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Blackness is Not a Crime: The Effectiveness of Diversity Training in Combating Police Brutality

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Abstract

Diversity training is supposed to help police officers better understand minority communities so that policing methods are safer. Research shows that diversity training does not successfully change officers' attitudes towards minority people. The research shows diversity training is not successful at repairing relationships between law enforcement and minority communities for three reasons: 1) the resistance to change in officers' implicit biases and ideals, 2) a justified distrust of police by minority communities, and 3) trainings are typically a reaction to public outcry over racial incidents, not a solution to police racial bias.

Introduction

Police are supposed to protect and serve all communities; but increasing media reveals that for People of Color, police can also be a source of fear and unprovoked violence.[1] While white communities may see police as a positive force, 37% of communities of Color see them as

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[1] Ingmire, Jann. "Division of the Social Sciences." *Young People of Color Mistrust Police, Report Finds | Division of the Social Sciences*, socialsciences.uchicago.edu/story/young-people-color-mistrust-police-report-finds.

a threat.[2] Because of a lack of cultural understanding and a prevalence of implicit bias, law

enforcement personnel are not properly equipped to safely police minority communities.

There is a long history of police brutality in America. For decades, police have used

excessive force and racial profiling, specifically on Black people and their communities. One of

the most well known incidents is the beating of Rodney King during a traffic stop in Los

Angeles.[3] This police behaviour towards Black people has not significantly changed since that

incident. Today Black men and women are still being harassed, attacked, and murdered by law

enforcement. It seems like no matter what an officer does to a Black person, rarely will they

actually be convicted of a crime. In 2012, thirteen Cleveland officers fired 137 shots into the car

of a Black couple, Timothy Russell and Malissa Williams, killing them.[4] At the time, none of the

officers faced legal justice or were fired. Communities of Color are disproportionately being

affected by police brutality and insensitivity. Officers continue to lack proper training on cultural

differences and enter minority communities carrying racist biases and prejudice. This is an

important issue because police brutality is taking Black and Brown lives. Police are too quick to

shoot first and ask questions later. If they were to understand minorities as humans and work

their communities to get rid of their biases, then lives might be saved.

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[2] Ballard, Jamie. "Black Americans Less Likely to Feel Safe during Police Interactions." *YouGov*, today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2018/11/13/Black-americans-police-safety-trust

[3] Park, Madison. "The 62-Second Encounter between Philando Castile and the Officer Who Killed Him." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 30 May 2017, www.cnn.com/2017/05/30/us/philando-castile-shooting-officer-trial-timeline/index.html.

[4] Lopez. "Cleveland Cops Shot at 2 Unarmed Black People 137 Times. Years Later, 6 of Them Are Fired." *Vox*, Vox, 26 Jan. 2016, www.vox.com/2015/5/23/8649675/timothy-russell-malissa-williams-police-shooting.

Research Question

- To what degree does diversity training help repair relationships between law enforcement and the Black communities?

Thesis Statement

- Diversity training is not effective in repairing relationships between law enforcement and Black communities because it is not proactive, it does not address the distrust of police in Black communities, and it does not successfully challenge officer's implicit biases.

Methodology

First, it was important to analyze various police department definitions and goals of diversity training to outline the standards of what successful implementation would achieve. To evaluate police acceptance and perception of the usefulness of diversity training and how it impacts their attitudes and biases towards minorities, data was utilized to determine the impact of diversity training on police behaviour. Finally, an important addition to the research was the historical data on police relations with minority communities to understand the history of distrust and determine diversity training's ability to repair such distrust.

Many studies conducted on diversity training tend to focus on police attitudes towards the training, but not its effectiveness for changing officers' attitudes and actions towards minorities. There are a few studies that have looked at the ability of diversity training to change law enforcement attitudes toward minorities. Three studies in particular, Teahan, 1975; Schlosser, 2013; and Zimny, 2015; all concluded that diversity training has no impact on officers' attitudes and behaviours.

Synthesis of Findings

Combatting Police Bias with Diversity Training

On July 6th, 2016, Philando Castile was shot seven times by an officer after being pulled over for a busted tail light. After informing the officer that he had a concealed weapon, the officer began shouting for him not to reach for it. Castille, who did not reach for his weapon, remained calm assuring the officer that he was not before being shot and killed in front of his girlfriend and daughter.[5] This is just one example of police racial bias and how deadly it can be. Such brutality is not new to America, and many voices have been calling for overdue change.

Many people believe that these issues arise because officers bring implicit bias and past experiences with them into the field.[6] One popular suggestion for working against this bias is

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[5] Park, Madison. "The 62-Second Encounter between Philando Castile and the Officer Who Killed Him." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 30 May 2017, www.cnn.com/2017/05/30/us/philando-castile-shooting-officer-trial-timeline/index.html.

[6] Gould, Larry A. "Can an Old Dog be Taught New Tricks? Teaching Cultural Diversity to Police Officers." Policing, vol. 20, no. 2, 1997, pp. 339. ProQuest, https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/211290243?accountid=10598.

diversity training. Little Rock Police Department states that the objective of their diversity training is "to equip police officers with cultural competencies. Throughout the course, applications are made to law enforcement interactions in the local communities that are protected and served."[7] Departments who adopt diversity training seek to achieve the same goals. Such training is supposed to help law enforcement build better relationships with minority communities through learning about the cultural differences. The hope is that such learning through diversity training will result in more effective communication and safer policing within communities of color.

Diversity Training is Reactive Not Preventative

Though diversity training is intended to help repair relations between law enforcement and minority communities, the training often comes after a major racial incident and is too late to be effective. Jamie Ballard writes in an article covering police brutality that "intense nationwide scrutiny on whether police wield fatal force too quickly and too often, particularly against Black Americans, has prompted many departments to step up training, but the pace of deadly shootings has not changed."[8] This implies that the motivations behind implementing diversity training are in response to public scrutiny and not in response to the real underlying issue.

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[7] Paxton, Marcus. *Policechiefmagazine.org*, www.policechiefmagazine.org/cultural-diversity-and-competency/.

[8] Ballard, Jamie. "Black Americans Less Likely to Feel Safe during Police Interactions." *YouGov*, today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2018/11/13/Black-americans-police-safety-trus t

Another example of the reactive nature of newly implemented diversity training programs is in Chattanooga. In a Times Free Press article, Andy Sher writes, "Concerns over recent local police incidents involving excessive force in encounters with minorities have spurred a state lawmaker from Chattanooga to file legislation requiring the state to provide annual training for law enforcement on diversity, race relations and 'cultural awareness.'"[9] Again, the call for diversity training is in response to public concern and outcry over the issue instead of because of the real problem that's occurring. Diversity training is being used to show effort on the part of police to correct their actions, yet the training is not showing positive results. Communities of Color are still being violently and disproportionately policed despite the efforts of diversity training.

Implicit Bias is the Main Factor

Though diversity training is designed to help officers learn to understand and to communicate with minorities, research shows that the training simply is not working. In a review of the Teahan diversity training study, Richard R. Johnson writes, "compared to control groups of academy cadets who did not receive the training, white recruits who completed the training exhibited more prejudiced attitudes towards African-Americans, while African-American recruits developed more positive attitudes toward whites."[10]

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[9] Sher, Andy. "Chattanooga Lawmaker's Bill Would Require Police to Take Annual Diversity Training Courses." *Timesfreepress.com*, 7 Feb. 2019, www.timesfreepress.com/news/politics/state/story/2019/feb/06/bill-require-police-take-diversity-training/488201/.

[10] Johnson, Richard R. "POLICE-MINORITY RELATIONS: WHAT SHOULD BE DONE? - LLRMI - Training and Expert Services for Law Enforcement, Jails & Corrections, Insurance Pools, Risk Managers, and Attorneys." *LLRMI*, 9 July 2018, www.llrmi.com/articles/legal_update/2015_johnson_minorityrelations/.

While diversity training is supposed to help officers communicate with and better understand Black people, this study showed opposite effects. Not only were the cadet's prejudice and biases not improved, they were made worse after the training. Johnson also reviewed the Schlosser, 2013 study on police attitudes towards diversity training and found that "Attitude surveys of the recruits before and after the training revealed that the training had no influence on the racial attitudes of the recruits" The training really does not seem to affect the police officer's because their attitudes towards Black people are not improving or even changing.

Police Distrust Within Black Communities

There is a justified distrust for police within in Black communities that has been reinforced for decades. In her article, *Young People of Color Mistrust Police*, *Report Finds*, Jann Ignmire writes "Black youth are far more likely than other young people to have negative experiences with the police, and believe overwhelmingly that the American legal system does not treat all groups equally."[11] In *Black Americans less likely to feel safe during police interactions*, Jamie Ballard states, "When asked how much they generally trust their local police, only 14% of Black Americans say they trust their police force "very much." The general population was more than twice as likely (33%) as the Black community to choose this answer." She also writes that Black people are more likely to think that it is common for innocent people to get arrested. She says, "(73%) of Black Americans believe it's somewhat or very common for innocent people to be arrested for a crime." Because of historical police behavior towards Black

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[11] Ingmire, Jann. "Division of the Social Sciences." *Young People of Color Mistrust Police, Report Finds | Division of the Social Sciences*, socialsciences.uchicago.edu/story/young-people-color-mistrust-police-report-finds.

people as well as current media visuals of Black people being beaten and murdered by police, many Black people have a fear and mistrust of law enforcement. This distrust can make it interactions between law enforcement and Black people difficult even if officers have been effectively diversity trained. This is something that is not addressed or compensated for by diversity training.

Conclusion

Diversity training is not effective in repairing relationships between law enforcement and Black communities. It is not proactive or preventative. The training often comes after a racial incident causes public outcry and it is not truly in response to the real cultural issues. Diversity training is supposed to help police officers communicate better with people in communities; but research shows that diversity training fails to correct officers' implicit biases and change their attitudes towards minority people. If the training does not help officers see People of Color as actual people, then how can they effectively police minority communities? Finally, diversity training does not address the distrust of police in Black communities. Even if the training were successful at changing officers' biases towards People of Color, it still does not change the generations of trauma that minorities have faced at the hands of law enforcement. This issue will continue to make relations between officers and minorities difficult.

Cultural training for police needs to be more community-based and involve officers and the communities that they work in to address officers' biases and minorities' distrust of police.

The training also needs to involve entire police departments and not just officers as research

shows that department culture could be the root of implicit bias.[12]

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[12] Gould, Larry A. "Can an Old Dog be Taught New Tricks? Teaching Cultural Diversity to Police Officers." Policing, vol. 20, no. 2, 1997, pp. 339. ProQuest, https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/211290243?accountid=10598.

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