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# Are they all the same? Norwegian police officers' personality characteristics and tactics of conflict resolution

Solveig Abrahamsen[a*] and Jon Strype[b]

[a]*Norwegian Social Research, Oslo, Norway;* [b]*The Norwegian Police University College, Oslo, Norway*

The issue of whether police officers possess certain personality characteristics that make them unique has been the subject of an extensive line of research. Several researchers have found evidence of a 'police personality', while other researchers have failed to detect personality differences between the police and the public. Making the picture even more complex, some researchers have found that officers differ from each other in terms of job performance, and that actual personality differences predict such variations. This study therefore examines personality differences between the police and the public by using the Big Five taxonomy of personality. It also explores differences in officers' job performance, using preferences for ways of resolving conflict situations as the job performance criterion. The study found support for the existence of a police personality. It also found differences in terms of preferences for conflict resolution tactics. Personality was only weakly related to such differences.

**Key words**: police personality; Big Five taxonomy; conflict resolution

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*Corresponding author.

## Introduction

The research is inconsistent as to whether police officers differ from the public in terms of personality characteristics. Some researchers have detected personality differences between the police and the public, supporting the existence of a 'police personality'. Other researchers have not found such differences. The present study applies two different methodologies to an examination of police officers' personality characteristics. The first method uses the well-known Big Five taxonomy of personality, which includes a core of five major personality factors. The second method is an analysis of individual police preferences for handling situations demanding conflict resolution in patrol work. The purpose of applying two methodologies is to discover whether a police personality indeed exists (implying personality differences between the police and the public), whether police officers differ systematically in terms of preferences for conflict resolution tactics and, if so, whether personality predicts preferences for tactics (implying personality differences between police officers). The purpose of the research is thus twofold: 1) To provide further knowledge concerning the existence of a police personality and 2) to investigate whether personality differences between officers are related to differences in preferences for conflict resolution tactics.

Before turning immediately to a personality inventory, however, we first need to review the literature on police personality to learn whether any common theme exists within the highly conflicting approaches and results of previous researchers. The sections following will then present the research project, the results, the analyses, and the conclusions.

## Literature review

### *Definition of police personality*

The discussion concerning 'police personality' has focused mainly on two areas: how to define the concept of police personality and how the police personality would develop. Personality refers to 'the unique organisation of characteristics that define an individual and determine that person's pattern of interaction with the environment' (Kleinmuntz 1982: 7). The concept of police personality refers to the question as to whether there is evidence 'for describing policemen as a somewhat homogeneous group, differing psychologically from the general population and/or other occupational groups' (Lefkowitz 1975: 4).

Characteristics that have been defined as common for police officers are attributes such as courage, authoritarianism, cynicism and aggression (Lefkowitz 1975, Twersky-Glasner 2005), as well as suspicion, conventionality and isolation (Evans *et al*. 1992, Rokeach *et al*. 1971, Skolnick 1994, Vastola 1978). Balch (1972) also highlights authoritarianism as an important element of police officers' personalities. Others claim that officers isolate their feelings and perceive expression of emotion as a weakness, and that they are pragmatic and action-oriented (Twersky-Glasner 2005). Skolnick (1994) believes that the elements of danger and authority, and the constant pressure of appearing efficient, make officers develop certain characteristics. Suspiciousness, resulting from the danger element - combined with the visible fact that officers constitute authority in most situations in which they are involved - may lead officers to isolate themselves socially from other people.

Much research has been conducted with respect to police personality, although extracting any consistencies from this research is difficult. There are many different attributes mentioned in the literature, and, despite some researchers having found consistent attributes for characterising police officers, some researchers have failed to find evidence of a police personality at all (Mahanta & Kathpalia 1984, Murrell *et*

*al*. 1978). Moreover, much of the research conducted with respect to police personality took place between the 1960s and early 1980s. Current research into police personality is sorely lacking.

### *Development of police personality*

The issue of the development of police personality involves a discussion of whether people who choose to become police officers share certain personality characteristics beforehand, or whether they become more homogenous throughout the process of occupational socialisation. According to the *psychological* paradigm, police officers share certain pre-occupational characteristics that make them choose a career within law enforcement (Vastola 1978), i.e. 'cops are born and not made' (Bonifacio 1991: 147). Researchers supporting the *sociological* paradigm perceive police personality to be a product of occupational socialisation; the demands inherent in the work of a police officer shape the personality of individual officers (Twersky-Glasner 2005, Vastola 1978). During the process of socialisation, certain skills and ways of behaving are acquired, as well as norms and values that are typical for this particular occupational group.

Researchers have found support for both the psychological and the sociological paradigms (e.g., Bennett & Greenstein 1975, Hanewicz 1978, Hogan & Kurtines 1975, Stradling *et al*. 1993). Thus, if a police personality does exist, it is a product of both disposition and occupational socialisation (Atamer 2003, Lefkowitz 1975, Trojanowitz 1971, Twersky-Glasner 2005). Certain types of people choose to become police officers. Certain types are admitted to education within the police, and those who do not fit the work quit or get fired. In addition to this combination of self-selection and formal selection, certain experiences and pressures have impact on the officers. Still, the lack of consistent findings leads Wilson and Braithwaite (1995) to claim that no firm conclusions can yet be made regarding the origin of police personality.

### *Personality differences between police officers*

The notion of police personality may give the impression that police officers possess very much the same personality characteristics. Certain types of people choose a career within law enforcement, and these people socialise into becoming even more distinct from the rest of the population. Contrary to the assumption of such homogeneity among police officers, a number of researchers have found personality differences among police officers. Such differences have typically been detected during studies of whether personality differences among police officers are related to differences in the level of success at work (success defined, for example, as not being fired, good supervisory ratings, and efficiency) (e.g., Bartol 1991, Gottlieb & Baker 1974, Mills & Bohannon 1980, Mufson & Mufson 1998, Shusman *et al*. 1984).

Consistent with the finding that police officers differ with respect to personality characteristics, various researchers in the field of police research have discussed different police *types*. People who belong to the same type have certain characteristics in common: a 'clustering of many different traits' (Pervin & John 2001: 5). Several typologies of police officers have been suggested (e.g., Finstad 2000, Granér 2004, Muir 1977). Muir (1977) uses the dimensions of *passion* and *perspective* to categorise police officers into four different types. Passion may be described as engagement, and is related to the degree to which an officer is able to justify using force. Perspective has to do with officers' ability to take both sides of a conflict into account and their ability to show empathy (Hochstedler 1981). Using the concepts of passion and perspective, Muir (1977) develops a typology of four police types: *the Professional* acknowledges that force is necessary on some occasions, but tries to restrict the use of force as much as possible by talking with colleagues and being open to new ideas. *The Reciprocator* is eager to help, but has problems accepting that he or she

sometimes has to use force. *The Enforcer* runs the risk of getting too caught up in enforcing the law, and has no problems using force. *The Avoider* hesitates to use force but lacks empathy for citizens (Hochstedler 1981).

## The working personality of police officers

The research into police officers' personality characteristics points in two directions: police officers possess similar attributes that separate them from the non-police population; and police officers differ from each other in important ways. Such differences have been found to be related to the success of individual officers and the concept of police types captures these differences. Adlam (1982) provides a solution to the confusion when discussing a police officer's 'working personality'. He reviews two different schools of thought in psychology. One considers people to be malleable, while the other looks upon people as possessing fixed qualities. While malleable individuals change according to the situation, people with fixed qualities act consistently regardless of the situation. The fixed quality perspective focuses on people's distinctive and enduring internal characteristics.

Adlam (1982) applies these contrasting schools of thought to the police. Malleable people would join the police force and experience serious change as they adopt the occupational role of police officer. Individuals with fixed qualities would not undergo such change; they would join the police force and keep all of their qualities intact, independent of the social situation. According to Adlam (1982), the view that people have fixed qualities is too narrow; all people possess social roles and act according to them. He believes that the view of people as completely malleable is too flexible; people maintain a self that is distinct from other people even though they act out different roles. 'Role players have a personality' (Adlam 1982: 346); thus '...police officer A treats prisoners differently from police officer B' (Adlam 1982: 346). Such differential treatment may be due to the two officers possessing different value systems or having different needs. Police officers may thus keep their private personalities and still play the role of police officer. This duality is summarised in the notion of a working personality (Adlam 1982), introducing an anthropological perspective on the development of police personality (as opposed to the psychological or the sociological perspective). Although police officers adopt a role, their personal backgrounds are equally important. This conclusion corresponds to the finding that officers as a group differ from the public at the same time as individual officers differ from each other.

The possibility that officers may possess certain common characteristics while simultaneously retaining their private personalities is highly remarkable. A police personality may thus exist, in addition to individual officers performing differently. Still, to determine in what ways officers are similar to each other and different from each other in terms of personality characteristics is a difficult task, given existing research. Not only have researchers focused on different personality characteristics, but they have also had inconsistent findings. When investigating the relationship between personality and job performance, researchers have typically used different personality inventories and different criteria of success, making comparisons hard to produce. Furthermore, both the predictor and criterion variables used in such research have come under criticism, bringing into question the validity of the results (see Sanders 2003).

## The present study

As a response to these problems, the present study aims to provide further insights into the personality characteristics of police officers and the relationship of such characteristics to job performance. To gain

systematic knowledge about officers' personality characteristics, we turned to the well-known Big Five personality taxonomy as an organising framework.

The personality inventory that we used in this study (the Big Five Inventory, BFI) derives from the Big Five taxonomy of personality. According to the Big Five, personality can best be defined in terms of five broad factors (the associated labels in parentheses): *extraversion* (talkative, assertive, adventurous, energetic), *agreeableness* (good-natured, flexible, cooperative, caring, trusting, tolerant), *conscientiousness* (responsible, careful, persevering, orderly, hardworking, planful), *emotional stability* (secure, stable, relaxed, self-sufficient, not anxious, tolerant of stress) and *openness to experience* (intellectual, curious, imaginative, cultured, broad-minded) (Mount *et al*. 1998: 146). The model has been widely acknowledged, with broad consensus that personality can be best described from these five dimensions (Black 2000, McCrae & John 1992). The five factors have been detected across languages, cultures and nationalities (Paunonen *et al*. 1992). (For a more elaborated discussion concerning the Big Five, see Goldberg 1993, Loehlin 1992.)

In addition, we investigated job performance in a different manner from that of previous studies. Instead of using job performance criteria such as supervisory ratings or job retention, we chose the officers' preferences for conflict resolution tactics as the criterion. Preferences for conflict resolution tactics have been shown to be related to the way in which officers behave on the street (Wilson & Braithwaite 1996). In other words, the tactic that a certain officer rates as effective in a certain situation is likely to be the tactic that he or she would employ in this same situation on the street. The effectiveness ratings of the tactics may thus be used as indicators of how officers would behave while doing their jobs. This relationship allowed for an indirect measurement of the relationship between police officers' personality characteristics and their behaviour in conflict situations. Specifically, the study investigated the following questions:

1. Do police officers' personality test scores vary from those of the general population?
2. Do police officers vary from each other in terms of preferences for conflict resolution tactics?
3. Do differences in police officers' personality profiles contribute to explaining the variation in preferences for conflict resolution tactics?

## Method

### Participants

The participants were 322 patrol officers working in various police stations and lensman's[1] offices in the police district of Hordaland in Norway. The response rate was 56% (179 officers).

### Design and procedure

The respondents received and answered a questionnaire used for measuring both their personality and their preferences for conflict resolution tactics. The personality test used in this study (the BFI) consists of 44 items, measuring each of the Big Five personality dimensions without facets. The items are short statements that describe people. Even though the BFI includes only 44 items, the inventory has impressively good psychometric properties. Cronbach's alpha (indicating the degree to which different items measure the same construct) for the five personality factors as measured by the BFI, is between .75 and .90, and test-retest

reliability (the degree to which individuals give the same answers when given a test at two different points in time) is between .80 and .90 (Engvik & Føllesdal 2005). Engvik and Føllesdal (2005) translated the BFI into Norwegian, and Cronbach's alpha was satisfactory during the use of the inventory in Norwegian.

To investigate differences between officers in terms of perceived effectiveness of conflict resolution tactics, we presented seven hypothetical situations as scenarios in the questionnaire. We based the situations on those used in an Australian study (Wilson 1993). Three police officers commented upon those of the situations from Wilson's (1993) study that we planned to include in the present study. We involved these officers to ensure that the situations were representative of those that the Norwegian police are likely to experience. Only details were changed in some situations, while we re-wrote other situations completely as a result of this feedback. The officers would have the opportunity to use discretion in all of the situations, thereby allowing measurement of individual differences in preferences for conflict resolution tactics.

Following each situation were 10 alternative approaches to conflict resolution (see Appendix 1 for descriptions of the seven scenarios and the 10 approaches). We based these conflict resolution tactics on the approaches in Wilson (1993). This study includes nine of the 12 tactics used in Wilson's (1993) study. In the analyses, we refer to them as: *physical force*, *bargain/compromise*, *wait and see*, *third party*, *argue*, *confrontational discussion*, *exchange information*, *call for advice* and *arrest*. We included one additional tactic, called *mutual discussion*. The respondents were told to read each story carefully and then to rate on a scale ranging from 1-9 how effective they believed that *each* of the approaches would be in dealing with *each* conflict situation. Only scale end points were labelled. '1' was labelled "approach with minimal effectiveness, while '9' was labelled "an ideal approach".

All patrol officers in the police district of Hordaland were invited to participate in the study, which was carried out in collaboration with the chief of police in the district. The officers learned by e-mail that in a few days they would receive an e-mail questionnaire. Along with the questionnaire, the officers received an e-mail invitation to participate in the study.


### *Limitations and ecological validity*

Other Western countries may differ in important ways from Norwegian culture. Police officers' personality characteristics and methods may thus vary from what we find in the present study. Police officers working in the United States, for example, are daily exposed to more violence and brutality compared to Norwegian officers, making work as a police officer more dangerous. Thus, American police officers may need different attributes and abilities. As a result, the characteristics of police personality could differ somewhat.

The American police may diverge from the Norwegian police also in terms of which ways of resolving conflicts they consider most efficient. This possibility applies for all countries in which violence is more prevalent and brutal than in Norway. Police officers' preferences for conflict resolution tactics may also depend on whether they bear arms. Norwegian police officers are normally unarmed; they bear arms only in extraordinary situations (Strype 2005). Norway is the only Nordic country in which police officers do not bear arms on a routinely basis (Knutsson & Norée 2005). Compared to police officers that are usually armed, Norwegian police may learn to trust other strategies of resolving conflicts. Police officers in the other Nordic countries, as well as in other countries in which police bear arms, may therefore value other tactics of conflict resolution.

In addition to the possibility of international differences, there may be national differences between the personalities and working styles of police officers. The respondents in this study were all patrol officers in the police district of Hordaland in Norway. For practical reasons we could not reach a representative sample. Still, there is no reason to believe that police officers in Hordaland differ significantly from police officers in other districts of Norway. The second largest town in Norway (Bergen) is situated within this police district, and

there are several built-up areas and rural districts in Hordaland. The officers in the sample were spread quite equally between rural districts and built-up areas and towns (small and large). We thus assume that the results would apply for other samples of Norwegian police officers, both those working in small areas and those working in towns. Still, regional differences in officers' views of conflict resolution cannot be ruled out based on the current sample.

The present research investigated the relationship between personality and preferences for conflict resolution tactics using hypothetical situations. Using scenarios is useful, in that they are standardised and easily administered. This benefit may be at the cost of external validity (Parker *et al.* 2004). Officers could utilise other tactics on the street than those being rated as most efficient in the questionnaire. Still, researchers have found officers' preferences for conflict resolution tactics to predict the way they behave on the street (Wilson & Braithwaite 1996). Sternberg and Dobson (1987) found evidence to support the ecological validity of hypothetical situations. Thus, we expect the respondents' ratings to indicate how they would respond on the street. This assumption needs further examination, though, as there may be several factors influencing officers' behaviour on the street. These may be factors such as temperature and noise, as well as the presence of spectators and other police officers (Wilson & Braithwaite 1995).

In addition to the limitations of hypothetical situations, the use of questionnaires in data-gathering entails certain problems. These are problems related to causal relationships, the possibility of third variables influencing observed relationships, those who do not respond differing in important ways from those who do respond, and the opportunity of respondents to distort their responses (Aldridge & Levine 2001). Researchers have frequently discussed the distortion of responses, especially in the context of personality tests being used to predict job performance. Rosse *et al.* (1998) discuss the possibility that job applicants may report personality characteristics that are slightly more positive than the reality. Applicants may also respond in a manner that reflects the characteristics they believe people with a certain role should possess. Such socially desirable responding is always a challenge when self-reporting constitutes the data.

Even though our subjects were incumbents and not job applicants, their responses may have been distorted in a socially desirable manner. The officers could picture an ideal police officer with certain personality characteristics and certain ideal ways of behaving. Moreover, all officers have gone through extensive training in which they have learnt how to proceed in various situations. Training combined with individual officers' perceptions of how an ideal police would behave, may lead them to believe that certain ways of acting are preferable (an assumption that certainly may be true). The respondents may thus rate certain tactics as effective, independent of these strategies being the ones they would employ on the field. In the same manner, the officers may report personality characteristics they believe to be indicative of the ideal police. Such characteristics may or may not correspond to the officers' real attributes.

Although people can provide socially desirable responses when told to (Barrick & Mount 1996, Nunnally & Bernstein 1994, Rosse *et al.* 1998), they do not necessarily do it in real life (Ones *et al.* 1996). Even if they do, several researchers have concluded that socially desirable responses do not distort the criterion-related validity of personality inventories (Barrick & Mount 1996, Hogan *et al.* 1996, Hough *et al.* 1990). In fact, scores on social desirability scales correlate with scores measuring personality characteristics (Barrick & Mount 1996, Dicken 1963, McCrae & Costa 1983, Nicholson & Hogan 1990, Ones *et al.* 1996, Smith & Ellingson 2002). Social desirability thus seems to represent personality trait variance instead of error variance (Ellingson *et al.* 1999, Hogan 1991), meaning that socially desirable responding does not threaten the construct validity of personality inventories (Smith & Ellingson 2002). McCrae and Costa (1983) discovered that validity *decreased* when they controlled for socially desirable responses. Mahanta and Kathpalia (1984) found that police officers also portray themselves in a less socially desirable manner compared to the non-police population. We thus assume that socially desirable responding does not constitute a problem in the present study.

**Results**

*Comparison between the personality of police officers and a reference group*

We compared the police officers' personality test scores with those of the sample used in Engvik and Føllesdal (2005) (investigating the reliability of the BFI in Norwegian). This sample is a convenience sample that is continuously being expanded to establish a norm for the distribution on the five personality factors in Norway. At the time we used the sample, it consisted mainly of Norwegian students and leaders (2/3 were students, 1/6 were leaders and 1/6 were 'others') (Engvik & Føllesdal 2005). As the sample comprised mainly students and leaders, it could be questioned that the original reference sample was representative of the general population. To minimize the possibility of falsely assuming a difference between the group of police officers and others, we constructed reference group t-scores from the personality test scores that consisted of both the original reference group (N=389) and the police officers (N=179) (total N=568). The police officers largely complemented the reference sample, which consisted mainly of students and leaders, as the group of police officers comprised more males, fewer academics and leaders, and a larger number of older people (as measured by years of experience in the police) (H. Engvik, personal communication, 3 March 2006). Figure 1 demonstrates the differences in personality test scores between the police officers and the reference group.
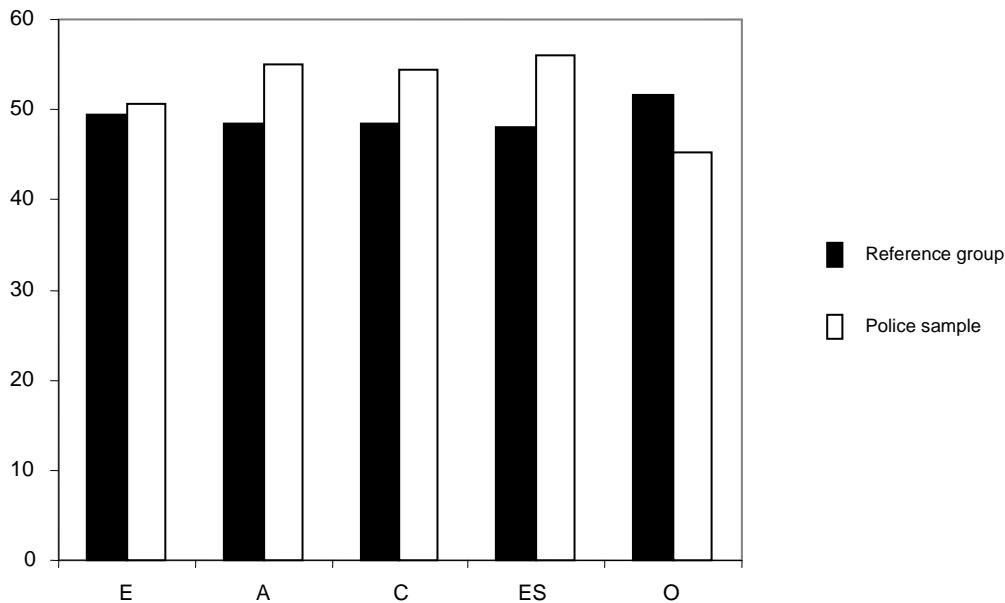


Figure 1. Comparison between the personality test scores of the police officers and the reference group.

We compared the t-scores of police officers with those of the reference group by carrying out independent samples t-tests for each of the five personality factors. The results appear in Table 1.

Table 1. *T*-score means and standard deviations for police and
a reference group in each Big Five dimension.

| | Reference group | | Police sample | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | SD | *M* | SD | t-value |
| E | 49.49 | 10.21 | 50.69 | 9.33 | 1.37 |
| A | 48.43 | 10.15 | 55.06 | 7.53 | 9.21** |
| C | 48.52 | 9.92 | 54.49 | 8.31 | 7.81** |
| ES | 47.95 | 9.96 | 56.08 | 7.31 | 11.57** |
| O | 51.57 | 9.89 | 45.17 | 9.23 | 7.54** |

** p<.01.

No significant difference existed between the police and the reference group on *extraversion* (E). A significant difference between the two groups showed up on *agreeableness* (A), *conscientiousness* (C) and *emotional stability* (ES), with police officers scoring higher than the reference group on all three dimensions (about half a standard deviation). The officers differed the most from the reference group on *emotional stability*, implying that they are considerably more emotionally stable than the reference group. *Openness to experience* (O) was the only dimension on which the officers scored significantly lower than the reference group (about half a standard deviation). Officers thus appear to be less open for new experiences than the reference group.

The results of the comparison between police officers and the reference group remained the same when we conducted the test independently for males and females. That is, the differences between male police officers and males in the reference group on the Big Five dimensions are about the same as the differences between female police officers and females in the reference group.

### Police officers' range of personality test scores

We compared the variance in scores for police officers and the reference group for each of the five personality dimensions (see Table 1 for the standard deviations) to investigate whether police officers are more similar to each other, compared with members of the reference group. If such an internal similarity existed, it would indicate that police officers constitute a more homogeneous group in terms of personality characteristics than does the reference group. Findings showed a significant difference in variance between the police and the reference group (including the police officers) on the following three dimensions: *agreeableness*, *conscientiousness* and *emotional stability*. Significantly less variance on these dimensions appeared within the group of police officers (about 75% of the variance in the reference group), suggesting that the police officers are more homogenous concerning personality characteristics.

### Internal consistency in police officers' preferences for conflict resolution tactics

An examination of internal consistency reliability for each of the 10 conflict resolution tactics revealed that all but one of the tactics (Third Party) had Cronbach's alpha values above .60. For nine out of 10 conflict resolution tactics we therefore constructed mean score indices representing officers' inclination to use the

respective tactics. Because seeking assistance from a third party in resolving a conflict may be a relevant measure in some kinds of situations and not in others, the Third Party tactic may be regarded as more situation-specific by nature than the other tactics, possibly explaining the low Cronbach's alpha for this tactic. Due to its low reliability we excluded this tactic from further analyses.

### *Variation in officers' mean ratings of the tactics*

We examined the degree to which officers vary in terms of preferences for conflict resolution tactics. If the officers very much agree on the effectiveness of a given tactic, examining the degree to which personality explains the variance in preferences for that tactic would be meaningless (given that there would be little or no variance to explain). Table 2 presents mean, standard deviation, range and skewness for each tactic.

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation, range and skewness for the conflict resolution tactics ($N$ =173-179).

| Tactic | Mean | SD | Range | Skewness | SE of Skewness |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wait & See | 3.43 | 1.55 | 8 | 0.86 | 0.18 |
| Physical Force | 4.58 | 1.43 | 8 | 0.17 | 0.18 |
| Bargain/Compromise | 5.22 | 1.64 | 8 | -0.05 | 0.18 |
| Argue | 3.96 | 1.87 | 7 | 0.09 | 0.19 |
| Confrontational discussion | 6.22 | 1.55 | 6.67 | -0.42 | 0.18 |
| Mutual discussion | 6.58 | 1.51 | 8 | -0.52 | 0.18 |
| Exchange information | 5.00 | 1.65 | 8 | 0.13 | 0.18 |
| Call for advice | 2.48 | 1.66 | 6.83 | 1.14 | 0.19 |
| Arrest | 3.51 | 1.42 | 7 | 0.38 | 0.18 |

The tactic *I would have asked for advice from a superior officer* was largely positively skewed, meaning that most officers did not believe in the effectiveness of this tactic (across the seven scenarios). The tactic *I would have waited to see whether the situation improved* was also positively skewed. Results of mean scores on each of the nine tactics (having excluded one tactic due to low reliability) showed that the officers proved to vary considerably from each other. On five of the nine tactics, the officers' mean rankings ranged from 1 to 9 (on a scale of 1 to 9). The group of police officers thus made use of the entire scale when ranking the tactics. Some of the officers did not believe in the effectiveness of certain tactics at all, while others rated these same tactics as highly effective across all situations. On the other four tactics the mean scores ranged from either 2 to 9, or from 1 to 8 (in both cases providing a range of 7). Even though the officers did not vary maximally from each other in effectiveness ratings of these tactics, they used almost the full scale. Standard deviation for the nine tactics varied from 1.4 to 1.9. Such disagreement as to the effectiveness of the different strategies makes examining the factors underlying the variation critical. In this study we limited this investigation to the influence of personality characteristics on preferences for conflict resolution tactics. First, however, we examined whether conflict resolution tactics could be fruitfully represented by meaningful superordinate constructs. This investigation was done by means of a factor analysis.

### *Patterns in police officer conflict resolution*

In preliminary analyses we found that a substantial number of police officers' preferences for conflict resolution tactics were significantly correlated. That is, a preference for one tactic (e.g., tactic 1), across situations, tended to be related to the preferences for other tactics (e.g., tactics 3 and 6). (Due to skewness in some of the conflict resolution tactics variables, both product-moment correlations and rank correlations were investigated. Correlation matrices r and rho: see Appendix 2). In an exploratory factor analysis of the nine

resolution tactic indices (one tactic was excluded due to low reliability) the conflict resolution tactics seemed to be fruitfully represented by two factors. The two-factor solution was based on the eigen-value criterion, inspection of the scree plot, and interpretability of the factors. The factor loadings are presented in Appendix 3.

One factor comprised tactics involving an element of seeking for information. This factor was thus labelled *Dialogue*. The second factor comprised tactics that were related to the use of force. This factor was thus labelled *Coercion*. Together the two factors explain 51% of the variance in the indices. Factor 1 explains 28.5% and factor 2 explains 22.6% of the variance. Mean scores (i.e., scores preserving the original scale metrics) were computed for both factors, excluding 'Wait & See' due to low loadings on both factors.

### The effect of personality on conflict resolution tactics

The second methodological approach we take in this study is to investigate whether personality differences are related to differences in preferences for tactics. In our analyses, we controlled for the influence of gender, years of experience on the force, and size of working area on the effectiveness ratings of nine conflict resolution tactics. As these variables explained only a small proportion of the variance in preferences for tactics, it seems reasonable to assume that for the present set of variables, any observed relationship between personality test scores and preferences for conflict resolution tactics derives from personality differences.

Table 3. Correlations between personality and conflict resolution tactics ($N$ =173-179).

| Tactic | E | A | C | ES | O |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wait & See | -.04 | -.05 | -.00 | -.03 | -.01 |
| Physical Force | .11 | -.10 | -.13 | -.05 | .19* |
| Bargain/Compromise | -.01 | .17* | .13 | .12 | .12 |
| Argue | -.01 | -.06 | -.01 | -.09 | .07 |
| Confrontational discussion | .14 | .02 | -.09 | -.08 | .06 |
| Mutual discussion | -.04 | .13 | .07 | .03 | .10 |
| Exchange information | -.00 | .22** | .10 | .09 | .16* |
| Call for advice | -.09 | .05 | .03 | -.18* | -.12 |
| Arrest | .00 | .01 | -.09 | .03 | -.01 |

*$p$<.05; **$p$<.01.

We investigated both product-moment correlations and rank correlations. However, the two analyses gave highly similar results. Thus, product-moment correlations are presented in Table 3 (for rank correlation matrix, see Appendix 4). As Table 3 shows, only a few correlations reached statistical significance. The largest correlation was between agreeableness and the conflict resolution tactic *I would be prepared to exchange opinions and give consideration to the other person's position* ($r$=.22, $p$<.01; $rho$=.20, $p$<.01). Personality seems to be somewhat related to differences in preferences for conflict resolution tactics, although the correlations were not prominent. Finally, we also correlated the personality factors with scores on the Dialogue and Coercion factors (resulting from the factor analysis). The only significant correlation was between agreeableness and the Dialogue factor ($r$=.15, $p$<.05).

**Discussion**

*Further evidence of police personality*

The present findings without doubt support the assumption that police officers vary from the public in terms of emphasis of certain personality characteristics. We found that police officers are significantly more *conscientious*, *agreeable* and *emotionally stable*, when compared with the reference group. The largest difference was for *emotional stability*, indicating that police officers are considerably more emotionally stable compared to the general population. *Extraversion* was the only dimension on which police officers did not differ from the public. On *openness to experience*, the officers scored lower than the public. Police officers evidently constitute a rather homogeneous group when it comes to scores on the Big Five personality dimensions. The variance in police officers' personality test scores was significantly lower than the variance in the personality test scores of the reference group for three of the five dimensions (*agreeableness*, *conscientiousness* and *emotional stability*). Given that the reference group was not a representative sample of the general population (although the officers were included in the sample), we cannot firmly claim that police officers are more homogeneous compared with those who are not officers. As several researchers have found the personality characteristics of police officers to differ from those of the general population, though, the homogeneity found in this group of police officers is highly interesting.

Atamer (2003) found that non-police students scored higher on *openness to experience* compared with police students. Topp and Kardash (1986) discovered that police officers are more conservative than the rest of the population, indicating less openness to new experiences. These findings are in line with our findings, that the police officers scored lower than the reference group on *openness to experience*. Consistent with the finding that officers are more emotionally stable compared with the public, Atamer (2003) found that students in the first year at the police academy scored lower on neuroticism (indicating emotional stability) when compared with the general population. Moreover, neuroticism decreased from the first to the second grade of the academy, indicating that officers socialise into becoming more emotionally stable. Burbeck and Furnham (1984) found that successful applicants to the police were less neurotic compared with unsuccessful applicants. These same researchers found that even the unsuccessful applicants scored higher on *emotional stability* compared to the non-police population. The findings from Atamer (2003) and Burbeck and Furnham (1984) suggest that applicants to the police force differ from the general population in terms of emotional stability, and those who are accepted into the police are those who are the most emotionally stable. Once accepted, the students become even more emotionally stable. Several researchers have found police officers to be more emotionally stable than the public (Carpenter & Raza 1987, Evans *et al*. 1992, Fenster & Locke 1973, Topp & Kardash 1986). Furthermore, in line with the present findings, the police students in Atamer's (2003) study scored higher than the control group on *conscientiousness*. The personality differences that we detected between the police and the public are thus supported by previous research. As discussed in the introduction, though, few researchers have used inventories based on the Big Five dimensions when studying police personality. Therefore, there are few studies with which to compare the current findings.

*Further evidence of variation in police officer job performance*

The officers did not only differ from the reference group; they also differed systematically from each other. These differences were reflected in the inter-person variation in preferences for conflict resolution tactics and, consequently, in the Dialogue and Coercion factors suggested in the factor analysis. From the constructs emerging from the factor analysis, it could be argued that evidence of conflict resolution styles was found in

the study. Although further investigation into these conflict resolution styles is required, they seem to be related to the police typology suggested by Muir (1977).

Officers that are high on Coercion and low on Dialogue seem similar to Muir's Enforcer type. Even though such officers do not necessarily believe in the legitimacy of all possible methods, they hesitate less than others using tactics such as physical force and arresting people. The police are indeed allowed to make use of such strategies, but some officers believe more in the effectiveness of these tactics. Officers that are high on Dialogue and low on Coercion appear comparable to Muir's (1977) Reciprocator. Officers high on Dialogue and low on Coercion share the preference for certain strategies with the Reciprocator. These are tactics such as talking to citizens and using negotiation and compromise to resolve conflicts. Officers that are high on both Coercion and Dialogue resemble the Professional officer in Muir's (1977) typology. These officers believe tactics involving force to be most effective in some situations while they believe in the superiority of more calm strategies in other situations. Lastly, the officers that are low on both Dialogue and Coercion appear similar to Muir's (1977) Avoider. Reiner (2000) also detected four types of officers and concluded that they were similar to Muir's (1977) types. This similarity is interesting as the styles of policing that appeared in the present research also seem comparable to Muir's (1977) typology. Several other researchers have found a typology of police officers that resembles the types that Reiner (2000) detected (Broderick 1977, Brown 1981, Shearing 1981, Walsh 1977), supporting the validity of this typology.

Wilson (1993) and Wilson and Braithwaite (1996) appear to be the only researchers who have investigated police officers' conflict resolution tactics specifically. Neither of these researchers investigated the degree to which officers show consistent styles of conflict resolution. However, several researchers have found differences in styles of conflict resolution in the general population that were constant across situations (Sternberg & Dobson 1987, Sternberg & Soriano 1984). It would therefore be interesting to compare the current findings with the styles that these researchers detected.

*Styles of conflict resolution in the general population*

Sternberg and Soriano (1984) posed the question as to whether people possess consistent styles of conflict resolution across situations. If they do, are the styles related to dispositions such as intelligence and personality? The researchers found that people possess consistent styles of conflict resolution that can be predicted from personality and intelligence variables. Sternberg and Dobson (1987) further investigated people's styles of conflict resolution and concluded that 'striking consistencies exist in styles of conflict resolution' (Sternberg & Dobson 1987: 802). Still, the researchers warn that one must be 'careful in specifying exactly what these consistencies are' (Sternberg & Dobson 1987: 802). This warning comes out of the finding that styles of conflict resolution showed only weak relationships with personality characteristics.

Sternberg and Dobson (1987) described the conflict resolution tactics along the following two dimensions: active-passive, and mitigating-intensifying. Based on these dimensions the researchers categorised four styles of resolving conflicts: active/mitigating, passive/mitigating, active/intensifying and passive/intensifying. These approaches to conflict resolution emerged when they crossed activity of the style with passivity, and intensification of the conflict with mitigation. The styles of conflict resolution in Sternberg and Dobson's (1987) study do not seem directly comparable with the styles that appeared in the present research, partly because these researchers based their categorisation on the outcome of the conflict (mitigating-intensifying). The categorisation in the present study did not take into account the likely effects of the approaches to conflict resolution. Still, there may be similarities between the two categorisations. Applying the active/passive distinction to the styles of conflict resolution found in the present study, officers low on both Coercion and Dialogue do not appear very active. As for the mitigating/intensifying dimension, one may hypothesise that officers high on Coercion and low on Dialogue are at greater risk of intensifying

conflicts when compared with officers high on Dialogue and low on Coercion. Wilson (1993) found that officers who rate arrest as an effective conflict resolution tactic are more 'resistance prone', compared to officers who prefer to use tactics such as bargaining and compromising.

According to Sternberg and Dobson (1987), personality and intellectual variables do not predict preferences for conflict resolution tactics. Other researchers, however, have found personality factors to predict styles of conflict resolution. Both Terhune (1970) and Sternberg and Soriano (1984) found that personality is related to the way people prefer to resolve conflicts. The findings from both the present study and the study of Sternberg and Dobson (1987) indicate the opposite: that personality is not important in predicting conflict resolution tactics. Still, as researchers have found personality variables to be related to the way people resolve conflicts, personality may be relevant in a manner that neither this study nor the study of Sternberg and Dobson (1987) detected. Differences in preferences for conflict resolution tactics among police officers may also be due to subcultural differences within the police organisation. Different police stations and lensman's offices may differ when it comes to which ways of relating to the public they perceive as most effective. Individual officers may thus socialise into behaving differently, depending on the working culture in which they are embedded. The possibility that officers socialise into behaving differently is opposite to Adlam's (1982) suggestion that personality differences underlie behavioural differences between officers. According to Adlam (1982), the socialisation process that officers undergo makes them similar to each other, while personality differences are related to differences in the way officers behave.

The officers in the present study were similar in terms of personality test scores, but differences in personality characteristics were *not* strongly related to behavioural differences (as measured in terms of preferences for conflict resolution tactics). The restriction of range of the officers' personality test scores may have lowered the correlations. Detecting relationships between personality and preferences for conflict resolution tactics calls for the existence of certain variances in personality test scores. The low correlations may also be due to us measuring personality in terms of five global dimensions of personality while the situations in which the officers rated the tactics were specific. Situational aspects may lower the direct effect of a more global personality. In addition to personality, socialisation differences may underlie the differences in preferences. This hypothesis is converse to Adlam's (1982) proposal and remains to be investigated.

## Conclusion

This study investigated whether there are systematic personality differences between the police and the public, and also whether personality differences between officers are related to differences in the way they prefer to resolve conflict situations. The study found personality differences between police officers and the general population. Mean scores on the Big Five personality dimensions differed significantly from those of a reference group on four of the five dimensions, providing evidence of a police personality, as the literature discusses. Police officers also differed from each other in terms of preferences for conflict resolution tactics. We identified two dimensions of conflict resolution styles from these differences in preferences. Personality test scores were related to differences in preferences for conflict resolution, although the correlations were not high.

These findings support the existence of a police personality. The differences in personality characteristics between the police and the public may be a result both of selection into the police academy and socialization in the police force. As the officers constituted a rather homogeneous group in terms of personality characteristics (as measured by the Big Five personality dimensions) one should not be surprised that differences in personality characteristics were not strongly related to differences in preferences for conflict resolution tactics. Still, officers did differ systematically in terms of preferences for tactics. What

underlies these differences cannot be determined based on the current research and should be an issue for further empirical investigations of police personality and behaviour.


**Note**

1.  Police officer in rural districts, under the chief of police. No English equivalent, as the lensman has other duties in public administration and civil process in addition to police duties (Norsk/engelsk terminologi for politiet 1995).

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**Appendix 1: Measure of police preferences for various modes of conflict resolution**

This appendix presents the seven scenarios in the questionnaire, along with the 10 tactics of conflict resolution (based on the scenarios and tactics used in Wilson 1993). The officers evaluated each tactic for each scenario. The labels on the tactics were not included in the questionnaire.

**Situation 1**
Police are called to a schoolyard on the weekend after a passing motorist sees a youth with a bat in the grounds. The police cautiously approach the youth, who seems to be aged about 15 and who is busily hitting a lamp-post. A couple of other boys are also there. They are slowly walking away from the boy with the bat as they scream angrily at him. The police ask him to put away the bat, which he does. They ask him his name and what he is doing. The youth shortly replies that it's none of their business.

1 = approach with minimal effectiveness
9 = ideal approach

Approaches:

1. I would wait things out, and see if they improved.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Wait & See**
2. I would attempt to have a third-party, for example health care personnel, child welfare or caretakers, to help arrive at the best solution.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Third Party**
3. I would attempt to get my way using a level of physical coercion.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Physical Force**
4. I would attempt to resolve the conflict through bargaining and compromise.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Bargain/Compromise**
5. I would be prepared to argue, to attempt to exert control and authority.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Argue**
6. I would point out that the person didn't have any option but to do as I told him/her to.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Confrontational discussion**
7. I would talk to the person about the problem.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Mutual discussion**
8. I would be prepared to exchange opinions and give consideration to the other person's position.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Exchange information**

9. I would call for assistance from a senior officer.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Call for advice**

10. I would inform the person that he or she is under arrest.
    1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
    **Arrest**

**Situation 2**
Police are patrolling at 11 pm on a Saturday night in a backstreet. They follow a car along a road until it approaches a stop sign. The car proceeds through the stop sign without slowing down. The officers pull the car over and approach the driver. The car is occupied by a man in his mid-thirties, dressed in a suit. They ask to see his licence and ask him why he failed to stop at the stop sign. The man appears sullen and answers that he does not have his licence on him. He says he has been working late and has to get home quickly as his wife was having friends over and he was late. 'You've made me even later now,' he shouts. 'There was nobody on the road and I wasn't speeding. You cops should be out catching real criminals, not picking on hard working guys like me. I'm going to complain about you.'

1 = approach with minimal effectiveness
9 = ideal approach

Approaches:

1. I would wait things out, and see if they improved.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Wait & See**

2. I would attempt to have a third-party, for example health care personnel, child welfare or caretakers, to help arrive at the best solution.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Third Party**

3. I would attempt to get my way using a level of physical coercion.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Physical Force**

4. I would attempt to resolve the conflict through bargaining and compromise.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Bargain/Compromise**

5. I would be prepared to argue, to attempt to exert control and authority.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Argue**

6. I would point out that the person didn't have any option but to do as I told him/her to.
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9
   **Confrontational discussion**

7. I would talk to the person about the problem.

   1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9

   **Mutual discussion**

8. I would be prepared to exchange opinions and give consideration to the other person's position.

   1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9

   **Exchange information**

9. I would call for assistance from a senior officer.

   1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9

   **Call for advice**

10. I would inform the person that he or she is under arrest.

    1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9

    **Arrest**


**Situation 3**

Police are passing a football club at six o'clock on a Sunday morning. A man in his late thirties is lying on the front step, singing the club song at the top of his voice. The club rooms are in an upper middle class suburban neighbourhood, and share a fence with an adjoining nursing home. The police approach the man and request him to quieten down and go home. The man responds by singing louder. One officer reaches down and pulls him to his feet. The man pulls quickly away and slaps the policeman's hand off of his shoulder. He raises his fists, adopting a fighting stance.


1 = approach with minimal effectiveness
9 = ideal approach

Approaches:
(The same approaches as in situation 1 and 2.)


**Situation 4**

Two police officers are patrolling football grounds at a match when they observe a young boy emptying litter from a large rubbish bin located near the entrance to the ground. He appears to be looking for empty cans and bottles and is throwing rubbish onto the ground as he searches. The officers approach the boy who, on seeing the officers, attempts to flee. One officer catches hold of the boy's arm as the boy pushes past him. The boy reacts by attempting to bite the officer's hand.


1 = approach with minimal effectiveness
9 = ideal approach

Approaches:
(The same approaches as in situation 1 and 2.)

**Situation 5**
Police are called to a department store to deal with a woman in her fifties who refuses to leave the premises. She has been pulling down commodities from the shelves. On arrival she informs the officers that she is engaged in a solitary protest at the manner in which the store is 'ripping off the consumers'. The officers inform her that she is trespassing and will have to make her protest in another way. The woman calms down a bit, but accuses the officers of 'complicity in a capitalist plot to keep the workers down'.


1 = approach with minimal effectiveness
9 = ideal approach


Approaches:
(The same approaches as in situation 1 and 2.)



**Situation 6**
Police observe a car moving along the main road of a country town travelling a little over the speed limit in the bus and taxi lane. The girl driving this rundown Volkswagen is approximately 19 years of age. Police pull the vehicle over and question the girl about her reason for speeding and for driving in the wrong lane. The girl looks frightened and frequently glances around the car. The officers ask her to get out of the car but she refuses. One officer opens the door and pulls the girl out of the car. She then becomes hysterical and attempts to strike the officer who is still holding her arm.


1 = approach with minimal effectiveness
9 = ideal approach


Approaches:
(The same approaches as in situation 1 and 2.)



**Situation 7**
Police are called to a local secondary school by the principal. On arrival at her office, they find the principal engaged in an argument with a boy who is aged approximately 16 years. The principal tells the police that the boy had been observed attempting to break into the canteen. The principal wants the police to talk to the boy about the possible consequences of such action, as the boy has a long history of bad behaviour. The boy interrupts the principal as she recounts the story to the police and says 'I don't have to listen to this old fogey. My dad will get you in big trouble for calling the police. I wasn't doing nothing. And anyway my dad says that cops suck.' He walks towards the door and pushes one of the officers who is standing in the doorway, to get past him.


1 = approach with minimal effectiveness
9 = ideal approach

Approaches:
(The same approaches as in situation 1 and 2.)

**Appendix 2: Correlations between the conflict resolution tactics (*N* =173-179).**

Product-moment correlations

| | Wait & See | Physical Force | Bargain/ Compr. | Argue | Confr. discussion | Mutual discussion | Exchange inform. | Call for advice |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wait & See | | | | | | | | |
| Physical Force | -.06 | | | | | | | |
| Bargain/Compr. | .30** | .00 | | | | | | |
| Argue | .00 | .27** | .30** | | | | | |
| Confr. discussion | -.08 | .41** | .02 | .27** | | | | |
| Mutual discussion | .21** | -.09 | .51** | .18* | .15* | | | |
| Exchange inform. | .18* | -.11 | .52** | .28** | -.10 | .53** | | |
| Call for advice | .06 | -.01 | .27** | .23** | .02 | .24** | .36** | |
| Arrest | -.07 | .46** | -.02 | -.02 | .48** | -.01 | -.21** | .06 |

*p<.05; **p<.01.

Rank correlations

| | Wait & See | Physical Force | Bargain/ Compr. | Argue | Confr. discussion | Mutual discussion | Exchange inform. | Call for advice |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wait & See | | | | | | | | |
| Physical Force | -.10 | | | | | | | |
| Bargain/Compr. | .26** | -.02 | | | | | | |
| Argue | .03 | .27** | .29** | | | | | |
| Confr. discussion | -.06 | .39** | .04 | .24** | | | | |
| Mutual discussion | .16* | -.11 | .51** | .15 | .14 | | | |
| Exchange inform. | .20** | -.10 | .49** | .25** | -.11 | .56** | | |
| Call for advice | .10 | -.01 | .26** | .22** | .00 | .22** | .34** | |
| Arrest | -.10 | .47** | -.04 | -.01 | .48** | .02 | -.20** | .05 |

*p<.05; **p<.01.

**Appendix 3: Factor loadings for approaches to conflict resolution.**

| Item | Factor | |
|------|:---:|:---:|
| | 1 | 2 |
| Exchange information | 0.83 | |
| Bargain/Compromise | 0.68 | |
| Mutual discussion | 0.68 | |
| Call for advice | 0.41 | |
| Argue | 0.41 | |
| Confrontational discussion | | 0.70 |
| Physical Force | | 0.66 |
| Arrest | | 0.62 |
| Wait & See | | |

*Note*: Principal components analysis, varimax rotation. Only factor loadings $\geq 0.40$ are shown.

**Appendix 4: Rank correlations between personality and conflict resolution tactics ($N$ =173-179).**

| Tactic | E | A | C | ES | O |
|--------|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| Wait & See | -.10 | -.06 | -.01 | -.05 | -.02 |
| Physical Force | .09 | -.10 | -.11 | -.04 | .13 |
| Bargain/Compromise | .03 | .16* | .13 | .13 | .13 |
| Argue | .00 | -.07 | -.04 | -.09 | .06 |
| Confrontational discussion | .10 | .08 | -.05 | -.05 | .05 |
| Mutual discussion | -.03 | .15 | .10 | .07 | .14 |
| Exchange information | .02 | .20** | .06 | .08 | .17* |
| Call for advice | -.12 | -.05 | -.04 | -.20** | -.13 |
| Arrest | -.04 | -.02 | -.09 | .01 | -.05 |

*$p$<.05; **$p$<.01.

**Figure caption and table captions**

Figure 1. Comparison between the personality test scores of the police officers and the reference group.

Table 1. *T*-score means and standard deviations for police and a reference group in each Big Five dimension.

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation, range and skewness for the conflict resolution tactics (*N* =173-179).

Table 3. Correlations between personality and conflict resolution tactics (*N* =173-179).