VOICES: a theory-driven intervention for improving relationships between police and the public

Shawn Hill
Santa Barbara Police Department, Santa Barbara, California, USA
Howard Giles
Department of Communication, University of California Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California, USA, and
Edward R. Maguire
School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Arizona State University, Phoenix, Arizona, USA

Received 13 September 2020
Revised 7 January 2021
Accepted 31 January 2021

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to describe a theory-driven intervention called VOICES that was developed to improve police-community relations. The intervention was designed based on principles derived from social psychological theories of intergroup contact and communication.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors discuss the theoretical basis for the intervention, as well as its development and implementation in the Santa Barbara Police Department. Based on this pilot testing, the authors provide preliminary evidence about its effectiveness using survey responses and qualitative feedback provided by participants.

Findings – Although the case study method used here does not allow for causal inferences about the effectiveness of the intervention, the limited evidence the authors present does suggest that participants found VOICES useful and it may have improved their perceptions of police. The next step will be to test this intervention using experimental or quasi-experimental methods that allow for causal inferences about effectiveness.

Originality/value – The paper shows how police can develop theory-driven interventions in an effort to improve trust between police and the public, including communities in which relationships with police have been historically strained. It also underscores how insights from the study of intergroup contact and communication can benefit policing.

Keywords Police, Trust, Confidence, Communication accommodation, Intergroup contact and communication

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Trust between the public and the police is a key element of the social contract in a democracy. Building that trust requires public confidence that police will provide essential services (such as public safety and order maintenance) in a fair and judicious manner. However, longstanding intergroup anxieties between the police and certain elements of the public have proven difficult to address. Evidence from research and theory on *intergroup communication* offers a path toward overcoming intergroup barriers and anxieties and expanding mutual respect between police and communities (Giles *et al.*, In press).

The authors are grateful to Chief Lori Luhnow of the Santa Barbara Police Department, and Dr. Carmel Saad of Westmont College, for their support during the development of VOICES.

Policing: An International Journal

1363-951X
DOI 10.1108/PIJPSM-09-2020-0154

The relationship between police and the public is often *intergroup* in nature (Giles and Maass, 2016; Keblusek *et al.*, 2017) [1]. Intergroup communication occurs when an interaction between two or more people is based primarily on their social group membership rather than on their individual personalities (Hill and Giles, 2018, In press). For example, when a police officer stops a vehicle for a traffic infraction, the interaction is typically formal and based primarily on the group roles the two people occupy in that moment – one is a police officer and the other is a member of the public who has violated traffic regulations. The two people involved in this transaction have different social identities that may have a powerful influence on how they behave toward the other (Lowrey-Kinberg, In press).

Intergroup communication focuses on the nature of the communication between people from different groups. It is a useful framework for thinking about how to improve communication and trust between conflicting groups. It is, therefore, a potentially valuable framework for thinking about how to improve relationships between police and the public. One of the foundations of intergroup communication is a social psychological theory called *intergroup contact theory,* which suggests that intergroup contact, when it occurs under certain conditions, can reduce prejudice between groups. Research has found that interventions based on theory – which typically involve bringing conflicting groups together to engage in dialogue – can reduce prejudice and enhance trust (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). This finding is consistent across many different types of conflicting groups, even when the contact is mediated [2] or imagined (Joyce, 2018; Vezzali *et al.*, 2014; Wojcieszak *et al.*, 2020). That said, four key conditions have to be met for the contact to be successful: the groups have to be perceived as of equal status, cooperative, sharing common goals and supported by their own agencies or institutions (Allport, 1954).

While researchers have applied the intergroup communication framework to the relationships between police and the public in recent years, no one – to our knowledge – has developed and tested an intergroup communication *intervention* on prejudice and trust between these two groups. As a first step toward filling this gap, the first two authors (Shawn Hill and Howard Giles) collaborated to create an intervention called "VOICES" based on principles from intergroup communication. The intervention involves bringing police and specific community groups together to engage in dialogue intended to reveal the humanity and commonalities of all participants. They tested the intervention in the Santa Barbara community to build trust and improve relationships between the police and several different underserved community groups, including LGBTQ + residents, at-risk youth, previously incarcerated adults and undocumented and Spanish speaking community members. Anecdotal evidence from our participant observations in these sessions is positive, though we have yet to conduct a rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation. In this paper, we outline the theoretical basis for the VOICES program, its implementation in Santa Barbara and preliminary evidence on its effects from two of the VOICES sessions.

Intergroup communication

The study of intergroup relations goes back more than 100 years (Allport, 1954; Sherif *et al.*, 1961); however, it gained significant momentum in the late 1970s with the advent of the "minimal groups paradigm" (Tajfel *et al.*, 1971) and social identity theory (e.g. Tajfel, 1978; for a review, see Reicher *et al.*, 2010). Research on the minimal groups' paradigm reveals that the minimally sufficient condition for social discrimination to occur is simply to divide people into two distinct groups, sometimes even by means of an arbitrary category label (e.g. wearing a blue badge versus a green one). People "tend to favor their own group over other groups" and to discriminate against other groups, whether consciously or unconsciously (Otten, 2016, p. 85).

The essence of social identity theory is that when individuals define themselves mainly in terms of their group identity (whether it be race, religion, occupation, organization or

whatever) and perceive themselves and others in their presence as members of *in-groups* and *out-groups*, certain processes unfold that are distinct from those apparent in interpersonal encounters (Dragojevic and Giles, 2014). For instance, when a member of the public (in-group) encounters a police officer (out-group), social stereotypes associated with "cops" are triggered for that member of the public. The communication between the two, according to social identity theory, would be primarily *intergroup communication*. In addition, various social and linguistic biases may also ensue (see Beukeboom and Burgers, 2018) with in-group members differentially accentuating their own group's values and diverging their speech away from out-group members (Giles *et al.*, 2007). Conversely, members of in-groups interacting with other in-group members (i.e. cops talking to cops) will adjust their behavior to be more similar to one another, a communicative process called *convergence* (Zhang and Imamura, 2018). The field of intergroup relations is now a major component of the discipline of social psychology. It is also influential in the field of communication and has many diverse theoretical frameworks (Taylor and Moghaddam, 1994).

Policing as "intergroup"

While research attention has focused mainly on interethnic, intergenerational, between-gender/sexually-oriented groups (see Giles and Harwood, 2018; Giles and Maass, 2016), theory and research viewing police-community relations from an "intergroup communication" perspective started to emerge in the 1990s. For instance, positive outcomes have been documented from situating school resource officers in high schools. Although assigning officers to schools does not necessarily constitute an intergroup communication intervention, it creates opportunities for direct, indirect and even vicarious contact, all of which have been shown to improve intergroup relationships [3]. For example, a study in the British city of Bristol found that contact between school police officers and students, both within the school and outside it (e.g. coaching sessions), resulted in students reporting positive attitudes toward the officers assigned to their schools (Hewstone *et al.*, 1992). However, students' views of "police *in general*" did not improve because the children did not consider the school liaison officers to be prototypical of other officers. Rather, students saw these officers as particularly amiable and accommodating. Students distinguished them from mainstream officers who were not assigned to schools. Hence, the study found that these children's attitudes were just as *un*favorable toward law enforcement *per se* as control groups of children not involved in such a program. These findings are important for designing effective intergroup interventions from their very inception. Participants need to feel that members of the other group they are in contact with are *typical* representatives of it and as, as such, any positive reactions to them *cannot* be discounted or sub-typed to a special group.

After this study, intergroup research attention on police-community settings proliferated (e.g. Choi and Giles, 2012; Giles,2002; Molloy and Giles, 2002), basically, in two major directions. First, a series of international investigations, across communities having different histories of police-citizen relations and conflict (e.g. USA, China, Mongolia, Turkey, and Bulgaria), examined the role of reported police-public *communications* in shaping attitudes toward law enforcement. Importantly, this work moved beyond the confines of socio-demographic factors being solely the determinants of attitudes toward police (Giles *et al.*, 2006) to showing that individuals' reported experiences of "good communication" from officers led to reported positive attitudes and behavioral inclinations. Across settings, the more police officers were seen to be communicatively accommodating (e.g. listening and taking drivers' perspectives into account), the more they were perceived as trustworthy which, in turn, led members of the public to report being more willing to comply with their requests (see, for example, Choi *et al.*, 2019).

Second, and moving to investigations with naturalistic data, studies have examined the intergroup communication patterns evident in traffic stops in parts of the USA

(Dixon *et al.*, In press; Lowrey-Kinberg, In press). For instance, Voigt *et al.* (2017) showed, by means of coders' ratings and computational analyses of transcripts, that officers were more respectful, friendly, formal and impartial with White than Black drivers, irrespective of the severity of the offense or outcome of the stop. In tandem, Whites were more reassured (e.g. told "no big deal"), while Black drivers were more often told to keep their hands on the wheel.

Dixon *et al.* (2008) content analyzed a stratified random sample of video and audio-recorded traffic stops coded with more than 100 contextual variables, including the race of the officer and the driver. They found that Black drivers were more likely than Whites to experience "extensive policing", such as: being detained for an average of 2.6 min longer than White drivers, having more than one police officer present, being 3–5 times more likely to be asked to leave the vehicle and having their vehicles searched for supposedly illegal items (see Tillyer and Klahm, 2015). While each party's accommodativeness predicted the other's level, intergroup encounters (i.e. White officers with Black drivers and Black officers with White drivers) were coded as more nonaccommodative than those where the driver and officer were the same race. This intergroup communication climate was characterized by officers listening less, being more indifferent and dismissive and less approachable, respectful and polite than in intra-ethnic situations (for similar outcomes with Hispanic drivers, see Giles *et al.*, 2012).

As evident by recent protests in response to police misconduct, relationships between police and community as well as their intersectionality with race are amongst the most salient intergroup settings in society. Police, by the nature of their role and authority, are able to restrict freedom and exercise sanctioned violence on members of the public, creating significant power differentials and exacerbating *us versus them* relationships (Bittner, 1970). Outcomes from successful intergroup dialogues have been shown to mitigate intergroup barriers (such as the *us versus them* mentality) by reducing fear, anxiety and prejudice, allowing for increased cross-group relationships and leading to more trust, forgiveness and empathy (see Harwood, 2018). The necessity for theory-driven interventions to alleviate these intergroup outcomes and societal consequences is, therefore, paramount.

The development of VOICES

VOICES began with a practitioner-researcher collaboration inspired, in part, by the final report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015). Essential to the creation of the VOICES intervention was using research and evidence from the study of intergroup communication to nurture trust and legitimacy and break down intergroup barriers on both sides of the police-public divide (Ferrin *et al.*, 2007). Indeed, dialogue is a central feature of intergroup communication (see Frantell *et al.*, 2019). To ensure that VOICES would be perceived as fair, transparent and legitimate among participants, key community stakeholders were invited to participate in creating the framework for the dialogue. Procedural justice theory posits that authority figures are perceived as more legitimate when people perceive their actions as fair (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler and Huo, 2002). Including community stakeholders helped to identify which organizations represented marginalized communities that could benefit most from improved relationships with police. These stakeholders also helped to open lines of communication between police and marginalized groups who often do not trust the police. In the VOICES model, community stakeholders serve as credible messengers who help to achieve "buy in" from marginalized community members to engage in intergroup dialogue with police.

The group of stakeholders responsible for designing VOICES, including both police and the public, came to be known as the VOICES design cadre. The cadre consisted of: a university professor with expertise in intergroup communication who served as a reserve officer for 15 years (Howard Giles), a local community collaborator with international experience in conflict mediation, an activist and organizer who was established in the local

community and two police lieutenants (including Shawn Hill). The cadre was diverse in multiple ways, with Latina, Black, White and LGBTQ + members. It was empowered by Santa Barbara's chief of police, who encouraged the team to design and implement a theory-driven police and community intervention to encourage dialogue, build trust and improve relationships.

The design cadre met on numerous occasions during the development process. In the early stages of developing VOICES, the cadre discussed relevant scholarship from the study of intergroup communication to inform the structure of the VOICES dialogue. This was intended to ensure that the VOICES intervention would be based on scientific evidence about how to reduce prejudice and build trust. The stakeholders at the table, including police practitioners and community organizers, also identified and sought to mitigate potential barriers to implementation. Scholars who study evidence-based policing practices have highlighted the challenges of implementing change in police organizations based on research evidence (e.g. Lum and Koper, 2017). The collaboration between researchers, police and community members enabled the cadre to learn from the perspectives of diverse stakeholders to help identify and reduce implementation barriers. Research from the field of implementation science highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement for implementing new initiatives (Lobb and Colditz, 2013).

Identifying community partner organizations and participating officers

The cadre identified an initial list of local community partner organizations ("CPOs"), representing marginalized community members to participate in VOICES. Important first steps included holding meetings and conversations to build intergroup trust between cadre members from the police department and leadership of the CPOs. For example, one police lieutenant in the design cadre began meeting with the director of a local nonprofit, Pacific Pride Foundation (PPF), which serves the Santa Barbara LGBTQ + community. Through meetings and discussions, both were able to share perspectives, acknowledge historical traumas, identify mutual goals and objectives (i.e. a better understanding of each other's perspectives and hopes) and build the intergroup trust necessary to support moving forward with the project. The lieutenant and PPF director, in collaboration with the mediator, began designing their agenda topics based on police training and policy (i.e. police searches of opposite sex) and traumatic historical experiences (i.e. the Stonewall riots) from the LGBTQ + community, informed by evidence-based practices from intergroup communication. Figure 1 illustrates the VOICES development process.

The four CPOs initially identified to participate in VOICES (based on the cadre's recommendations) were PPF, Los Prietos Boys Camp, Y-Strive and Just Communities. PPF, as mentioned above, provides programs and services to the local LGBTQ + community. Los Prietos Boys Camp (part of Santa Barbara County Probation) is a local commitment option for delinquent males between 14 and 18 years old, often involved in gangs. Y-Strive is a youth-initiated peer intervention for at-risk and previously incarcerated youth and adults, seeking to identify short-range skill-building projects in order to achieve long-term goals. Finally, Just Communities is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to advance justice by building leadership, fostering change and dismantling all forms of prejudice, discrimination and oppression. The eight officers identified to participate in the initial four VOICES sessions were all recent police academy graduates. These eight officers attended a separate VOICES intergroup dialogue session with each of the four CPOs. At the time, these officers were undergoing post-academy training, which is provided to officers after completing regional police academies and returning to their own agency. During this post-academy training, officers learn department policies and procedures, familiarize themselves with the local community and prepare to begin their field training.

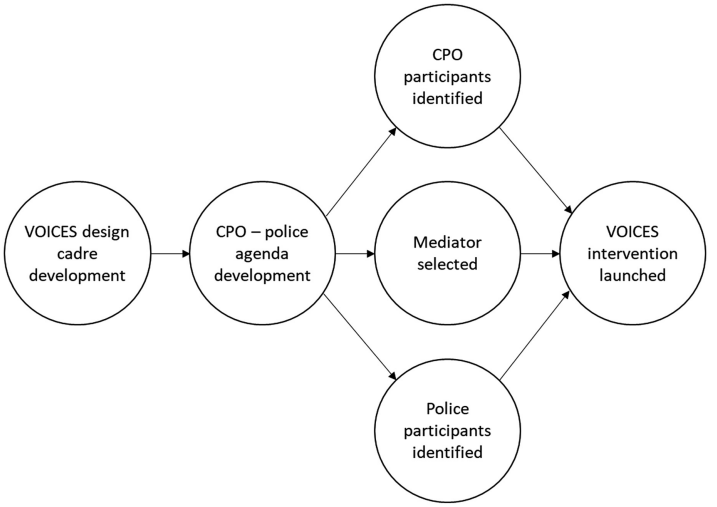

Figure 1.
The VOICES development process

Schedules and locations for the intervention

VOICES sessions for each CPO were scheduled for half days. Some CPOs requested shorter time periods and alternative times to meet the needs of community participants. Respecting time constraints among participants and making accommodations as needed was an important part of scheduling the intergroup dialogues. Future replications will benefit from organizers recognizing time constraints among participants as a potential barrier to the implementation and evaluation of VOICES. To facilitate participation, the intervention needs to be scheduled at a time that is convenient for community participants.

The research evidence suggests that interventions promoting intergroup contact and communication are more successful in reducing prejudice when they occur under carefully controlled conditions (e.g. Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Thus, a key consideration in developing VOICES was selecting an environment conducive to building trust and encouraging intergroup communication. One of the most significant challenges was limiting, as much as possible, power differentials between police and community participants. Therefore, officers dressed in casual plain clothes rather than police uniforms and carried their weapons concealed. The locations were selected by each CPO, most of which were either the headquarters of the CPO or another location commonly used for community meetings. A trained mediator (not associated with either the police or the CPO) was used to facilitate the sessions.

Launching the VOICES intervention

When the dates, times and locations of the initial four VOICES sessions were identified, the CPOs coordinated the schedule with the community participants and the police department coordinated with the officers. The four sessions included a total of 31 community participants, including six from Pacific Pride Foundation, seven from Los Prietos Boys Camp, ten from Y-Strive and eight from Just Communities. Eight police officers participated in each of the four sessions.

In the room where the VOICES sessions were held, organizers placed chairs in a large circle to foster a greater sense of connectedness and equality amongst participants. This arrangement is often referred to as a restorative circle or peacemaking circle

(see Coates *et al.*, 2003). The circle formation is a departure from traditional police-community meetings where officers are often positioned as a central focal point of the meetings (i.e. position of authority). Often, as the participants arrived, civilian community members engaged in conversation with police officers (dressed in plain clothes) without recognizing they were police. Research evidence on intergroup contact interventions suggests that establishing an appropriate environment for the dialogue is essential for establishing trust. Intergroup dialogue must take place in an atmosphere characterized by cooperation, shared goals and institutional support (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). In addition, it was important that each participating group not only viewed themselves as prototypical members of their own social category but also saw the representatives of the other group in such a light (see, again, Hewstone *et al.*, 1992). Agendas for VOICES sessions were generally formatted as follows:

(1) Welcome and overview

(2) Participant introductions

(3) Experiences with law enforcement

(4) Group discussions

(5) Full group debrief

(6) Scenarios (role playing)

(7) Group sharing exercise

The specific content of each dialogue was tailored to the needs identified by the CPOs. Common topics included participants' (including both public and police) personal experiences with law enforcement as youth and adults and recent local police-public interactions that participants learned about through conventional media, social media or other sources. Participants also had the opportunity to discuss their perceptions and expectations of the other group. For example, members of the public expect police officers to be courteous and explain why they were detained, while police officers expect members of the public to follow their directions and to afford police the opportunity to provide explanations when they can safely do so. In one session, a member of the public noted that officers, when standing, appeared to be stiff and robot-like, which gives the perception of being unfriendly. An officer responded by describing how uncomfortable it is to wear body armor and the police utility belt, which caused her to stand in a stiff posture to avoid back pain. This exchange allowed both groups to see the other's perspective.

Participant feedback

At the end of two of the VOICES sessions, CPO representatives handed out anonymous and voluntary surveys to community participants [4]. Completed surveys were received from seven members of Los Prietos (out of seven youth participants) and four members of Y-Strive (out of 10 participants), for a total of eleven completed surveys [5]. Ten respondents answered the question asking whether the session was a good use of their time; 100% indicated that it was. When asked whether the session changed their perception of police, 80% indicated that it had. Among those eight, all indicated that their perceptions of police had become more positive. When asked whether they would participate in a session like this again, 100% indicated that they would. While the responses to these survey questions do not constitute a rigorous evaluation of the effects of VOICES on participants, they suggest that the intervention was well-received.

The survey also included open-ended questions asking participants about what aspects of the sessions they found most and least valuable. Our analysis of the responses indicated that

what participants found most valuable was the opportunity to talk with police officers and get to know them. This theme was evident in seven of the ten responses to this question, including the following:

(1) "Talking to a cop without the cuffs"

(2) "The open honesty from the cops"

(3) "Getting to know people on a personal level"

(4) "Hearing both sides take on different scenarios"

(5) "Getting to know the officers' past experiences"

The responses with regard to what participants found least valuable were more mixed. For instance, three of the four respondents in the Y-Strive session reported that they did not like the icebreaker exercise at the start of the session [6]. Among the Los Prietos participants, four of the six respondents to the question about what they found least valuable indicated either "nothing" or "N/A". Aside from the respondents' distaste for the icebreaking exercise at one of the sessions, the open-ended responses indicate that the participants found the VOICES sessions valuable, particularly the opportunity to get to know the officers at a personal level.

Discussion

VOICES builds on a well-established body of theory and research for reducing prejudice and building trust between groups, including those with longstanding histories of conflict with one another. Relationships between police and the public are often *intergroup* in nature and, therefore, principles from intergroup contact theory and intergroup communication can provide practical insights for improving these relationships. This case study describes the application of intergroup principles to the development and preliminary testing of VOICES in Santa Barbara. Although a formal evaluation of the intervention using rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental methods was not possible, feedback from participants was generally positive. Based on the results of this preliminary initiative in Santa Barbara, it seems worthwhile to conduct a more formal evaluation of VOICES to determine whether, and under what conditions, it can promote trust between police and the public.

The intergroup communication perspective that we recommend here is consistent with procedural justice theory (PJT), an approach that has received significant attention in recent years (e.g. Maguire *et al.*, 2017). As applied to policing, both approaches focus on building trust and legitimacy and improving relationships between police and the public. Similarly, both emphasize the importance of police communicating in a polite manner that respects the humanity of those with whom they are interacting. Although the two approaches have many similarities, intergroup communication interventions focus on much more than procedural niceties during fleeting contacts between police and the public. These interventions involve a structured dialogue that allows for longer, deeper conversations between police and the public in a controlled environment.

There is evidence to suggest that interventions based on PJT may lack sufficient depth to cure the relationships between police and historically marginalized groups (Epp *et al.*, 2014). Addressing these "hot spots" of discontent with the police may require interventions that focus specifically on improving relationships between police and *particular* marginalized communities. Intergroup communication provides a powerful, theory-driven and evidence-based framework for designing and testing such interventions. While the results presented here do not constitute definitive evidence that such interventions are effective, they do suggest that testing them using more rigorous designs is an appropriate next step.

There is extensive research on public attitudes toward police, but much of this research relies on data from random samples of community residents. This is a useful method for drawing inferences about overall attitudes in the community, but it is less so for tapping into the attitudes of people coming from *subgroups* within the community where discontent with the police is particularly concentrated (Desmarais *et al.*, 2014; Maguire and Johnson, 2010; Scaglion and Condon, 1980). The contact surveys from VOICES, although based on a small sample, provide useful information from those who have experienced recent direct contact with police and who come from segments of the community that have had historically conflicted relationships with police. Direct contact surveys like those used to assess VOICES are useful for measuring attitudes toward police from segments of society where police struggle the most to maintain legitimacy (Tyler and Huo, 2002). This focus on communities with historically conflicted relationships with police is a key element of VOICES. We hypothesize that VOICES can improve relationships between police and the public both directly and indirectly. The direct effects would be experienced by those who participate in a VOICES intervention. The indirect effects would be experienced by those who learn about the intervention vicariously, whether through contact with a participant or through other channels (social media, conventional media, etc.). Impact evaluations of VOICES should seek to measure both types of effects.

Just as interventions intended to reduce violent crime tend to focus on the hot spots where those crimes occur most frequently, VOICES is designed to focus on areas or groups where discontent with the police is most heavily concentrated. Violent crime control interventions are sometimes implemented in a "strategically serial fashion" that resembles the triage processes used in hospitals (Kennedy, 1997, p. 477). Using this type of queuing process enables professionals in many disciplines to concentrate their resources on the most serious cases first. The implementation of VOICES can be conceptualized in a similar manner, focusing initially on the groups where discontent with police is most intense and, then, working downward in a strategically serial manner. We hypothesize that this type of approach can improve relationships between police and the public, but this hypothesis needs to be tested using rigorous research methods.

Additional questions that are worthy of exploration include the effect of various moderator variables on the effectiveness of intergroup communication interventions. For instance, might such initiatives be more effective with certain marginalized communities than others, and why? Similarly, might certain types of officers be more effective in forging intergroup trust than others and, again, why? Many have suggested that the "*us versus them*" mentality solidifies as officers become acculturated within the agency and progress throughout their careers (Hill and Giles, In press). The amount of time a person has been a police officer may, therefore, moderate the impact of intergroup interventions. Early and continued exposure to intergroup interventions in the police academy, and throughout an officer's career, may impede the development of the "*us versus them*" mentality among officers. Future research should seek to unpack the impacts of age, ethnicity, gender and political affiliation of the police and the public on their willingness to participate in intergroup communication as well as the effectiveness of these interventions. It would also be useful to understand the nature of contextual factors, such as the historical relationships between police and the specific communities (geographic and otherwise) where such interventions are attempted. Such research will help to clearly demarcate the conditions under which such interventions can be more or less effective in promoting trust and reducing prejudice among police and the public.

More generally, as VOICES or related intergroup communication interventions are tested in other settings, it would be useful to learn more about implementation and scalability issues. These issues have exerted powerful effects on earlier reform efforts seeking to improve relationships between police and communities, including team policing (Sherman *et al.* 1973;

Walker, 1993), community policing (Cordner, 2014; Greene *et al.*, 1994) and problem-oriented policing (Braga and Weisburd, 2019; Maguire *et al.*, 2015). In addition to the well-known challenges of implementing change within police organizations, reform efforts that involve the community present an extra layer of complexity. For instance, a significant challenge in many community policing initiatives has been encouraging the community to get involved in these efforts (Brainard and Derrick-Mills, 2011; Grinc, 1994). VOICES is likely to raise similar implementation challenges. Moreover, expanding it from a small "proof of concept" project to a larger, more comprehensive reform effort is likely to raise scalability issues (Banerjee *et al.*, 2017; Maguire, 2010). Implementers and their research partners will need to pay careful attention to these issues and identify any barriers that may arise.

Finally, three elements need to be carefully introduced into the intervention process not found in the foregoing. First, besides collecting evaluative data immediately after the dialogic experience has been concluded, there is a dire need to determine pre-intervention attitudes and ideologies of *both* parties beyond the forms of informal feedback garnered from one side of the equation in the VOICES experiment. Second, such outcome measures would be really insightful when they not only solicit quantifiable evaluative measures of the intervention experience and its implications for intergroup attitudes (e.g. trust, empathy and respect) but also engage participants in interview or group-focused discussions that are amenable to a range of robust qualitative analyses. The field of intergroup communication has an evolving and exciting armory of innovative methods toward these ends at its disposal (see Angus and Gallois, 2018). Also, this could include ways of exploring if and how – in terms of their intergroup narratives – participants spread "the good word" to their neighbors, family, friends and social and professional networks.

Third and relatedly, it is important to determine the longevity and potency of these outcomes beyond those achieved during or immediately after the intervention. Important lessons can be learned from interventions in other intergroup settings where significant behavioral changes have eventuated, only to discover these positive effects have dissipated after only two months (see Williams, 2006). In other words, fairly regular (and temporally to-be-determined) follow-up evaluations need to be socially engineered not only to check lasting impact and whether there is a need for ongoing reinforcement in training, but also to fine-tune future interventions as particular communities, policing, and societies change.

Conclusions

There have now been decades of research on intergroup relations and to such an extent that it is a zeitgeist in a number of social sciences. Lamentably, little of this has been related theoretically to understanding and improving police-community communication, although there are promising signs that this on the horizon (see Giles *et al.*, In press). This article has underscored one important avenue for developing interventions and potential solutions to the breakdowns in trust between police and communities. The preliminary test described here is hopefully just the beginning of a program of empirical research designed to understand the effects of intergroup contact and communication on police-community relations. We hope similar efforts will be tested elsewhere in a variety of settings and under a variety of conditions. This research will help to reveal the conditions under which such interventions can work. Given the ongoing salience of breakdowns in relationships between police and communities, we view such research as making major contributions not only to policing, but to democracy and governance more generally.

Notes

1. As Choi and Giles (2012, p. 264) have contended, the police-civilian encounter is, arguably, "among the most visibly salient identity-marking of intergroup settings." While interactions between police

and the public are often intergroup in nature, intergroup dynamics can be less evident in certain kinds of casual, more informal encounters (see Giles and Walther, In press).

2. In the study of intergroup contacts, a mediated contact is one that typically occurs via various forms of computer-mediated communication and is conceptualized as "an indirect contact form that may comprise an experience analogous to face-to-face encounters" (Wojcieszak *et al.*, 2020, p. 73).
3. The extent to which such initiatives improve relationships between police and youth often depends on how police carry out their duties. Research evidence on many such initiatives is positive (see Theriot, 2016). At the same time, there is a current movement in the United States to remove police from schools. The underlying logic of this movement is that police sometimes treat students punitively and invoke the criminal justice process against them unnecessarily, thus fueling a so-called "school-to-prison pipeline" (Mallett, 2016).
4. VOICES was developed and implemented by stakeholders with no budget and limited resources, therefore participant surveys were only distributed at two of the four sessions.
5. According to one stakeholder, some Y-strive participants did not want to spend more of their personal time completing and returning the surveys.
6. At the beginning of the session, participants were seated in a circle and asked by the mediator to choose a "superpower" and explain why they made their choice.

References

Allport, G.W. (1954), *The Nature of Prejudice*, Addison-Wesley, Oxford.

Angus, D. and Gallois, C. (2018), "New methodological approaches in intergroup communication", in Giles, H. and Harwood, J. (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Intergroup Communication*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, Vol. 2, pp. 163-179.

Banerjee, A., Banerji, R., Berry, J., Duflo, E., Kannan, H., Mukerji, S., Shotland, M. and Walton, M. (2017), "From proof of concept to scalable policies: challenges and solutions, with an application", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 73-102.

Beukeboom, C. and Burgers, C. (2018), "Linguistics bias", in Giles, H. and Harwood, J. (Eds), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Intergroup Communication*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, Vol. 2, pp. 70-84.

Bittner, E. (1970), *The Functions of the Police in Modern Society: A Review of Background Factors, Current Practices, and Possible Role Models*, National Institute of Mental Health, Chevy Chase, MD.

Braga, A.A. and Weisburd, D. (2019), "Problem-oriented policing: the disconnect between principles and practice", in Weisburd, D. and Braga, A.A. (Eds), *Police Innovation: Contrasting Perspectives*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 182-204.

Brainard, L.A. and Derrick-Mills, T. (2011), "Electronic commons, community policing, and communication", *Administrative Theory and Praxis*, Vol. 33 No. 3, pp. 383-410.

Choi, C.W. and Giles, H. (2012), "Intergroup messages in policing the community", in Giles, H. (Ed.), *The Handbook of Intergroup Communication*, Routledge, New York, NY, pp. 264-277.

Choi, C.W., Khadavy, G.H., Raddawi, R. and Giles, H. (2019), "Perceptions of police-civilian encounters: communication and intergroup parameters in the USA and the United Arab Emirates", *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 82-104.

Coates, R., Umbreit, M. and Vo, B. (2003), "Restorative justice circles: an exploratory study", *Contemporary Justice Review*, Vol. *6* No. 3, pp. 265-278.

Cordner, G.W. (2014), "Community policing", in Reisig, M.D. and Kane, R.J. (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Police and Policing*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 148-171.

Desmarais, S.L., Livingston, J.D., Greaves, C.L., Johnson, K.L., Verdun-Jones, S., Parent, R. and Brink, J. (2014), "Police perceptions and contact among people with mental illnesses: comparisons with a general population survey", *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, Vol. 20 No. 4, pp. 431-442.

Dixon, T., Schell, T.L., Giles, H. and Drogos, K.L. (2008), "The influence of race in police-civilian interactions: a content analysis of videotaped interactions taken during Cincinnati police traffic stops", *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 58 No. 3, pp. 530-549.

Dixon, T., Smith, M.A. and Weeks, K.R. (In press), "Race, policing, and communication: old problems, twenty-first-century struggles", in Giles, H., Maguire, E.R. and Hill, S. (Eds), *The Rowman and Littlefield Handbook of Policing, Communication, and Society*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD.

Dragojevic, M. and Giles, H. (2014), "Language and interpersonal communication: their intergroup dynamics", in Berger, C.R. (Ed.), *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin, pp. 29-51.

Epp, C.R., Maynard-Moody, S. and Haider-Markel, D.P. (2014), *Pulled over: How Police Stops Define Race and Citizenship*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.

Ferrin, D.L., Bligh, D.C. and Kohles, J.C. (2007), "Can I trust you to trust me?: a theory of trust, monitoring, and cooperation in interpersonal and intergroup relationships", *Group and Organizational Management*, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 465-499.

Frantell, K.A., Miles, J.R. and Ruwe, A.M. (2019), "Intergroup dialogue: a review of recent empirical research and its implications for research and practice", *Small Group Research*, Vol. 50 No. 5, pp. 654-695.

Giles, H. (2002), *Law Enforcement, Communication, and the Community*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Giles, H. and Harwood, J. (2018), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Intergroup Communication*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, Vol. 2.

Giles, H. and Maass, A. (2016), *Advances in Intergroup Communication*, Peter Lang, New York, NY.

Giles, H. and Walther, J.B. (In press), "Epilogue: intergrouping and aging matters textually", in Dehghani, M. and Boyd, R.L. (Eds), *The Atlas of Language Analysis in Psychology*, Guilford Press, New York, NY.

Giles, H., Fortman, J., Dailey, R., Barker, V., Hajek, C., Anderson, M.C. and Rule, N.O. (2006), "Communication accommodation: law enforcement and the public", in Dailey, R.M. and Le Poire, B.A. (Eds), *Applied Interpersonal Communication Matters: Family, Health, and Community Relations*, Peter Lang, New York, NY, pp. 241-269.

Giles, H., Willemyns, M., Gallois, C. and Anderson, M. (2007), "Accommodating a new Frontier: the context of law enforcement", in Fiedler, K. (Ed.), *Social Communication*, Psychology Press, New York, NY, pp. 129-162.

Giles, H., Linz, D., Bonilla, D. and Gomez, M. (2012), "Police stops of and interactions with Latino and White (Non-Latino) drivers: extensive policing and communication accommodation", *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 79 No. 4, pp. 407-427.

Giles, H., Maguire, E.R. and Hill, S. (In press), *The Rowman & Littlefield Handbook of Policing, Communication, and Society*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD.

Greene, J.R., Bergman, W.T. and McLaughlin, E.J. (1994), "Implementing community policing: cultural and structural change in police organizations", in Rosenbaum, D.P. (Ed.), *The Challenge of Community Policing*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 92-109.

Grinc, R.M. (1994), "'Angels in marble': problems in stimulating community involvement in community policing", *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 437-468.

Harwood, J. (2018), "Intergroup communication and contact", in Giles, H. and Harwood, J. (Eds), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Intergroup Communication*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, Vol. 1, pp. 765-777.

Hewstone, M., Hopkins, N. and Routh, D.A. (1992), "Cognitive models of stereotype change: (1). Generalization and subtyping in young people's views of the police", *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 22 No. 3, pp. 219-234.

Hill, S. and Giles, H. (2018), "Using research to build trust and empathy", *The Police Chief*, Vol. 85 No. 8, pp. 48-53.

Hill, S. and Giles, H. (In press), "Police culture: us versus them communication", in Giles, H., Maguire, E.R. and Hill, S. (Eds), *The Rowman & Littlefield Handbook of Policing, Communication, and Society*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD.

Joyce, N. (2018), "Mediated contact", in Giles, H. and Harwood, J. (Eds), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Intergroup Communication*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, Vol. 2, pp. 128-138.

Keblusek, L., Giles, H. and Maass, A. (2017), "Language and intergroup communication", *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, Vol. 20 No. 5, pp. 632-643.

Kennedy, D.M. (1997), "Pulling levers: chronic offenders, high-crime settings, and a theory of prevention", *Valparaiso University Law Review*, Vol. 31 No. 2, pp. 449-484.

Lobb, R. and Colditz, G.A. (2013), "Implementation science and its application to population health", *Annual Review of Public Health*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 235-251.

Lowrey-Kinberg, B.V. (In press), "Language in traffic stop interactions: patterns in language use and recommendations for fostering trust and compliance", in Giles, H., Maguire, E.R. and Hill, S. (Eds), *The Rowman & Littlefield Handbook of Policing, Communication, and Society*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD.

Lum, C. and Koper, C.S. (2017), *Evidence-Based Policing: Translating Research into Practice*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY.

Maguire, E.R. (2010), in Frost, N.A., Freilich, J.D. and Clear, T.R. (Eds), "Taking implementation seriously: a response to Mastrofski, Weisburd, and Braga", *Contemporary Issues in Criminal Justice Policy: Papers from the American Society of Criminology Conference*, Wadsworth, Belmont, CA, pp. 265-270.

Maguire, E.R. and Johnson, D. (2010), "Measuring public perceptions of the police", *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 703-730.

Maguire, E.R., Uchida, C.D. and Hassell, K.D. (2015), "Problem-oriented policing in Colorado Springs: a content analysis of 753 cases", *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 71-95.

Maguire, E.R., Lowrey, B.V. and Johnson, D. (2017), "Evaluating the relative impact of positive and negative encounters with police: a randomized experiment", *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 367-391.

Mallett, C.A. (2016), "The school-to-prison pipeline: a critical review of the punitive paradigm shift", *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 15-24.

Molloy, J. and Giles, H. (2002), "Communication, language, and law enforcement: an intergroup communication approach", in Glenn, P., LeBaron, C. and Mandelbaum, J. (Eds), *Studies in Language and Social Interaction*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 327-349.

Otten, S. (2016), "The minimal group paradigm and its maximal impact in research on social categorization", *Current Opinion in Psychology*, Vol. 11 October, pp. 85-89.

Pettigrew, T.F. and Tropp, L.R. (2006), "A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 90 No. 5, pp. 751-783.

President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015), *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing*, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, Washington, DC.

Reicher, S., Spears, R. and Haslam, S.A. (2010), "The social identity approach in social psychology", in Wetherell, M. and Mohanty, C.T. (Eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Identities*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 45-62.

Scaglion, R. and Condon, R.G. (1980), "The structure of black and white attitudes toward police", *Human Organization*, Vol. 39 No. 3, pp. 280-283.

Sherif, M., Harvey, O.J., White, B.J., Hood, W.R. and Sherif, C.W. (1961), *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robbers Cave Experiment*, University of Oklahoma Book Exchange, Norman, OK.

Sherman, L.W., Milton, C.H. and Kelly, T.V. (1973), *Team Policing: Seven Case Studies*, Police Foundation, Washington, DC.

Sunshine, J. and Tyler, T.R. (2003), "The Role of procedural justice and legitimacy in shaping public support for policing", *Law and Society Review*, Vol. 37 No. 3, pp. 513-548.

Tajfel, H. (1978), *Differentiation between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Academic Press, London.

Tajfel, H., Bundy, R.P., Billig, M.G. and Flament, C. (1971), "Social categorization and intergroup behavior", *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 149-178.

Taylor, D.M. and Moghaddam, F.A. (1994), *Theories of Intergroup Relations: International Social Psychological Perspectives*, 2nd ed., Praeger, Westport, CT.

Theriot, M.T. (2016), "The impact of school resource officer interaction on students' feelings about school and school police", *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 62 No. 4, pp. 446-469.

Tillyer, R. and Klahm, C.F. IV (2015), "Discretionary searches, the impact of passengers, and the implications for police–minority encounters", *Criminal Justice Review*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 378-396.

Tyler, T.R. and Huo, Y.J. (2002), *Trust in the Law: Encouraging Public Cooperation with the Police and Courts*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, NY.

Vezzali, L., Hewstone, M., Capozza, D., Giovannini, D. and Wolfer, R. (2014), "Improving intergroup relations with extended and vicarious forms of indirect contact", *European Review of Social Psychology*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 314-389.

Voigt, R., Camp, N.P., Prabhakaran, V., Hamilton, W.L., Hetey, R.C., Griffiths, C.M., Jurgens, D., Jurafsky, D. and Eberhardt, J.L. (2017), "Language from police body camera footage shows racial disparities in officer respect", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 114, pp. 6521-6526.

Walker, S. (1993), "Does anyone remember team policing? Lessons of the team policing experience for community policing", *American Journal of Police*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 33-55.

Williams, K.N. (2006), "Improving outcomes of nursing home interactions", *Research in Nursing and Health*, Vol. 29, pp. 121-133.

Wojcieszak, M., Kim, N. and Igartua, J. (2020), "How to enhance the effects of mediated intergroup contact? Evidence from four countries", *Mass Communication and Society*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 71-106.

Zhang, Y.B. and Imamura, M. (2018), "Communication accommodation theory and intergroup communication", in Giles, H. and Harwood, J. (Eds), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Intergroup Communication*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, Vol. 2, pp. 133-150.

Corresponding author
Edward R. Maguire can be contacted at: edmaguire@asu.edu