

# Moral ethics and racial profiling

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



## **Introduction**

Racial profiling has been an increasingly common occurrence by law enforcement authorities over the years. Racial profiling is an event where an individual is treated differently or scrutinized more than others due to negative assumptions arrived upon based on race or other determinant factors (Legewie, 2016). Daniel and Ezra are both victims of profiling by the police. They were both stopped and searched by police in New York city. None of them had committed any crime or intended to commit any crime, but they were singled out because of the way they looked. Daniel, who is of African origin, felt that he was targeted because of the color of his skin. Ezra however finds this to be necessary while sympathizing with the plight of the police who have the unenviable task of ensuring that everyone is safe. Authorities often claim that the stop-search routine is carried out randomly but the general opinion is that it happens to specific groups of people more than others. The reasons that are mostly given by police enforcement for racial profiling are safety, security and public protection (Briggs, 2014). The question however still remains, are law enforcement justified in profiling people based on their race, religion appearance or ethnicity? This paper will delve into the morality of racial profiling.

## **Stakeholders**

The number of cases where a routine police stops has escalated and led to a serious implication have significantly increased over the years. This has led to significant increase in attention by the public calling out for police reforms and a reevaluation of the approach that law enforcement authorities apply. The first major stakeholders in this issue are therefore the police. The

methods they apply in suspect identification may not necessarily be based on the profiling system. However, due to the continual perception of various races being a bigger threat than others, they inadvertently find themselves in situations where they unconsciously identify the individuals from those races as greater threats.

Police oversight authorities also have a significant part to play in the issue of racial profiling. They ensure that the police officers act under the law. The 14<sup>th</sup> amendment facilitates the principle of equality for all before the law. This means that officers who actively profile suspects based on stereotypes without any basis for suspicion are breaking the law. Oversight authorities such as the internal affairs have the responsibility to ensure appropriate disciplinary measures are taken against the perpetrators of the crime.

The second major stakeholders are the various human rights groups and movements such as the ‘Black lives matter’ movement. These movements help keep the authorities in check. They help to identify and uncover incidences that would go unmentioned if the authorities were left to monitor themselves. These movements are critical since they play the role of civilian oversight. They help bring a voice to the tribulations and often organize protests and demonstrations in order to force a form of disciplinary action on the perpetrators.

### **Utilitarianism**

Utilitarianism is a way of ethical thinking that helps an individual distinguish between right and wrong based solely on the impact of the outcome (Mill, 2016). It is an ethical theory developed by John Stuart Mills in the year 1861

and has remained extremely relevant in the realm of philosophy up to date. The concept of the theory is that the action that will serve to greatly benefit the largest number of people is the most ethical course to take. This theory is most used in justifying the great devastation caused by military action or war. The theory is however vulnerable to the fact that nobody knows the exact outcome of the future and whether a particular cause of action will be beneficial to all people involved.

### **Kant's moral theory**

Kant's moral theory stipulates that an activity cannot be deemed to be right or wrong based on the outcomes but on the fulfillment of an obligation by an individual (Vaughn, 2015). Immanuel Kant argued that the most significant concept of morality is a standard he called the categorical imperative. This principle is to be adhered to at all times regardless of the urges or desire to do anything different. The sense of duty is set by this categorical imperative. If the morality is based on the categorical imperative, one has no option but to act on it.

### **Discussion**

Based on the above theories, the issue of morality of racial profiling can be tackled on two aspects. The theory of utilitarianism can be used to justify the utilization of racial profiling by claiming that it is being conducted to ensure public safety. The consequences of these actions are for the greater good for all thereby the continual use of the profiling system is justified. The profiling however does not completely guarantee the improvement of the security situation or even the reduction of crime.

Using the Kantian theory, the sense of morality implies that the action of racial profiling is wrong by itself. The theory's deontological approach to the sense of obligation is key in determining the immorality of the actions. The police have the duty to uphold the law, the same law that stipulates that all people are equal in the eyes of the law. By treating people differently just because they look like they may potentially break the law, the police themselves are abandoning their duty in upholding the law and are subsequently acting immorally.

Racial profiling may be based on intrinsic qualities of an individual, considering the background they come from. Racism is still rife in the current time despite the general opinion that we live in post racial times. Racial profiling usually comes as a result of systemic racism where there social and political institutions have subtle expressions in the practice of racism (Feagin, 2013). This form of racism is very subtle and is not easily recognizable but closer scrutiny at the disparities present between the majorities and minorities in society will help bring it to light.

Ramifications of racial profiling in society are great with little to no benefits attached to the process. Daniel felt targeted even though he did not do something wrong. This has been a major issue especially to the African American society to in the US as the police view the male between age demographic of 15-45 as a threat and this preconceived bias puts both the policeman and the suspect at risk. A routine traffic stop may turn violent or even lead to fatalities if the police officer wrongly assesses the situation at hand. By perceiving the individual as a threat, the police officer may feel

justified to use appropriate force to nullify the threat and any sudden movement on the part of the suspect may lead to an unwarranted assault, shooting or death.

Racial profiling is an immoral method suspect identification and should be rooted out from the enforcement. The Kantian theory is more acceptable to my reasoning since the end should not always justify the means. Racial discrimination has led to entire communities living in fear. They do not feel safe walking out of their houses not because of the crime rate but because of the police the people who are tasked with keeping them safe. Even though people should be sympathetic to the immense task that the police force have of ensuring safety and security, proper procedures should be implemented in the carrying out of their duties.

The feeling that Daniel had of harassment is a common occurrence among innocent individuals who have been targeted for one reason or another. In the case of Daniel, we are not told whether he cooperated or not, but there are instances where lack of cooperation by the suspect warrants the officer to apprehend or contain the suspect using any means necessary within the law. This may lead to an escalation of the incident whereby if an altercation ensues the individual is now an offender and is liable for his crime. This may lead to a blemish in the record of the individual with listing of a felony such as the assault of an officer of the law.

According to Ezra, racial profiling made him feel safer because he felt that law enforcement authorities were carrying out their duties as expected. This however contradicts the reports that imply racial profiling has minimal

impact on the rates of crime in an area (Johnson, 2015). The perception of feeling safer is abstract and thereby the use of such tactics only serves to aggravate the minorities or the targeted groups.

## Conclusion

Police oversight authorities should put measures in place to ensure that the officers work within the stipulations of the law and stop systemic racism in the form of racial profiling. Crime does not have any color, religion or race. Anybody has the potential to commit a crime if the circumstances are right. Racial profiling is greatly immoral and measures should be put in place to ensure effective reforms are achieved to help prevent bias from dictating suspect profiling.

## References

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