



ETHICAL POLICING IS COURAGEOUS



Loyola Hosts First National Police Peer Intervention Conference

BY SUE WEISHAR, PH.D.

Participants discuss ethical policing at the National Police Peer Intervention Conference at Loyola University New Orleans College of Law

On April 19th and 20th Loyola University New Orleans College of Law hosted the first National Police Peer Intervention Executive Leadership and Training Conference. In attendance were almost one hundred police chiefs, trainers, and policy experts from more than 25 municipalities, including New York, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and Atlanta. Participants also included police executives from four cities in the Gulf South: Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Jackson, Mississippi; Plano, Texas; and Austin, Texas. The purpose of the conference was to learn about the New Orleans Police Department's (NOPD) innovative Ethical Policing is Courageous

(EPIC) program. Developed by the men and women of the NOPD, social science researchers, community stakeholders, and police reform experts, EPIC's goal is to educate, empower, and support officers on the streets to play a meaningful role in "policing" each other by intervening *before* a wrongful action occurs.

EPIC is the first department-wide police peer intervention program in the country. Through role-playing, discussions, and lectures, the program helps officers identify potential mistakes and misconduct before they occur, and gives officers the tools and

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strategies to intervene promptly and effectively, thereby saving careers and protecting the public. A major program focus is to help officers see that intervening is a way to protect fellow officers from disciplinary action, criminal charges, or worse. As conference co-organizer and long-time civil rights attorney Mary Howell told attendees, EPIC takes the pressures of peer conformity and loyalty that too often lead officers to remain silent in the face of improper behavior of their colleagues and “flips it” for good.

EPIC draws upon the social science research on active and passive “bystandership” conducted by renowned psychologist Dr. Ervin Staub. A Holocaust survivor who fled Communist Hungary when he was 18 years old, Dr. Staub gave the keynote address at the conference. He began his remarks with the following observation, “Policing may be the most honorable profession of all.... Except when it goes wrong.” He explained that policing often goes wrong when a “bystander,” which he defined as “a witness who is in a position to know what is happening and is in a position to take (positive) action,” fails to act.

Based on years of experimental research on helping behavior and the study of genocidal actions, Staub described what inhibits active bystandership: other bystanders who remain passive, harm-doers modeling wrongful behaviors, and a culture or group standards that justify harm towards victims—often persons who have already been devalued by blaming or scapegoating. In addition to helping the NOPD establish EPIC, Dr. Staub has worked with educators to stop bullying in schools, developed a training program to reduce the use of unnecessary force by California police after the Rodney King incident, and led a project in Amsterdam to improve Dutch-Muslim relations. Since 1999 he has conducted workshops and trainings in Rwanda to promote healing and reconciliation and to prevent new violence.

The long-troubled New Orleans Police Department reached a nadir in the chaotic aftermath of Hurricane Katrina when officers shot and killed unarmed citizens and then orchestrated elaborate cover-ups to escape accountability. A March 2011 U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) investigative report found the NOPD to be one of the most corrupt and dysfunctional police departments in the country. In July 2012, the City of New Orleans entered into the nation’s most comprehensive federal Consent Decree ever for a police department. This decree covers virtually every aspect of modern policing: policies, operations, training, accountability, discipline,

use of force, sex crimes investigations, interrogations, canines, search and seizure, racial profiling, gender discrimination, etc. Against this background, it is all the more remarkable that six years later the NOPD led a national conference on a ground-breaking program in ethical decision-making in law enforcement.

A diverse group of organizations sponsored the conference, including the Southern Poverty Law Center, Fraternal Order of Police, New Orleans Police and Justice Foundation, and the Jesuit Social Research Institute (JSRI). Loyola Law School Dean Madeleine Landrieu and JSRI Director Fred Kammer, S.J., discussed this unique collaboration in a joint statement after the conference:

... what we have in common is far greater than what divides us. What we most assuredly have in common is the belief that ethical policing that respects and protects the Constitutional rights of all residents to liberty, equality, and justice is a noble profession that plays a vital role in holding communities together in a democratic society.¹

There was a strong Jesuit presence at the conference. Loyola College of Law Professor Andrea Armstrong provided the opening remarks, noting that participants would be honoring Loyola’s Jesuit origins when they strove to achieve intellectual rigor, service, excellence, and justice. Christy Lopez, Visiting Professor at Georgetown University Law Center, spoke on two panels about her experiences helping to establish EPIC. She served as Deputy Chief in the Special Litigation Section of the DOJ’s Civil Rights Division from 2010 to 2017 and played a key role in including peer intervention training in the NOPD consent decree. The former Director of Loyola’s Twomey Center for Peace Through Justice, Ted Quant, was one of the community stakeholders who provided input to the EPIC training curriculum. With a long history as an activist against police brutality, Ted urged police leaders to infuse the EPIC ethos into everything they do. Of the seven NOPD leaders on the conference program, six have degrees from Loyola University, including NOPD Superintendent Michael Harrison (M.S., Criminal Justice, 2009).

Conference supporter Jonathan Aronie, who also serves as the lead Federal Monitor for the NOPD consent decree, shared with participants his belief that, when police departments nationwide see how much more objectively safe and effective policing becomes through an EPIC lens, the adoption of peer intervention training

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will grow to the point where incidents of an officer afraid to intervene to keep a colleague from making a mistake or engaging in misconduct will become extremely rare.

In an age of widely shared video footage of police abuse, police leaders are increasingly held accountable for the actions of their rogue officers. The Black Lives Matter movement has exposed the deep distrust between communities of color and local police agencies across the U.S. With crime rates down dramatically since the 1990's, there are growing expectations that police agencies focus on improving community relations. With the policing profession under scrutiny on so many fronts, the EPIC program may very well have come at a critical time for our nation's law enforcement community.²

For more information on EPIC, including training materials (e.g. program guide, PowerPoint, and videos) see <http://epic.nola.gov/home/>

ENDNOTES *Ethical Policing Is Courageous*

- ¹ Landrieu, M. & Kammer, F. (May 10, 2018). NOPD Deserves Recognition. *The New Orleans Advocate*. Retrieved at http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/opinion/letters/article_d6f370b0-53ae-11e8-b323-3756b7071635.html
- ² See Aronie, J. (June, 2018). Buy-in is irrelevant when it's just a better way: One reason why NOPD's novel police peer intervention training program is taking off, *Community Policing Dispatch*. Retrieved from <https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/index.asp>

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