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Bridging the Cultural Gap
Between Police and Minorities

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ABSTRACT

The lack of regular cultural diversity training in law enforcement has played a role in the state of affairs the world is witnessing today in regard to public disdain for law enforcement.   In a world where the public, especially minority communities, are openly displaying the lack of trust for law enforcement, through acts of protests and violence, law enforcement must first recognize the need to change and keep pace with the changes occurring in the world, and then must develop regular training with a relational approach to bridge the gap that has developed.

In 2015, the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing was created in response to the apparent unrest between the police and communities (COPS, 2015). The task force developed six pillars with action items that police departments should focus on moving forward. The number one pillar recommended is building trust and legitimacy, with pillar five discussing training and education, specifically mentioning implicit bias and cultural response.

A different approach to diversity training is clearly needed. The approach needs to be one in which officers are taught about different cultures within their community, but also one in which officers have to actually successfully communicate with citizens and establish rapport. The strategic social interaction model offers a good example of the type of training law enforcement should move towards, offering training which teaches officers how to interact with different cultures.

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INTRODUCTION

All too often, police have a tendency to become complacent with the way they currently operate. It seems it takes a major incident, or chain of incidents, to re-evaluate what is being done and what could be done better on a day to day basis. Law enforcement as a profession has become complacent about the need to continue training in the area of cultural diversity in order to maintain health relationships within communities.

An example of this complacency can be found right here in Texas law enforcement in the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE). TCOLE (2017) is the agency which oversees Peace Officer Certification in Texas, and they only require officers to complete one 8-hr class in cultural diversity every 4 year training cycle until they reach the intermediate level of certification. Once this requirement has been met, cultural diversity is never required again, and it is up to individual departments to decide if and when that training is needed. Police are expected to work in communities where social norms evolve rapidly; yet the police profession does not evolve with them or as a part of them.

While law enforcement in Texas has come a long way in a relatively short period of time in terms of educating officers, the education received in diversity has not evolved as times and cultural norms have changed. Historically, law enforcement has taken a serious look at cultural diversity training only when something happens which raises the issue to a high level of concern within the community and often a national level of concern (Barlow & Barlow, 1993). If the same pattern is followed and training is developed when problems arise, then the same results can be expected. History will

repeat itself and training will need a massive overhaul again, with the same problems continuing. What is done now to break the cycle can impact the future of police training, as well as the way in which the public views the profession for generations to come.

New research released by the Pew Research Center shows the majority of officers believe the recent high profile tensions between blacks and police officers have made their jobs more difficult, to the point where three quarters of the officers surveyed are reluctant to carry out some of their duties such as stopping and questioning suspicious persons (Morin, Parker, Stepler, & Mercer, 2017). This same research also suggests that police officers believe only 14% of the public understands the risks inherent with the job; yet 83% of the public believe they do understand the risks that police officers face (Morin et al., 2017). In this area alone, there is a huge difference in the way police officers and society view what is happening today, which further points to the fact that additional cultural diversity training is needed. It only stands to reason that in order to successfully work together to create a safe environment for all, al parties have to understand each others' point of view, and it appears as though society is a long way from doing that.

The need to bridge the gap between police and minority communities is long overdue, and law enforcement must take real, meaningful steps towards achieving unity that goes far beyond mere cultural diversity training in a classroom at the beginning of an officer's career. In order to thrive as a community and be truly synergistic, the profession must develop officers who are able to relate from a multicultural perspective, beyond what they learned in a classroom and in a way citizens can trust. Law enforcement agencies should provide regular cultural diversity training to officers, and

the training should have both a theoretical and relational aspect. Simply reformatting cultural diversity training and bringing officers up to speed on what current trends show, will only result in the same cycle of training received when the public outcry is great. True advancement will only come when law enforcement realizes and accepts the impact cultural diversity has on the profession, and then maintains development, awareness, and training in this area.

POSITION

Law enforcement agencies need to stay current on issues related to minorities within their community, as well as ways that they can better relate to these groups in an effort to handle situations as they arise in a manner that the public understands and accepts. The point is to say, it is not enough to stay updated on issues within the community; agencies must also train the officers how to relate to culturally diverse groups in order to be effective. The training provided for officers has to have theoretical content, but must also include a relational aspect which focuses on how to bridge the gap by relating to others. Community leaders like Kevin Hawkins, business owner and area leader for My Brother's Keeper initiative, believe that officers should walk the neighborhoods with community leaders and interact, as well as take the time to talk with citizens outside of enforcement (K. Hawkins, personal communication, October 3, 2016). This type of policing, while forging relationships within the community, does not come natural to many in this profession and will likely need to be sold to officers as a strategy that works before training in this area is conducted.

Seen by so many as a growing concern in the nation today, former President Obama created a Taskforce on 21st Century Policing to develop new strategies and

focus for law enforcement (COPS, 2015). The taskforce developed and recommended 6 pillars for agencies. Pillar five discusses training and education, specifically mentioning the need to focus on implicit bias and cultural responsiveness. In response to this, the Vera Institute of Justice (2016), whose mission is to improve the justice system and ensure fairness, safety, and strong communities, developed three guidebooks for agencies to use in an effort to build trust in diverse communities.

Community policing was designed specifically to bridge the gap between police and community by establishing principles that will guide agencies on how to gain the support, trust, and involvement of the community. This is important because in the tenth principle, building for the future, we realize that the police cannot impose order on the community from the outside, but rather as one part of the community working in unison with others (Love, 2002). An article written in response to the violence and rioting in Ferguson, Missouri after the death of Michael Brown, claims that the only way to bridge this gap is through relationship building that gets to the root of the issues, instead of responding reactively after an issue has erupted (Bennett & Alpher, 2014).

The US Department of Defense has funded some groundbreaking training in this area of enhancing the ability of officers to talk and relate to others in a culturally diverse environment through their Strategic Social Interaction Modules (SSIM) (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, n.d.). The training, known as Tactical Social Interaction (TSI), is a student-led, adult learning process, which aims to prepare officers for successful encounters within any cultural context (Zschoche, Anderman, & Lettic, 2015). Unique to this training is that it teaches officers to read the proper cues and apply learned competencies in cultural contexts, but it also involves going out and

demonstrating how this occurs and can be applied. The students then, must actually show what they have learned in the classroom in a practical exercise portion, then come back and teach what they learned to the rest of the students. Although fairly new, this program has received excellent ratings from the four completed courses to date, and has expected outcomes which include increased community satisfaction and greater officer integration (Zschoche et al., 2015).

The United States military is also using the SSIM model with success for much similar circumstances as law enforcement. The military is training their warfighters in the basic social interaction skills needed to succeed regardless of the cultural or language barriers they may encounter. According to COL Matthew Hepburn, part of the aim of this training is to "enable service members to approach and engage strangers in unfamiliar social environments, and to de-escalate conflict" (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, n.d., para. 2).

In 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice awarded $2.1 million to a company named Polis to provide national police de-escalation training based on T3 training-tact, tactics, and trust (Polis Solutions, n.d.). This program provides an interactive approach to learning that allows for learning these skills and practicing them in a realistic format, due to the belief that lecture based training has been largely ineffective. As the problem of community relationships with police departments continue to emerge and worsen, more programs to address this issue will be developed.

Law enforcement should provide theoretical and relational training on a regular basis in an effort to sharpen the critical thinking skills which are necessary to make decisions in culturally diverse surroundings. Critical thinking allows officers to come to

conclusions which are based on the facts and circumstances presented at the time, rather than relying on subjective information such as personal bias or self-interest that they assume to be true. It requires analysis into their own thoughts, as well as the ability to regulate their own thoughts. Brown and Hendricks (1996) conducted a nationwide survey mailed to the largest cities in every state, which showed that even then, officers believed prolonged exposure to culturally diverse issues and training would reduce discriminatory practices and lead to fewer stereotypes prejudices.

Learning which takes place in police academies and continuing education in the profession is mostly accomplished through teacher-directed learning that does not instill any critical thinking skills (Sereni-Massinger, Bawden, & Rowe, 2015). As police officers who perform their jobs in a multicultural environment, the interactions they have on a daily basis will likely involve cultures that are different from their own. If officers cannot separate personal beliefs and biases from these situations by applying critical thinking, the results will likely cause dissatisfaction and misunderstandings. Critical thinking must be taught, and the ability to think critically will enhance over time if used. Because officers are faced with so many situations and incidents on a daily basis that require one to think critically and provide solutions, training in this area should be taken seriously and provided on an annual basis. Possible outcomes for critical thinking training as it applies to multicultural interactions are better interactions with culturally diverse citizens, increase in options for resolving conflict, and more equitable outcomes for all involved (Sereni-Massinge et al., 2015).

Training to deal with issues that evolve in multicultural settings for law enforcement dates back to1947 and is commonly deemed as necessary training in this

field (Marion, 1998). Yet, while law enforcement as a profession seems to have recognized for quite some time that diversity is a necessary area for development, it has not shown the dedication and emphasis which would place this as an integral area which requires continuous research and education. Agencies train continuously for tactical situations which may never occur in an officer's lifetime with an agency, but they do not train to properly deal with the cultural diversity encountered every day.

Policing, at its very nature, resists change. Law enforcement professionals, sworn to serve the public, must overcome this resistence and implement real change in the way they think, plan, and train for cultural diversity if they expect to have communities who will cooperate and respect the job. Right now, officers are faced daily with a public that does not trust what they say or do at the lowest level seen in 22 years, and only 25% of the American public that say they have a great deal of confidence in police (Jones, 2015). Law enforcement professionals must work hard to regain that trust by educating themselves, and being more prepared to deal with diversity. Once the trust is re-established, they then have the responsibility to maintain that trust through continuous education, training, and development.

COUNTER POSITION

There is some resistance to theoretical and relational diversity training because the state has already developed cultural diversity training and mandated how often officers need that training, and there are those who believe it is not necessary to develop new training because it will become too costly to try to develop what is already in place. The New Jersey Senate recently tried to pass bill A1663, which would make it mandatory for every agency in the state to develop cultural diversity training which

matched the diversity in their jurisdiction (Sullivan, 2016). Governor Chris Christie vetoed this bill, pointing to the unnecessary cost for non-mandated training, further saying that it would create plans across the state which were inconsistent with each other.

Training brought into departments from outside trainers is even more costly than the time and money it costs an agency to develop their own training. A company called Racial Intelligence Training and Engagement (RITE) has developed just such a program to bring to agencies, combining emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and de-escalation techniques all revolved around positive cultural changes (Rite Academy, 2015). An agency can bring this training to their department for up to 24 officers for $4,800 plus travel and tool kits for each officer.

In addition to the cost of new training, there is not a consensus that training is the actual problem; therefore, it may not solve any problems to spend a bunch of money on developing training. Donald Grady, a retired Police Chief with over 30 years of experience in various US cities, believes what is happening today is not a training problem, but rather a recruiting problem (Lantigua-Williams, 2016). In his opinion, the training given will be effective only to a certain point, so agencies must ensure they are recruiting and hiring the right personnel who are able to operate and communicate in culturally diverse environments.

There is a vailid argument out there for the cost prohibition to develop or bring in new training if training already exists. The idea that training is too costly to redevelop is not a viable argument, however, when compared to the cost on society, cost in human lives, cost in lawsuits, and costs on communities that will be paid in the long run if the

status quo continues. The Wall Street Journal reported in 2015 in the 10 largest cities in the US alone, cities paid out $248.7 million for civil rights cases that reference police misconduct, up a staggering 48% in just five years' time (Elinson & Frosch, 2015). It is staggering the kind of training that could be developed to train officers nationwide with over $200 million dollars.

Another point which speaks against further training in this area is that law enforcement needs to focus on crime, not social problems. There are hundreds of social agencies whose job is to deal with problems that police officers encounter and are forced to deal with on a daily basis, such as homelessness, mental illness, and drug addiction. It would not be considered fair or acceptable for a mental health caseworker to deal with burglaries on a daily basis, and the outcome certainly would not be expected to turn out positive. In the same manner, police officers should not be expected to deal with issues which require resources they are not equipped to handle. Many of the recent police shootings which have been highlighted in the media have dealt with social problems that people expect the police to just come in and solve (D. K., 2015).

In contrast to this idea of focusing only on crime, is one that emphasizes the police profession as one that is sworn to protect and serve. The U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) (2015) states that law enforcement is a job that is comprised of more than just crime fighting and also includes addressing public safety problems which often include those social issues (Plant & Scott, 2009). If the police are to serve the community, then they in turn need to train themselves in a manner that meets the needs of their increasingly diverse

communities (Glenn et al., 2003). Police officers know that they need diversity training. They may not agree with everything being said or the perceived unfairness in placing all police in the same basket as the ones who have messed up. However, they know that things are not what they used to be in this job, and that the overall public does not trust them at their word anymore. In 2009, a survey was conducted from over 500 police officers in Rhode Island, in which the officers' perceptions and opinions were sought on matters relating to multicultural issues (Coon, 2016). Overwhelmingly across the state, 81% of officers felt as though participating in divesity training would help them in their jobs, and 82% felt that officers in their own department would benefit.

RECOMMENDATION

In order to bridge this gap that seems to be increasingly growing between police and minority communities, law enforcement agencies must take the first step towards building trust by establishing policies that call for regular training in the area of cultural diversity that includes a theoretical and a relational aspect. It is going to take a real commitment with long term solutions in mind to fully address an issue which has repeatedly plagued this country since law enforcement was born. It is a problem that varies in depth and intensity, and one that needs to be addressed by each community where problems exist.

From local community leaders like Kevin Hawkins, to the Department of Defense, to the President of the United States Task Force on 21st Century Policing, the need for relationships to be built between police and members of the community it serves is a realization that needs to be addressed (K. Hawkins, personal communication, October 3, 2016; Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, n.d.; COPS, 2015). Developing

training like this may take some out of their comfort zones, may cost additional money, and may require officers to be off the street longer while training, but the cost on society is far greater in the long run if no one takes the time and effort to correct the problem now.

Procedural justice plays a huge role in being able to win the trust and respect of citizens. The four basic components of procedural justice – fairness in process, transparency in actions, an opportunity to have a voice and be heard, and impartial decision making – are applicable internally in an agency and externally in the community (Bradley, Holihen, & Moe, 2015). If officers feel they have an avenue of procedural justice in their working environment, they are much more apt to apply the principles when dealing with the community, and when officers learn these concepts apply them, the likelihood of solving the immediate problems, as well as increasing community satisfaction, will increase.

Agencies must first admit that the problem exists, then commit to a plan of action to deal with the problem. Whether seeking out the Department of Justice's Tactical Social Interaction model, bringing in outside companies who have developed training to deal specifically with these issues, developing an internal training module to specifically address your community, or combining efforts with other agencies, law enforcement must do something. With only 25% of the public having great confidence in what police officers do as professionals, it is glaringly obvious that something must be done to increase this and bring the profession back to the trusted professionals people need (Jones, 2015). The training implemented and conducted up to this point is obviously not

working, because if it were working we would not see so much social unrest and public sentiment of distrust.

However departments decide to implement the training, it should be done in a way that the training is not merely information fed to officers in a classroom. It must be training that will assist them in the relationships they have to develop when dealing with people who come from different cultures and backgrounds. Once the initial training has been received, a department should care enough about their officers and their community to continue training and focusing on these issues on a regular basis.

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