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A New Lens Community Engagement Project

Danielle Hance
Lesley University, dmhance@gmail.com

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Danielle Hance

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Dr. Kelvin Ramirez

Abstract

Tensions continue to run high between law enforcement and communities of color in the Twin

Cities metropolitan area following multiple police-related deaths, including Jamar Clark and

Philando Castile. Studies, both nationally and regionally, demonstrate an elevated level of

distrust for law enforcement in the Black community and higher numbers of police errors

involving the shooting of unarmed Black people. The author sought to create a project that

would enhance perspective taking, address bias and stereotypes, and provide a safe space for

healthy dialogue between the volunteers from the law enforcement and Black community using

the arts. Photovoice is a technique that combines photography and narrative to create social

awareness and has been used with oppressed or marginalized groups, such as sex workers,

refugees, and former child soldiers. A modified Photovoice project was used to bring together

individuals to present photographs representing their lived experiences and engage in dialogue

together. A modified Photovoice project was chosen to facilitate this process with members of

the Black community and law enforcement with the goal of seeing each other through a new lens

and creating conditions for trust to be built between the two groups. This project highlighted the

multidimensionality of identity for each participant, reduced tension, created the safety needed to

discuss difficult topics, and provided the foundation for future relationships. Feedback from

participants indicated a desire to share this project with the community and reproduce it in other

communities and with other groups who have a history of conflict or are experiencing a lack of

trust or engagement with each other.

A New Lens Community Engagement Project

Introduction

Nationally and globally, tensions have run high between police forces and those who appear to be of African descent – and for well-evidenced reasons. Members of the Black community, particularly Black males, have higher odds of being stopped and arrested and are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. Anyone falling outside of the majority White population in the United States of America is more likely to be perceived as a criminal and be halted by the police (Kahn et al., 2016). These same minority populations are also more likely to be searched, arrested, and have force used against them. Young African-American males are 21 percent more likely to be killed than young Caucasian males (Hall, Hall & Perry, 2016). Moreover, within non-White groups, those with darker skin tones and more stereotypically Black features are more likely to be victims of shooting errors at the hands of the police (Kahn et al., 2016). To complicate tensions, law enforcement has a historical "blue line" that cannot be crossed, and the high degrees of loyalty that officers have from each other, coupled with the black-and-white thinking and respect for authority, which are common characteristics of those who choose a career in law enforcement (Hall, Hall & Perry, 2016).

Tension and fear between law enforcement and people of color, particularly African-Americans, is elevated in the Twin Cities metropolitan area (containing Minneapolis, St. Paul, and the surrounding suburban area), where the author resides. Two individuals, Jamar Clark and Philando Castile of African-American descent, were shot and killed by police officers in the last three years. The two officers involved in the shooting of 24-year-old Clark had no charges filed against them after the incident in 2015. The officer who shot Castile, Jeronimo Yanez, in 2016, claimed to be afraid for his life when shooting Castile, even though Castile appeared to be

complying with his instructions and had made no sudden movements

(https://www.cnn.com/videos/us/2017/06/22/philando-castile-facebook-and-dashcam-full-

mashup-video-ctn.cnn). Most recently, at the time of the submission of this research, Australian

woman Justine Damond was shot by a Somali officer, one of 524 people shot and killed by law

enforcement in the United States in 2017, and the fifth in Minnesota respectively, according to a

Washington Post database (Mettler, Phillips, & Berman, 2017).

 The death of Castile was a catalyst for the Governor's Council on Law Enforcement and

Community Relations to be created in Minnesota's capitol. This council examined whether or

not a shooting would have taken place if the passenger or driver were white ("Council on Law

Enforcement," 2017). Governor Dayton believed it would not have.

 Nationally, only one-third of African-Americans versus three-quarters of Whites believe

that "police in their communities do an excellent or good job in using appropriate force on

suspects, treating all racial and ethnic minorities equally, and holding officers accountable when

misconduct occurs," according to a 2016 Pew Research study (as cited in "Council on Law

Enforcement," 2017, p. 4). This same study found that law enforcement officers were nearly

two-times more likely to believe that police-black fatalities were isolated incidents than the

general public. Locally, a 2016 Star Tribune poll found both black and white Minnesotans

believe that police were more likely to use deadly force with encountering a black person than a

lighter-skinned person with 60% of blacks and 28% of whites holding this view (as cited in

"Council on Law Enforcement," 2017, p. 4).

 These tensions have been increased through the use of social media. For example, in the

shooting of Castile, a cell phone video captured by Castile's girlfriend Diamond Reynolds

immediately following the shooting went viral, prompting outcry and anger on social media

outlets. Brady, Wills, Jost, Tucker, & Van Bavel (2017) call this phenomenon "social contagion." They found that messages on Twitter that contained moral-emotional words, words that would be found in both a moral and emotional vocabulary, such as hate, were much more likely to be shared and "go viral." Particularly within social media, this social contagion tended to operate in two separate echo chambers, divided by political affiliation. So while social media can cause messages to be transmitted quickly within in-groups, it rarely causes messages to be transmitted between groups. Moreover, it can cause the same messages to be seemingly endlessly repeated and transmitted, reinforcing beliefs held by the group sharing these messages.

Therefore, in order to address the tension following the aforementioned large tragedies and decades of lesser-known incidents between these two communities and attempt to create trust and cultivate sustainable and reciprocal relationships, a community engagement project was chosen for this capstone thesis.

One of the recommendations of the Governor's Council on Law Enforcement and Community Relations was to create opportunities for community members and law enforcement agencies to meet to discuss their concerns and share perspectives in the hopes of building bridges and creating strong partnerships ("Governor's Council on Law Enforcement," 2017). This project sought to fall into line with this goal identified by the Council. Since most of the tragedies were police on black Americans and since only 26% of black Minnesotans polled by the Star Tribune in 2016 had a favorable view of the police force (as cited in "Council on Law Enforcement," 2017, p. 5), the author chose to focus specifically on relations between law enforcement and the African-American community.

Multiple methods for engagement were considered. Body-based exercises were considered because of the ability to create synchronous movement and attunement. However,

the author recognized that this would be highly vulnerable and could limit participation. Drama was also considered because of the natural perspective-taking involved in this modality, but this would also require a high level of engagement and might have been anxiety-provoking for participants, especially given the tumultuous history and lack of trust between these groups.

After examining multiple methods for engagement using the arts, a modified Photovoice project was chosen. Photovoice has been used successfully with marginalized, oppressed, and misunderstood populations – both with those who have been perceived as perpetrators or pariahs, and those who have been perceived as victims. This visual arts-based research technique prompts individuals to capture and represent their experiences through images, which are then assigned meaning by adding an accompanying narrative. These projects often enhance perspective-taking, highlight intersectionalities of identity and experience, promote community dialogue, and can be a means of social change (Desyllas, 2014).

Although none of the research had used Photovoice with two groups simultaneously, it was deemed appropriate for this project. Photography was an accessible medium for both groups. Given the pervasiveness of smartphones, access to a camera was not seen as a limiting factor. Photography was seen as inherently personal and humanizing and could be easily used to begin conversation and dialogue. While sharing photographs could be vulnerable, it also offered some aesthetic distance and a secondary focus. Particularly with law enforcement officers, who are often seen as black-and-white thinkers, photography offered an easy pathway into the arts, which didn't seem too "out-there" or "touchy-feely," based on queries to local police departments. In summation, Photovoice was chosen because of it offered a new lens for these two groups to see each other, offered some aesthetic distance to create safety, and helped to

promote dialogue within groups, between groups, and had the potential to be transmitted to the larger community.

The author acknowledges that this capstone thesis could not address all the factors that have contributed to tragedies involving police brutality or force, nor could it change the country's history of systemic racism, which has often been perpetuated, advertently and inadvertently by the law enforcement system. It could also not fully address the stigma and hatred that police often perceive from the public and the media, in part as a result of the aforementioned tragedies and systems. This capstone thesis community engagement project was the author's attempt to understand the current interpersonal dynamics in the sample of volunteer participants in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Literature Review

Criminal Justice and Non-White Populations

Studies have shown that African-American males are more likely to be perceived as older and less innocent, when compared to youth of other races, which may have played a factor in the death of innocent youths, such as 12-year-old African-American Tamir Rice. Officers who responded to the scene claimed that they believed he was an adult (Hall, Hall & Perry, 2016). Kahn, Steele, McMahon & Stewart (2017) studied how a suspect's race influences their interactions with police. They found that officers interacting with Black and Latino suspects used force earlier in the interaction than with White suspects. Because of the power deferential between officers and citizens, perceived non-compliance was often met with the use of force, whether lethal or non-lethal, and race of a suspect was one factor that could cause an encounter to escalate more quickly and also be used to justify the presence of a threat when force was used (Kahn et al., 2017).

The sentencing of Black defendants has also shown to be more severe when compared to other racial backgrounds, particularly Whites. There is also variance in the skin tone and features of the defendant in non-White populations, with lighter skinned individuals with less stereotypical features being perceived as less criminal as those with darker and more stereotypically Black features (Kahn et al., 2016). Even in a French study, where demographic information on origin is only classified in two categories – French national or foreigner, it was found those of North African or sub-Saharan African descent were nearly twice as likely to receive jail time as those of European descent (Fabien & Sophie, 2009). The researchers also looked at cases where police officers filed suits for damages against citizens and found that those belonging to the North African and Black groups were 1.4 times more likely to have a suit filed

against them when compared with those of White European descent (Fabien & Sophie, 2009).

Systems of white privilege like this, which can be found in several countries and continents,

favor those with lighter skin tones and so-called Western features over those with darker

complexions and features associated with Blackness.

In-Group Bias and Trained Incapacity in Law Enforcement

Police officers often find themselves in ambiguous situations, where surface level

information tends to dictate their actions. Therefore, their previous interactions with people of

color often color their future interactions. The deeply engrained negative beliefs of the police

force (and greater society) regarding African-Americans coupled with the well-known practices

of racial profiling and history of tragedy at the hands of police may make African-Americans

more anxious when encountering officers, producing behaviors that officers perceive as

suspicious, which in turn leads to the same destructive reactions (Hall, Hall & Perry, 2016). It

may also be possible that officers anticipate resistance and non-compliance from minority

suspects, which may account for greater use of force early in police interactions with Black and

Latino suspects as opposed to Whites (Kahn et al., 2017).

There are also complicating factors related to in-group bias and protection. According to

Hall, Hall & Perry (2016), those who choose law enforcement as a profession have higher

desires to belong to an "in-group," exercise power, preserve order, and create conformity than

the general population. This loyalty or brotherhood can cause an us versus them mentality and

make officers more likely to maintain that they were "just doing their jobs" in cases of use of

excessive force.

Another contributing factor is "trained incapacity," where the so-called "super highways"

in the brain cause people to default to certain perceptions and behaviors in high-pressure

situations (Beausoleil and LeBaron, 2013, p. 135). African-Americans are often portrayed as more dangerous and aggressive in society at-large, particularly in the media, and racial stereotypes and their corresponding implicit and explicit biases come into full force in situations of ambiguity, where biases tend to "fill in the gaps" of missing information (Kahn et al., 2017). For example, given the implicit bias that associates Blacks with weapons, it is more likely that an officer will mistakenly believe that an African-American will have a weapon (Kahn et al., 2016). This implicit bias could easily lead to the perception of a threat and a higher likelihood that force would be used.

Fortunately, neuroscience has shown that the brain is more plastic than originally believed, giving humans the capacity to overcome this "trained incapacity" and resolve conflicts that have existed for decades, centuries, or even longer (Beausoleil and LeBaron, 2013). Hall, Hall, and Perry (2016) suggested an increase in inter-racial contact to promote healthy dialogue and lessen the effect of stereotypes as a part of their multi-faceted recommendations for combating police brutality and racial prejudice in greater society.

Addressing Bias Using Photovoice

Photovoice is a technique that involves using participants from a group of people and prompting them to take photos that represent their experiences. Researchers then gather the narratives that inspired these photographs and use them to gather information about issues facing these population and often to create social awareness and social change by using the photographs and narratives as a form of advocacy.

Denov, Doucet and Kamara (2012) did an arts-based Photovoice project with former child soldiers in Sierra Leone, who were marginalized in the greater community and often estranged from family members. Many were homeless and engaging in illegal activities in order

to survive. The researchers found that photography offered a means to address and look at sensitive and difficult topics through a different lens. They also found that exhibition of the project played an integral role into their re-acceptance into their community by helping others to see their struggles before, during, and after the war through their photographs and accompanying narratives (Denov, Doucet, and Kamara, 2012).

A Photovoice project involving adult female sex workers in Portland, Oregon was able to give a voice to these stigmatized individuals and their stories (Desyllas, 2014). Through within-case and cross-case analysis the researcher discovered that sex work experiences were far from universal and stigma and stereotypes were widespread because of the nature of the work. Art offered the workers the opportunity to show the many dimensions of their lives and to be empowered to engage in activism. Their photographs and accompanying stories were displayed in multiple exhibits and highlighted in the media over a two-year time span, helping these women to assert their existence and significance while debunking myths and stereotypes, for example, that all sex workers are coerced victims or that they are drug users (Desyllas, 2014).

Sethi (2016) completed a similar modified Photovoice project to expose racism against immigrant minority women in the Canadian workforce. Many women took pictures of damaged, undernourished, or dead trees to show how they were affected by labor discrimination, and the losses they felt when the skills, education, and experiences that they had gained in their countries of origins were not recognized in Canada. The main themes identified through the photographs and accompanying interviews were discrimination in the workplace and racism in society (Sethi, 2016). The images also exposed the racism they experienced at work as people of color and how they were sometimes viewed as dirty or as lesser than because of the color of their skin.

In all three studies, the populations had experienced high social stigma. The results of these studies indicated that Photovoice allowed their experiences to be seen and their stories to be heard through a new lens. Photovoice provides a different medium for seeing and hearing the misunderstood "other," while also providing a means of distancing through the lens of the camera.

In expressive arts therapy, visual art as a modality creates distance and containment. Knill, Levine, and Levine (2005) proposed that this distancing was a necessary component of shaping expressive arts therapy work because it offered something that was "not-me", something "out there in the world," something that could be looked at (p. 254). This distancing helps to contain the brokenness and allow for greater engagement.

Because of the long history of tension and brutality between police officers and people of color, Photovoice was seen as a tool for helping these groups to see each other more multidimensionally and to address some of the stigma and stereotypes felt by each group. It also informed and addressed implicit and explicit bias between the two groups and within the larger community in the hopes of affecting greater social change for the future.

Methods

This capstone thesis project utilized the arts, specifically, Photovoice, to go beyond stereotypes and help create more humane interactions between police officers and African-Americans in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area where the author currently resides. To carry out this project, the author sought an African-American male co-facilitator since she identified as a Caucasian female. The researcher pursued a member of the hosting site, Atonement Lutheran Church, in Bloomington, MN, to be the project's co-facilitator. As the racial justice liaison for Atonement, the co-facilitator was well-qualified and willing to fulfill this role. The author and

co-facilitator met frequently to discuss the project and modify it, as obstacles were encountered and modifications to the project had to be made.

Several African-American affinity groups and police departments, as well as the governor's office of inclusion and diversity, were contacted to recruit a small number of participants (4-8) from each group. Survey Monkey was used to create a registration page and contact both groups. Both groups received information about the nature and goals of the project, as well as outlines of the proposed meetings. Email and phone calls were used to follow up with individual groups and departments, and a brochure was distributed to multiple police departments and shared with the community. The author also met personally with the then community liaison at the Bloomington Police Department, representatives from the office of inclusion and diversity at the Minnesota State Capitol, and with African-American community leaders at a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event with Black Lives Matter – St. Paul. Facebook and the neighborhood networking site NextDoor were also used to recruit participants.

After the removal of the community liaison at the Bloomington Police Department, the researcher had multiple conversations with the commander of the Bloomington Police Department to recruit a small group of participants from the department, who would meet with the African-American group at the department.

The project consisted of two meetings – one meeting of the African-American group alone at Atonement Lutheran Church in Bloomington, MN, and a second joint meeting with both the African-American group and the Bloomington Police Department held at the Bloomington Police Department. Each meeting was approximately 90-minutes in length.

The African-American group consisted of three participants, and the law enforcement group consisted of two participants. As the group was significantly smaller than originally

planned, the co-facilitator was able to act in a participant role and did not need to co-facilitate.

Participants from both groups presented 4-6 photographs that represented their identity and lived

experiences to the group. Following the presentation of the photographs, participants shared

reactions and dialogued with each other about topics and questions that emerged from the

presentations.

During group meetings, the author took careful notes about the images and themes that

arose from the presentations and discussion that followed. The researcher also followed up with

participants during and after the project to discuss their feedback about the project and to

consider how the project might be continued or be used as a springboard for further work in the

greater community.

Results

In the information-gathering and recruitment phase of this capstone thesis project, the

author gained greater awareness of the present state of tension between law enforcement and the

African-American community, the current efforts being made to improve policing and achieve

racial justice, as well as the barriers and varying opinions on how to approach a community

engagement project involving law enforcement and the African-American community.

Pre-Project Reactions From the African-American Community

Initial interactions with affinity groups for African-Americans and other leaders in the

African-American community revealed mostly positive reactions to the project. Many expressed

interest in using photography and being able to share their stories with law enforcement and also

a curiosity about what images and narratives police officers would share with them. Several

African-Americans expressed a desire to interact with police officers and were enthusiastic about

the possibility of meeting the officers at the end of the project. Leaders from the Office of

Inclusion and Diversity at the Minnesota State Capitol even criticized keeping the two groups

separate, stating that it was reminiscent of the era of segregation and Jim Crow laws. One leader

of a mission-based media organization leading efforts to disband the police force in favor of

using community-based alternatives encouraged the author to call off the project. This leader

believed that efforts to reform the police department were short-lived and that the Black

community should not be forced to have relationships with law enforcement officers in order to

be seen as human. This view was balanced with others who believed that relationships with law

enforcement were vital to establishing trust between police and African-Americans since the

history in the Twin Cities metro area has shown that this trust has never really been established.

Others expressed that a project like this could be used to inspire Black youth and the larger

community and wanted to know how the author could share the project's results with the

community. Since most voices encountered from the African-American community were

interested and open, the researcher decided to move forward with the project.

Pre-Project Reactions From the Law Enforcement Community

Law enforcement had many positive reactions to the project model. They appreciated

that the groups would meet separately, as they felt that officers would feel less threatened by

using the photos to create a dialogue. They also reacted positively to the use of photographs

since many in law enforcement identify as "black-and-white thinkers" and do not easily engage

with their feelings. One community engagement liaison told a story of another project that

required officers to pose like trees and participate in a dramatic presentation. Although the

officers complied, it was "not an easy sell," and he believed this project would be much easier

for the officers to understand. When the idea of a joint meeting was proposed, law enforcement

was optimistic that the structure and platform that the photos provided would prevent an

atmosphere of accusation and promote a more productive discussion than other discussions that they had engaged with in the past.

The First Meeting

At the first meeting with the African-American group, two of the original seven participants who had signed up for the project attended. The three participants from the African-American group represented a law enforcement student and army reservist in her 20s, a salesman and musician in his early 40s, and a customer service representative in his early 50s. With a small group, there was ample time for each participant to share their photos, and the author was also able to share photos in order to model and promote vulnerability.

During the photo presentations and discussion that followed, several themes emerged, including occupational privilege, overt and covert racism, a cold welcome to Minnesota, and a lack of understanding from the White community. One theme was the occupational privilege that comes with the badge and uniform of an officer. One participant had a family member in law enforcement and also had experienced an African-American police officer in the community where he grew up who was a "dirty cop" and tried to set up the participant and his friends. In his opinion, some officers of color want to become law enforcement officers in order to have this sense of power that they could not obtain otherwise.

Another participant formerly worked for the military police and was currently an intern at a local police department. She found that she was treated much differently when she was in uniform rather than as a civilian. Conversely, when she is not in uniform, she has experienced officers who "were on their power horse." These same officers became "buddy-buddy" with her when she took out her military ID, and they saw her badge. She had also entered her workplace without her uniform on carrying a duffle bag and been stopped and questioned where she was

going. This led to a discussion of occupational privilege and how evident this was, especially with law enforcement and the military.

Another discussion that emerged was overt and covert racism. None of the participants were natives of Minnesota, and while they had not experienced much overt racism from Minnesotans, they did express that Minnesotans were often "as cold as the weather" and that they often felt that there were "time bombs" that would eventually explode in their interactions with natives of the state. One participant had been sent to sensitivity training multiple times after calling out the covert racism that he had experienced on the job.

One participant was called to pastor a local church after completing seminary. He worked there for less than year after a meeting approximately six months in where they gave him a "laundry list" of concerns and complaints that had never been expressed to him directly. He was the only African-American in this church and felt that this church had no idea what to do with him and did not understand why they had called him as a Black man when they clearly had not welcomed him. He now attended a church where he was the only African-American but felt welcomed because the congregation was "open" and "accepting" of who he was and to discussions of race. He grew up in inner-city Detroit and still struggled with his wife's perception of crime where he grew up. He believed that this is partly due to her being White and what she has been conditioned to believe about the inner city.

The Second Meeting

At the second meeting, which was a joint meeting between the African-American community and law enforcement officers, three African-Americans and two law enforcement officers were able to attend. The meeting was held at a conference room in the Bloomington Police Department. There was a lower turnout of law enforcement officers, due to a suspected

homicide that had occurred in the city on the same day, which had placed higher than normal

demands on staffing. Both law enforcement officers were middle-aged White males in

leadership headed toward the end of the careers with 18 years and 33 years of law enforcement

service respectively.

A common theme among the officers was a desire for work-life balance. Both had

photos that showed a love for the outdoors, physical activities, and their families, with only one

photo each respectively of the officers in uniform. One officer chose a photo of officers and

FEMA representatives planning for the Super Bowl, as much of his career in leadership is

focused on networking rather than patrolling the streets and doing "typical" police work. The

other officer chose to show a photo of his police dog, which became a positive memory for many

of the children in the neighborhood who are now grown. Both officers had once been on SWAT

team together and expressed that officers are often "adrenaline-junkie types" and that they both

needed outlets for their energy after moving to deskwork in the department. Both officers

showed several photographs of their families and of activities they enjoyed doing outside of

work.

There were not as many common threads among the photographs displayed by the

African-American group. For this group, the photos seemed to be used to show the many

dimensions of their identities. One participant was able to use his photos to share how he left a

career in music in order to have a steady job with benefits to provide for his oldest son who was

born with a heart condition requiring five surgeries early in life. Now he has returned to music,

and his son is now his "mini-me," who often joins him on stage.

Another participant was able to share about the many "hats" of identity that she wears as

an army reservist specializing in mental health, a law enforcement student and intern at a local

police department, and as an African-American. She was able to use her photos to show the

many facets of her identity, which others often do not think can live in harmony with each other,

and how she was still a child at heart, in spite of her many demanding roles.

The final African-American participant was able to talk about how he was able to

overcome his fear of storms by studying meteorology, and this led to reactions from the officers

about how many in the department are also "storm chasers" and always looking at the clouds and

studying weather patterns. This participant also shared about having a paper route and having

the neighbors call the cops to check on his "erratic" behavior as he crossed back and forth across

the street to deliver papers and used a flashlight in the early morning to make sure he had the

right house. The officers commiserated with his plight, sharing about how many calls they get

from the same "concerned" neighbors for activity that is actually not suspicious at all.

The discussion that followed the presentations covered many different topics, including

common traits of law enforcement officers, the need for self-care and work-life balance in law

enforcement, the complications created by social media, and barriers to community engagement.

Members of the African-American group noted that both officers had a lot of photos

highlighting the outdoors and adventure. The officers reflected share that many in law

enforcement have "type A" personalities and can be overly confident and not think they need

backup. They explained that this is sometimes harmful but that the competitive spirit is what

often creates longevity in the officers. One of the African-American participants had a fireman

and police officer in his family and remarked that although he was not attracted to either career,

both of his careers in sales and in music involve a high degree of activity. Several of the

participants grew up in big cities and went through a culture shock when they realized that not

everything was open all night long and also found that Minneapolis and the surrounding suburbs were often "too quiet" for them.

Another theme that emerged was the importance of self-care for officers. Both officers expressed dismay at candidates and young officers who have always wanted to be cop and a reluctance to hire "kids who slept in police jammies." They perceived that many of these candidates and several younger officers could not separate their identity from their profession. They deemed this mentality as dangerous and as leading to burnout. The law enforcement group was very adamant about trying to separate from work when off-duty. One officer remarked, "You couldn't pay me to watch COPS." The other officer mentioned not wanting to always be introduced as a police officer.

The officers also emphasized the importance of mentorship and that once of the most important roles they play is teaching customer service and communication. Although some younger officers might judge them as being "soft," they place a high emphasis on empathy, telling officers that they can "chew someone out or give them a ticket but not both" and to "imagine how they would feel if someone talked to your family member that way" when they get complaints. One of the officer talked about using this same strategy when getting pulled over for speeding and how he will always remember getting reamed by the officer, who did end his tirade when he used this line and identified himself as an officer but still gave him a ticket.

One officer reminded those under him that they are often talking to people on their worst day and that while they will hand out hundreds of tickets and make hundreds of arrests over the course of their career and forget about them, the people they encounter will most likely remember these interactions for the rest of their lives. One officer talked about how their uniforms are "presence enough" and that they do not have a need to belittle or talk down to those

they encounter. The law enforcement student talked about how intimidating the uniform can be

and how she forgot the fear that came with her uniform until she was called on it.

Another subject that emerged was social media and how impersonal it can become and

how quickly enmity builds through social media platforms. One participant from the African-

American group remarked that social media often eliminates the other side of the story and that

the family of the victim always says that "my kid was a good boy" even when that is likely not

the whole story. The officers added that thirty seconds of criminalizing video on social media

could color an entire community's view of the police and make it very difficult for them to show

the community that they do desire to protect and serve.

While the officers understood that the community wants improvements, one officer

commented that "sometimes the grass is dead on the other side" and that they want to do the little

things that matter to build trust with the community rather than completely revamping the

department. Some of these efforts have included the Joint Community Police Partnership to

build relationships with diverse communities across police departments, handing out small gifts

at the Mall of America, adding a community engagement unit, and doing monthly Coffee with a

Cop events, where the public can come and converse with officers. The officers and law

enforcement student discussed the limitations of Coffee with a Cop and other such events, such

as officers ending up at the same table, which can be even more intimidating to the public. All

participants agreed that having more of a sales mentality where the officers approach community

members would be helpful.

Feedback From Participants

Feedback from participants was collected through live feedback during the project,

follow-up emails, and two follow-up meetings with participants. Participants generally came in

unsure of what to expect and how much participants would share of themselves. Multiple

participants had expected that the groups would be larger but also enjoyed the intimacy and

sharing that was able to be done with smaller numbers. One participant mentioned that she did

not think that the same level of authenticity would have been present in a larger group.

Another participant wrote in an email follow-up:

Projects like this go a long way to help enhance our common humanity...regardless

of the "roles" we play at our jobs. Using a form of art such as photography helped all

participants be more personal and relaxed. I felt an atmosphere of acceptance and

relaxation because a common goal of dialogue was achieved through a creative means

that everyone can do...take pictures!!

Participants generally reported entering the project with an open mind toward the other

group but did express some shifts in their general views. One African-American participant

wrote that she will encourage others to attend community events sponsored by police and that

events like these help to "not paint everyone with that broad paintbrush."

One officer wrote that he was surprised by how quickly the photos lent themselves to

discussion and believed that the discussions could have gone even deeper if time had allowed.

While he did not report that a great deal shifted for him as a result of the project, he did find the

project to be helpful in approaching each person as an individual rather than falling back on

stereotypes.

In an in-person follow-up with one of the African-American participants, she expressed

appreciation for the project and how she really felt seen and heard for all of the many hats she

wears as a person of color, service member, and future law enforcement officer. She appreciated

the ability to express herself freely and also the opportunity to network with both communities.

She thought that the smaller numbers were advantageous to really deepening the conversation and that she had shared the project with the police department she was interning with, who also expressed interest in the project. Urban disconnection and isolation was also discussed, and the author and participant considered how this project offered a way to combat this by using photographs, which are also used in social media, but presenting them in front of live audience and being able to "comment" in real time without all the barriers and anger that tend to infiltrate social networks.

The author met in-person with the commander of the police department after the project to follow up, and, again, the conversation flowed easily without pretense or a need to disclaimer or over-explain. Even though this was a follow-up conversation, it seemed to build on the work that had been done in the previous meeting. Police stereotypes, such as police officers being conservatives, were discussed, and he made a commentary about how he does not like to be put in this box and will point out to conservative officers when they are afraid about the possibility of de-unionizing, that it is actually the liberals who are fighting to keep the unions.

He appreciated how the project allowed him to live "outside of the box" and saw great potential for the project to be duplicated in the department and outside of it. He made a plan to share the project with the Joint Community Police Partnership, which is a program run through Hennepin County (which contains the city of Minneapolis and several other suburbs) to improve relations between law enforcement and diverse communities, in particular, people of color, immigrants, indigenous groups, and communities of faith. He could see other departments using this to reach out to diverse populations in their respective communities, such as the Somali population or Latino population, which are growing in many parts of the metro area. He also talked about the possibility of doing a presentation to the public about the project so that more

people would know about it and be able to bring it to their communities and neighborhoods. He also echoed the sentiments that smaller numbers were crucial to the success of the project, and it was discussed how the project could be done at a larger event with multiple tables of smaller numbers of participants. He also noted that there has been greater receptivity for projects like this than there had been three years ago and that he wants to see more of this kind of work happening in the community.

Discussion

Significant barriers were encountered in the planning and execution of this project. Recruitment proved especially difficult due to the timing of the project in winter and Minneapolis hosting the Super Bowl, which required nearly complete law enforcement engagement.

However, in conducting this project, the author learned that art could be a powerful medium for creating safety, trust, and deep dialogue in a short amount of time. Using photography highlighted the many dimensions of each individual helping to disrupt stereotypes and single stories. The selection of photographs also allowed individuals to control and craft their own narratives and led to safe and selected self-disclosure, fostering an environment of acceptance and trust and temporarily dismantling the power differential. The simplified model that was executed is also easily reproducible without the need for the author and could easily be used with different populations in the broader community.

Strengths

Before the project, the participants in the African-American group were strangers to each other, yet in just one 90-minute meeting, using the Photovoice model, they were able to talk about difficult issues and some of the most difficult moments in their lives, both during the

presentations and in the discussion that followed. Some participants still keep in touch with each other and reported that they felt hopeful and encouraged by the project.

When meeting with officers, the researcher initially noticed that she was the person that the officers were making the most eye contact with during the presentation of their photos. It may have been because of her role as the organizer of the project or her light-colored skin. As the second meeting progressed, and, especially after the African-American group presented their photos, the researcher no longer found any need to facilitate anything other than time-keeping and could more or less be invisible and allow both groups converse with each other.

The Photovoice technique allowed the participants to create their own narratives, and the author found this aspect helpful in not falling into stereotypes, single stories, and assumptions, and allowing each participant to stand as an individual. The officers were relieved that they did not have to show all police photos, and the African-American participants appreciated that their photos did not all have to be centered on their interactions with police or being Black. This helped a more three-dimensional story to be created than what is often depicted in social media or in the news.

At the same time, the discussions had depth and did not avoid difficult topics like racism and police brutality. However, participants did not feel that the entire conversation had to center around these topics, and they were able to get to know each other on a personal level as well. Participants asked questions of each other based on the photos, and participants went from being quiet and slightly apprehensive at the beginning of the session, to open and jovial by the time the session was completed. Moreover, they were able to find commonalities with each other that went beyond race and occupation, such as the cities they grew up in, their families, their personalities, and their quirks.

For the officers, it also offered a safe space to voice critiques of their profession that may not have otherwise been accepted in a more formal meeting, such as a policy meeting or town hall. Having just a couple officers who were able to be vulnerable and relatable also seemed to make engagement easier for the African-American group. The participants continued to converse across groups as they left the session, and many shared contact information with each other voluntarily following the meeting. This seemed to be another indicator that relationships could be forged through this simple model.

Limitations and Revisions to the Model

The author faced many limitations and barriers in the recruitment phase of the project, which led to several revisions of the model. Engaging with both groups required numerous phone calls, emails, and meetings. The initial dates in January were not workable for law enforcement due to Minneapolis hosting the Super Bowl, requiring all of the police departments in the metro area to be involved, and in some cases, working overtime, leading up to and during the game's events. Many officers also were given compensation for their time after the event. The month of January also proved difficult in contacting Black affinity groups, some of which had pre-planned activities or were in the midst of planning activities around the Super Bowl or Black History Month. Therefore, the decision was made to move the dates to late February (two weeks following the Super Bowl) and early March to accommodate this need. Originally, the three initial meetings were scheduled to be held on January 14, 21, and 28; the project was delayed by three weeks and rescheduled for Feb. 11, 18, and March 11.

The original model was to prompt each member of each group to take 6-8 photographs before the initial meeting and upload them to a private group photo page through Flickr. The groups would then meet separately (African-American and law enforcement) at Atonement

Lutheran Church in Bloomington, MN. Each group member would speak about their

photographs and the narratives that accompany them. Then the group would identify 4-6 images

and their accompanying narratives that represent their common experience to be printed and

displayed for the other group.

The participants would then come back together for a second meeting, where they would

have an opportunity to view the selected photographs and accompanying narratives of the other

group. They would be provided with sticky notes to write and leave their reactions on the frames

of the printed photographs. After the group members had responded the photographs, the group

facilitators would take each photo down individually and read the responses. The group would

then be prompted to discuss which responses they would like the other group to see and which

ones they would like to discard.

At the third meeting, participants would receive their own photos and narratives with the

responses selected by the other group. They would then be asked to determine whether they

would like to meet participants from the other group and also if they would like to hold a public

or private reception of their images and narratives, where others in the community might also

have an opportunity to respond to the images and narratives.

Bloomington Police Department had agreed to be a part of the project in its original

model. However, their department regulations prevented them from asking officers who were

not on duty to participate, and they were not able to offer the officers any compensation for their

time. Because the project was scheduled for three Sundays, fewer officers were on-duty. This

resulted in only six officers being asked to participate. Of these six officers, only one agreed to

participate in the project with the caveat of only participating if other officers would participate.

Consequently, Bloomington Police Department was unable to participate in the original model.

At the first meeting for the African-American group, only one participant showed up after several cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances and conflicting events, causing the project to be delayed by one week. To further complicate matters, the community engagement liaison at Bloomington Police Department was removed from his position, and the commander of the department became the contact for the project. Because of all of these complicating factors, the project model was revised.

In the revised model, meetings were reduced to two meetings for the African-American group and one meeting for the law enforcement group. Instead of collecting photographs from both groups, photographs would only taken by the African-American group. At the first meeting, the African-American group was to select photographs to be shown to the law enforcement group, and the researcher would collect the accompanying narratives. Both would then be printed and brought to the Bloomington Police Department, where officers would be asked to respond to the photographs and narratives using sticky notes. The officers would also be asked if they would like to meet the participants from the African-American groups, in order to create an environment to establish positive relationships and trust between the two groups. At the second meeting for the African-American group, they would shown the responses to their photos and narratives and be asked whether they would like to meet the law enforcement officers who responded.

The Bloomington Police Department was offered this model as either an in-vivo workshop or a progressive event, where they could respond to the printed photos at their leisure. They responded with openness to this modified model. Feedback was also solicited from the African-American group at their initial meeting. They expressed a desire to see the images and hear the stories of law enforcement officers as planned in the original model. After being

proposed the options for the revised model, they were most favorable to a model that involved a live meeting with the officers at the police department. This became the project's model and was also agreed upon by the police department.

Possibilities for Future Studies

If this project were performed again with the same model, the author would still want to meet with the African-American group separately first, especially if they did not know each other previously, as was the case with this group. Even if they had known each other, it would be advantageous to meet with them separately first, in order to create a safe space to discuss difficult topics that might be easier to talk about in an in-group, and also because of the significant power differential between the African-American community and law enforcement.

Although it might have been interesting to print photographs and do written responses, having a live conversation brought an element of depth and humanity that would not have been possible otherwise. However, if it were feared that tensions were too high between two groups or there were larger groups than the ones used for this project, it would still be recommended to first identify common images and use printed images and sticky notes to create a dialogue. This method could also be used when time constraints are too great to allow each participant to speak.

In this metropolitan area, weekdays were easiest for police departments, so this would be a consideration for future projects involving law enforcement. It also seemed to remove barriers to hold the joint meeting at the police department, so this would be an addition recommendation for future projects, though events being held at places of worship or community centers would also be foreseeable. However, churches can be a barrier for some people of color; again, the recommendation would be to use a community center or the police department itself when possible. Given the power differential between law enforcement and the community, this project

could also be powerful when initiated by the police department rather than by an outside party, as was the case with this project.

Using Flickr to upload photos ahead of time proved cumbersome, so having participants bring small portable drives in order to show their photos or sending them to the facilitator, who could upload them to a common secure drive would be more feasible. Bringing printed photos to the meeting could also be a possibility, particularly if it was a larger event where participants met in smaller groups around tables. Having participants use photos from their phones or social media accounts also reduced many fears and barriers to finding or taking photos for the project and would be another recommendation for ease of disseminating the project across the community.

Calling and in-person networking proved to be the most effective means of recruiting participants for the project. Future projects should allow significant time for this process, especially for police departments, which sometimes plan their community engagement a year in advance. This project brought in participants from multiple places in the metro area, but future projects could be even more powerful and effective if focused on one police department and the community they serve, which would also support community-based policing initiatives. Several metro police departments declined to participate in the project but expressed interest in participating in future projects if it were brought to their particular city or suburb.

Potential to Create a Sustainable Conversation

In conclusion, photography is an accessible medium across diverse groups. It also has the advantages of being individualized, being inherently humanizing, offering aesthetic distance for containment, and is an easy in-road for beginning dialogues about difficult topics. Unlike cumbersome sculptures, it can be easily transported from place to place and reproduced digitally,

offering many opportunities for projects like this to be brought into the community and to other locations both near and far. Using photographs can reduce fear between groups with tension, as it provides a tangible focus and is less reliant on words than a typical discussion, while at the same time leading naturally to deep and productive discussion.

Photovoice allows participants to control their own narratives and gives them ownership in how they choose to identify themselves. It allows multidimensionality of identity to be easily seen and acknowledged, in order for a new lens of seeing each other to be established. This project could be reproduced and adapted for a variety of groups. For instance, it could be used to promote dialogue between liberals and conservatives, Muslims and Christians, and could even be used in family therapy. If sessions were longer than 90 minutes or took place over several weeks, it could also be possible to engage at a deeper level and discuss the difficult issues in an environment of safety and trust.

The author's hope is that this intermodal Photovoice community engagement project has empowered African-Americans and law enforcement officers to express their diverse narratives and begin to forge relationships and build trust. After giving each group a new lens and allowing them to respond to each other through art and narrative, hopefully future conversations will have more depth and empathy and that people of color in particular may be seen as fully human rather than as dangerous threats to law enforcement officers, leading to lessened anxiety for people of color when encountering law enforcement in their communities. It is also hoped that this community engagement project would go beyond people of color and law enforcement officers and permeate the greater community, promoting greater perspective-taking among other groups with a history of conflict in Twin Cities and in the greater regional area, country, and world.

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