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Conflict Communication in Law Enforcement

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CMST 694: Alternate Plan Paper

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May 2021

Abstract

This paper will focus on addressing conflict communication in law enforcement and what literature are available and the gaps within them. Conflict communication can range from the way's words are used, what words are used, and when those words are used when police officers interact with the public. Due to the lack of extensive research done within communication studies and law enforcement, this paper aims to aid in getting future research studies done within the professions. Conflict communication within law enforcement is a topic that should be talked about more to possibly lower the number of instances where physical and/or deadly force is needed. This paper doesn't aim to diminish the tools already available to police officers and there will be times where communication is not an option. Instead, this paper aims to help in getting more research done when it comes to communication and law enforcement by addressing the gaps.

Keywords: [training, communication, conflict, de-escalation, crisis, negotiations, police, law enforcement.]

Rationale

Within law enforcement, very little research exists on the topic of effective conflict management skills. There are plenty of studies and research papers done on the use of force, de-escalation tactics, potential intercultural communication training programs, but few studies on the communication aspect within law enforcement. People do not think effective communication when they imagine police officers. Instead, society has given them this image of a tough, white male who is uncompromising and quick to use of force in all situations. This study examines why there is a lack of research done and will offer alternatives to conflict communication training within the profession. The importance of proper communication tactics for current and future police officers cannot be overstated. Police officers interact with the public daily and having the proper communication tools can help increase the number of positive interactions. Proper communication tactics will also be a tool in helping the profession of law enforcement and the communities they serve rebuild the broken bridge which brings me to my research question. Is current de-escalation and conflict communication practices in law enforcement effective and how does it impact the way police officers perform their responsibilities?

Literature Review

In this study, I will focus on conflict management and de-escalation communication tactics used by those in law enforcement and the field of communication studies. This is done to explore what similarities and differences connect the two professions. The findings of the literature review will be used to create a basic role-play training module that will help current officers develop new conflict communication skills and serve as a base for future research. Future research will be the main end goal because of the limited number of studies comparing the two fields of communication studies and law enforcement.

Conflict Communication and Negotiations.

Proper communication is essential in any organization. From the sender to the message to the receiver, communication at any level must be carried out in an effective and efficient manner. Conflict communication arises when the message is either misinterpreted or miscommunicated. Negotiation tactics provide officers with invaluable tools when dealing with uncooperative subjects. People cannot have and maintain good relationships without communication (Spaho, 2013). Experience shows that few of us can have communication without some sort of conflict. Conflict communication can happen at any level, from organizations to interpersonal communication. What we do to minimize and adapt to lower the chances of conflict communication shapes us into effective communicators. There are also various kinds of conflict within communication. Ranging from social interactions to hierarchical where communication either happens from the top down or bottom up, to interpersonal and intercultural, and much more (Spaho, 2013). Organizational conflict communication is the most relevant when it comes to the field of law enforcement when one focuses on the internal affairs of policing. Since law enforcement is highly bureaucratic, organizational conflict communication always plays a role in how and if officers receive training in de-escalation tactics. Officers often must figure out how to navigate conflicts within their own departments (Spaho, 2013). How police officers handle conflict at work, either with their superiors or fellow officers, and knowing how law enforcement organizations handle conflict communication may prove to be fruitful. If officers can manage organizational conflicts, they stand a much better chance at taking those skills and implementing them in community relations.

Culture also plays a part in how conflict communication is managed. Marin et al. (2019) mentions how some cultures use negotiation tactics more than others when addressing conflict

communication. For example, cultures where direct communication is appropriate, individuals may be more willing to engage in negotiations (Marin et al., 2019). Other cultures may choose a less confrontational tactic when engaging in conflict communication. Learning cultural differences and how they treat conflict communication may also be beneficial to law enforcement organizations.

Conflict communication also is not always a negative thing. One can learn many things when engaging in conflict communication. In negotiations, a positive aspect of miscommunication is that it can create new pathways and thus, lead to better end results (Marin et al., 2019). An interesting study done by Oostinga et al., (2016) went a different way when dealing with conflict communication by focusing on the errors made in crisis negotiations. According to Oostinga et al., (2016) as cited in (Giebels & Taylor, 2009), “Crisis negotiation is a protracted interaction between the police and a perpetrator in which the outcome is not necessarily a win-win situation, but rather a solution characterized by individual gains with win-lose structures” (p. 18). Focusing on the errors made by negotiators helps produce actionable intelligence that future negotiators can use in crisis situations. Oostinga et al.’s (2016) study identified six conclusions that future researchers could use when dealing with crisis communication. The findings suggests that there are areas within policing that can benefit from the lessons learned from crisis situations. These range from using different response strategies because using the same strategy may lower the negotiators credibility, to how some errors are made on purpose to establish rapport with the perpetrator (Oostinga et al., 2016). Another interesting finding from Oostinga et al.’s study is how by focusing on the errors of crisis communication, negotiators treat those errors as something to overcome. This helps boost the

morale of negotiators but can be dangerous to their decision making as it can decrease their awareness of their own mistakes (Oostinga et al., 2016).

Cross culture negotiations and conflict communication is another area that requires more research when it pertains to law enforcement. Having the ability to execute proper intercultural communication goes a long way with establishing rapport and increase the chances of success (Martin et al., 2019). Another shared aspect of crisis negotiation and conflict communication is the ability for individuals and negotiators to be flexible. knowing when and how to say something can make the difference between a positive and negative ending. Sensemaking is the term used by Martin et al. (2019) to explain how individuals and groups can develop certain connections with each other to help build on the feeling of rapport. Rapport building is a good skill for negotiators and conflict managers, but there are different ways of doing so. Some may require a harder stance than others. Sikveland and Stokoe's (2020) study on if police negotiators should "speak" or "talk" to people in crisis explains this phenomenon further. "Talking" in Sikveland and Stokoe's study means communication between two or more people. It is a conversation and has less direct forms of communication. "Speaking" is when a negotiator or conflict manager declares a statement and the words carry more weight than talking (Sikveland & Stokoe, 2020). Different situations may require different communication methods, but most negotiations classes or learnt material emphasizes "talk" more than "speak." Sikveland and Stokoe (2020) though, found that most successful negotiation strategies used "speak" more than "talk." This contradiction is another reason why more research is needed in the fields of conflict management and law enforcement.

Conflict communication and negotiations require precise dialogue choices spoken at the right time and at the right moment. It is a difficult process for even veteran negotiators and

conflict managers. Sikveland and Stokoe (2020) also found that negotiators used “talk” more in part to distance themselves from the image of policing. When most people hear police or see them, they tend to imagine a strict or “no compromise”- type of person - forcing negotiators to “talk” to the person in crisis, rather than “speaking” to them. Doing so can be dangerous because if the person in crisis feels that they have more control than they really do, they may choose to act or behave in ways they would not under normal circumstances (Sikveland & Stokoe, 2020). Word selection matters because of the way people interpret the meanings behind them. Most crisis situations aren’t situations that present a danger to the public, but rather to one or two individuals. Negotiators face people in the middle of a personal crisis more than situations like hostage incidents (Charles, 2007). These types of incidents require skilled negotiators who can recognize any signs of mental illness and adapt to a everchanging environment. As for hostage situations, Charles, (2007) mentions how the crisis negotiation course at the FBI Academy teach active, brief, and problem-focused approaches. From using active listening skills to being able to quickly think of their feet, these FBI cadets learn the difference between the skills they learn and those who use traditional therapy skills (Charles, 2007).

A successful hostage incident that serves as the model for Charles (2007) study was the Jefferson High School hostage incident. According to the participants Charles (2007) interviewed, some key factors were taking it slow and speaking the language of the hostage taker. The negotiators in the Jefferson High School hostage incident used various interactional conversational practices like being flexible, using the information they had, and making sense of the hostage takers behaviors within the context provided (Charles, 2007). This falls in line with how Sikveland and Stokoe (2020) views crisis communication. The limitations of Sikveland and Stokoe’s (2020) study was that it was done in the Netherlands and different countries may treat

crisis communication differently. As for Charles (2007) study, she looked at crisis communication through a systemic lens as a marriage and family therapist.

What is problematic with the above discussed studies is the infinite number of differences the crisis situations have from the models. Every crisis manager and negotiator approaches crisis situations differently, even if they use the same methods. The other unknown in the crisis is the person in crisis. No one person acts or behaves the same in high stress situations. There is some universal groundwork, but once the situation goes critical, rules and methodology go out the window. To understand how police officers can better handle themselves in volatile situations, conflict communication must be put into practice.

Conflict Management in Practice.

Looking at conflict communication being used by police departments and the communities they serve, within the organization itself, and in their own relationships can provide some background on the effectiveness of these tactics. Rosenbaum and Lawrence's (2017) study evaluated Chicago's Quality Interaction Program (QIP) for their police recruits. This training program focused on procedural justice, interpersonal communication, decision-making, cultural awareness, and stress management. According to Rosenbaum and Lawrence (2017), "attention was given how the recruits handled their emotions, empathy, and communication skills." The QIP is applied to police training through programs like case studies, role-playing scenarios, and involves personalized and individualized feedback. Rosenbaum and Lawrence believe that more departments should utilize QIP because of the unique way the training program tests police recruits. The results from Rosenbaum and Lawrence's study found that though the QIP did not improve police recruits interpersonal skills, it was effective in creating respectful behaviors and reduced the reliance on force when "arresting" suspects. One of the reasons Rosenbaum and

Lawrence decided to go with this study is because of how much police officers are expected to handle. From domestic disputes to traffic stops, to dealing with mental health crises, and they are expected to do all of this and more while being able to respond to an infinite number of external factors. In a diverse country such as the United States, police officers also have to balance how to properly communicate with people from various backgrounds (Rosenbaum & Lawrence, 2017).

The QIP was created in 2010 and ever since the 2014 officer involved shootings of Tamir Rice and Michael Brown, American policing has been thrust into the spotlight. QIP was also designed to move police officer training away from lectures and into hands on activities and real-world case studies that provide trainees with real time data to work with (Rosenbaum & Lawrence, 2017). Though even with this type of reform training program, the QIP did not manage to improve trainee interpersonal communication skills or their attitudes about showing respect when they were not being recorded. Rosenbaum and Lawrence then brought up the point of how these communication behaviors must be present within each officer. That even if individual officers knows of QIP communication tactics, it is up to them if they want to use it in different situations. This seems to be a recurring theme of how police officers are resistant to change when it comes to learning skills like conflict and interpersonal communication skills. It just isn't high on their priority list. Though Rosenbaum and Lawrence did mention that part of their limitations for this study was the lack of opportunities to practice and put new communication skills to the test. Another part was how the QIP training program faces an uphill battle against traditional training programs that emphasizes officer safety and toughness (Rosenbaum & Lawrence, 2017). It is hard to balance officer safety with a respectful and empathy filled civilian conversation. Most police departments spend over 70 and 60 hours on

firearm and self-defense training, respectfully. Topics like conflict management and interpersonal communication get about nine hours (Reaves, 2016, as cited in Rosenbaum & Lawrence, 2017). One final big issue with QIP training is that officers who are more focused on ideals like empathy, fairness, respect, and compassion find it harder to apply them to perpetrators of crimes, unlike victims. Treating a drunk driver with compassion is much harder than treating a rape victim with the same values (Rosenbaum & Lawrence, 2017). Future research studies could involve a mixture of both QIP and traditional methods to compensate for a profession that has mostly stayed the same since the beginning of its creation. Conflict management also applies to issues that police officers face with each other. Though policing is unlike any other profession, the same rules of politics, bureaucratic issues, and hierarchy concerns can be applied here. It is an organization after all. Corcoran (2014) believes that police supervisors should take a problem-solving approach when dealing with conflict within the organization.

Corcoran (2014) draws upon existing literature that defines problem-solving as dealing with conflict that happens when one party infringes, either knowingly or unknowingly on other party's rights. Dealing with internal issues within the law enforcement organization may be different than say a corporate world. Mainly due to the hierarchical nature of the profession. It is a paramilitary profession with ranks and a top-down chain of command and communication. Corcoran (2014) believes that police managers draw upon their own experiences when dealing with internal struggles from officers. This means that what each supervisor or manager believes will influence their approach to conflict management. This may not be the best approach because of the already established biases. To remedy this, Corcoran outlines various lenses to view conflict management within the law enforcement organization. By understanding that yes, police officers are human too. Treating each officer's conflict as someone who has complex human

emotions and relationships, supervisors can reach an outcome that shows mutual respect and justice to all parties involved (Corcoran, 2014). Taking the time to listen and communicate with all parties and understanding that rank may be a factor in how much is told, supervisors can affect how their officers perceive justice. This then can influence how well they perform their responsibilities and may even improve their conflict management skills when interacting with the public through the use of communication tactics like compromises and talking on their level. Another example Corcoran (2014) gives is by understanding the difficulties of top-down communication, officers may develop empathic communication skills because they know what it is like to be talked down to.

Communication in a police officer's romantic relationship is another aspect that is not talked about much. Horan et al.'s (2012) article was one of the few that even mentions communication between police officers and their spouses. Horan et al. (2012) focused on the use of humor to mediate the stress of the job and work/home life balance. Police officers face a different kind of stress than other occupations. Burst stress describes their profession as being a police officer can mean moving from a calm and peaceful state to a suddenly life-threatening situation in a second. This causes undue stress upon not just the officers, but their loved ones. Communication then between officers and their spouses can be volatile and involve conflict that extends to their safety, being a single parent, and the unpredictable hours. Though this study is an outlier to the rest, it still conveys an important message about the profession of law enforcement. When society thinks of policing, they barely understand that officers often take their work home, even if they don't want to. In order to understand the impacts that a healthy relationship has on officer-community relations, society must acknowledge that officers are human too.

Horan et al. (2012) goes on to explain how humor might be a mediating communication tool that officers use in their interpersonal lives and lists three features of conflict communication. Frequency, negative, and intense aspects of communication that involved high emotions and personal attacks. This is where humor comes into play. Humor encourages coping mechanisms in conflict communication and Horan et al. (2012) believe having one partner who is funny can lead to shorter and less common conflict communication. Humor is essential in successful relationships and help manage stress and conflict in relationships. Horan et al. (2012) brought up an interesting point on how police departments and the spouses of officers could take training and support group sessions that teach the uses of humor when managing conflict communication within their relationships. According to Horan et al. (2012), “past research on humor in conflict management show that it is one of the few acceptable ways for police officers to vent emotions, feel a sense of control, and reinforce shared values” (p. 568). The limitations for this study were the fact that Horan et al.’s (2012) findings were correlational findings and when it comes to humor, what is funny for one group of people may not be funny for another. Dark humor is something that police officers sometimes use and those outside the profession may have a hard time understanding why it is humorous. Another limitation was how Horan et al.’s (2012) study focused on police officers and other professions that are high-risk might share similarities or exhibit different responses to the use of humor in conflict communication within romantic relationships. The findings of these studies determined that police officers tend to use different coping mechanisms from the public because of the nature of their work and that most officers still are hesitant to reach out for support. The stigma of not having a strong, unmoving, and tough personality still exists in the culture of law enforcement, though it is making progress.

The mental health of officers must be accounted for because having a healthy mindset can mean the difference between a positive community interaction and a negative one.

Disorders and Communication.

Police officers interact with a range of individuals so being knowledgeable on every form of conflict communication is impossible. One of the biggest challenges for police officers in being able to communicate properly with those suffering from mental health issues. Mental health conflict communication is still a tough subject for law enforcement because of the lack of resources and how society expects police officers to be both social worker and mental health professional on top of their existing responsibilities. Tinney and Rosenbaum's (2015) study as cited in Hacker and Horan (2019) found that in 2015, 33 percent of police calls in the United States were relatable to mental health issues. This means that most officers respond to at least six mental health calls per month. With mental health calls being unpredictable, police officers should be better trained in how to handle such calls in an effective manner. The problem lies with the amount of time it takes for recruits to become police officers and the type of training they receive (Hacker & Horan, 2019). Even with models like Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) being implemented in more police departments, the effectiveness and longevity of these programs have been inconsistent. This goes back to the difficulty of training police officers in topics that are not traditionally important in law enforcement culture. It is also extremely challenging to conduct randomized controlled trials for these types of training programs for police officers (Hacker & Horan, 2019).

Another communication challenge posed by those with mental health issues is how the language of policing is traditionally authoritarian to bring order to a scene. Law enforcement language consists of commands, straight talk, and sometimes, hardline questions. This type of

communication does not work well when dealing with people with mental health issues (Hardy, et al., 2014). With the unpredictable nature of mental health calls, most police officers aim to get a handle on the situation fast and sort out the questions afterwards. Hardy et al. (2014) argues that authoritarian language should not be used and instead, therapeutic communication styles should be adapted and be a part of the training program for police officers. Various research on interpersonal communication has shown that dominant language tends to lead to aggression from those suffering from mental health issues (Hardy et al., 2014). By using therapeutic language in an interpersonal setting may help de-escalate certain mental health calls. The problem lies with the “how to apply” these types of communication styles into the training program for new and current officers. With social welfare being accepted as a role for police officers, the need for better interpersonal and therapeutic communication training must be addressed. Such a framework should include a series of verbal and non-verbal communication styles designed to bridge the gap between police officers and those who suffer from mental health issues (Hardy et al., 2014).

Communication challenges happen in law enforcement often and more training content should be created by those with policing experience to be credible in the eyes of police officers. Neave-DiToro et al.’s (2019) article on law enforcement interactions with those who suffer from communication disabilities also found that more training is required and that there is a lack of material made for police officers. It is the lack of cross profession experience between law enforcement and communication studies that seems to be the problem. Hence, Neave-DiToro et al. (2019) wants to raise awareness for the public to these types of issues within law enforcement. Without the attention that communication training deserves within the profession and the public, proper education and law enforcement adaptability may never happen. A few

programs do exist that combats the issues of proper communication in law enforcement. Crisis intervention teams and negotiators are tools that police departments could utilize (Neave-DiToro et al. 2019). The issue here though, is that these organizations and experts aim to create specialists in their field and most departments cannot afford to train every officer to become specialists. These findings conclude that more mental health resources must be available for both the public and the officers in an accessible manner. To address these issues in an productive way, one must look at the culture within law enforcement and take into account the cultures of the communities in which they serve.

Culture and Conflict Communication.

Another area within law enforcement that could use more research is the subject of intercultural communication training for police officers. In a diverse nation as the United States, intercultural communication is important in attempts to de-escalate a situation. Cornett-DeVito and McGlone (2000) did a case study on intercultural communication training within the community policing model. The study was focused on the issues of rule of law and why sometimes, the system may treat minorities unfairly. No one is above the law, but some tend to get the short end when dealing with it. Culture means more than it used to as Cornett-DeVito and McGlone points to the culture within law enforcement. Every organization has its own culture, a set of rules in which their employees abide by. Law enforcement is no different. Cornett-DeVito and McGlone believes that for police officers to understand and want to learn intercultural communication, their culture must be addressed as well. This makes it hard for communication trainers of any field to come in and face officers and tell them how to speak or act. Law enforcement culture has traditionally been a tight lipped and tight knit organization who treat outsiders with suspicion (Cornett-DeVito & McGlone, 2000). To bring the idea of intercultural

and conflict communication to the table, trainers must understand and develop a rapport with the officers in training. Cornett-DeVito and McGlone's (2000) study found many things that separated law enforcement culture from cultures from other organizations. Topics included police slang language, the sense of right and wrong, and how police officers tend to socialize within their own circles. Many officers responded to issues like intercultural conflict communication with a positive attitude and believed that proper training could help them in their jobs. They understood that their job consists of interacting with the public and many wanted but didn't know how to address conflict communication across cultures (Cornett-DeVito & McGlone, 2000). Ideally, the trainers of such topics should come from a law enforcement background to establish rapport and reputation. Though civilian trainers could do the job if they understand law enforcement culture. Cornett-DeVito and McGlone also suggests using formats like group exercises, simulations, and case studies which allow officers to share their experiences and validates them when engaging in intercultural communication.

Interestingly, Sun and Payne (2004) went a different route when it came to evaluating culture and policing. Their study compared the differences and similarities between a Black and White officer and how they handle conflicts on the job. Race and ethnicity do play a part in how police officers perform their jobs, even if the subject in question are the skin colors of the officers themselves. Prior to Sun and Payne's (2004) study, there had been little research studies done on Black officers and how they interact with the community and fellow officers. Mainly because policing was still a predominately White male dominated profession. Sun and Payne's study aimed to find out whether Black and White officers differed in their approach to conflict towards citizens and how they managed to handle said conflicts. The limitations mentioned though included the communities in which the study was done, which were majority either Black

or White. There was a lack of diversity within the community. The second major limitation Sun and Payne mentioned was it is highly difficult to measure what kind of supportive or coercive activities police officers used in their engagement of the community. Though the findings of Sun and Payne's (2004) study were still relevant. Black officers were more likely to engage in supportive or compassionate behaviors and communication styles, especially towards those in Black communities. They also had a difficult time identifying themselves as either a "blue or black cop." Sun and Payne found that it was the location and type of police activity that determined which personality came out for Black officers. Black and White officers also acted in similar fashions when engaging with Black or White citizens, with a few variables like the severity of the situation, type of police activity and other external factors. Sun and Payne's finding also showed that police behavior is not affected by the race of the citizen. The findings discussed should be a steppingstone for police departments to recognize the differences between Black and White officers and find the best compromise that benefits the Black or White communities they serve. This could be done by examining and performing evaluations between officers within the same department. Given the findings of how police behavior is not affected by the race of the citizen, more research should be put into hiring qualified minority officers to patrol neighborhoods of color.

McManus et al.'s (2019) study focused on the community relations between Black officers and their own communities in a positive light to dispel the myths that there aren't Black officers who routinely patrol and participate as members of their own neighborhoods. One of the main topics was on the development of social bonds between Black communities and how they viewed those who became police officers. Around 12 percent of police officers in this country are Black and this growth in representation has resulted in mostly positive benefits for the Black

officer's own community (McManus et al., 2019). These positive interactions then build on the social capital by creating a positive image among the Black communities and often translates to younger Black individuals into joining or becoming interested in law enforcement. The more Black officers that patrol Black communities, the higher the social capital. By establishing these bonds, the ability to interact and know the police in a positive manner is increased. McManus et al. (2019) calls this "stakes in conformity" or the ability for Black communities to know their police officers who are often in their neighborhoods. All of this has led to the formation of Black community leaders who are willing to work with their local police departments on cleaning up their streets and helping them solve crimes. Another positive that Black social capital brings is the normalization of police encounters and the feeling of being adequately represented (McManus et al., 2019). A well represented and understood community tends to work better with law enforcement in making their cities safer.

Sun and Payne's (2004) findings share similarities to Nanes's (2020) article on policing in diverse and divided societies. Though Nane's study was done in Israel, the idea behind policing in diverse societies remain the same. The profession of policing has adapted to a point in response to the ever-diverse communities they serve in. Police departments which represent the communities they serve tend to do better in areas like intercultural communication, professionalism, and community engagement (Nanes, 2020). In areas where conflict, whether it be physical or communicative, the level of cooperation from citizens may depend on if they believe the police department is inclusive to their needs. Hence why most departments that practice community policing with an appropriate level of citizen demographic representation tend to score better where issues like conflict communication, mental health issues, and welfare checks are concerned. These studies found that police departments that are representative of their

communities tend to fare better in terms of community policing and cooperation. This could be used as the base for hiring qualified minorities in major urban police departments. By having a diverse and qualified police force may also help reduce physical use of force.

Use of Force and Communication Training.

Due to recent high-profile officer involved shootings, the topic of police use of force has once again been brought into the spotlight. Use of force applies to any situation where the officer must physically subdue an individual, with or without the aid of tools like pepper spray, tasers, or lethal force. Rajakaruna et al's (2017) study on police use of force training explored seven skillsets that police officers utilize when they consider using force in encounters. These were being Aware, able to Assess, their Approach, how they Act, their ability to Automatically react, how they Appraise the situation, and how they Adapt. Out of the seven skillsets, only Act involves communication in some form (Rajakaruna et al. (2017)). The rest involve a mixture of critical thinking skills, adaptability, and skillsets learned on the job. This once again highlights how the communication aspect of police officer training often forgets or teaches little conflict communication skills. Rajakaruna et al. (2017) does mention that as useful as these other skillsets are, further communication training should be applied to reduce the likelihood of use of force. The problem lies within the training regimen and the topics taught in classroom settings for law enforcement officials.

For many officers, the things they learn come from field experience and either can't or aren't taught in traditional lecture halls. Interestingly, Wolfe et al.'s (2020) article mentions how most police officers understand the importance of being an effective communicator. Most police work involves interacting with the public and being able to accurately "read" people is an essential skill to be a good police officer (Wolfe et al., 2020). This enables police officers to

become effective communicators, especially in situations where conflicts might arise. The problem Wolfe et al. (2020) argues is that experience alone does not make officers experts in communication or being able to “read” people. Part of the reason why is because it takes repetition of any subject for individuals to learn and with law enforcement being another bureaucratic institution governed by politics and funding, it is nearly impossible for that kind of training regimen to become part of the law enforcement culture (Wolfe et al., 2020). Another fundamental issue with what Wolfe et al. (2020) call Social Interaction Training is the lack of experts who also have a law enforcement background. Rank also plays a part in how serious officers take the training and bringing in outsiders to train police officers does not work as the officers often reject them outright. Even experts in both communication and has a law enforcement background may be rejected at a police department because they still come from the “outside” world, where they do not know department policies nor have the respect of the officers there (Wolfe et al., 2020). The idea of use of force training often makes officers turn a blind eye because some believe it means that they should not use force even when the situations call for it. These are issues that Wolfe et al. (2020) believes all police departments share. Which means for social interaction trainings to work, a completely new approach to the system of police training must be created.

Wolfe et al. (2020) did list three ways for such a training program to at least grab hold of a system that has a high rejection rate of outside training. First, trainers must develop rapport with the officers and be willing to listen and not treat officers as if they have no idea what they are doing. It is a matter of telling versus teaching, the former of which will shut down the training program before it starts. Secondly, the training should be repetitive, but not overly so as time is something officers' value a lot. Lastly, being flexible regarding time and scheduling as training

programs take a toll on the personal resources of a department. Wolfe et al. (2020) believes that with proper implementation, social interaction training could be the steppingstone in making the lives of this nation's officers and its citizens safer. Wolfe et al.'s (2020) findings may explain the results of Stroshine and Brandl's (2019) article on why and how often police officers use force. There has been plenty of articles and studies done on use of force that involves either a non-lethal or lethal weapon. Stroshine and Brandl's (2019) study though focuses on the most common use of force: physical force. This type of force carries across police departments in every nation, unlike lethal force options like the handgun. Stroshine and Brandl (2019) found physical force to be used mostly against people who offer the least resistance to the officer in terms of the subject's body size, weight, gender, and whether they are armed. This highlights the issue of how often police officers use physical force and one could argue that it is due to the lack of effective communication and social interaction training programs. It also could just be the way departments expect their officers to handle situations where the subject is being unresponsive or volatile. Physical force though is not something that officers go out of their way to do because of the risks to themselves (Stroshine & Brandl, 2019). While physical or use of force with a weapon may sometimes be the only option, one could argue that Stroshine and Brandl's (2019) findings could indicate why more departments should implement training programs like social interaction. These conclusions show that proper communication and social interaction training could mean the difference between an outcome that involved physical use of force or voluntary compliance. These studies also found that creating and maintaining efficient training programs have a variety of challenges that must be addressed before police departments can implement them. Once that happens, the focus can be put onto de-escalation communication training.

De-Escalation Communication.

The stereotype of police officers being these “stop the bad guys” type of people is part of the reason why most of the public misunderstand what truly is the profession. Police officers aren’t the crime fighters that the media portrays them to be. Instead, most police work involves performing public services that no one else is willing to do (Oliva et al., 2010). Ironically, the area that makes up the highest percentage of police work often get the least amount of training, which is communication. Communication is a key factor in de-escalation tactics in programs like Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT). De-escalation communication is defined as a style of communication that police officers use to calm the situation or sometimes, use basic levels of force to subdue an individual. It means to slow down and offers police officers a way to minimize conflict through negotiation or compromise to bring about a peaceful resolution (Compton et al., 2014). CIT training though varies from department to department and usually focus on certain issues like mental health and generally do not cover broad topics. CIT training is around 40 hours and is taught either during the academy or within the department (Compton et al., 2014). Compton et al.’s (2014) study focused on using CIT training to help officers handle mental health calls better. The results were officers who received the full 40 hours of training scored higher in areas like knowledge in how to use appropriate de-escalation communication, handling officer attitude, and self-awareness in how they behave and act. Some limitations of Compton et al.’s (2014) study include how the CIT training model was based on Georgia’s method and the effects of long-term knowledge and resolutions of calls with people suffering from mental health issues.

Police officers are not known for using creative or compassionate communication and tend to rely on law enforcement tradition when handling calls. Chopko’s (2011) article decided to go a completely different way when addressing CIT training. A police officer can be a

compassionate warrior and do so without sacrificing their safety. By looking back at historical warriors and adapting warrior codes, police officers could develop a compassionate warrior mindset (Chopko, 2011). This is where Verbal Judo comes into play as a form of de-escalation. If officers have a compassionate warrior mindset when they arrive on scene, they could have increased patience, empathy, and utilize effective Verbal Judo techniques (Chopko, 2011). Many officers believe that if they show any sign of weakness and aren't "tough" a hundred percent of the time, it may create risks to officer safety. Various studies contradict each other with some saying easy going officers are more likely to get wounded or killed in the line of duty, while others say they are the ones who can be both a warrior and display compassion (Chopko, 2011). By showing examples of compassionate warriors throughout history like the Samurai, Kung Fu Monks, and Native American warriors, officers could be taught that it is OK to use other forms of "toughness." Chopko's (2011) model of teaching de-escalation techniques is one of its kind. Whether it works will have to be seen as de-escalation training usually focuses on real world applications.

De-escalation training involves a variety of effective communication and active listening skills (Olivia et al., 2010). Some of these skills can be found in conflict communication management styles like, using open and closed ended questions and mirroring and summarizing statements (Olivia et al., 2010). These types of behaviors are designed to gain cooperation from the individual and are just some of the tools used in de-escalation training. An interesting study done by Todak and James (2018) found that officers frequently used de-escalation tactics like treating individuals with the appropriate level of respect, reduced the power imbalance in their interactions, and that the officer's actions were based on the demeanor, not demographics of the individual. These findings were done through 35 police ride-alongs with 131 police-citizen

interactions. With all the scrutiny on police use of force and a lack of de-escalation training, ride-alongs, if granted, are some of the best ways for citizens to see how the police perform their duties. Todak and James (2018) also found citizen reflections on their police encounters were more positive and felt it gave the police legitimacy when they were respectful and got the same treatment back. The feeling of humanizing the badge and seeing the other side can go a long way in fixing the current issues facing the profession of policing. Another reason Todak and James's (2018) study was intriguing was how most of the officers that portrayed de-escalation tactics did so without direct training and seemed nature. Even when the individual escalated the situation, most officers still used effective communication and respectful tactics. The level of experience could also play a factor in how officers use de-escalation tactics as an officer with more years on the job knows how to handle difficult situations better than a rookie.

Todak and James (2018) study contradicts what Giacomantonio et al.'s (2020) study found. The term Verbal Judo is used in Giacomantonio et al.'s (2020) study. Verbal Judo appears a set of tools that police officers could use in their de-escalation tactics. It is a way for police officers to resolve situations through voluntary compliance and persuasion without the use of force. Giacomantonio et al. (2020) states 16 skill patterns within Verbal Judo training that police officers could be taught. This form of de-escalation training also faces the same roadblock as other forms like CIT because of the unique and challenging task of evaluating the effectiveness of said training. This roadblock could be a research area that requires further study to figure out why it is near impossible to examine and conduct scientific studies within police departments. Giacomantonio et al.'s (2020) Verbal Judo training found that though some behaviors changed right after the training, most did not. This shows that some behaviors and actions come naturally with the profession and trying to change them is fruitless. Verbal Judo also seemed to apply

more in situations where the individual was exhibiting a calmer demeanor and when officers felt more at ease. Different situations call into question the effectiveness of Verbal Judo training. It is hard to override an officer's natural responses and use of force training when facing a potentially dangerous situation (Giacomantonio et al., 2020). Police work is different from all other professions and attempting to use the same training programs doesn't seem to work. De-escalation tactics also isn't limited to the profession of policing. Fields like nursing, educators, business managers, and more all use some form of de-escalation communication (Spielfogel & McMillen, 2017). The differences are in the ways de-escalation tactics are used across professions.

Health professionals tend to use skills like listening and body language to work out differences, while those in the business industry utilize reassurance, and police officers are more focused on safety and gaining control of the situation (Spielfogel & McMillen, 2017). Though one of the big limitations of de-escalation training is the implementation and record of its effectiveness. One could do everything right and by the book, but external and internal factors in human-to-human interactions are boundless. These theories, explanations, and skills in de-escalation training are things that can be used. Whether they should be or are effective in real life scenarios requires further research (Spielfogel & McMillen, 2017). As many proponents there are for additional de-escalation training for police officers, there are a few critics that believe such tactics may pose unnecessary risks to police officers. Engel et al.'s (2020) article explored the benefits and drawbacks of de-escalation training. The ever-eluding question of how much force is the correct option has plagued both the civilian and law enforcement communities. Some critics argue that in many de-escalation trainings, it requires officers to take a moment and analyze the situation before acting. This is directly opposite of what many use of force trainers

teach as in dangerous situations, quick action and thinking is what can save lives (Engel et al., 2020). The lack of evidence on the effectiveness of de-escalation training or a lack thereof is another issue that the profession of policing face.

Disciplines other than law enforcement have decades worth of empirical evidence to support their theories and claims of de-escalation tactics. Engel et al. (2020) argues that both the law enforcement and civilian communities must come together to build and test scientific studies on the effectiveness of de-escalation training for police officers. As a profession that is based on the use of force, which separates it from all other professions besides the military, the idea of de-escalation through words or actions is challenging to implement. Many departments do have de-escalation training and policies in place, but few enforce them (Engel et al., 2020). Some don't because it is merely an image to put up, others can't or won't due to officer safety and a few believe it goes against what policing is about. This is part of a larger issue that is creating some positive news as new models are being developed that might further the effectiveness of de-escalation training.

Peterson et al.'s (2020) study proposed a R-Model: Research, Respond, and Refer to aid crisis intervention teams with de-escalation training. The R-Model approach aimed to train officers to be better equipped when dealing with people who suffer from mental illness by de-escalating situations without the use of force. By taking time to communicate and use less "cop talk" and potentially inflammatory language, officers could reach those individuals to gain their cooperation (Peterson et al., 2020). The results were interesting as after the training, some officers reported less calls where mental illness was the primary reason. One reason could be how the R-Model trains officers to refer them to appropriate health resources. Though a limitation of Peterson et al.'s (2020) study was the geography as it was done with a mid-sized

urban department. Also, Peterson et al.'s findings were done over a year. The long-term effects of the R-Model hasn't been evaluated yet. There are also some civilian leaders who believe that current de-escalation training and tactics don't have enough evidence to back up the effectiveness of such models (Engel et al., 2020). Whatever the case is, new and current de-escalation training programs must be made with police and civilian input to accurately combat the issues facing both sides. De-escalation communication has been on the frontlines of policing reform, but has faced pushback from some departments, particularly in more rural areas. There are positives and negatives to de-escalation communication because of the way it is taught. Proper trainers with the appropriate rapport must be the only ones that can educate police officers.

Discussion

The overlying theme in the literature review agree on one thing - there is no question that policing in America needs more de-escalation and communication training, but the issue is far more complex than society believes. There are a multitude of problems when it comes to training police officers ranging from the culture of law enforcement to the topics and the way trainings are conducted. Police officers generally are private individuals and treat outsiders with suspicion. Thus, building and establishing rapport is essential and the trainers must have some sort of law enforcement experience (Chopko, 2011). This helps show officers that the trainer understands what it means to work with other officers or even better, what it means to have been a patrol officer. Bringing in outsiders to train or manage police officers will result in a lack of support and morale and oftentimes, it will be a waste of department time and resources. The importance of having an expert in communication and law enforcement cannot be overstated (Chopko, 2011). Police departments are highly bureaucratic and often are subjected to the game of politics.

This means that funding for training programs is controlled by outside forces and if a police department does not have the necessary funds or time, they cannot form and deal out any sort of training program.

Current de-escalation and communication training programs like CIT and negotiations are taught to select officers who voluntarily wish to learn more and become specialists. Another main theme was how experience tends to turn officers who never got or received little communication training into effective communicators, especially during hostile situations (Rajakaruna et al., 2017). There are things that cannot be taught in a classroom and must be learned from on-the-job experience. Things like intercultural and conflict communication are learned from interacting with the community (Cornett-DeVito & McGlone, 2000). This in some ways shows how even with the current de-escalation and conflict communication trainings that police officers receive, the most effective teacher is still experience. Which is why there are critics to instituting training programs that teach de-escalation and conflict communication with the number one reason being officer safety (Engel et al., 2020). A few argue that this type of training might make officers think that they should rely on words more than action, even if the situation calls for the use of force. Counter arguments explain that the training isn't about not using force, it is about using it less and taking steps to prevent the situation from reaching the tipping point (Engel et al., 2020). There are situations where communication should not even be on the mind of an officer and sometimes, the use of force is the only correct option.

De-escalation and conflict communication within law enforcement is a hard subject to talk about because of the traditions within the profession and the implications it may have on future officers. As stated by Rajakaruna et al. (2017), Wolfe et al. (2020), and Stroshine and Brandl's (2019) studies, most police officers receive far more defensive tactic and firearms

training than say how to communicate effectively with people from different cultures. Some departments do not even have their officers take any communication training courses. This can be troublesome as most of a police officer's duties are interacting with the public.

Communicating with people is what they do, and it is ironic how it sometimes is the hardest thing for police officers to do effectively. The belief is it is not that officers don't want to be better communicators, it is the lack of time, funding, and experts who have previous law enforcement experience that poses the biggest obstacle. Conflict communication is not just a challenge for police officers, but law enforcement in general. The traditions and culture of law enforcement often relies on police officers being these tough, no nonsense type of people and showing any emotion or compassion could be seen as weakness. This stereotype is overused and, police officers often show compassion and try their best to remove the power imbalance when communicating with the public. Getting down to the public's level and interacting with them as fellow human beings can and has gone a long way between establishing respectful relationships.

Conflict communication tactics that are used in organizations are especially helpful because law enforcement with its paramilitary structure is still an organization. Some conflict communication skills used in organizational communication must be twisted and evolve to fit law enforcement (Spaho, 2013). Just because something works for one organization does not mean it will for another. There are skillsets that overlap when it comes to communication studies and law enforcement. Negotiations is one as multiple studies showed similarities between how the field of communication studies manage interpersonal conflicts and how police negotiators handle uncooperative individuals (Spaho, 2013). The issue here is how only a select few police officers ever receive the training to become effective negotiators because of the time and cost of such training programs. Which is another reason why there remains no universally accepted de-

escalation training module that is used within every police department. Another challenge, though not a negative one, is how each officer brings to the table different experiences from their time on the job. Veteran officers are more likely to utilize interpersonal conflict communication in most cases. These officers also tend to understand the differences between “talking” and “speaking” when communicating with the public (Sikveland & Stokoe, 2020). Talking is usually reserved for those who are cooperative and who officers do not believe are a threat. Speaking is for those who need that extra push for them to understand the severity of the situation (Sikveland & Stokoe, 2020). This could be a good topic area for de-escalation communication training as often, officers react to the individual/s attitude when they first arrive on scene. Society must understand that for police officers to receive and retain effective conflict and de-escalation training, the community must be willing to come to the table too. One side cannot be expected to do everything, and the other side then wonders why the program did not work (Olivia et al., 2010). One of the best ways to create less racial incidents is to have more qualified minority officers in major police departments. The visual presence of officers who represent their communities can go a long way in rebuilding trust and maintaining positive relationships (McManus et al., 2019). The hardest part is getting into the profession of law enforcement as a first-generation public servant. Once a family member becomes a minority police officer, it seems to make others of the same racial background loosen up and develop bonds with their local police department (McManus et al., 2019). Those bonds then can translate to a healthier relationship due to representation and a sense of belonging. Both law enforcement and the communities they serve have work to do and one cannot exist peacefully without the other.

Role Play Training Module

Role play scenarios are often used in law enforcement training but are focused on the use of force and tests the reactions of officers in dangerous situations. The following is a potential role-play training module that was created for current police officers to put into practice the conflict and de-escalation skills they already know from previous training and/or experience in conflict communication. This role-play module will also incorporate Standpoint Theory into its discussions in the form of a survey. Standpoint theory states that people's experiences help shape their perspective on a range of issues. People's experiences, knowledge, and opinions are shaped by their social groups (Borland, 2020). The reason for this theory is because police officers deal with people from all backgrounds daily. Each encounter is different from the last and having a basic understanding that officers should have an open mind when engaging individuals could bring benefits to the encounter. Standpoint theory also argues that people develop their own standpoints through experiences, either as an individual or as a collective (Hallstein, 2000). Interestingly, those who share similar experiences may not have the same standpoints. Standpoint theory will be used in this role-play module because it will allow officers to utilize critical thinking skills to ponder how their experiences as someone with authority may be seen to citizens in two different scenarios. This role-play module is not to teach new skills. Rather, it aims to evaluate current conflict and de-escalation communication programs and gauge the potential effectiveness against real world scenarios. This module consists of an introduction activity, directions, two different situations of conflict communication (mental illness and intercultural), instructor and peer feedback, discussion, and closing statement. For this training module to work, I would need to find two actors (Asian male and White female) to be the person in question in each scenario and make the training program cost and time effective for urban police departments. Rapport would be established by making the four actors ex-cops who have

years of experience as a police officer in an urban department. This training module will also be recorded so the researcher can review the footage and compare/contrast the officer's reactions to current de-escalation communication practices. This will also provide the researcher data to hopefully create a new form of de-escalation communication training program that incorporates missing or minimally talked about subject matter.

Introduction to the training session

Before the role-play module begins, the researcher will ask the officers to share their attitudes, values, and behaviors as it relates to their role as police officers in mental health and intercultural calls from their previous experiences. The reason for this first activity is to gauge the type of standpoint each officer already has coming into this training module. It will serve as a baseline for the officers to improve on. This activity will also allow officers to understand their own standpoints through dialogue as stating out loud their perspectives may force them to critically think about how they approached these two types of calls in the past. The following questions will be asked after the introduction to this training module:

1. What past experience or life event made you decide to become a police officer?
2. What kind of attitude do you bring into mental health and intercultural calls?
Why?
3. What are your values as a police officer and how do they align with your personality as you respond to mental health and intercultural calls?
4. How do your values and ethics shape your behaviors when on scene with someone suffering from mental health issues or interacting with someone from a minority background?

After this short discussion, the training module will move onto the role-play scenarios and officers should be mindful of using the answers they just gave and applying them to the best of their ability. This role-play scenario is designed to evaluate how current police officers respond to different situations, one of which involves a person with mental illness and the other involves a minority individual. Our actors would be ex-cops who have at least five years of experience working in an urban department. This gives them the necessary qualifications and helps build rapport with the officer trainees. This training program will take place with an urban police department in a major city to provide the researchers with enough data to build upon future studies. The course will be restricted to 15 officers to allow for time orientated feedback and group discussion for each trainee. Conflict communication is a necessary skillset for any police officer because of how much it makes up their daily responsibilities. Having officers who are well trained in conflict communication tactics like de-escalation and crisis intervention may help reduce officer use of force and rebuild the bridge between law enforcement and the communities they serve. The training program will be five and a half hours long and the following is the outline:

- 10:00 am: Introduction to the course with activity
- 10:30 am: Directions and self-introductions of the actors.
- 11:00 am: First role-play scenario (mental illness).
- 12:15 pm: Discussion of first role-play scenario between the trainers, trainees, and peer feedback.
- 13:00 pm: Lunch Break.
- 13:30 pm: Second role-play scenario (intercultural).

- 14:45 pm: Discussion of second role-play scenario between the trainers, trainees, and peer feedback.
- 15:30 pm: Closing Statement and follow up directions.

The Role Play

Each officer trainee will act out two scenarios by using conflict communication practices that they have learned from their own training programs. For the first scenario, each officer gets five minutes to take their own route in how they deal with a subject suffering from mental illness (female actor) while the male actor will be the secondary individual playing the caller. No use of force or use of any tools on the tool belt is allowed as this is focused on the officer's communication skillset. The researcher will give some background information for each officer with some repeat scenarios. For example, one officer may be given a subject that suffers from depression while another officer may be given a subject that suffers from suicidal tendencies. This allows for variety and gives the officers fresh viewpoints when they are watching their peers act out each scenario. The actor's responsibilities will involve acting out each scenario in a reasonable manner. Which means that since the officers are not allowed to use any force or tools, the actor may not become violent or threaten the officer in any way. The scenario ends after the five minutes are up and the role-play scenarios will continue until all 15 officers have acted. Afterwards, there will be a discussion with peer feedback first, then the researcher and actors will give their take. The reason for peer feedback first is because officers are more likely to listen and acknowledge feedback from those they know and trust. Once peer feedback is given, the instructor and actors will explain what the officers did well and according to the department's training guidelines and what the officers could improve on. The second scenario involves an Asian male actor being the main contact individual with the female actor playing the role of the

agitator. The officers must use either conflict or de-escalation communication that incorporates the cultural barrier between them. The steps will be the same as the first scenario, including the discussion and feedback portion. Once both scenarios have been acted out, the class will move onto the closing statement where officers will be given the opportunity to voice their thoughts, questions, and concerns about the training program. Afterwards, the instructor and actors will thank the officers for their time and take what was learned and potentially add to and create their own conflict and de-escalation communication training program.

Scenario One: Mental Illness Conflict Communication.

- **Female Suffering from Mental Health. Male Caller.**

This scenario is designed to evaluate how an officer reacts to someone suffering from mental illness in a non-combative situation. Standpoint theory in this case will involve how an officer views an individual suffering from each of the below-mentioned mental illnesses. The following questions are designed as a survey to gauge an officer's predetermined thoughts before they arrive on scene of a person suffering from mental illness:

1. What do you think of when you hear that someone is suffering from mental illness?
2. How many mental health calls have you gone on?
3. How did you manage to resolve the situation? Did you use force or communication?
4. What have your experiences been like regarding mental health calls?
5. Do you believe police officers should be responsible for responding to mental health calls? Explain why or why not.

The answers to these questions will be talked about in the discussion section after each officer goes through the role-play scenario. This gives the researcher time to compare the officer's answers to how they approach each of the five mental illness scenarios. The female ex-officer actor will be playing as someone suffering from one of the following conditions which will be randomly chosen for each of the 15 officers:

- Depression.
- Panic Attack.
- Suicidal Tendency.
- Schizophrenia.
- Bi-Polar Disorder.

Each officer will use previous de-escalation communication training they received to lower the chances of conflict. These could range from models like the Memphis CIT to negotiation tactics taught to specialized officers. Other forms of de-escalation training models could be classroom materials that teach Verbal Judo, basic intercultural communication tactics, and mental health conflict communication. The researcher and peers should pay attention to the words the officer uses, the body language, tone, volume, and whether the officer is “speaking” or “talking” to the actor. Taking notes is recommended so officers have something to refer to for the discussion portion of the training module.

The researcher should be recording each officer's role-playing scenario for after project review. The goal is to compare/contrast the officer's reactions and the effectiveness of their training to current law enforcement de-escalation training practices.

Scenario Two: Intercultural Conflict Communication.

- **Male Minority Subject Engaging Female Agitator.**

This scenario is designed to evaluate how an officer responds to someone from a minority culture. Standpoint theory in this scenario will be examined using a survey designed to evaluate each officer's personal biases and/or experiences with someone from a minority background.

The following questions will be used:

1. Have you engaged in conflict communication with someone from a minority background? What was your experience like? What are some positives and negatives that came from your experience?
2. What is your level of comfort in interacting with someone from a minority cultural background? Has this changed the more you interact with someone from a minority background?
3. What do you think of when you hear on the radio that someone needs police help but does not speak English fluently? How did that impact your perceptions on people from a minority background?
4. Can you give an example of a time when you had the wrong perceptions about someone from a minority background and how did you correct course?
5. Do you act and speak differently when engaging with someone from a minority background? Why or why not?

By having an Asian ex-officer being the actor, this scenario will test the officer's knowledge of intercultural conflict communication. The actor will play the following parts which will be randomly chosen for each officer:

- Angry subject because of a neighborhood dispute.
- Language barrier when attempting to communicate with the responding officer and the agitator. Actor will mix English with native language.

- Female Actor is being racist towards Male actor. Officer must de-escalate the situation.

This scenario is designed to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of each officer's effectiveness in lowering intercultural conflicts. The researcher and peers must pay attention to the words, body language, and any communication styles that is deemed appropriate for intercultural conflict communication. The researcher should also be evaluating each officer's reactions and communication techniques through a Standpoint theory lens. This will be done by comparing the officer's survey responses and how they interact with the actor. Are they acting through their experiences in response to the scenario or they are reacting through their training? The researcher should be recording each officer's role-playing scenario for after project review. The goal is to compare/contrast the officer's reactions and the effectiveness of their training to current law enforcement de-escalation training practices.

Feedback with Discussion.

The discussion portion of the training module is designed for the officers to hear what their peers, actors, and researcher thought about their performance in each scenario. This discussion takes place after scenario one and two. Standpoint theory will be used as the base line for these discussions. The researcher's responsibility would be to explain the theory as it relates to each scenario. Scenario one required officers to interact with someone suffering from mental illness. Standpoint theory will be used to explain how each officer's previous experiences with mental health calls may shape their interactions. This could be either positive or negative, depending on each individual officer. No mental health call is the same, even if the illness is as people react differently in different contexts.

Scenario two required officers to interact with someone from a minority background using Standpoint theory. Officers in this discussion would be asked how they approach the

scenario with an open mind and reflect on their past experiences with a minority individual. Once again, no person acts the same so officers must be ready to adapt to the rapidly evolving scenario. The researcher will open the discussion by asking the officers to share their intercultural experiences that made an impact on how they perform their responsibilities as a police officer. The discussion will continue with what their peers thought because the officers will be more willing to listen to those who they know and already have a well-developed rapport with. Their peers must share their thoughts on what the officer did well, what they could improve on, and what, if anything, they would have done differently. The actors will be required to state their thoughts on who did the best and why. They will also be required to share their experiences on similar situations when they were on the job. This will provide the officer trainees with proof that the actors know what they are talking about when critiquing them. The primary responsibility of the researcher during all of this is to take notes for future de-escalation and conflict communication training programs. After the feedback portion is done, the floor will open to anyone to express their thoughts, opinions, and concerns about each scenario. By providing the officers the ability to say whatever they want, it will make the training module seem more authentic and the officers will be reminded that what happens in the training module stays there.

Closing Statement.

During the closing, the researcher and actors will thank the officers for their time and effort during the training module. Contact information will be passed out to each officer for the researcher and actors if they feel the need to contact us in the future. The researcher will sum up the day and ask if any officer has any final thoughts/questions.

Conclusion

Conflict and de-escalation communication is an invaluable tool for any organization and law enforcement is no different. Throughout the literature review and role-play training module, we have learned that though there are multiple conflict and de-escalation programs like CIT and crisis negotiation. These programs are designed to help officers use less non-lethal and lethal force through proper de-escalation tactics like knowing when to “speak” or “talk” to individuals, how to address the power imbalance when communicating with the community, and much more. Though it is hard to evaluate the effectiveness of current conflict and de-escalation communication training programs because of the lack of extensive research on the long-term usage of the material by police officers. There are also pushbacks from law enforcement and civilian leaders who believe that changing how policing is done, it may make the job even more dangerous for officers. By hiring qualified communication experts who knows the profession of law enforcement could make or break any training program designed for police officers. Future research on this topic must include long-term follow ups to determine if current conflict and de-escalation communication tactics are being used by officers and how effective they are. Communication studies and law enforcement are two fields that may not seem like they belong together. The reality is that these two fields cannot survive without the other. Police officers interact with the community daily and communication makes up most of an officer’s responsibilities. When police officers understand and practice effective conflict and de-escalation communication when appropriate, it could be the start to rebuilding the broken bridge between the profession of law enforcement and the communities they serve.

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