



# Training Police to be Kindly Disposed Toward Marginalized Persons

Seif J\*

PhD Candidate, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom

**\*Corresponding author:** Jeffrey Seif, PhD Candidate, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, Email: jls201@cam.ac.uk

**Received Date:** April 22, 2025; **Published Date:** May 31, 2025

## Abstract

In response to ubiquitous calls for police reform, this researcher sought to ascertain the extent to which, if any, basic police academy training in the United States of America has heeded the call. The researcher made twenty years' worth of police training survey data, collected by the US Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics and published under the titles "State and Local Law Enforcement Training Academies", the object of his attention. The number of academy directors who responded to surveys for this descriptive analysis ranged from 626 to 747. Results were published in 2002, 2006, 2013, 2018 and 2022. Using empathy as a hermeneutical key, this researcher examined (1) ethics-related curriculum content in the BJS reports, (2) the number of content hours assigned to interactional legitimacy, (3) the percentage of contact hours assigned against the overall Basic Peace Officer Course curriculum hours, (4) national trends and (5) compared trends in the BJS data with trends in Texas' academy curriculum. At both the national and Texas-state levels, the researcher observed a significant rise in course content and contact hours that speak to, for and about the need to train neophyte officers to be more kindly disposed toward marginalized persons. Following on the heels of Bureau of Justice Statistics and Texas-based data, are analytical reflections on best practices in police education, related to the inculcation of values. A preliminary, descriptive analysis in a woefully understudied field, it is hoped agencies will use information herein to-if need be-update the quantity and quality of empathy-related course blocks in basic police officer education. This research is part of its author's PhD research at the University of Cambridge, that began when he was superintending three police academies in Texas, USA, through the Dallas College system. He covets affirmations, critiques, and notification of any related studies-especially from other parts of the world.

**Keywords:** Empathy; Legitimacy; Procedural Justice; Distributive Justice; Restorative Justice; Use of Force; Police Training; Ethics; Curriculum; Contact Hours; Police Reform; Marginalized; Interaction; Perception; Courtesy; Respect; Dignity; In-Service Training; Academy; Bias

## Abbreviations

BJS: Bureau of Justice Statistics; PERF: Police Executive Research Forum; IACP: International Association of Chiefs of Police; RCT: Randomized Controlled Trial; NAACP: National

Association for the Advancement of Colored People; DOJ: Department of Justice; NCJ: National Criminal Justice; EAI: Empathy Assessment Index; PBS: Public Broadcasting Service; MSt: Master of Studies; PhD: Doctor of Philosophy; OC: Oleoresin Capsicum; NIJ: National Institute of Justice;

US: United States; GDP: Gross Domestic Product; PD: Police Department; LE: Law Enforcement; CJ: Criminal Justice; AI: Artificial Intelligence.

## Introduction

Like bio-waste, power can be inherently corrosive. Vocations vesting practitioners with authorization to wield it must take pains to prepare practitioners for the deleterious consequences associated with its handling [1,2]. The importance of helping police recruits be more empathic toward marginalized persons [3] and “competent” and “capable” in managing people and circumstances intra-personally and inter-personally cannot be overstated [4]. To date, however, studies on basic police training are lean, as are studies dealing with power and force management [5-10] thus the need. “Force”-as in “Police Force”-comes from the Latin *fortis*, for “strong, mighty and bold”. The US National Institute of Justice published an acceptable “Use of Force Continuum” with force deployment predicated upon circumstances.

- Verbal Force (e.g., giving verbal instruction) is said to be the first level of force, followed by others for the recalcitrant
- Empty Hand Force (e.g., using grabs, holds punches and kicks)
- Less-Lethal Force (e.g., using the hand to deploy a baton, taser, OC spray) and, lastly
- Lethal Force (i.e., using firearms) (<https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/use-force-continuum#0-0>) represent the continuum.

Justifiably needing to go “hands-on” every now and again, there’s an imperative to justify both using force [11] and training for so doing-and, for not overtly using force. In October 2024, the US Bureau of Justice Statistics reported 49,161,200 citizens had contacts with police in the previous year: 748,800 resulted in the threat of or actual use of non-lethal force (<https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/contacts-between-police-and-public-2022>). One may mistakenly conclude force was not used in the remaining 48,412,400 encounters. Presupposed here, however, is that every police interaction is an actual show of force, thus, a use of force. Thus construed, personal encounters accounted for 98.47% of those officers’ actions-thus interactional encounters. This research considers the how new police officers are being trained to manage these encounters-with empathy as its guiding heuristic criterion.

## Interactional Legitimacy

Tankebe J and Liebling A [12] gave pride of place to citizens’ perceptions of what they perceive in those encounters to be “lawful, appropriate, or just” [12] thus “audience legitimacy”

[13]. Legitimacy, per Beetham D [14], is “multidimensional” (1991). Concurring, Tankebe J [12] identified related quads: (1) Procedural Fairness, (2) Distributive Fairness, (3) Lawfulness and (4) Effectiveness. With Tyler [15], Paternoster R, et al. [16], Tyler & Huo Y [17] and Sunshine & Tyler [18,19], Tankebe J [20] opined these inform citizens’ perceptions of “quality of treatment”. A triad of “symbolic resources”-associated with Distributive and Procedural Justice-are understood to factor in: (1) respect, (2) dignity and [3] courtesy [21]. Employed empathically, the aforementioned triad shows promise. Leaning on Tyler [20], legitimacy for Tankabe J [21] entails cultivating positive “socializing experiences” with different sorts of people [21]. Per the triad noted above, (1) respect is understood to mean the admiration felt or shown for someone or something adjudged to have good ideas or qualities; (2) dignity harks to the importance and value assigned to a person; and (3) courtesy corresponds to polite behavior, action or remark. For Tankabe J [21] and others, these assets contribute toward citizens’ perception of how those with police power utilize it. Though other global factors precede and impact citizens’ appraisals overall [22], beyond individual interactive encounters, the value of training to improve personal interactions, especially with minorities, is enormous-and is the object of attention here.

## Police and Minorities in America

Many minorities in the United States are ambivalent toward police-at best. Though appreciative of the need for it, many view police as “instrument[s]” of an oppressive “dominant ethnic group” [23], as “armed agents of domestic social control” [24]. Eric Garner’s choking death on July 17, 2014, while in the custody of New York City police officer Daniel Pantaleo in Staten Island, New York, gave credence to the perspective [24]. Another 18 years old, Black male’s untimely death at the hands of police on August 9, 2014, gave further credence. Michael Brown allegedly had his hands up in surrender when shot and killed by officer Darren Wilson, in Ferguson, Missouri. The grand jury’s decision to not indict Officer Wilson furthered the public’s discontent and the perspective of many that Black lives simply did not matter to police. Those tragic deaths, along with 46 years old George Floyd’s May 25, 2020 suffocation while in the custody of Officer Derek Chauvin in Minnesota, pushed police and minority relations in American cities to the brink. There are other examples prompting calls for reforms. George Floyd’s untimely death “acted as an external stimulus for change” [25]. Writing for the Public Broadcasting System’s News Hour, Laura Santhanam affirmed it did so here, correctly observing-with all else-Floyd’s death “cracked open the country” [21]. Tankebe & Liebling underscored the importance of adapting in the wake of perennial failures [12]. The press for adaptation, as we shall see, included calls

for improvement in basic police officer training—a field that, as noted above, is woefully understudied.

### The Lack of Research on Police Training and Minority Relations

Das DK [26] surveyed state police training oversight organizations in the USA and found both an overall lack of ethics training and considerable variance in states' approaches toward it. Later, Moll questioned legitimacy's inculcation in her doctoral dissertation, entitled: "How Far Have We Come: The State of Police Ethics Training in Police Academies in the US" [25]. She found lack of consistency in curriculum. She observed changes in style, however, noting andragogic principles were beginning to emerge [25] and extolling militarization's "warrior mindset" was "under increased scrutiny" [26]. Moll opined: "this is the perfect time for reform minded police leaders... [to] try new approaches to police training". Contemporaneous with Moll, MSt students at Cambridge's Institute of Criminology recognized the dearth of studies and experimented with new approaches in legitimacy training—with premiums on cultivating empathy. Brandon L [27] was curious of the extent to which Procedural Justice might have an impact on those engaged by security police at an international airport. After having been trained in Procedural Justice, Langley's officers used checklists when interacting with minorities at border crossings. It did and the results were statistically significant. In his subsequent systematic review of nine robust studies, submitted and approved for his PhD dissertation at Cambridge, Langley further noted positive effects [28].

Debra Platz [29] conducted an empathy-associated RCT, exposing Australian police recruits to stories of police malfeasance during the holocaust. In a blinded study, she utilized a psychometric test to measure recruits' attitude(s) toward marginalized persons (1) when entering the academy (baseline), (2) immediately after the intervention (with both treatment and control groups) and then (3) six weeks later with both treatment and control. Her studies showed a positive effect. This author Seif J [10] built atop Platz's MSt work with a pilot RCT in Texas for his-both Platz and Seif superintended police academies at the time. As with Platz's, this researcher's sister study showed effect—but his smaller scaled pilot was not statistically significant. Like Langley above, with this descriptive assessment, the author is pressing on with his investigation into empathy inculcation in basic police training for his in-process PhD work at the University of Cambridge.

Like many other scholarly works, there's a chance this researcher's work will never see the light of day on America's streets—after his reviewers assess it. Unfortunately—though understandably— "[police officers do not generally read

research journals and [scholarly] articles" and prefer "learning] from peers" [30]. A consortium of police executives and scholars, known as the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), focused on police training and published: "Transforming Police Recruit Training: Forty Guiding Principles" (PERF 2022). Prior to the above, in 1997, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) surveyed its 4,500 members on the state of police ethics training. The 20% who responded identified the need for "job specific training on ethics", "enhanced training curriculum content" and developing an "appropriate training style" for training's delivery. Correctly, they note much more work still needs to be done. This descriptive analysis is a response to the call for more practice-related research. Hopefully others will take up the call. While calls from within the craft and the universities are heartening, it's the calls from the "estranged" on the street [23], the acrimonious and cynical [24], that are principal drivers here. In 2022, proximate to PERF's recommendations, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) observed: "many law enforcement agencies [in the USA] have minimal training relating to diversity, culture, and bias with many states having no bias training mandates at all, and that is then exacerbated by the focus on combat tactics in basic training which, in turn, heavily impacts and amplifies the perceptions and biases officers carry into their interactions with the public, specifically with Black people and people of colour, who are dehumanized and seen as threats" (<https://naacp.org/resources/reaffirming-necessary-police-reform-policies-united-states>)—and especially the poor.

The US Census Bureau reported there were 335,893,238 people living in the United States on 1 January 2024 live in poverty at society's margins. Picked up on petty charges by First Responders in "ecologically 'contaminated' spaces" [24] the hapless poor are shuffled to and through an impersonal underworld. When lawyers visit the unfortunates who can't "make bail", they spend an average of 2-5 minutes on each and afterward "plea bargain" amongst themselves to decide their fates [31]. "The US has the highest prison population [percentage] rate in the world" [32]. Those "handled" are processed through 7,500 Municipal US Courts which manage 3.5 million cases annually, generating 2 billion dollars for municipalities [31]. Only 10% are held on federal charges, with the remaining 90% held in local and state jails—20% for drugs and other misdemeanours [31,33]. Tragically, in the US "a single [petty] arrest [can easily evolve into] a lifetime of exclusion and subordination" [33]. As of 2017, in eleven states, at least at least 1:20 Black males are incarcerated [33].

Adjudged illegitimate [32], many minorities are disinclined to accept authorities' governance. A perennial disregard for ghettoized Black lives, coupled with the perennial "rounding up" of poor Blacks as fodder for a for-profit carceral state,

are adjudged “systemic” [31,33,34]. Today’s first responders seen as a “re-imaging of yesterday’s slave patrols” [35]. Difficulties notwithstanding, like Paternoster, et al. [16] and Langley [36] found when responding police employed fair “procedures”, utilizing proper “manners”, their doing so had an ameliorating impact on citizens’ performances and perspectives—specifically in highly energized domestic assault cases [37]. For these and other reasons, police do well to promote empathic responding and labour to cultivate more of a proclivity toward interactional legitimacy in basic training. Though unwise to presume too much, amalgamated with (1) training benefits from other Procedural Justice RCTs [37-40] and buttressed by (2) the merits of both Restorative Justice trials [41] and (3) Distributive Justice research Tankebe J [20], an inchoate picture is emerging. These, along with (4) attestations of training’s benefit in improving constables’ interactions with citizens [37], with (5) new knowledge on building trust [42], with (6) benefits shown in studies on how and why officers act (Quinn 2025) and studies on improving police officers’ interactions [36,43,44] and, bundled with benefits from (7) “legitimacy” training [45], show promise. In that which follows, attention turns to how this is taking shape in the USA and the State of Texas in the USA.

## Interactive Legitimacy Training in the USA

### Primary Source Material

Data troves secured by the US Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and published under “State and Local Law Enforcement Training Academies” are made the object of attention here. Police academies in the US have been surveyed since the turn of the new millennium. The survey on national trends in 2002 was reported on by B. Hickman (NCJ 204030), in 2006 by B. Reaves (NCJ222987), in 2013 (NCJ 249784), in 2018 by E. Buehler (NCJ 255115) and then again in 2022 (NCJ 309348). Course blocks in US basic police training that spoke to, for or about empathy were selected; the troves were subjected to quantitative analysis. This researcher examined their (1) extent and (2) content. Extent, considered hours of interactional legitimacy training; content examined what precisely is being offered legitimacy-wise. Because course blocks with the strongest empathic characteristics were selected for observation, a word about the selection criteria follows after which the data is presented.

### Empathy as the Criterion for Inclusion

Different social scientists define empathy differently. Inzunza M, et al. [46] hark to the “ability to understand another person’s situation”. Clark K [47], for his part, defined empathy as the “unique capacity of the human being to feel the experiences, needs, aspirations, frustrations, sorrows, joys,

anxieties, hurt or anger of others” (*Italics added*). Batson, et al. [48] prefer “an other-oriented emotional response congruent with another’s perceived welfare”, with empathic “feeling” including, for example, sympathy, compassion and tenderness. Macagno CD, et al. [49] define empathy as “the ability to experience another’s emotions and perceptions” and underscore that it “is one of the major attitudes and actions underpinning an individual’s participation in dialogue across diversity” (*Italics added*).

Questioned here is whether individuals (police particularly) came be trained to be more kindly disposed toward marginalized persons, thus more empathic. Clarke opined “the majority of human beings can be trained... to counterbalance the more primitive animalistic determinants of behavior” [47]. His basis for his optimism is, in part, derived from his understanding of the evolution of humans’ anterior frontal lobes—where he and others locate empathic capacities. After observing how lobotomies, brain injuries, lesions and other insults to the function of the brain result in empathy loss in patients, Clark proffered “probably the majority of people have an adequate cortical base making it possible for them to be trained” in “empathic interaction” [50,51]. The question is how.

After noting the paucity of evidence on the longitudinal impact of educational interventions on medical clinicians, [52] tested an immersive program designed to promote communication and empathy. Developed by Barrett-Lennard, a tripartite intervention with foci on (1) active listening, (2) empathic responding and (3) gauging patients’ responses was tested and found it to be efficacious for clinicians. Batson CD, et al. [48] previous study on interacting with stigmatized persons (not patients) observed exposure to “stereotype-inconsistent information and intergroup contact” could be helpful in ameliorating prejudice, but not guaranteed because exposure can be perceived as “threatening” to some Lietz CA [53]. Teding van Berkhoust and Malouff’s meta-analysis of empathy training—alighting upon (1) instruction, (2) modeling, (3) practice and (4) feedback [51] advances those pedagogies; it did not have larger effect sizes than others, however. Paulus and Meinken did note Fragkos and Crampton’s observation “the behaviour modeling component of empathy interventions was more effective in developing empathy when practice was present and mixed-model interventions (for example (1) experiential education, (2) didactic and (3) skills training) were used” (*Italics added*). Harking to “experiential education”, Batson CD, et al. [48] posit an educational strategy that taps participants’ emotions may “enable us to better hit the elusive target of improving attitudes toward the stigmatized”. With empathy and emotions cut from the same cloth, Inzunza et al. (2022) explored the inter-relationship between empathy’s two dimensions, “cognitive” and “affective” in Swedish police



recruits (n=157). They were keen to underscore "...it is important to consider the interest of future applicants to professions dealing with people since performing well in tasks requiring cognitive ability is different from performing well in tasks requiring the understanding of the other"-and police forever deal with "the other". The question, of course, is whether police do so empathically.

Macagno CD, et al. [49] observed how "politeness is grounded on an empathic attitude towards the interlocutor", that "understanding the others' commitments is a requirement for developing arguments that can be acceptable" to them and that, in rhetoric, "adapting the discourse of the audience-namely making it suitable to the common ground of the hearers-is the key to persuasion". In ways akin to Macagno CD, et al. [49] studied and validated a research model that explored "social cognitive neuroscience conceptualization and empathy" Lietz CA [54], known as the Empathy Assessment Index (EAI). They surmised that a "four-factor model of empathy (i.e., affective response (1), self-other awareness (2), perspective taking (3) and emotion regulation" to be particularly helpful (4). "Empathic attitudes" were also noted (5); however, the category was omitted from their results' discussion for various reasons. For purposes here, however, Leitz et al.'s five-fold conceptualization served as the principal heuristic to inform the selection criteria for course block entrance into the analysis of BJS data. Currently, "In-Service" Procedural Justice training holds sway, as

the principal pedagogical agent adjudged to facilitate and cultivate the proclivity toward legitimacy in/for officers. Intrinsic as perceptions of empathy are in Procedural Justice (as with others, e.g. Distributive Justice and Restorative Justice) it is given pride of place here.

### Selected Empathy-Associated Course Blocks in the BJS Data

The US Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics collected surveys in 2002, 2006, 2013, 2018 and 2022. A total of 626 academies returned the survey 2002; 646 returned surveys in 2006; 664 returned surveys in 2013; 681 returned surveys in 2018 and 747 did so in 2022. The average overall length of academy programs in 2002 averaged 720 contact hours. The average contact hours in 2006 were 716 hours. In 2013 it was 814 hours; in 2018 it was 833 and in 2022 it was 806 hours. Course blocks along with the Contact Hours for those blocks are noted on the horizontal axis in the chart that follows immediately below. A total of fifteen course blocks that met the empathy-associated inclusion criteria are noted as well, on the chart's vertical axis. Noted with each of them is the (1) year when the course block was offered, (2) the number of contact hours that were assigned for each of the course blocks and (3) the percentage of time assigned to the course block against the overall allotment of time for the entire basic training course that particular year.

BPOCs						140	240	320	400	560	576	618	643	696	720	736
BPOC by Year						1970	1973	1981	1985	1994	2002	2005	2013	2019	2022	2024
Police and Community Relations			4	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Law Enforce. Ethics /Profess				---	2	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Constitutional Law and Liability				---	5	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Human Relations					---	8	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Communications					---	---	2	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Recognizing & Handling Abnormal Persons		---	2	6	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Human Relations w/ Recog. Hand. Abnormal Persons	---	---	---	14	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Interacting w/the Mentally Ill				---	---	---	---	6	6	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Stress Management					---	---	---	---	8	8	---	---	---	---	---	---
Professional Policing Approaches			---	---	---	---	6	6	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Problem Solving & Critical Thinking			---	---	---	---	4	4	4	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Communication & Problem Solving			---	---	---	---	---	---	---	16	---	---	---	---	---	---
Crisis Inter / Mental Health Code			---	---	---	---	---	---	24	16	---	---	---	---	---	---
Interpersonal Comm /Report Writing			---	---	---	---	24	24+	28	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

US/TX Constitution & Bill of Rights			---	---	4	4	10	10	12	8	10	10	10			
Professional Policing					---	---	---	---	---	10	10	8	12	12	12	
Professionalism & Ethics					---	---	---	8	8	8	8	12	12	12		
Use of Force Concepts / Force Options			---	---	---	---	16	16	24	24	24	28	28			
Multiculturalism & Human Relations			---	---	---	---	12	12	12	10	8	8	8			
Victims of Crime					---	---	---	---	8	8	10	10	10	10	10	
Racial Profiling						---	---	---	---	---	---	---	4	4	4	4
Fitness, Wellness & Stress Management		---	---	---	---	---	---	---	14	16	16	16				
Verbal Communication / Public Interaction		---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	16	16	16				
De-escalation						---	---	---	---	---	---	---	8	8	8	8
Crisis Intervention Training				---	---	---	---	---	---	---	40	40	40	40		
Traumatic Brain Injury					---	---	---	---	---	---	---	2	2	2	2	
Civilian Interaction Training				---	---	---	---	---	---	---	2	2	2	2		
Interacting w/Deaf & Hard of Hearing			---	---	---	---	---	---	---	4	4	4	4			
<u>Canine Encounters</u>					---	---	---	---	---	---	---	4	4	4	4	
Total Interactive Training Hours / Percentage per BPOC	4	17	12	18	102	112	132	178	166	170	170					

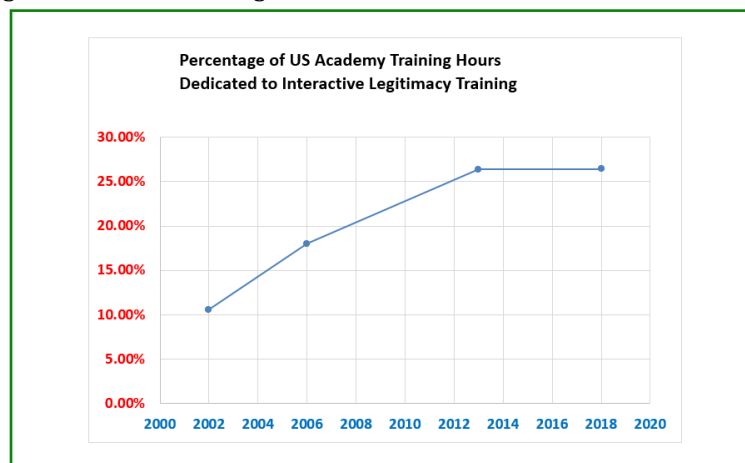
**Table 1:** Interactive Legitimacy Course Blocks and Hours of BPOC in Texas Curricula.

A comparison between the 2002 and the 2022 data shows noticeable increases-and decreases. See below. Ethics and Integrity went from an 8-hour course in 2002 to a 12-hour course in 2020. Others, e.g. Human Relations, Communications and Professionalism, showed a decrease. Material from those course blocks migrated to others. New courses emerged. De-escalation and Research Methods and the Study of Crime emerged in 2022: the former represents an interest in moderating force through enhanced personal interactivity; the latter reflects an interest in evidenced-based approaches to policing. Better than looking at the

granular particulars here would be to amalgamate and graph the particulars and see if an overall trend appears as a result.

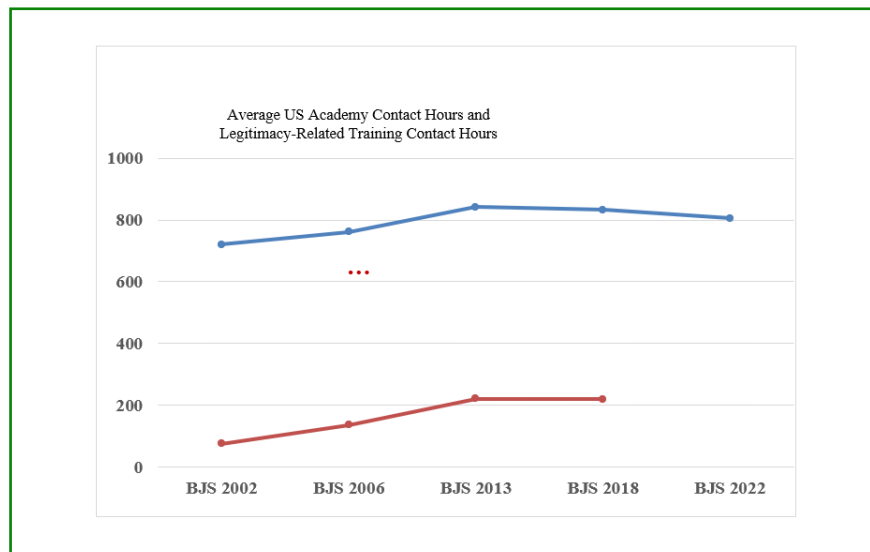
#### Amalgamating Data and Graphically Representing It

Of particular interest at this juncture is the overall trending of the data-something that is not readily observable in the above-noted chart. Noteworthy is that, on the whole, interactional legitimacy-associated course blocks took up just above 10% of police academy curriculum in 2002 and over 25% in 2018.



Though the Bureau of Justice Statistics' 2022 report was released, it was released without the granular data. In response to an inquiry of its author, this researcher was informed the fuller telling of the story will be released later this year. Despite the incompleteness, a reasonably responsible picture emerges, informing that policing in the United States of America is endeavouring to inculcate more of a proclivity toward legitimacy in neophyte police officers

at the onset of their careers. Though a good sign, to be sure, it only suggests that the vocation is attempting to do so. No evidence that it is succeeding is offered. Believing the cursory overview sufficient for introductory, descriptive purposes here, the following chart is offered, juxtaposing the overall course hours (in Blue) atop the number of contact hours associated with interactive legitimacy (in Red).



### The Question of Location

Energy is indeed being expended, nationally. Change is observable-but it varies through space and time? The United States of America is constituted by fifty separate states and a land mass that cover a 3.8 million square mile swath. America is both enormous and diverse. Because American policing is heterogeneous, claims to know what police are or are not doing-as if policing was homogeneous-are tenuous. National and State data troves offer a glimpse on average into what neophytes entering America's 18,000 police agencies are being offered on interactional legitimacy. US policing is spread out over 50 states-where 710,000 federal, state, county and local municipal officers are employed. Depicting amalgamated returns statistically is a picture worth seeing-but one must not lose sight of challenges posed by variance, as offering vary from state to state and even amongst counties in the respective states. Beyond that, delivery and content vary amongst locations where academies are situated.

Currently, big city police agencies house 19.6% (n = 131) of America's academies-with programs tethered to their specific needs and municipal interests. Regional academies (co-ops) account for another 8.8% (n = 52)-and serve a broader range of small and mid-sized departments-and similarly tethered to local interests. Technical schools, two-year and four-year colleges account for 33.2% (n = 316) of academies (i.e., 3.2% [n = 45], 25.1% [n = 221] and 4.9% [n

= 50]). Rural/county academies account for another 3.7% (n = 22). Sheriffs' academies account for 10.2% (n = 75). State/highway patrol academies account for 14.8% (n = 36) and State POST-equivalent academies make up 14.8% (n = 29). Special jurisdiction academies add another .08% (n = 13) and "other" state agencies account for 0.7% (n = 7). (See Buehler 2021; Seif 2022). Though an overall upward trend is observable, we do not have nearly enough data to know what is really happening in various academies in the United States.

### Selected Empathy-Associated Course Blocks in the Texas' Data

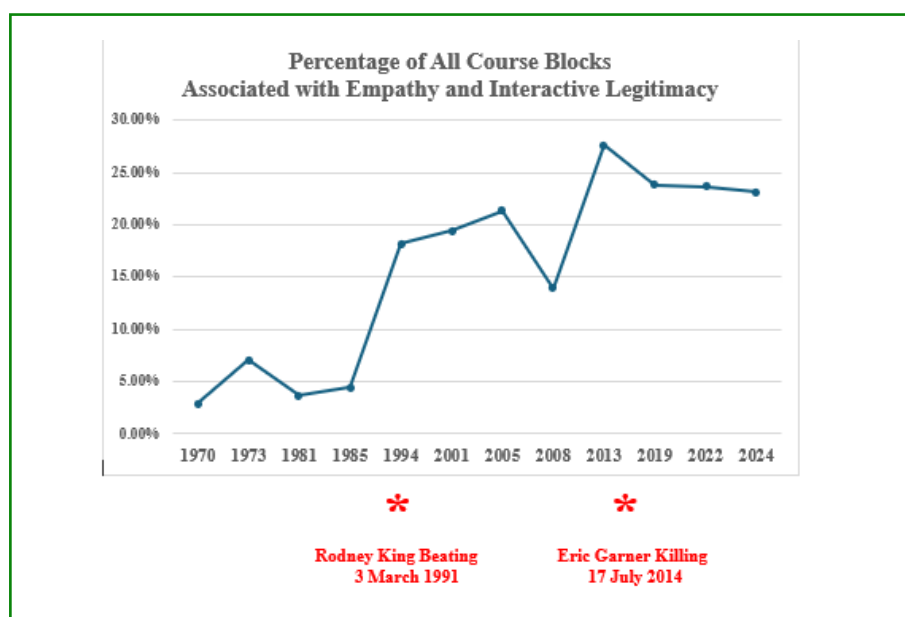
Here, this researcher wrestles with the question of to what extent, if any, Texas' policing authorities seem to have endeavoured to inculcate empathic-associated programming into their Basic Peace Officer Training Course programming between 1970 and 2024. Twelve iterations in Texas' Basic Peace Officer Course (BPOC) curricula are noted during this 54 year period: 1. BPOC 140, 2. BPOC 240 (1973), 3. BPOC 320 (1981), 4. BPOC 400 (1985), 5. BPOC 560 (1994), 6. BPOC 576 (2001), 7. BPOC 618 (2005), 8. BPOC 618 (2008), 9. BPOC 643 (2013), 10. BPOC 1000696 (2019), 11. BPOC 720 (2022) and, lastly, 12. BPOC 1000736 (2024). For reasons to be explained below, only BPOC 560 (beginning in 1994) and those following were subjected to qualitative analysis using Constructivist Grounded Theory.

Texas' formal Basic Peace Officer Course (BPOC) began in 1970 with a 140-contact hour program, sub-divided into 23 constituent course blocks. Save for one course block commended at the end of the mandated curriculum—"23. Police and Community Relations"—the others, without exception, deal with mechanical aspects of policing (e.g., Laws of Arrest and Search, Code of Criminal Procedure, Jail Procedures, Firearms Training, etc.)—not personal aspects associated with the vocation. Today, the BPOC has grown to a mandated minimal 736 contact-hour course program, composed of 43 constituent course blocks—thus a growth of 425.7% since 1970. Questioned by this researcher was whether—and, if so, to what extent—the interpersonal aspects of policing that are of paramount importance in inculcating a proclivity toward interactional legitimacy were represented in the expanding curriculum. Assessing this required ferreting out unrelated course blocks and alighting upon those which had merit for this researcher's particular purposes. Inclusion criteria for selected blocks deemed meritorious had to be determined, and the theoretical basis for those determinations justified per the above. A preliminary assessment of those that qualified turned out 91 distinct Unit Goals containing 471 Learning Objectives manifested in the transcripts/curricula. Empathy-associated course blocks that singularly and specifically placed a premium on goals and objectives that tapped (1) affective responding, (2) self-other awareness, (3) perspective taking, (4) emotion regulation and (5) empathic attitudes, or any combination, were adjudged relevant and included. The course blocks selected (noted in black below) provide the data which was subjected to Constructive Grounded Theory analysis. The following chart notes the various selected BPOCs, the Course Blocks included from those BPOCs, the time allocated for their instruction. BPOCs noted in red above, between 1970-1985 (and extended

till 1994), were excluded. This researcher was not able to secure detailed curricula from the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement prior to 1994, with the result BPOC 140 (1970), BPOC 240 (1973), BPOC 320 (1981) and BPOC 400 (1985) will be omitted from the study later. The Commission did provide some detail, however, which afforded this researcher an opportunity to get a preliminary glimpse of all required course blocks and instructional hours, including the pre-1985 data—and these were helpful in getting a preliminary view.

This researcher was able to ascertain the total hours for all of the BPOC programs along with the course blocks associated with each of the BPOCs. By going through the course titles for each of the pre-1985 (1994) blocks and applying the inclusion criteria against the titles of the respective course blocks, this researcher was able to discover a merger amount of interactive legitimacy-associated course blocks pre-1985 and add that discovery to the data on hand.

As can be clearly seen above and below, the lion's share of the training dealt with mechanical aspects of policing. This is amply attested through translating the raw course block data into percentages. Specifically, by (1) quantifying the total number of instructional hours in each of the included blocks and aggregating that number, (2) then noting the total amount of instructional hours in each BPOC program, this student was able to (3) determine the percentage of time/energy spent on interactive legitimacy-associated training in Texas' basic police training programs. The raw numerical results were noted on the bottom line of the horizontal axis noted above. The percentages are noted in the graphic depiction that follows below.





As seems the case with the national data, interactive legitimacy-associated course offerings follow an upward trajectory—from a mere 2.86% of the entire BPOC curriculum (4 hours of instruction) in 1970 to 23.10% of the BPOC curriculum (170 hours of instruction) in 2024. The jump from 2.86% to 23.10% is noteworthy, leaving one to ponder what precipitated the uptick in interest in Texas.

Introduced into the graphic depiction of the uptick are two major police-associated abuse cases that rocked America proximate to the surge of interest in legitimacy. (1) The merciless beating of Rodney King by a number of police officers with the Los Angeles PD left an indelible mark on American consciousness as did (2) the killing of Eric Gardner by an officer with the Ferguson Missouri PD—a man said to have had his hands up at the time. Because the purpose here is simply to describe what's happening in the data (and something is), as opposed to investing energy in tendering opinions on why it is happening, the question can be left open. It would indeed be helpful if other agencies in other jurisdictions conducted comparable studies and, by so doing, attempted to discover the extent to which, if any, police are endeavouring to inculcate the proclivity toward legitimacy in aspiring police officers. As has been noted over and over again, there is way too little research on police training, generally, and ethics-training specifically. We know that, in large measure, police in the US are attempting to improve training. Simply because one does more does not necessarily equate to one actually doing more, or doing better. When looking at the question of IF agencies are trying to inculcate interactive legitimacy into their basic training for police, researchers would do well to also look at HOW police are attempting to do it—and this involves the consideration and employment of best practices in education, the likes of which are suggested below.

### Employing Adult-Focused Learning Models

Lecturing and moralizing—as are standard fare in police training—are pedagogies adjudged to be outdated and counterproductive. Anthropologists and sociologists have long lauded sensory rich learning. By contrast, till the 1980s, educators in other fields lagged, preferring anachronistic “verbal and written implicit representations” [55]. Despite that “visual communication has increasingly become an integral part of everyday life” a shift has yet to be sufficiently mirrored by educators [56] and this can be particularly true for police educators who, traditionally, have been known for bellicosity. Bumbak A [57] observed the “old fashioned, brutal approach to recruit training, employed by the majority of police trainers” has too long held sway. By modeling this behavior months on end, neophyte trainees are subconsciously prompted to mimic the bellicose behavior of their instructors—to no good effect.

Time honored para-militaristic (mechanistic) vs androgynous (adult / interactive) pedagogies were tested by Kooi (2006), who sought to ascertain police recruits’ “perceptual and attitudinal” responses to the two pedagogical styles. A low powered experiment with 97 police recruits—41 in an experimental group (where adult-based, interactive learning was highlighted) and 46 in a control group (which employed the traditional, bellicosity-ridden training model)—showed little attitudinal preference. Kooi observed, “mean attitude scores [sometimes only] slightly favoured problem-based learning over traditional approaches, but not necessarily to the level of statistical significance” (pp. 129, 131; cf. Kooi and Palmer 2014). Other studies fared better. Recalcitrant, by way of contradistinction, Anderson (2024) advocated for the “old guard” model, extolling incessant hectoring. Bumbak A, [57] as noted, disagrees, opining training “requires creativity and a degree of panache, as well as establishing rapport”—thus inter-activity. Younger minds, says Bumbak A, [57] are particularly keen on participatory and socializing experiences—not lecturing and hectoring. Dual Code Theory helps explain why creativity works, underscoring (1) how the brain uses visuals and “operates on models”, and (2) how “visual metaphors can evolve familiar text into something more extraordinary and engaging”. Delany and Gaunt [58] inform: “qualitative studies... [attest] vivid and tangible experience, stretching the imagination, increasing emotional self-awareness and providing access to tangible knowledge” are effective [18]. Kinder presses “purely vicarious and verbalistic learning is not consistent with modern theories of education” [59]. Delivering legitimacy-related material traditionally obfuscates the information and diminishes its impact.

### Maximizing Perception vs Imperception

To inculcate empathy, police trainers do well to try to maximize recruits’ perception and self-awareness? Police, of course, will not present to exigent situations with a *tabula rasa*. Officers present with deeply ingrained epistemological presuppositions which exert considerable subconscious influence. Epistemology is a philosophical discipline that reflects on the essence of a person’s claim to see or know something. In epistemic terms, what people/police claim to know to be true—be it (1) about persons police happen to see, or (2) about seemingly threatening people police engage—derives from individuals’ perceptions not absolute truth about what an officer purports to see and know. Evagorou M, et al. [60] construe visual representations as “epistemic objects” our perception alights upon an object and internal decisions are made; from there we sort out what we believe and decide on our response. We don’t always perceive correctly, however. We tend to uncritically adhere to subjective truths associated with the cultures from which we emerge and abide. Brunson & Gau [24] concur, noting

police interactions on the streets are complicated by the “perceptual frameworks officers bring to their interactions”. Officers’ epistemic and ontological senses are subconsciously informed and conditioned by a multiplicity of social and psychological factors, what for Murphy and Gardner are “primal reflex function[s]... ingrained tendencies to respond” to stimuli [61]. Persons’ ethical decisions operate from “basic primordial functions”, which are enforced by cultural considerations and, sometimes, corrupted Bottoms & Tankebe [11] even by well-intended first responders. Agencies do well to help recruits know themselves-and not just course material.

### **Inculcating Virtues in a Sometimes Value-Less World**

With the embrace of never-before-held power comes a new “status” (p. 70). Young officers are given a powerful “new self” [13]. Police can all-too-easily become infatuated by the badge and unknowingly sullied by the empowerment that comes with it. There can be “unfavourable consequences” associated with the new, deleterious warrior identity (Greenberg & Easterling [62]). Storr observed it is “rare for people to shift significantly on beliefs around which they form their identity”. Cognizant of the importance of cultivating personal awareness, staving off moral “devolving” [10, 57,63] and helping recruits to be more socially aware [64] police do well to use educational strategies that prove to be more efficacious.

### **Expositional vs Experiential Training**

Biologically speaking, the acquisition of knowledge, and its evolution into matured wisdom, virtue and habit, rises and falls on the extent to which information is received and encoded. As noted, what humans come to know (be it on police ethics or anything) is best known through sensory-rich experiences-not auditory stimuli, alone. Our three-pound brains are made up of a complex of 100 billion nerve cells... [managing] 100 trillion synaptic connections [65] The Science of Storytelling. Abrams Press, New York.

Kandel [66] Humans can hold 2,500,000 gigabytes in storage, as compared to the largest computer that holds 10,000. By means of biochemical “action potentials”, neuro-signals move at speeds up to 120 meters per second along 150,000-180,000 kms of synaptic wiring [65]. Biochemically-speaking, neurons’ dendrites receive signals and pass information on through axons, through synapses [66]. The greater the electrical inputs associated with the initial signalling, or the more “excited” more and more neurons become, the stronger the current that transmits data to adjacent neural regions thus information retention. Auditory stimuli often lack electro-chemical power-and are adjudged less impactful.

Leaning on Cuban and Shabiralyani [67] informed learning is derived 1% from taste, 1.5% from touch, 3.5% from smell, 11% from hearing and 83% from sight. Giovengo [68] observed 70% of knowledge comes from what we experience; 20% comes from associates; 10% comes from formal training. Information-be it for training purposes or otherwise-is sometimes consolidated, stored and retrieved; but more often simply forgotten. Because legitimacy training for police is designed to be transformative, its success rises and falls on the extent to which its information load is successfully encoded and retained-and trainers have only a limited time to facilitate the transaction.

US police academy training is typically delivered in approximately 800 contact hours. With 8,760 hours in a year, police training absorbs 0.09% of a person’s yearly time. If 10% of recruit training dealt directly with legitimacy-and typically it is 5%-in a year’s time 0.01% of the stimuli recruits receive deals with legitimacy. By the time a twenty-one-year-old cadet presents to the academy, s/he would have been processing data for 210,240 hours in the course of their lifetime. Recruits interior dispositions-already informed by genetic predispositions and environmental influences-will have already amalgamated and transmitted biologically stimulated inclinations. When seen against 210,240 hours of neural inputting for a twenty-one-year-old, the extent to which 50 hours of legitimacy instruction in an academy-a mere 0.00023782% of living time-will be transformative is open to question. One thing seems rather certain: lecturing on legitimacy doesn’t hold transformative promise. What then? Genova notes “we initially pay attention to what we find interesting, meaningful, new, surprising, significant, emotional and consequential. These excite biological processes. Raiyn observed: “Performance Analysis shows that visual learning tools increased students’ higher order thinking skills” [69] as do engaging hands-on interactivities [70]. Experiential learning is known to communicate more powerfully Bobek and Tversky [71]. Visual images process information 60,000 times faster than words alone Bingham and Gaggiotti. Learners “privilege word order that’s filmic” and paints on the mind [66]. In their systematic review, Guo et al. [72] surmised: educators can “enhance content-area learning” by means of it, particularly when delivering interactive content in conjunction with “teacher provided [verbal] support”. Seif [10], Platz and Platz et al. [63] discovered this, as well.

Lecturing stresses facts; experience expresses facts-by deliveringheftier electro-chemical burns [73]. Mayer and Sims observed “consistent with Dual Coding Theory, spatial ability allows learners to devote more cognitive resources to building referential connections” [74], prompting better assimilation and information retention. Memory draws from both an internal visio-spatial scratchpad (what humans see) and a

phonological loop (what humans hear). Recollection, itself, is “mediated by memory images” [75]. Neuropsychological studies attest to the limits of auditory stimuli, and the additive effects of complimentary sense learning on memory [76]. Per Bloom’s taxonomy [77], Verducci called for more “imaginative engagement” and social experiences, noting “perception, knowledge and understanding are forged from an amalgamation of individuals’ physical, social and political locations and experiences” [78]. Genova observed: “studies have shown that making people aware of biasing influence can counteract some kinds of mental contamination”. Gopal et al. [79], however, were unable to discover any viable debiasing strategies. More studies are needed. For legitimacy training to be transformative-and not just temporarily informative-experiential learning needs to be employed as a principal “pedagogical agent” [80]. Experiences facilitate better values-formation, adding benefit to thinking, socialization and performance in professional life [81,82].

### **Sterile vs Visual, Tactile and Kinetic-Scenario Training**

Recruits are “not necessarily typically kinder and gentler people” [57]. As with all learners, recruits need to “see legitimacy training as something that will improve them as individuals” [83]. Students must “insinuate themselves into a work” [66] visually, experientially and socially. Recruits become more engaged intra-personally through interpersonal experiences. Adjudged beneficial [68], scenario training reconstructs moments designed to stimulate engagement, reaction and reflection. Training scenarios (1) involve envisioning and (2) coming to quick terms with circumstances, (3) kinetic movement among people, (4) tactile experiences like breaking up mock domestic disturbances, utilizing handcuffs and making mock arrests-and involve more of a student’s entire being. Because more-abundant sensory loads forge greater cognitive imprints, utilizing scenarios shows promise, generally, and have bearing on ethical decision-making and impulse control. Baldwin et al. [84] studied the performance of 122 active-duty officers who underwent realistic lethal force scenario training. Predictably, the experience prompted a cardiovascular spike (to 150 heart beats per minute) along with perceptual and cognitive distortions. They discovered that 27% of officers in the scenario training made at least one lethal force error owing to stress and surmised police trainers need to “...critically reflect on police training practices and continue to make evidence-based improvements to training”. Anderson et al. [85] tested whether cardiovascular responses manufactured through simulated SWAT scenario training correlated with the stress experienced when officers responded in hazardous real-world situations. Unsurprisingly, they discovered scenario-based training drawing officers into emotionally and physiologically

charged experiences-enabling them to experience their bodies and minds-was efficacious. Agencies have acquired expensive, reality-based virtual, “shoot-don’t-shoot” systems, where, akin to flight simulators, officers enter virtual worlds, and experience generated people and circumstances in a dynamic environment. Trainees are immediately beckoned to decide whether they are dealing with an actual threat or are being misled by misperceptions. Weitzer R [23] reported in twenty shoot-don’t-shoot video experiments Blacks were more likely to get shot-immediately.

### **Conclusion**

The call for police reform in America has been heralded and heard-or so it seems. On the whole, American police agencies are discernibly investing more energy in legitimacy training in basic training for police recruits. Limited studies that have direct and indirect bearing on police training are observable-and reported upon herein. Dunn noted, however, academic theorists-such as this author-often “have no real weight” beyond learned environments, and he underscored the importance of “speaking to what those who perform or interpret professionally... already know” [86]. Mindful of this and the problematic perception of, and resistance to, “academia imposing its truths from on high”, [87] called for more “inclusive” approaches that are “flexible, imaginative and adaptive” [62-100], for their part, place a premium on academic partnering, as do others. One of the benefits of studies such as this is the data gives to what police are doing-as opposed to academics telling police what they ought to do-if only they were as smart as us. The policing craft is intuiting needs and making appropriate responses in response to them [101-150]. Game to partner with, as opposed to lecture to, this article-written by a former police officer and police academy director in Texas, who is now an aspiring criminologist-represents an attempt to formally reflect on (1) what the craft is doing and (2) the extent to which the doing comports with best practices in education as discernible with the conventions of academic inquiry. The questions raised are more important than the answers given [151-200]. At this time, mindful of the scant resources, much more work needs to be done before one can speak with certainty about the extent to which police training in America is effectively inculcating the proclivity toward interactional legitimacy in aspiring officers, at the basic academy level [201-258]. Two things seem certain: the policing vocation is trying; more research is necessary!

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