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The Criticality of a Community Perspective

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To enhance interactions between police officers and citizens, industrial–organizational (I-O) psychologists will have to utilize a systems thinking approach to understand the multifaceted challenges facing Baltimore and other cities across the nation and develop holistic solutions that include the whole community. Ruggs et al. (2016) overlooked the systems view of Baltimore's challenges by focusing solely on isolated incidents of racial bias and proposing solutions predominantly inside the police station. To develop a

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comprehensive solution that has the potential to truly extinguish Baltimore's flames, we must also account for the interplay of police bias where it exists in the community; otherwise, we risk simply fanning the flames and escalating the challenges further with linear solutions.

Bias Is Multidimensional

Racial bias may influence an officer's choice of behavior as was proposed in recent events, including the Freddie Gray shooting in Baltimore. In addition, with the uprisings and civil unrest creating solidarity around these perceived injustices, police bias may influence a citizen's choice of behavior during police–citizen interactions. Ruggs et al. acknowledged this fact when mentioning that minority citizens may have negative experiences with police officers because of their awareness of other events involving police brutality. However, their proposed solutions were mainly focused on racial bias and police interventions, and their solutions minimized the importance of addressing police bias and community interventions (Ruggs et al.). Therefore, in addition to the solutions proposed to help detect and reduce the isolated incidents of racial bias in the police force, an emphasis must also be made on detecting and alleviating police bias where it exists in the community, to rebuild relationships of mutual respect. Because bias is multidimensional, when addressing the dialogue between police officers and citizens, I-O psychologists' goal must be broader than simply addressing racial bias in the police station.

Community Relations Must Be Elevated

To develop holistic solutions that have the potential to improve police–citizen interactions, community relations and engagement must be a focal point. Baltimore's Police Commissioner Kevin Davis stated that "public safety cannot be one-dimensional" (personal communication, March 28, 2016). He pointed out that police officers feel the same as minority citizens and do not want to be "painted with a broad brush" and stereotyped either; instead, most of them want to do the right thing (K. Davis, personal communication, March 28, 2016). Therefore, solutions must focus on changing the perceptions of both law enforcement and community members to successfully enhance police–citizen interactions.

To address the multidimensional bias challenge, the Baltimore police commissioner has established a new curriculum where new officers spend 90 days on foot patrol throughout the city, learning how to interact with citizens and achieve effective community policing that builds mutual relationships of respect (United Way, 2016). Although multiple solutions identified by Ruggs et al. are also being addressed, including increasing the diversity of the police force and enhancing cultural sensitivity through training

programs, the police commissioner's efforts place community at the center. To enhance cultural sensitivity training, the Baltimore police department has a History of Baltimore speaker series to teach police officers about the cultures of the communities in which the officers will be asked to work (K. Davis, personal communication, March 28, 2016). In addition, the police department partners with the communities in a project called Ceasefire, which is a nationally proven model used to identify the most vulnerable people prone to commit and receive violence and connect them with organizations that can help address their challenges, using police force only as a last resort (K. Davis, personal communication, March 28, 2016). Ceasefire models the integration of community organizing and engagement to solve problems and achieve collective goals (Bramson & Buss, 2002). Mr. Davis asserted that "if the only time a citizen sees a police officer is at the scene of a crime, that's an opportunity lost" (personal communication, March 28, 2016).

Similar community relations projects are underway in other cities affected by isolated incidents of bias. In Ferguson, Missouri, a new program called Community Oriented Policing Services (C.O.P.S.) is creating an open dialogue between the police department and community members with the goal of solving community problems before they lead to criminal issues (City of Ferguson, 2016b). On March 15, 2016, the city agreed to begin hosting structured, facilitated conversations with police officers and community members, specifically with members who have not had positive relationships with the police department or the city (City of Ferguson, 2016a). Cleveland, Ohio, created a community relations board, which is responsible for promoting peaceful relations between different cultures in the community and facilitating positive police–citizen interactions through training and community meetings (City of Cleveland, 2016). Finally, New York has reinvented the partnerships among the police, community, and public and private entities with an emphasis Police Commissioner William Bratton referred to as "not just policing *in* New York's communities but *with* the residents in each of those communities" (NYPD, 2016). To accomplish the new vision, the NYPD has designated 33% of police officers' shifts as uncommitted time that will be used to work with community members, identify reoccurring issues for resolution, and focus on youth prevention instead of answering calls (NYPD, 2016). The nature of the integrated solutions being implemented across Ferguson, Cleveland, and New York signifies the importance of elevating community relations as the core emphasis to any proposed solutions to these complex challenges.

On the basis of the emphasis of these change efforts, I-O psychologists should offer cities that are grappling with similar challenges a myriad of solutions similar to what Ruggs et al. suggested but with community relations at the core, incorporating the whole interconnected system to foster change

(Bramson & Buss, 2002). One of the characteristics necessary and important to become an effective officer is community relations (Berner, 2010). Therefore, rather than selecting, training, and developing police officers with the sole goal of reducing bias, solutions also need to focus on enhancing community relations, which in and of itself can help alleviate both racial and police bias. To accomplish this feat, talent acquisition and management systems in law enforcement should incorporate community relations as a core competency sought in their selection processes, developed and sustained through their training programs, and reinforced with their performance management practices, rewards programs, and organizational cultures and climates.

Conclusion

Social interactions are complex because people bring their background, experiences, biases, and assumptions to the relationship. As a result, any attempt to improve interactions must involve all stakeholders. If I-O psychologists want to improve police–citizen interactions, solutions must incorporate the whole system, police officers and community citizens, and address all biases, racial and law enforcement biases. Placing community relations at the core of solutions provides the foundation for rebuilding police–citizen relationships of mutual respect and trust. With a systems perspective, I-O psychologists have the potential to bring the I-O discipline to the community and not only improve police–citizen interactions but also build stronger, more resilient communities and enhance social change.

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