through social norms and social influence in police groups (Gatto & Dambrun, 2012; Zhao & Papachristos, 2020). Additionally, officers are chronically at risk of the consequences (e.g., negative behaviors) of exposure to segments of society that research shows elicit negative emotional reactions (e.g., homeless people, sex workers, people with serious mental illness), and to victims and perpetrators of crimes in general (Goff & Rau, 2020). Emotional hardening and increased prejudice serve as coping mechanisms for police officers who routinely have (negative) experiences with victims and perpetrators of crime.

After outlining the importance of studying prejudice in general, the two specific outcomes examined in this study, namely ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation, are discussed. Generally, social dominance orientation (SDO) is conceptualized as expressing “general support for the domination of certain socially constructed groups over other socially constructed groups, regardless of the manner in which these groups are defined [emphasis added]” (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001, p. 61). People who score high on social dominance orientation will use and prefer social ideologies (e.g., ethnic prejudice) that enhance group inequality, whereas people who score low on social dominance orientation will use and prefer ideologies that would attenuate group inequality. Empirical research has shown a strong relationship between social dominance and ethnic prejudice (Pratto et al., 1994). In their seminal work on social domination orientation, Sidanius and Pratto (2001, p. 49) explicitly acknowledged that even if part of the variation in social dominance orientation follows from “temperamental predispositions and personalities,” it is also affected by background characteristics and numerous socialization experiences, including education. Previous literature has shown that situational experiences can influence social dominance orientation (e.g., Dhont et al., 2014; Sibley & Liu, 2010). Specifically, Dhont et al. (2014) demonstrated that the level of social dominance orientation can be influenced by ethnic intergroup contact interventions.

Ethnic prejudice, the second outcome examined in this study, is generally defined as holding
negative attitudes toward someone from a different ethnic group. Ethnic prejudice often becomes generalized ethnic prejudice in which migration and coexistence of different cultures are regarded as impossible and undesirable (Spruyt et al., 2016). Indeed, studies have demonstrated that negative views about one out-group can quickly spill over to other out-groups, creating one or more “bands of others” (Kam & Kinder, 2012). Such attitudes are important for several reasons. First, people's behavior toward members of other ethnic groups is based on their ethnic sentiments (Lemmer & Wagner, 2015; Wagner et al., 2008). Second, the generalization process itself shows that these attitudes are often based on processes of oversimplification and motivated reasoning.

Studying these two outcomes raises the question of their theoretical relationship. In social dominance theory, social dominance orientation is considered a more general underlying factor that has a causal effect on the use of more specific legitimizing myths such as racism, sexism, and classicism (Kteily et al., 2011; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). Studying the effect of the training on both ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation enables us to assess the extent to which the training has a specific (i.e., ethnic prejudice; in the training, ethnic prejudice plays a central role) versus a more generalized effect (i.e., on social dominance orientation; two core features of police officers' job are the hierarchical organization of work and the multitude of groups they encounter during their daily work). It may be assumed that if training has an effect on SDO, it will also have an effect on ethnic prejudice, whereas the reverse should not necessarily be true.

In summary, combating prejudice is an important first step toward achieving police administrators' long-term aims of gaining legitimacy and residents' approval of the police as a legitimate agency. If civilians are unsure about whether the police will treat them ethically and fairly, evidence suggests that citizens lose trust in the police and are less likely to obey the law and cooperate with it (Tyler, 2006). Therefore, police administrators are exploring ways to effectively change officers' attitudes and behavior.

**Police Ethics Training**

The goal of police training is to teach a certain manner of accomplishing a task and learning the official rules regulating police officers' behavior. Just as police officers require training for proper usage of tasers, batons, or guns, exercising ethical behavior also requires appropriate training (Wyatt-Nichol & Franks, 2009). Ethics training helps police officers, particularly new recruits, bridge the gap between the behavior regulated by official rules and actual behavior on the street (Wyatt-Nichol & Franks, 2009). As police officers are often in a position to use discretion, ethics training is expected to teach them how to exercise discretion without prejudice or discrimination (see e.g., Cohen, 2021). As White (2006, p. 397) pointed out, “we get exactly the police officers we ask for, and they behave in just the way they have been trained.”

In most situations, police ethics training is a stand-alone course that does not cover all areas of police work (e.g., Haberfeld, 2018). Despite some claims that ethics is part of general departmental training, it is uncommon to see this topic woven across all training modules. This approach creates an artificial divide between ethical policing ideals (taught in ethical training) and everyday police operations (taught in all other aspects of training).

In countries where policing is more decentralized, efforts to implement ethics training can vary immensely, resulting in no real mandatory standards (Klockars et al., 2006). For example, in the United States, ethics training—which can range from a few hours to a few days and includes a small proportion of the training curriculum overall—generally depends on the financial resources of police agencies that might involve or outsource the program completely to state criminal justice organizations, colleges/universities, or private consulting companies (Cohen, 2021; Wyatt-Nichol & Franks, 2009). Studies indicate that the duration of ethics training at police academies is very short (e.g., Cohen, 2021; Delattre, 2011; Gaffigan & McDonald, 1997; Wyatt-Nichol & Franks, 2009) and that public administration
training at police training academies typically accounts for a mere 3% of the training curricula (Cohen, 2021). Additionally, in-service ethics training is provided less often than pre-service training (e.g., Trautman, 2000; Wyatt-Nichol & Franks, 2009). In more centralized police agencies, such as in Belgium, a more standardized approach is followed, where the same training is offered to all employees of their nationalized police agencies. Furthermore, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) offers modules on police ethics and fundamental rights that last between 4 and 6 days (European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training, 2021).

In Belgium, which is the context of this study, police officers are trained in ethics in two ways. First, cadets undergo ethical training during regular mandatory training in police academies. By law, a subject on police integrity must be included in the curriculum of all police academies. The regulations specify the goals of ethics training, which include learning about police integrity, the code of ethics, police misconduct, police organizational ideals, and their discretionary power (Maesschalck & De Schrijver, 2015). Second, as part of their ongoing professional development in service training, police officers can enroll in ethical training programs. The Holocaust, Police, and Human Rights Training is one such program.

In general, Prenzler and Ronken (2016) stated that effective ethics training must define clear expectations and aid in the resolution of ethical dilemmas. It is clear that (a) the recruitment, screening, and selection efforts that precede training, (b) the socialization efforts of peers and superiors that follow it, and (c) a variety of less obvious organizational, political, and economic factors have a significant impact on the programs’ potential influence (Klockars et al., 2006). One of the most important questions regarding in-service training is whether it is possible to design programs that effectively modify officers’ attitudes and behaviors. Thus, studies need to assess the impact of real interventions (rather than laboratory experiments). This was the objective of the present study.

Effects of Ethics Training on Attitudes Related to Prejudice

In 2004, the U.S. National Research Council (Skogan & Frydl, 2004, p. 154) concluded that “particular programs to enhance police training and education are developed and offered without scientific evidence of their likely effects.” Skogan and Frydl (2004) advocated the development of comprehensive and scientifically rigorous programs that could be used to test the effectiveness of police training and education. A decade later, Huey (2018, p. 1) published a paper presenting the results of a failed systematic review of studies exploring the effectiveness of in-service training and wrote that, “[a]fter initially narrowing the search results to 21 studies, the review had to be abandoned because there was an insufficient number of studies on any one topic or training technique.” Indeed, it is by no means surprising that the effects of training on police attitudes and behaviors related to prejudice are under-researched (Skogan et al., 2015).

In a recent meta-analysis on the effectiveness of prejudice reduction interventions by Paluck et al. (2021), none of the 418 studies targeted police members. Similarly, in a meta-analytic study by Bezrukova et al. (2016) on 40 years of research on diversity training evaluation, only one study targeted police attitudes toward people with intellectual disability (Bailey et al., 2001). Although there are some other intervention studies that target discrimination and stigmatization of people with mental health problems by police officers (Modgill et al., 2014; Pinfold et al., 2003), to the best of our knowledge, none of these studies have focused on ethnic prejudice among police officers.

Such a paucity of evaluations of police training to reduce ethnic prejudice is surprising given the importance of the topic, particularly in the 21st century with consistent problems of discrimination and racism among police officers, and the homogeneity of police officers as a group. For example, President Barack Obama’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015) recognized the potential role that implicit bias could play in producing disparities in policing. At the
same time, the Task Force demanded that police training be used to reduce the effects of this implicit bias. As mentioned before, in recent meta-analyses, no study focusing on police training that targeted explicit or implicit bias was included. However, in 2020, Worden et al. tested the impact of training on implicit bias in a randomized control trial. They found “insufficient evidence to conclude that racial and ethnic disparities in police enforcement actions [e.g., stops, frisks, searches, arrests, summonses, and uses of force] were reduced as a result of the training” (Worden et al., 2020, p. vi).

**The Holocaust, Police, and Human Rights Training**

In this section, we discuss the particularities of the training followed by police officers in this study. The Holocaust Remembrance Museum of Kazerne Dossin is located in Mechelen, Belgium. Its main mission is to foster an understanding of the causes of collective violence. The Holocaust, Police, and Human Rights (HPH) training began in 2014 as part of the museum’s wider offering of learning trajectories for educational target groups (e.g., secondary school pupils and journalists). The training used the case of the Holocaust to draw participants’ attention to the timeless mechanisms of collective violence. The focus of the training is not on learning about the Holocaust and human rights but rather on learning from the Holocaust.

HPH training is a 1-day program for police officers that includes a museum visit and a workshop on human rights and ethical awareness (Kazerne Dossin, 2019). Participants came from all ranks of the Belgian police force. The Belgian integrated police service comprises both the federal (approximately 13,500 employees) and local police (approximately 35,100 employees). Both levels are independent but they collaborate closely (e.g., recruitment, code of behavior, and training) and are complementary. Both Flemish- and French-speaking police officers participated in this training. The museum is in Flanders but offers a training program in French.

The instructors of the HPH training are former police officers with extensive experience in the field. The HPH training consists of two main parts: in the morning session, the trainer takes the participants on a guided museum visit. Participants are asked to reflect on certain historical events (examples of stereotyping and the role of police officers during the Holocaust). After the visit, there is a debriefing where the group can express their impressions of the visit and discuss its relevance. In addition, the key concepts used in the museum are explained, such as the spiral of violence and the 10 stages of genocide, according to Stanton (2016). In the second part, in the afternoon session, participants follow a workshop in which contemporary ethical dilemmas related to their work life are discussed following Cooper's (2012) ethical decision-making model. The program has three main objectives. First, throughout the visit to the museum and the workshop, a connection is created between human rights violations during the Holocaust and current events and situations that violate human rights. Second, emphasis is placed on universal mechanisms, including dehumanization, the impact of propaganda, and the mass behavior that underpins group violence. In this regard, the process that might cause ordinary persons to perpetrate atrocities, rather than the historical events themselves, is the central focus. This automatically leads to a focus on issues such as peer pressure, polarization, and the spiral of violence and dehumanization. Because the police have a monopoly on the legitimate right to use force, special attention is paid to the role of the Belgian police during the Holocaust. The general role of the police in different cities and individual police officers who play an important role are also discussed. Third, the training emphasizes people’s willingness to act and their willingness to say “no” to injustice even in the direst of circumstances. To that end, the afternoon workshop focuses on ethical dilemmas (e.g., “A fellow police officer posts something racist on Facebook”). Participants discuss these dilemmas first in small groups and later in the whole group using Cooper’s (2012) ethical decision-making model. In the second phase of
the group discussion, the behavior described in the ethical dilemmas is related to the police code of conduct.

The HPH training aims to (a) foster awareness that enable people to continue using their existing degrees of freedom and leverage in challenging circumstances and not blindly obey any instructions that might be given, and (b) teach participants the skills required to recognize and analyze ethical dilemmas and make reasonable choices. In conclusion, the HPH training moves away from traditional deontology courses by teaching police officers how to deal with difficult situations involving ethical dilemmas. The training might be considered a type of remembrance education within the larger scope of peace education programs (Spruyt et al., 2014).

Research Strategy and Hypotheses

The preceding arguments illustrate that there is a great paucity of studies assessing the potential effects of real-life police training. Indeed, although many lab experiments have demonstrated the mechanisms that lead to ethnic prejudice and/or social dominance orientation with great internal validity, studies with high ecological validity that assess the potential effects of real-life efforts aimed at changing attitudes are nonexistent. This study aimed to fill this gap by examining the impact of a 1-day training program on police officers’ ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation.

It was expected that after the HPH training, participants would show lower levels of ethnic prejudice (Hypothesis 1) and social dominance orientation (Hypothesis 2). Although interesting, support for this general expectation cannot be considered as strong evidence for the effectiveness of the program. Indeed, in this design, we worked with an experimental group only because it is difficult to find a comparable control group that can be measured multiple times. Therefore, to get closer to potential causal effects, we examined (a) whether the change in attitudes after HPH training was stronger among theoretically meaningful subgroups and (b) whether we can attribute the observed change in attitudes to aspects that reflect how participants subjectively experienced the training. Indeed, such effects, whose patterns are theoretically meaningful, would lower the risk that our results can simply be attributed to the Hawthorne effect.

Different potential moderation patterns were expected. First, respondents differed on the extent of their openness to change. For some participants (i.e., trainees), participation in this training was a mandatory part of their police training. This implies that some participants might not have been convinced about the relevance of the program. Because the duration of the program in this study was only 1 day, it is likely that the effects of training on ethnic prejudice (Hypothesis 1b) and SDO (Hypothesis 2b) are larger among respondents who are open to training and believe it can help them. Second, it is clear that participants from different departments will have varying contacts with victims and perpetrators of crimes. It is reasonable to expect that participants with extensive experience working with victims and perpetrators of crime are likely to be more accustomed to situations where serious misconduct occurs. This may make it more difficult for a 1-day program to curtail the effects of the chronic aspects of their daily work environment. For them, the effect of training on ethnic prejudice (Hypothesis 1c) and SDO (Hypothesis 2c) was expected to be weaker.

Emotions and cognitive processes contribute to the expression (and reduction) of prejudice and are its potential mediators (Paluck et al., 2021). There has been extensive discussion about how cognitive processes and emotions relate to each other (e.g., Storbeck & Clore, 2007). Research inspired by social identity theory, for example, has often shown that the mere awareness of belonging to or the identification with a category has an independent effect on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (i.e., a categorization effect), but that the feelings of emotional attachment to the category or group have much stronger behavioral outcomes. However, in the more general literature on emotions, it is often suggested that one
function of affect is to regulate cognitive processes. The exact directionality of the interdependence of cognition and emotion is, for our purpose, less important. Therefore, we attempted to operationalize both pathways (cognitive vs. emotional) toward attitude (change) and assess their relative importance.

As illustrated before, HPH training is a cognitive and emotional training based on the assumption that police officers can be trained to use thinking and emotion regulation strategies to reduce their prejudice. Regarding the relevance of the subjective experience of the emotional and cognitive impact of the training, we examined whether these experiences predict an observed change in ethnic prejudice and SDO. Following Westen (2008), who argued that the political brain is an emotional brain rather than a dispassionate calculating machine, we distinguished between a more (a) cognitive and (b) emotional pathway along which these changes might come about. Since the training targets both emotions and cognitive processes and it is unclear whether an emotional or cognitive pathway would have the strongest effect, we formulated a nondirectional hypothesis.

In summary, in the empirical part of this study, we examined the following hypotheses:

- Hypotheses 1 and 2: Participants who followed the HPH training will show lower levels of ethnic prejudice (H1) and social dominance orientation (H2).
- Hypotheses 1b and 2b: Participants who are open to training and believe it can help them will have a stronger reduction in ethnic prejudice (H1b) and SDO (H2b).
- Hypotheses 1c and 2c: The effect on ethnic prejudice (H1c) and SDO (H2c) will be weaker for participants who have more contact with victims and perpetrators of petty and serious crimes.
- Hypotheses 1d and 2d: The change in ethnic prejudice (H1d) and SDO (H2d) will be stronger among participants who are emotionally moved by the training.
- Hypotheses 1e and 2e: The change in ethnic prejudice (H1e) and SDO (H2e) will be stronger among participants who perceive the cognitive impact of the training.

Methodology

Design

We conducted a field study to assess the effectiveness of a 1-day training program using three longitudinal surveys. The researchers had no influence over the content or length of the training program. Participation in this study was voluntary. Data were collected between February 2017 and December 2017, during which, 83 HPH training sessions were conducted at the museum. Prior to the training’s commencement, police officers were requested to participate and complete the first questionnaire (i.e., the pretest). At the end of the pretest, participants were asked to provide their email addresses if they were willing to participate in the posttest and follow-up surveys. The posttest survey was administered the day after training. Finally, a follow-up survey was administered 1 month after the initial visit. Respondents who provided a valid email address were contacted a maximum of three times for the posttest and follow-up surveys, with the request to participate. As indicated before, both Flemish- and French-speaking police members could participate in the training. The questionnaires were translated from Dutch to French by the federal police translation departments. The translations were cross-checked with French-speaking academic colleagues.

Data

The posttest and follow-up surveys were only administered to individuals who provided a valid email address on the pretest. During the pretest, 1,255 participants were surveyed. About half of the participants (52.7%; 661) provided valid email addresses and indicated that they would be prepared to engage in follow-up surveys. About half (48.6%; 321) of those who answered that they wished to participate in future surveys and provided a valid email address responded to the email invitation and participated in the second survey.
Our response rate of 48.6% is identical to the response rate reported by Nix et al. (2019) as the average response rate for police surveys distributed via alternative methods (e.g., email, online). Finally, one third (33.7%; 223) of those who expressed an interest in participating in future surveys and supplied their email address participated in the third and final survey (follow-up). Compared to the pretest, the final follow-up response rate was 17.8% (223 out of 1,255). We considered this response rate satisfactory in light of the fact that respondents could not be contacted in any manner other than through the email addresses they provided to the research team. Our final sample consisted of 223 respondents, of whom, 60 (26.9%) were trainees, 90 (40.3%) were police officers, 35 (15.7%) were in management positions (e.g., police chief), and 38 (17.0%) belonged to another category (e.g., administrative staff). The majority of participants were Flemish speaking (82.1%). This is a consequence of the museum being located in Flanders, making it less convenient for police officers from the French-speaking part of Belgium to participate.

Nonresponse bias was analyzed through the extent to which participants in the posttest and follow-up groups were representative of the overall group that took part in the study’s pretest (see Appendix in the supplemental material). The nonresponse analysis revealed that posttest selectivity was confined to a number of sociodemographic variables (e.g., age and language group) as well as the participants’ positions within the police force (i.e., participation in the follow-up was lower among trainees, younger participants, and French speakers). Weight coefficients were determined, to account for these differences. This ensured that the relative distribution of these features in the data from the pretest and posttest was identical to that of the HPH training group that participated in the pretest. We found no indications of selection effects according to sociopolitical views (e.g., authoritarianism, sensation seeking) and specific working conditions (e.g., frequency of contact with victims and perpetrators of crimes, perceived culture of openness to discuss problems, and racism within the force).

**Measures**

**Dependent variables.** Ethnic prejudice was measured with four items (e.g., “Foreigners are generally not to be trusted,” “Foreigners contribute to the prosperity of our country”) derived from an Ethnocentrism Scale developed by Billiet et al. (1990). This scale measures generalized ethnic prejudice, in which migration and multiculturalism are considered undesirable. Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was .75, .79, and .80 for pretest, posttest, and follow-up, respectively.

Social dominance orientation was measured using five items (e.g., “We should not strive for equality between groups,” “Some groups of people are inferior to other groups”) from the Dutch version of the SDO scale, as translated by Duriez and van Hiel (2002). The scale measures belief in the fundamental inequality between social groups and represents this inequality as a good thing. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ($1 = \text{strongly disagree}, 5 = \text{strongly agree}$). For both ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation, summation scales were constructed (ranging from 0 to 100). Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was .75, .68, and .60 for pretest, posttest, and follow-up, respectively.

**Predictor variables.** Our multivariate models were constructed in two steps. First, sociodemographic and work-related variables were included and measured in the pretest. These were years of service with the police, gender ($0 = \text{female}, 1 = \text{male}$), and police function ($0 = \text{trainees}, \text{police in management (e.g., chief constable), and others (e.g., advisor)}; 1 = \text{police officers (e.g., uniformed officers, detectives)}$). Respondents’ contact with victims and perpetrators of petty and serious crimes was measured using a scale developed by van Craen (2015) with five items (e.g., “How often do you come into contact with perpetrators of petty crime and/or nuisance during your work?”; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ($1 = \text{every day}, 5 = \text{never}$). A proxy variable was also employed to measure the degree to which participants were open to change by asking respondents, “Do you think an education like
HPH can influence your views and way of thinking?” (0 = no or doubts, 1 = yes).

Finally, two indicators that referred to people’s experiences during the training program were incorporated and measured in the posttest. The degree to which participants were emotionally moved by the training was referred to as the perceived emotional impact of the course. Participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 5 = frequently) how much they experienced seven emotions (e.g., “rage,” “powerlessness,” “compassion”; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$). Perceived cognitive impact was measured using four items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree; e.g., “The training made me think about human rights,” “I really learned something about ethical dilemmas that I will use if it comes in handy in a particular situation”). Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$.

### Analysis

The analysis was conducted in two steps. First, MANOVA with repeated measures (within-subject design) was used to assess whether the training had an impact on ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation over time (pretest vs. posttest vs. follow-up; see Table 1). Second, multivariate multilevel linear regression analysis was used to investigate whether the impact of training on ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation differed between subgroups and followed an emotional or cognitive pathway (see Table 2). In this final step, we used the difference score of the posttest minus the pretest for the two outcomes (e.g., ethnic prejudice before training vs. ethnic prejudice after training). Standardized coefficients for the multilevel models were obtained from unstandardized coefficients using the formula proposed by Hox et al. (2017, p. 18).

Since our findings suggested that the training effects remained stable or declined between the posttest and follow-up, only the difference between the pretest and posttest was considered. A positive difference score indicated that HPH training resulted in a desirable change (e.g., less ethnic prejudice). The two models were analyzed for each outcome. Sociodemographic background and work-related variables were entered into Model 1. In Model 2, the perceived cognitive and emotional effects of the training were entered.

### Results

#### Effects of the HPH Training on Ethnic Prejudice and Social Dominance Orientation

Table 1 shows whether respondents’ ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation changed after the HPH training. The results of the

| Table 1. One-way MANOVA for ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation at three time points. |
|------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|                                            | Ethnic prejudice (0–100) | Social dominance orientation (0–100) |
|                                            | $M$      | $SE$     | $M$      | $SE$     |
| Pretest                                   | 35.92    | 1.48     | 34.08    | 1.45     |
| Posttest                                  | 33.47    | 1.47     | 31.17    | 1.33     |
| Follow-up                                 | 33.83    | 1.47     | 32.01    | 1.31     |
| $\eta^2$                                  | .04      |          | .03      |          |
| $p$                                       | .003     |          | .024     |          |
| $p$ post hoc tests                        | $p$      |          | $p$      |          |
| 1 vs. 2                                   | .002     | .098     |
| 1 vs. 3                                   | .01      | .436     |
| 2 vs. 3                                   | .600     |          |

**Note:** 
- Ethnic prejudice scores range from 0 to 100, where higher scores indicate greater prejudice.
- Social dominance orientation scores range from 0 to 100, with lower scores indicating a higher social dominance orientation.
- Results are based on one-way MANOVA with repeated measures.
- $\eta^2$ represents the effect size.
- $p$ values indicate the significance of the results.
- $p$ post hoc tests compare specific time points.

The analysis revealed a significant decrease in ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation after the training. The effect sizes were moderate ($\eta^2 = .04$ for ethnic prejudice; $\eta^2 = .03$ for social dominance orientation), indicating a moderate impact of the training on these variables.
One-way repeated-measures MANOVA showed a multivariate main effect, Wilks' $\lambda = .89$, $F(4, 134) = 4.01$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2 = .11$. Mauchly’s test for sphericity was significant for ethnic prejudice, $W = .95$, $\chi^2(2) = 6.93$, $p < .031$, and social dominance orientation, $W = .89$, $\chi^2(2) = 16.04$, $p < .001$, thus violating the assumptions of sphericity. Single effects for each outcome were estimated after univariate ANOVA with repeated measures, and a Greenhouse–Geisser correction indicated a significant interaction between case type and time for ethnic prejudice, $F(1.91, 261.03) = 5.93$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 = .04$, and social dominance orientation, $F(0.80, 246.56) = 3.79$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .03$.

For ethnic prejudice, the means revealed that respondents reported less ethnic prejudice both immediately posttraining, $\Delta_2.45$, CI $[0.93, 3.96]$, $p = .002$, and in the follow-up, $\Delta_2.08$, CI $[0.43, 3.74]$, $p = .014$ (supporting H1). For social dominance orientation, a significant drop, $\Delta_2.91$, CI $[1.08, 4.73]$, $p = .002$, was observed when scores were compared before and after training. Comparing the pretest with the follow-up, there was a decrease in social dominance orientation, but this was not significant, $\Delta_2.07$, CI $[-0.38, 4.51]$, $p = .098$ (H2 was not supported). This implies that for SDO, a recidivism effect was observed; after an initial drop in the posttest, follow-up scores returned to baseline.

There were no statistically significant differences between the reported ethnic prejudice when posttraining was compared to the follow-up, suggesting that once the effects of HPH training have occurred, they remain relatively stable over time.

**Multivariate Models of Changes in Ethnic Prejudice and Social Dominance Orientation**

Table 2 reveals similar results for the multivariate linear regression analysis of the impact of training on ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation. For the shift in ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation between pretest and posttest, Model 1 found little difference between subgroups. Most indicators were insignificant. Only contact with victims and perpetrators was...
significantly related to a shift in ethnic prejudice ($\beta = -0.27, p < .001$) and social dominance orientation ($\beta = -0.20, p < .009$). This pattern suggests that the effect of training was weaker for participants who had more exposure to victims and perpetrators of crimes (supporting H1c and H2c). The belief in the general effectiveness of peace education programs was unrelated to ethnic prejudice (not supporting H1b) but significantly related to social dominance orientation ($\beta = -0.16, p < .018$; supporting H2b).

Model 2 investigated whether perceived emotional and cognitive impacts are mechanisms through which a change in ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation is achieved. Only perceived emotional impact ($\beta = 0.17, p = .020$), that is, being emotionally touched by the training, was significantly related to a reduction in social dominance orientation (supporting H2e but not supporting H2d). This indicates that the effect of HPH training mainly followed an emotional pathway for social dominance orientation, rather than a cognitive pathway. However, for ethnic prejudice, neither the perceived emotional nor the cognitive impact was related to the shift in ethnic prejudice (not supporting H1d and H1e).

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Given the widespread prejudice- and racism-related misconduct among police officers worldwide, it is crucial to assess the effectiveness of real-world ethics training programs developed for police officers. However, surprisingly little research has investigated the effectiveness of such training, either at the police academy or in service. To partially fill this gap, we explored the impact of a 1-day police ethics training program—Holocaust, Police, and Human Rights (HPH)—on the ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation of 223 Belgian police officers.

The main goal of HPH training is to teach participants about the origins and mechanisms of collective violence and how to handle ethical dilemmas in their daily job context. The training discusses and depicts how large-scale group violence often begins with minor discriminatory incidents that can quickly escalate into collective and widespread violence through processes of dehumanization and polarization. Throughout the training, the role of the police during the Holocaust (e.g., heroic acts by individual police officers and how the police in some cities assisted the Nazi occupiers) is used to illustrate the difference between blindly obeying orders and resisting such orders. This is important given that the police, in response to the functional needs that follow from working in potentially dangerous situations where one has to be able to take and execute decisions quickly, is strongly hierarchically organized. The training is connected to current events using real-world examples from police agencies. The ultimate goal is to equip police officers with the tools and abilities they need to deal with the ethical challenges and potential peer pressure they may experience. The training’s main theme is that in any situation, a police officer has the ability to say “no” to injustice and accept responsibility.

Our data suggest that HPH training had a significant and lasting (i.e., until at least 1 month after the training) impact on ethnic prejudice. Members of the police force reported less ethnic prejudice after training, both immediately and after a month. The results were less clear regarding social dominance orientation. Although less social dominance orientation was reported between the pre- and posttest, there was an increase in social dominance orientation at the follow-up survey. The results suggest a tendency for social dominance orientation to return to baseline (i.e., pretest), which is in line with previous literature indicating that social dominance orientation is more stable, but can nevertheless be influenced by situational factors (Bratt et al., 2016; Kteily et al., 2011; Sibley & Liu, 2010). Sibley and Liu (2010) showed that social dominance orientation can be influenced by both slow-changing situational factors over time (e.g., resource scarcity) and more short-term factors. The latter can temporarily increase or decrease the cognitive accessibility of the motivation to achieve group-based dominance. HPH training seemed to have an emotional impact on participants, which temporarily impacted social dominance orientation, after which, social dominance orientation...
returned to baseline. The hopeful element in this observation is that even a fundamental element such as social dominance orientation can be influenced (albeit temporarily) by deliberate and focused training. It would be beneficial to expand such training interventions by making them longer and embedding them more strongly in the work of the police force itself.

The effects of HPH training on both ethnic prejudice and social dominance orientation were weaker for members of the police who were more often exposed to victims and perpetrators of crimes. According to previous literature, such exposure causes emotional hardening and can lead to increased prejudice as a coping mechanism, potentially reducing the impact of ethics training (Dhont et al., 2010; Goff & Rau, 2020). It is important for police trainers to be aware of such dynamics, as police officers arguably have the greatest need for such training.

The design of our field study had important and well-known limitations (Schweizer et al., 2016). First, it is important to note that we studied attitudes related to prejudice and not behavior. The observed effects over time may have causes other than the effects of training itself. Changes in self-report measures, rather than actual changes in ethnic prejudice, may reflect participants’ familiarity with the questionnaire, awareness of the goals of the study, or awareness of being the subject of a study. Future research could explore a true experimental design and include behavioral measures. Second, the study was conducted in a natural setting where we assessed the impact of an existing training program. This implies that we had no control over those who participated in the study. Some participants attended the training voluntarily, whereas for others, it was mandatory. This might have induced a partial selection bias (e.g., police officers who are interested in social rights, the history of the Holocaust, and who believe in the general effectiveness of such training might be more inclined to participate voluntarily). Although we did not find any differences between police officers who believed in the efficacy of such training and those who did not, other selection effects may be possible. Third, although the organizers of the HPH training provided extensive training to the trainers and created a uniform program, it is possible that there were differences in the training sessions. Fourth, we explored emotional and cognitive impacts as possible explanatory mechanisms. However, other mechanisms might also be involved. For example, the common in-group identity model posits that social bias can be reduced by uniting people who identify with different social groups in one larger, superordinate group (Gaertner et al., 2016; Riek et al., 2010). Because the program focuses on rehumanizing the “other,” further research could explore the impact of the training on establishing such a common in-group identity. Finally, our third survey was administered 30 days after the training. It is unclear whether the effects we observed for ethnic prejudice would remain in a longer time frame. Future research should apply a longer follow-up period.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study adds to the scarce literature on the impact of ethics training on police officers’ attitudes toward prejudice in a natural setting. Our results demonstrate that peace education in the form of a Holocaust remembrance training program tailored to police officers has the potential to reduce ethnic prejudice. However, we found no support for this program’s effect on respondents’ generalized social dominance orientation.

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**Supplemental material**

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

**References**


