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Dancing with Cops: A Strengths-Based Approach Toward Revitalizing Police Training

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Dance/Movement Therapy at Sarah Lawrence College
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“When we have enough mutual understanding and compassion, we will be able to help other people bring down the level of violence within themselves.”

-(Nhat Hanh, 2005)

Abstract

Unreasonable amounts of force used during police-civilian interactions have led to a significant number of arrest related deaths. The Department of Justice identified lack of effective training as a key factor in the use of force. This thesis investigates the current state of officer training programs and identifies deficits in focus on emotion regulation, stress management and interpersonal skills. The role of dance/movement therapy in developing these skills is discussed.

Keywords: police, police training, emotion regulation, interpersonal skills, empathy, coping skills, dance/movement therapy

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Background

In the United States, there were 425 arrest-related deaths over a three-month span in 2015 from June through August. Causes of these deaths include shooting or other use of force, accident, suicide, and natural causes. Of the 425 deaths during that three-month span, 64% were ruled homicides and 11% were considered accidents. An extrapolation of this data leads to an estimated 1,900 arrest related deaths in the year 2015 (Banks, Ruddle, Kennedy, & Planty, 2016). That is an average of 158 deaths per month with a range of 122 through 219 arrest-related deaths per month. This means that about every 4 hours, a person dies due to an arrest-related incident (Banks et al., 2016).

The Department of Justice has been conducting Pattern-or-Practice Investigations across the country. They look for ongoing patterns or practices within law enforcement agencies that violate the Constitution and they provide feedback on areas that require reform. Police departments with a chronic history of “use of force or discriminatory policing” (Christie & Attorney, 2007) were the main targets of these investigations. In many of these investigations they found that police officers were using inappropriate amounts of force in unnecessary situations. The police officers appeared to have an ambiguous perception of situations that required the use of force (Christie & Attorney, 2007). During the Pattern-or-Practice investigation of the Chicago Police Department, findings concluded that there was an unreasonable amount of force being used during police-civilian interactions, which led and continues to lead to an unnecessary number of people being placed in harm’s way (“Investigation of the Chicago Police Department,” 2017). Similar results were found after the Pattern-or-Practice investigation of the Baltimore City Police Department (*Investigation*

of the Baltimore City Police Department, 2016), and the list continues, with investigations of large and small police departments across the country (Christie & Attorney, 2007).

Investigators ascertained that a major contributing factor to these results is a lack of adequate training (*Investigation of the Baltimore City Police Department*, 2016, “Investigation of the Chicago Police Department,” 2017, “United States Department of Justice,” n.d.). Per the investigation of the Chicago Police Department, officers are experiencing a lack of guidance, which is resulting in a poor understanding of how and when to safely and effectively use force. Officers are not competently and proactively engaging in conflict resolution or de-escalation tactics which is resulting in unnecessarily violent interactions. (“Investigation of the Chicago Police Department,” 2017, p. 5). These investigations are revealing that a lack of training is negatively affecting the communities as well as the police officers who are being sent out to do jobs that they are not prepared for (*Investigation of the Baltimore City Police Department*, 2016, “Investigation of the Chicago Police Department,” 2017).

Police Training: Overview

The Bureau of Labor and Statistics lists various competencies for the subcategories under state and local law enforcement which include uniformed police officers, state police officers, and federal law enforcement. As part of their job, officers are expected to protect lives and property and must be ready to respond to potentially stressful incidents at a moment’s notice. Aside from physical stamina and strength, the Bureau lists communication skills, empathy, good judgement, leadership skills, and perceptiveness as important qualities for a member of law enforcement. “Police officers need to understand the perspectives of a wide variety of people in their jurisdiction and have a willingness to help the public” (Bureau

of Labor Statistics). Interpersonal skills, as well as immediate ethical decision making skills are emphasized (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, there is a wide range of subjects offered during initial police training. The average duration of basic training programs in 2013 lasted a total of 840 hours (Reaves, 2016). Content and duration of police training curriculum varies by program (Birzer, 2003). Cadets generally learn about constitutional laws, self-improvement, operations, firearms skills, self-defense tactics, and the use of force. During their training, recruits were exposed to reality-based scenarios in order to help simulate possible real life conditions. About sixty percent of recruits experienced scenarios focused on honing threat assessment skills which “allows recruits to practice critical decision making” (Reaves, p.6, 2016). These mock scenarios focused on use-of-force continuum, arrest control tactics, self-defense, and firearms. Since 2006, there has been an increase in the number of hours of training dedicated to firearms skills and a decrease in the amount of hours on criminal/constitutional law and patrol procedures (Reaves, 2016). An average of seventy-one hours was allocated toward firearm skills and twenty-one hours on the use of force; meanwhile, an average of eight hours was spent on ethics/integrity and eleven on professionalism. Additionally, an average of one hundred and fifty-two hours was focused on defensive tactics including firearms skills and the use of force whereas an average of sixteen hours was spent studying nonlethal weapons (Reaves, 2016).

Since there has been a shift in policing in the direction of a more community-oriented system which emphasizes “problem-solving, interpersonal, and decision-making skills” (Bradford & Pynes, 1997, p. 283), their training also has an emphasis on “community policing, with an average of more than 40 hours of instruction per recruit” (Reaves, 2016, p.

1). This includes twelve hours on cultural diversity/human relations, nine hours on meditation/conflict management, ten hours on community partnership building/collaboration, and twelve hours on problem-solving approaches. Much of policing happens in communities, and about five percent of their basic training is focused on community policing topics (Reaves, 2016). The community-oriented policing perspective requires police officers to depend on their collaboration with the citizens of the community as opposed to viewing them as the enemy. As such, emotion regulation, empathy, leadership, and interpersonal skills are necessary (Berking & Meier, 2010; Bradford & Pynes, 1997; Davidson et al., 2000). This shift in desired training outcome requires a shift in the training methods themselves (Birzer, 2003).

For over fifty years, qualities of a prime recruit included their “good physical condition, their interest in crime control, and their ability to follow command decisions without hesitation” (Birzer, p.29 2003). Military personnel often fit in well with the paramilitary training model used for police officers because it promotes a “warrior-like mentality” (Birzer, p.30 2003). This style of training promotes forming a bond against a common enemy, by tapping into feelings of hate, fear and aggression. This results in an “us versus them” perspective, (Birzer, 2003). Behaviorism is a militaristic teaching method that implies learning is a simple function and all students approach learning from the same perspective. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the idea that people behave like machines was applied to the culture of learning and education. It suggested that humans are like equations, or mathematical functions, where you give the equation an input and the result is the desired output. There is no room for variation. Although this method has the potential to be useful when teaching recruits about various aspects of the written law, it is not an

effective, all-encompassing teaching method. Behaviorist and militaristic approaches to teaching “does little to promote the acquisition of essential non-technical competencies such as problem solving, judgement, and leadership” (Birzer, p.31 2003). It sets up a passive environment where the student is not embodying or internalizing the material and therefore does not support the student in the implementation of taught theories (Birzer, 2003).

Without initiating a participatory model, the students will be “physically absent in the sense of not being actively engaged with the ideas, skill, and knowledge being presented” (Birzer, 2003, p. 36). Along with this, feelings and emotions are not explored as part of the normative culture in police training, which carries out through their careers (Birzer, 2003). Police officers must be able to access skills that involve discretion as part of their daily routines, which requires a thorough understanding of emotions and empathy. This needs to be taught and reinforced during their training. “The police work in a democratic society but are trained and learn their jobs in a very paramilitary, punitive, and authoritarian environment” (Birzer, p.32 2003). Aside from missing out on rich insight that is elicited by discussions of feelings and emotions, ignoring them leads to serious health problems (Berking & Meier, 2010; Davidson et al., 2000; Ehrlich Martin & Susan Ehrlich Martin, 1999). A stress filled environment manifests which again, reduces the quality of education. Excessive amounts of stress minimize the efficacy of learning. Individuals have their own optimal methods of learning which must be taken into consideration (Birzer, 2003; Marion, 1998)

In order to maximize the outcome of effective community-policing, an evolution in the process of teaching needs to occur (Birzer, 2003). When police officers attempt to fulfil their job requirements, they are faced with ambiguous situations that require flexibility of thought and creative adaptability. Although these skills, along with conflict resolution,

decision-making, and interpersonal skills are being taught in some police academies, it has not become a national standard. “Police officers can improve their effectiveness by becoming skilled in conflict resolution methodologies [such as] meditation, problem solving, and problem management [which] are all underutilized in police work” (Bradford & Pynes, 1997, p. 293). Implementing training programs that reinforce these skills as well as complementary interpersonal skills, will create a safer environment and help police officers become more effective at their jobs (Bradford & Pynes, 1997). Community policing needs a training program that is not militarized and instead allows for creative, autonomous problem solving and communication (Birzer, 2003).

Police Culture: Coercion

Traditional police culture is directly related to instances of coercion and the use of force. Terrill et al define coercion “as acts that threaten or inflict physical harm on citizens”(Terrill, Paoline, Manning, I, & Al, 2003, p. 1019). The bureaucracy within the organization promotes punishment and a “crime fighter” mentality which leaks into the methodology of day to day work for police officers (Terrill et al., 2003). Supervisors within the organization feel a need to demonstrate their authority by displaying dominant behavior while making ambiguous commands. This leaves the officers feeling high levels of anxiety and a need to withdraw, since their expectations are unclear and open communication is not available. As supervisors model this type of behavior, police officers practice it in the field. In order to defend their authority to the citizens they rely on fear and intimidation. As a way to cope with the strains of this punitive organizational structure, police officers tend to turn to “social isolation and group loyalty” (Terrill et al., 2003, p. 1006). In an investigation of the Baltimore City Police Department, an officer stated, “you’ve got to be the baddest

motherfucker out there... [and] own the block” (*Investigation of the Baltimore City Police Department*, 2016, p. 157). Officers who align with a more traditional cultural perspective reported socially isolating themselves from citizens because they are seen as dangerous opponents. This need to prove their authority and “maintain the edge over citizens” (Terrill et al., 2003, p. 1006) further emphasizes a disconnect between the citizens and police officers. Community policing involves a mutual relationship with the local citizens, yet the traditional culture of the police organization denies this relationship (Terrill et al., 2003).

Police officers are separated from the public with an us-vs-them mentality which is enforced by this traditional culture. It emphasizes and exaggerates suspiciousness in the eyes of the police officers and removes space for trust and enforces a stronger allegiance with fellow officers (Terrill et al., 2003). Local citizens are seen as the “others” and in more extreme cases, the enemy. Research on police culture reveals that police officers define the quality of their roles as selective and aggressive as evidenced by approaching citizens with aggression and selectively choosing which laws to enforce (Terrill et al., 2003). For example, police officers were more likely to follow a stricter interpretation of the law while interacting with African-American citizens (*Investigation of the Baltimore City Police Department*, 2016). When compared to officers who did not align with this traditional cultural view, officers who were pro-culture had higher instances of the use of force. In this case, the use of force referred to multiple categories, including verbal force as well as physical force (Terrill et al., 2003, p. 1020).

In sum, the traditional view of police culture posits that officers should almost uniformly, hold strong unfavorable views of both citizens and supervisors, show disdain and resentment toward procedural guidelines, reject all roles except that

which involves fighting crime, and value aggressive patrolling tactics and selectivity in performing their law enforcement duties. (Terrill et al., 2003, p. 1007)

Coercion is a result of traditional police culture that affects citizens as well as fellow officers. It negates the idea of mutual trust, does not allow for compassion, and adds to an overall stressful environment. Occurrence of negative encounters and dangerous situations increases when there is an emphasis on a culture that promotes coercion. Given these severe results and implications of traditional police culture, an ongoing conversation focused on ways to reduce this behavior is necessary (Terrill et al., 2003).

Police Training: Mental Health Crisis

People with mental illness constitute a portion of the population that police officers will interact with. “Approximately 10% of all police contacts with the public involve persons with serious mental illnesses” (Watson & Fulambarker, 2012, p. 2) and this rate will continue to increase as the budgets for mental health programs are cut. Although it is difficult to collect precise data depicting police interactions with people with mental illness, statistics about its prevalence within the correctional systems provides some insight. 14.5% of male inmates and 31% of female inmates present with “serious mental illness” (Watson & Fulambarker, 2012, p. 2). Officers recognize this lapse in training when they express their apprehension about responding to calls involving people in a mental health crisis (Watson & Fulambarker, 2012). This lack of training leaves officers feeling unprepared to approach individuals with mental illness. It is understandable that officers view them as “unpredictable and dangerous” since they are not taught the necessary de-escalation skills. Dangerous and fatal interactions take place when tension escalates and police officers do not feel safe or adequately prepared to handle the situation (Watson & Fulambarker, 2012).

To address this immediate concern, cities around the country have been implementing supplementary training models that focus on “signs and symptoms of mental illnesses; mental health treatment; co-occurring disorders; legal issues and de-escalation techniques” (Watson & Fulambarker, 2012, p. 4). The application of this training model has been seen to decrease the risk of injury during police-civilian interactions and has increased levels of confidence in police officers. It is a “model of collaboration” that works closely with mental health professionals and has been positively influencing the cities in which it is implemented (Watson & Fulambarker, 2012).

Discussion

Police officers are faced with many physical and emotional obstacles each day that require substantial personal resources in order to respond effectively. Staying mindful of the reality that they see and being conscious of how it affects them will help to maintain a healthy, positive, and compassionate life. This in turn will spread to the community and foster a peaceful environment (Nhat Hanh, 2005). Dance/movement therapy has the potential to strengthen the qualities that police officers need in order to enact effective and sustainable law enforcement practices.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Police officers work in extremely stressful conditions and thus, many of them develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD. Without the proper coping skills, PTSD is almost inevitable. Repeated exposure to trauma increases the likelihood of developing PTSD. Each time they step out on the streets they are entering potentially dangerous territory. This type

of constant, chronic exposure to “civilian combat,” has a lasting impact on the lives of the officers and often results in PTSD. Observable symptoms arise including “hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal overreactivity, exaggerated startle response, sleep disruption, and nightmares” (Violanti et al., 2002, p. 197). A perceived need surfaces which requires a state of uninterrupted alertness. However, this distorted sense of reality that requires constant “arousal... despite the absence of threat” takes an incredible toll. There is no resting state once a pattern of chronic stress has been established. Officers with PTSD are “hypervigilant, anxious, aggressive, and have no determinable baseline of psychological calm even after exposure to threatening situations has long ended” (Violanti et al., 2002, p. 197). These long lasting symptoms impact the officers’ lives even after retirement which typically leads to “generalized anxiety, worry, and depression” (Violanti et al., 2002, p. 197). Aside from impacting the officers’ work performance, these symptoms affect their personal relationships, rippling out to their families. Police officers face a myriad of obstacles and challenges that make them more vulnerable to PTSD and further research on the subject is necessary (Violanti et al., 2002).

Emotion Regulation

Davidson, Putnam, and Larson (2000) discuss the relationship between poor emotion regulation and impulsive aggression which leads to physical violence. A strong correlation exists between individuals with “a low threshold for activating negative affect (a mixture of emotions and moods that include anger, distress, and agitation)” (Davidson et al., 2000) and impulse control. Part of this relationship is an inability to anticipate aggressive reactions and respond appropriately before an emotional response comes into play. By examining various neural pathways in individuals responding to different types of stimuli, they concluded that

emotion regulation skills, namely “suppression of negative affect” (Davidson, Putnam & Larson, p.592, 2000) are directly related to one’s vulnerability toward violence and impulsive aggression. Lack of emotion-regulation has been known to result in mental health problems specifically with at-risk populations, such as police officers. “Compared to controls, officers have difficulties in accepting and tolerating negative emotions, supporting themselves in distressing situations, and confronting emotionally challenging situations” (Berking & Meier, p.329, 2010). Negatively charged, emotional situations bombard police officers regularly (Berking & Meier, 2010). “The emotional state of the police officer influences how the officer enters into the contact with civilians” (Euwema, Kop, & Bakker, 2004, p. 34). Further studies emphasizing the importance of emotional regulation skills are necessary in order to develop effective training procedures aimed toward decreasing an individual’s impulsivity and negative affect (Davidson, Putnam & Larson, 2000).

In order to further investigate emotion-regulation skills in police officers, Berking et al. (2010) conducted a study in which they implemented training procedures to enhance these skills. Their study showed that police officers gained insight and awareness about their emotions and emotional responses to various situations by following a specific training program. Bringing an awareness to what they are experiencing and arming them with tools to help modulate and alter these emotions is invaluable to their daily routines (Berking & Meier, 2010). The Integrative Training of Emotional Competencies (iTEC) program is designed to help officers hone the following skills: muscle relaxation, breathing relaxation, nonjudgmental perception of emotions, acceptance and tolerance of emotions, compassionate self-support, identification of the causes of one’s emotional reaction, and active modification of emotions. The initial self-report revealed that police officers had a far weaker grasp on

emotional regulation when compared to a community based control group. However, after working through the iTEC program, the officers were able to “normalize” their emotion-regulation skills. Police officers view negative emotions as a weakness which results in difficulties with emotion regulation. By suppressing negative emotions, risk of mental health problems and other negative manifestations of their suppressed emotions increases. “Police officers reported having particular difficulties with (a) accepting negative emotions, (b) tolerating negative emotions, (c) supporting themselves in emotionally challenging situations, and (d) confronting situations that cue negative emotions in order to attain important goals” (Berking et al., p. 336, 2010). The iTEC program helped the police officers confront these difficulties. The focus on an appreciation and awareness of positive emotions is also thought to be the cause of their “increase in positive affect” (Berking et al., p.336, 2010). In order to curb impulsive aggression and proactively avoid mental health disorders, police officers must master their emotion regulation skills. (Shafir, 2016).

Dance/movement therapy is an accessible path toward learning more skills to help with emotion regulation. Deliberate choices in posture and motor behavior influence a felt emotional state and it is from this perspective that emotions can be regulated. “One of the most readily available but under-utilized strategies is emotion regulation through changes to posture and movement” (Shafir, 2016). Recognizing and understanding the relationship between motor behavior/movements, proprioception, and emotions is an invaluable perspective of emotion regulation. A key factor in this research suggests that emotion regulation abilities can be learned and practiced regardless of an individual’s baseline. Mirror neurons also play a role in the felt experience regarding emotions and simulated emotions. This can be conceptualized as emotional empathy (Shafir, 2016).

Using motor imagery, a witness can emotionally empathize with the mover. Similar neural pathways are stimulated in the mover as in the witness and in this way a witness can gain a stronger understanding for the mover's internal state (Shafir, 2016). This is a form of kinesthetic attunement and it is a main principle in dance/movement therapy. With this perspective, an observer or witness (police officer) can nonverbally empathize with a mover (civilian), and by attuning to this felt state they can meet them where they are. Again, this is a key component of dance/movement therapy because it helps to build trust and understanding. Using kinesthetic attunement, a witness can help to facilitate this shared experience. These skills are used in dance/movement therapy to help with guided emotion regulation for the mover and also brings more awareness to the witness's emotional response. It helps in situations where a facilitator is attempting to elicit some change in their client -- de-escalation for example. Making motor observations helps to bring insight into a situation and can influence and complement verbal skills by applying conscious non-verbal techniques. This type of emotional regulation as it relates to others is also one way to approach empathy and empathic interactions.

Empathy

Empathy is a crucial skill in law enforcement, as stated by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics. Officers must be able to understand the needs and situations of the people in their jurisdiction in order to help serve and protect their citizens (Gray 2016, Bureau of Labor Statistics). Empathy is more than a superficial awareness of somebody else's experience, rather, it is "emotional and/or intellectual identification with another; vicarious experiencing of the feeling or ideas of another" (Guralnik, 1992). Self-awareness and insight are necessary to build a foundation for empathy. Taking personal experiences and understanding

felt emotions helps to lay the ground work for understanding others. Although this self-discovery process begins at a very young age for most people, it is also a process that can be learned and strengthened later in life (Behrends, Müller, & Dziobek, 2012; Berrol, 2006).

Inherent in the empathic process of understanding lies an embodied element. Empathy helps not only to convey a cognitive message but also attaches with it the emotional component which adds additional meaning to the conversation. Mirroring is used to strengthen a sense of empathy (Behrends et al., 2012; Berrol, 2006; Gray, 1991). Research shows that “mirror neurons are currently being linked to psycho-affective, social and cognitive development, attachment, attunement, empathy, social cognition and morality” (Berrol, p.307, 2006). Therefore, they play a key role in communication and interpersonal skills. Communication is largely non-verbal and as such, an embodied or kinesthetic version of empathy is necessary. The neurobiology behind kinesthetic empathy explains the felt sense/reaction that an observer experiences. Mirror neurons are responsible for the strong relationship between perceiving an action and producing an action. Thus, there is a direct connection between personal experience and the empathic process. “Mirror neuron research has led to concepts of embodied simulation and intercorporeity as central functional mechanisms for empathy” (Behrends et al., 2012, p. 110). Embodied mirroring strengthens empathy which is positively linked to an increase in cooperative interactions. “The neuronal system of internal motor representations can be modified by movement experience-- studies support the approach of fostering empathy and prosocial interactions through the experience and practice of coordinated interactional movement and dance” (Behrends et al., 2012, p. 111). Using the body to gather real time information can help develop rapport and trust. Practicing kinesthetic empathy leads to reciprocal interpersonal relationships. Berrol (2006)

describes the efficacy of using Dance/movement therapy as a means of exploring and understanding attunement and empathic relationships. Physically mirroring another individual utilizes mirror neurons to help cultivate a shared experience and understanding. “The experience of whole-body synchrony promotes cooperative ability” (Behrends et al., 2012, p. 11). By considering this nonverbal aspect of communication and without direct imitation, emotion states can be better understood and more accurately communicated. Humans are designed to have these shared perceptions that affect their “moral and emotional development [which] are integrally related to social cognition” (Berrol, p.310, 2006). The potential to develop the skills for rich, affective communication is present and can be accessed and fostered by the practice of dance/movement therapy (Behrends et al., 2012; Berrol, 2006).

Neuro-Linguistic Programming

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a tool used by probation officers and other law enforcements officials to build rapport with clients by integrating emotion regulation with other interpersonal skills. Since officers directly “deal with individuals... some recent developments in psychology may provide tools for investigation, assessment, helping, and sometimes healing” (Gray, p.1, 1991). Building trust by empathizing with the client supports open lines of communication and developing a strong sense of mutual aid helps the client realize that the officer is their ally. NLP works with the concepts of building rapport through empathy and mirroring in hopes that “both parties feel free to communicate and perceive that they are being understood” (Gray, p.2, 1991). Essential in this foundation is the understanding that life experiences help to shape reality and expectations. By building a mutually supportive environment, both the client and the officer will find themselves less

tense, more relaxed and comfortable. Mirroring to aid in the foundation of understanding applies to nonverbal as well as verbal language. Physically mirroring the position of another opens up a new level of understanding. An unspoken awareness of an internal state that is otherwise not communicated comes into light. Compared to a non-mirroring witness, it becomes clear that this embodiment provides different information (Gray, 1991). This concept is described in further detail within the section titled “Empathy” in the discussion of mirror neurons.

NLP teaches conscious communication with a heightened sense of awareness. Implementing these techniques with a high level of skill allows the officer to elicit changes in behavior of their client by considering and altering their internal and external states. The officer will be able to meet the client where they are by attuning to them and help guide them in the appropriate direction (Gray, 1991). This approach directly relates to dance/movement therapy. Specific movement assessment tools learned within the scope of dance/movement therapy can provide structured feedback based on understanding implications of movement and posture.

Social Intelligence

Social intelligence helps with assessing social situations and developing well-informed responses and reactions. Empathy is one of the building blocks of social intelligence which is defined by “our abilities to interpret others’ behavior in terms of mental states (thoughts, intentions, and desires and beliefs), to interact both in complex social groups and in close relationship, to empathize with others’ states of mind, and to predict how others will feel, think and behave” (Baron-Cohen et al. p.1891, 1999). Dance/movement therapy is one of the therapeutic approaches used to address multiple goals with individuals who

struggle with social intelligence, including increasing their social skills (Duhovska & Paipare, n.d.).

Emotional Intelligence

Mayer and Geher (1996) define emotional intelligence as “recognizing emotion, reasoning both with emotion and emotion-related information, and processing emotional information as part of general problem-solving ability” (Mayer and Geher, p.90, 1996).

Police officers have a direct need for this skill set as it relates to emotional regulation.

Empathy, one of the qualities necessary for effective communication, is positively associated with emotional intelligence. Increased empathy and decreased defensiveness has frequently been linked to higher levels of emotional intelligence (John D. Mayer & Geher, 1996).

Individuals working in law enforcement should have higher levels of emotional intelligence because that would foster higher levels of emotional regulation. Law enforcement officers must monitor their own emotions as well as those of others, and cope with different environments and contexts under various external pressures (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004). “The scope of emotional intelligence includes the verbal and nonverbal appraisal and expression of emotion, the regulation of emotion in the self and other, and the utilization of emotional content in problem solving” (J D Mayer & Salovey, p.433, 1993). Emotional intelligence is essential in cultivating skills associated with interpersonal awareness.

The importance of emotional intelligence for police officers has been studied for many years (DeValve & Adkinson, 2008). Results of such studies conclude that police officers who have the most success with de-escalation and social interactions, also have a stronger sense of emotional intelligence. It has been seen that these police officers tend to

use less force than their peers and approach potentially explosive situations with a calm demeanor which ends with more positive results (DeValve & Adkinson, 2008).

Meekums (2008) discusses the implications of using dance/movement therapy as a means of developing emotional intelligence. According to Meekums (2008), emotional intelligence requires a sense of “embodied empathy” which is strengthened by the utilization of mirroring techniques in Dance/Movement Therapy. Mutual understanding accompanies mirror neuron function. Emotional intelligence utilizes felt sensations as well as nonverbal cues to help with decision making and forming socially appropriate responses. “Emotions are integrated body-mind functions” (Meekums, p.97, 2008). In this study, dance/movement therapy helped to externalize felt emotions on a body level without being destructive (Meekums, 2008). This skill is specifically essential for police officers who gravitate toward dominant behavior.

Dominant Behavior

Police officers can only do their jobs effectively if they are able to have effective interpersonal interactions. Civilians expect police officers to approach with a dominant demeanor in most situations. Although this expectation can potentially provide comfort, it also opens the doors to a power struggle. When one party is actively in a dominant role, they tend to resort to using their power to overtake the other party. This will lead to escalation and an exaggeration in aggression from both sides. A mutual solution will be difficult to achieve with this style of approach (Euwema et al., 2004).

Police officers are faced with interpersonal conflicts on a regular basis. Although they are naturally in a position of dominance, this stance is detrimental to the conflict resolution/de-escalation process. When one party is more dominant than the other, a power

struggle is almost inevitable. To address this problem, a preventative method must be implemented. Instead of entering a situation with *superior* dominance, a *less* dominant style has more potential to help with de-escalation and problem solving. “Conflict resolution will be more effective when the professional acts with less dominance” (Euwema et al., 2004, p. 26). However, in order to take command of a situation, particularly in conflict scenarios, dominant behavior is required, yet this is also the behavior that tends to continue to escalate the event (Euwema et al., 2004).

As soon as the police officers are spotted on scene, their presence directly affects the events to follow. Before the police officers even speak, the civilians start to form opinions and when an officer approaches with a dominant demeanor, “with their hands on their weapon” for example, they are seen from a negative perspective. Civilians automatically assume that they will be “unpleasant and provocative” (Euwema et al., 2004, p. 26). This immediately sets up a situation in which de-escalation will become nearly impossible to achieve. Thus, officers are typically instructed to arrive on scene with calm energy. This is an example of the necessity of emotion regulation. When police officers enter into a conflict, their goals are typically to prevent escalation and ensure mutual satisfaction. These goals complement one another and are hugely influenced by the police officers’ behavior. They can curb the duration of a stressful interaction by assuming “a neutral, less dominant” stance. As a result, this approach also implies prevention of escalation and a more amicable interaction and conclusion (Euwema et al., 2004). Maintaining a calm, less dominant demeanor in the face of conflict requires skillful practice and conscious awareness.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness addresses coping with negative emotional responses including anger, loneliness, depression, and pain. It enables acceptance and confrontation of negative emotions. Emotional responses are to be expected and by embracing this truth a calm equilibrium will be realized through mindful living. Fighting anger tends to fuel those negative emotions whereas embracing and accepting them allows for rational functioning. Emotions are informative rather than punitive. “Law enforcement officers need to be able to handle their loneliness, suffering, and anger before they can truly help” (Nhat Hanh, p.27, 2005). Falling into a pattern of emotional reaction rather than anticipatory action makes it difficult to set aside personal bias and form a compassionate, helpful plan. Mindfulness can be practiced in every aspect of daily life and “has the capacity to transform the negative things” (Nhat Hanh, p.24, 2005). Healthy relationships form when interpersonal interactions have positive and productive value. In order to build a compassionate and supportive community, law enforcement officers need to take advantage of these skills (Nhat Hanh, 2005).

Police officers are in a unique position that allows them to see the innerworkings of a community. By taking a mindful approach, they can see and understand the people who are suffering and better equip themselves to help. “Insight into suffering is the result of mindful concentration” (DeValve & Adkinson, 2008, p. 102) and one of the keys toward developing empathy for the people that they have sworn to protect and serve. Taking on a mindful and compassionate approach requires a shift in the culture of law enforcement. There tends to be an emphasis on punishment and powerful dominance rather than nurturing a compassionate outcome (DeValve & Adkinson, 2008). Mindfulness helps to bring a deeper level of

relational and self-awareness (Laury Rappaport, 2014). By introducing mindfulness practice during police training it will become accessible to police officers from the start of their careers.

Mindfulness can be accessed and strengthened through the practice of dance/movement therapy. An understanding of the relationship between inner thoughts, feelings, and emotions leads to insight about the effects of outward expressions of these sensations. Dance/movement therapy can help transform what were once negative thoughts or emotions and turn them into constructive and compassionate attention toward self and others.

Ethical Decision Making

Another advantage to studying embodied empathy is its application to the understanding of ethics- another competency for law enforcement officers. “[The] inception of human ethics was embodied, or based on the lived experience of the body” (Hervey, p.95, 2007). Using the body to help process information in the moment produces well-informed, ethical decisions. Taking in the entirety of a situation- environment, context, emotional responses with regard to self and others- and using the felt experience provides invaluable information when practicing ethical decision making. The value in assessing ethics through an embodied awareness becomes more obvious when considering the way unethical scenarios can affect a felt experience. “One must not be apathetic, but instead feel a sense of passion or *desire* for vitality of life in oneself and for others” (Hervey, p.96, 2007). Mutual awareness and a need for the best possible outcome for both parties supports the development of ethical decisions. If there is a passionate desire to help others as well as oneself, it can be assumed that the decisions will be in favor of everybody involved. Part of the complete

picture “include(s) that which is known to the body” (Hervey, p.97, 2007). Multi-sensory information and understanding of the other and of the relationship one has with the other is based on body level knowledge (Hervey, 2007). Before an officer of the law can help cultivate peace in the community, peace must be found within themselves (Nhat Hanh, 2005).

The decision-making process is affected by emotions integrated with concrete/factual context which reveals a more empathic perspective (Hervey, 2007). “The awareness of our shared embodied experience of the problem facilitates resolution while maintaining our relationships with those involved” (Hervey, p.97, 2007). This awareness is only achievable if the ability to confront potentially uncomfortable situations is present. Police officers have reported difficulties when confronting potentially uncomfortable or negative situations. This embodied decision making process cannot take place without recognizing and admitting that there is an ethically challenging scenario. One basic way to recognize an ethical dilemma is to take note of shifts or changes in the body when specific situations arise. “Each unique situation needs to be mindfully embodied through the process until a decision can be made, behind which one can stand with integrity, if not comfort” (Hervey, p.106, 2007).

Police Training: Use of Imagery and Psychoeducational Groups

Supplementing a pre-existing police training curriculum with a program that utilizes the practice of imagery, guided relaxation, and psychoeducational groups, resulted in lasting positive effects once the cadets graduated and joined the active police force (Arnetz, Arble, Backman, Lynch, & Lublin, 2013). The study paired up one group facilitator to one small group and they remained with the same matches for the duration of the program. This choice was implemented so that a relationship and trust could form between the facilitator and their

group to reinforce a consistent and supportive learning environment. The program introduced relaxation techniques and adaptive coping skills training with the use of imagery. The cadets were instructed to rehearse these techniques so that they became more fluent in their daily routines. This two year “study provide[d] evidence for the utility of an imagery-based training protocol for urban police officers”(Arnetz et al., 2013, p. 86). The goal of the program was to reduce stress for active police officers through a preventative training program that considered somatic symptoms, coping skills, mental well-being, sleep quality, exhaustion, and neurohormones used as stress indicators. Even after the training program, when the cadets were active police officers, they “enjoyed lower levels of depression, anxiety, and social dysfunction than did the control group” (Arnetz et al., 2013, p. 86). Although the training program only lasted for ten, ninety-minute sessions, the effects were long lasting. By positively coping with and decreasing stress, the police officers were able to rest effectively which in turn increased their “physical and psychological resiliency... [and] provide[d] officers with additional physical energy and cognitive resources” which is invaluable in the field (Arnetz et al., 2013, p. 86).

This training also helped police officers to recognize and reflect on their internal responses to external situations which allowed them to develop an integrated response that was influenced by their all-encompassing perspectives. The ability to use their own awareness to help them develop well informed decisions and adaptively respond to changing situations, also provided the police officers with confidence. Having an increased general sense of confidence when entering a situation helps to decrease anxiety in a potentially high stress environment. Not only does this support the physical and psychological well-being of the police officers, but it allows them to consider the implications of their actions and how

they might affect the other people involved (Arnetz et al., 2013). “Training blending psychological preparation and tactical rehearsal is capable of greatly improving the psychological resilience of active police officers, providing a critical supplement to standard training” (Arnetz et al., 2013, p. 87). Dance/movement therapy also utilizes imagery and addresses physical, psychological and cognitive integration and development.

Dance/Movement Therapy

Dance/movement therapy is a body based form of psychotherapy that brings an awareness to the relationship between the mind and body and uses personal insight to help individuals grow, heal, understand, and communicate. Dance/movement therapy takes advantage of a strengths based approach to help individuals better understand themselves on a movement level. This compassionate and holistic approach allows for individualized learning in a creative and supportive setting. It analyzes the components that lead to a complete person and helps them understand the relationship that they have with themselves as well as with the world around them. Since dance/movement therapy is psychotherapeutic, its pillars are based in psychology yet it is also linked to a raw human experience. Therefore, it has the potential to be a flexible and accessible learning tool for someone who relies heavily on their own reactions, instincts, and communication skills.

The use of imagery integrated with movement can help with emotion regulation. Dance/movement therapy works with the relationship between mind and body and brings an awareness to what that means for the mover as well as the witness. Facial expressions combined with full body movements and attitudes produce emotional responses which can validate and modulate the felt experience. As such, emotions can be regulated through the use of imagery and movement (Shafir, Tsachor, & Welch, 2016). Emotions occur on a body

level. In order to fully understand emotions and acknowledge their true meaning, there has to be a wealth of awareness around the potential for information that emotions provide.

Accepting and validating felt experiences and emotional responses helps to process them in a healthy and productive manner. Suppressing emotions and the buildup of tension and stress can lead to various health problems (Aposhyan, 1999). Different emotions manifest in the body through pathways unique to each individual. An awareness of the ways in which emotions present themselves requires unique insight and it is through this insight that motor movement can elicit emotion regulation and modulation (Shafir et al., 2016).

Skills to reduce stress can be learned through dance/movement therapy. It “fosters emotion-oriented stress and coping strategies” and addresses “cognitive stress reactions” by raising “awareness of senses, feelings, images, thoughts and cognition” ((Bräuninger, 2012, p. 5). Even when dance/movement therapy groups are administered over a finite period of time, for example over the course of ten weeks, the effects are long lasting. Short term improvements in stress management and coping skills are overserved as well as long term reduction in anxiety and positive approaches to stress reduction (Bräuninger, 2012; Duhovska & Paipare, n.d.). This has the potential to have lasting positive effects on the police force as well, when administered during training.

Interpersonal skills can be examined and enhanced through the use of dance/movement therapy as a means to increase social/emotional intelligence and empathy. Attuning to body attitudes and muscle tension in combination with mirroring is one perspective in which dance/movement therapy can strengthen a sense of empathy (Berrol, 2006; Duhovska & Paipare, n.d.). Not only can dance/movement therapy increase a sense of empathy, but it can also help elicit empathic responses through understanding. Different

movement analysis tools focus on body posture and movement patterns that allow for an understanding of the way a person uses space and the way they are able to relate to themselves and their environment. With this understanding comes the ability to recognize and implement the use of kinesthetic empathy and attunement on a nonverbal level. There are also instances when one should clash with their target in hopes of eliciting an immediate change in behavior. The ability to take all of this into consideration and experiencing and understanding an embodied reaction to a stimulus has the potential to aid in ethical decision-making. A compassionate choice can arise when all parties involved in a situation are considered and empathized with and each person's best interests are taken into account.

Conclusion

Police officers hold an incredible amount of responsibility as they navigate unpredictable terrain riddled with violence, passion, emotions, and stress. It is up to the officers to handle interpersonal disputes that can potentially deregulate emotions and result in poor impulse control. The way an officer is trained dictates their approach in handling these situations. Their reactions and responses ripple out to the community. By recognizing the potential in the connection between their mind and body, police officers will always have an invaluable tool available to them. They will be able to take advantage of insightful information and implement skills that help them on a daily basis.

Dance/movement therapy takes a strengths-based approach to utilize this body-mind connection and expose insight that may otherwise go unnoticed. Since dance/movement therapy is body based, the tools that it takes advantage of are always available. By highlighting what is already working and finding individualized ways to enhance what is not, dance/movement therapy can be used to individualize police training in order to strengthen

the following areas: emotion regulation, social/emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, empathy, mindfulness, and decision making skills. Implementing this during the training process will help to shift the culture of law enforcement in the direction of compassion, which will enhance the sustainability and efficacy of community policing.

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