

# **Community Report**

## **Austin City Council Resolution 66: Austin Police Department Training Video Review Panel**

**By: Jeaux Anderson, Angelica Erazo, Andrea Black, Maya Pilgrim,  
Miriam Conner, Phil Hopkins**

**January 18, 2021**

*"The truth is that the police reflect America in all of its will and fear, and whatever we  
might make of this country's criminal justice policy, it cannot be said that it was  
imposed by a repressive minority."*

*-- Ta-Nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me*

*"Today has shown police don't need de-escalation training. They choose who to  
escalate on. That's not a training issue."*

*-- @traceyecorder in reference to Jan. 6 riot at the US Capitol*

## [LINK TO EXECUTIVE SUMMARY](#)

### **I. Introduction**

### **II. Patterns Identified in Videos**

- A. Pattern: Racial Bias, Stereotypes and Use Of Force
- B. Pattern: Overrepresentation of “What Not To Do” Videos
- C. Pattern: Ineffective Language and Neglected Power Dynamics
- D. Pattern: “Us Versus Them” Mentality
- E. Pattern: Dramatic Reinforcement of the “Danger Imperative”
- F. Pattern: “A Few Bad Apples” Theory of Police Accountability
- G. Pattern: Emphasis on Transactional Interactions
- H. Pattern: Inappropriate Use of Mass Media News Clips

### **III. Insights into the APD Training Academy Curriculum and Process**

- A. Ineffective Adult Learning Strategies
- B. Lack of Overall Coordination
- C. Ethics Training Isolated
- D. Concerns About Process

### **IV. CONCLUSION**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **SCOPE OF THIS PANEL**

We were invited as community member representatives to review a core set of Austin Police Department (APD) training videos shown at the police cadet academy as laid out in Austin City Council Resolution 20191205-066.<sup>1</sup> The videos we reviewed were chosen by leadership from the Austin Police Department and the Office of Police Oversight. We reviewed videos within the Arrest, Search and Seizure; Arrest and Control; Crisis Intervention; De-escalation, Tactical Communication; Use of Force; and Use of Force - Legal modules. Our task was to identify and analyze any racial and gender inequities in the videos and the ways in which the video training material may reinforce larger cultural stereotypes and narratives.

We are writing this report to share our experience and analysis at the end of a seven-month process. This report supplements the formal reports submitted by the panel facilitators at Life Anew. We would like to call attention to the external review produced by Peace Mill Research and Communications, “Community + APD Equity Assessment Series: Austin Police Department, Training, and Recruiting Divisions.”<sup>2</sup>

### **CONTEXT**

We are writing this report in the midst of turbulent times. We undertook this review as a community panel a year after the Austin City Council recognized in 2019, through Resolution 66, the Austin Police Department’s (APD) “history of bigotry and discrimination that has contributed to racially disparate outcomes in policing and policy.”<sup>3</sup> We came together in 2020 during a summer of uprisings in response to the police killings of Black people. We are currently experiencing a global pandemic that is overwhelming our underfunded public health system and has resulted in disproportionately high sickness and death for Black and Brown communities. This same year, a presidential executive order banning anti-racism training in federally funded programs was issued in an attempt to erase the history and the violence inflicted upon communities of color.<sup>4</sup>

We have undertaken this review and report with a sense of responsibility to the communities of which we are a part and a commitment to voice our analysis and experiences in regards to disproportionate targeting of, and violence toward,

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=332753>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/pio/document.cfm?id=352525>

<sup>3</sup> <https://austintexas.gov/page/resolution-66>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-race-sex-stereotyping/>

communities of color at the hands of Austin's police force. We recognize that the patterns we witnessed while reviewing the APD training videos are not exclusive to APD but are reflective of our society at large. However, as we witnessed in video after video, the power and authority which APD wields can have lethal consequences. We continue to witness Black, Indigenous, and Brown deaths across the country at the hands of police. We know APD wants to and can do better. We submit this report in the hope that APD will:

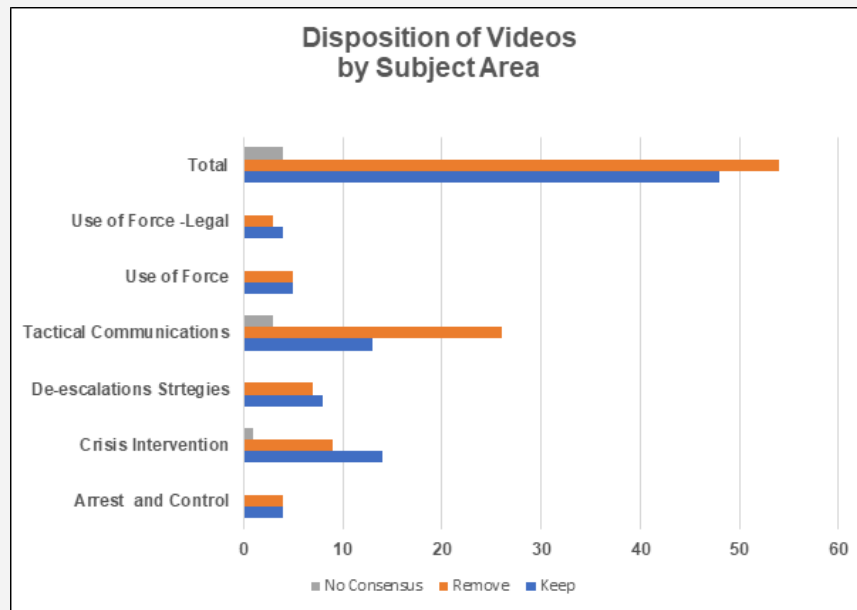
- Unify a siloed approach within the department that currently leads to disjointed training;
- Reevaluate, root out, and correct the ways in which the numerous biases we delineate below--specifically racism, classism, homophobia, ableism, and misogyny--currently permeate its training materials; and
- Interrupt the patterns and mechanisms of systemic violence in the larger culture which are perpetuated by the department charged to protect and serve.

We also recognize that the review of videos used in the cadet training is but a single gear in a larger departmental, city, and cultural machinery that perpetuates biases and behaviors that enact systemic harm and oppression on our communities.

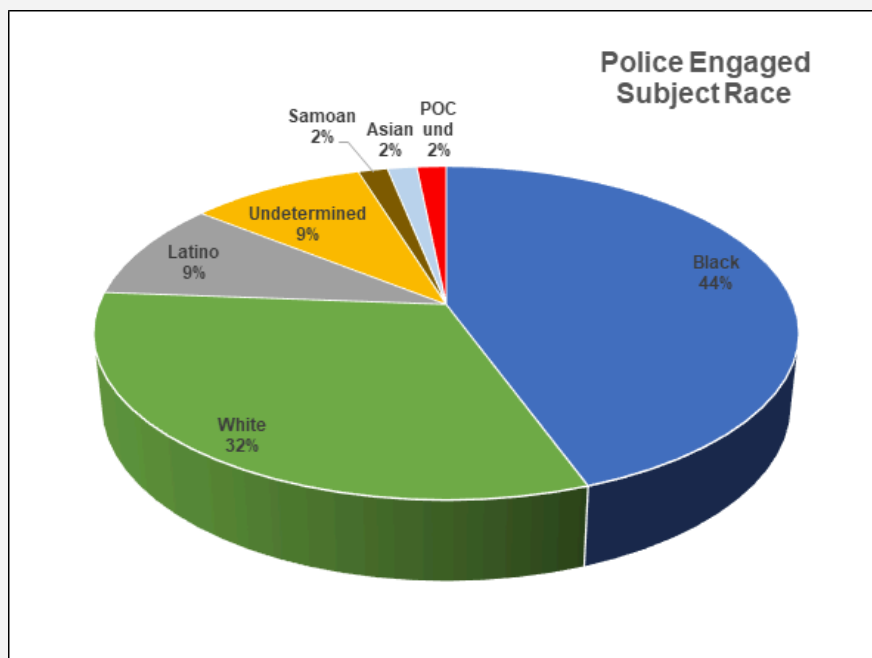
## II. PATTERNS IDENTIFIED IN VIDEOS

### **Pattern: Racial Bias, Stereotypes and Use of Force**

The vast majority of the videos we reviewed over these seven months were disappointing in quality. Most were outdated, many were hard to follow and had poor viewability, and some had unprofessional or sensationalistic commentary. Please reference Graphic A below. ***But, by far the most alarming pattern we witnessed was the harmful stereotypes perpetuated against Black and Brown communities.*** The videos shed light on the disproportionate interactions police have with Black, Indigenous, and Brown communities that result in violence and death. The videos we reviewed were mirrors of the patterns of racism, sexist gender norms, and classism we see perpetuated across systems and institutions in Austin and nationwide, including the fact that the outcome of many of these videos was almost immediate and completely avoidable death. Graphic B below highlights the race of the subjects that engaged with police from the videos reviewed. Graphic C depict the subject's race that involved the subject being shot. In both graphics we can see people of color, particularly, Blacks, being overrepresented in the videos highlighted in the curriculum.



**Graphic A** - (Graphic highlights the disposition of videos by subject area and the review panel's suggestion on either keeping the videos, removing them or where no consensus was reached. Over 50% of the videos were recommended to be removed from the curriculum.)



**Graphic B** - (Graphic displays the subject's race from the videos. Blacks comprised the largest percentage of subjects at 44% and whites as the next highest percentage of 32%. "POC und" is a subject of color of undetermined race. Out of the videos filtered, 59% involved subjects defined as people of color). Austin's city demographic listed the city's population as: 48.3% White (non-Hispanic), 33.9% Hispanic, 7.8% Black, 7.6% Asian, 0.7% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

### **Issues of Racism, Implicit Bias, Not Integrated Throughout**

We did not observe any discussion about the historical context of policing and the impact of White supremacy, racism and other intersectional forms of oppression, or implicit bias. While this may be covered in a separate training module, we believe it is critical that discussion of these issues be integrated throughout the training and that cadets be supported and encouraged to discuss the racialized, gendered and classist dynamics at play in every day interactions with the community. **These issues should be addressed at both the individual officer level as well as at the departmental level. Instead, the training appears to be focused solely at an individual level, focusing on an individual officer's "professional" vs "personal" demeanor and looking solely at their individual interactions.** There is no discussion about how they can and should intervene when issues of bias or racism or other misconduct arise or to examine how a department can and should build trust in the community and how it can respond to harm it creates in the community and work to repair harm and rebuild trust. It should not be about "hiding" or ignoring bias but about confronting it in effective ways. This is a critical area that requires in-depth training integrated throughout the training modules.

### **Dehumanizing Footage**

Overall, the videos displayed a great deal of dehumanization and lack of respect or just common humanity, both in terms of the verbal and physical interactions and the way community members were portrayed. We saw this play out in the way that many peoples' faces were not blurred--even when footage showed them in extreme crisis, nudity, and in vulnerable positions. In several videos, people's names were shared or people were depicted via police "mug shots" although not relevant to the training objective.

Many of the videos showed People of Color, and in particular, Black people, being brutalized and/or their well-being utterly disregarded. ***Because these are real human beings, not actors, in particular moments of time in their life, it is important to not perpetuate insensitivities to people's privacy and show care and ethics around how people's stories are used as training tools.***

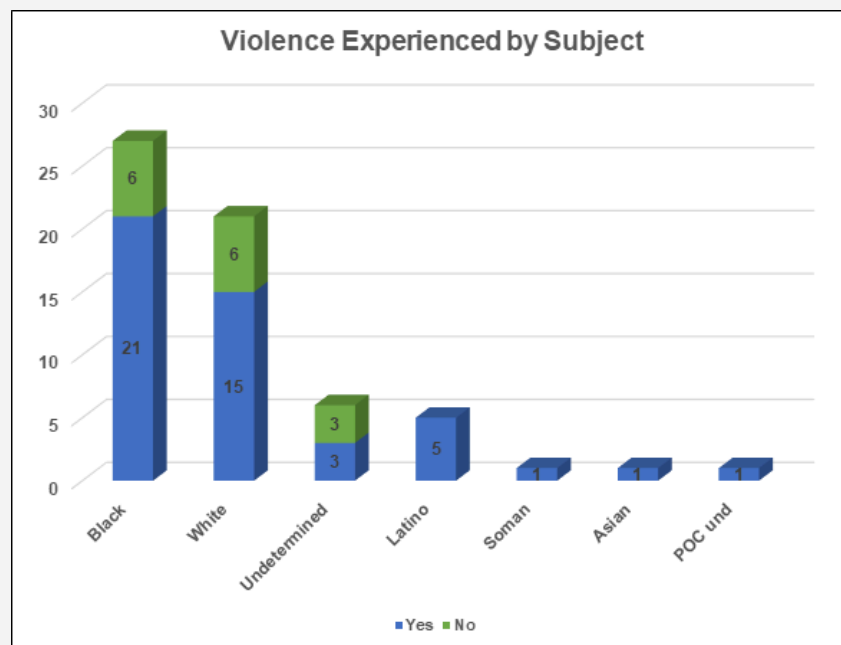
### **Rapid Escalation and Use of Force with People of Color**

There was gross overrepresentation of the use of force and negative outcomes from mostly White male officers interacting with Black and Brown community members. We witnessed again and again mostly Black men dying within minutes, sometimes within seconds, of an interaction with police. There were exceptionally few videos showing the police trying to de-escalate situations involving People of Color. In many of the videos showing encounters with community members over minor criminal infractions, a strong emphasis on gaining compliance and control quickly

led to rapid escalation with often violent and even deadly results. We did not find any consistent focus in the training material on the fact that not all situations need to be controlled to the same extent and in the same ways. Please refer to Graphic C which is a representation of the number of subjects that experienced violence.

Many of the videos, including several that are more broadly used in police academies nationwide, are so disturbing in gratuitous violence against Black and Brown people that we strongly recommend that they only be used as examples of why community members historically mistrust the police. We do not believe these videos should be shown if APD trainers or guest facilitators are not able to offer a critical analysis and discussion of both what went wrong in the videos and how the results shown in them are shaped by deep cultural biases and stereotypes. We fear that repeated exposure to needless violence normalizes such interactions with the public for the cadets and desensitizes them to their own and their communities' humanity.

***It is important to state that it was very traumatic for community members to watch repeated racialized violence displayed in the videos. We have grave concerns about the impact watching these videos will have on all cadets, and particularly cadets of color.***



**Graphic C** - (This graph is a representation of the number of subjects that experienced violence. Violence is described as tased, shot, shot at, killed, excessive force, shot with a bean bag, and pepper sprayed. As a percentage of the total number of subjects that experienced violence, Blacks represent 46%, Whites represent 30%, Latino 11%, Asian, POC und and Samoan represent 2% each, respectively. All people of color collectively represent 63% of all subjects that experienced violence.)

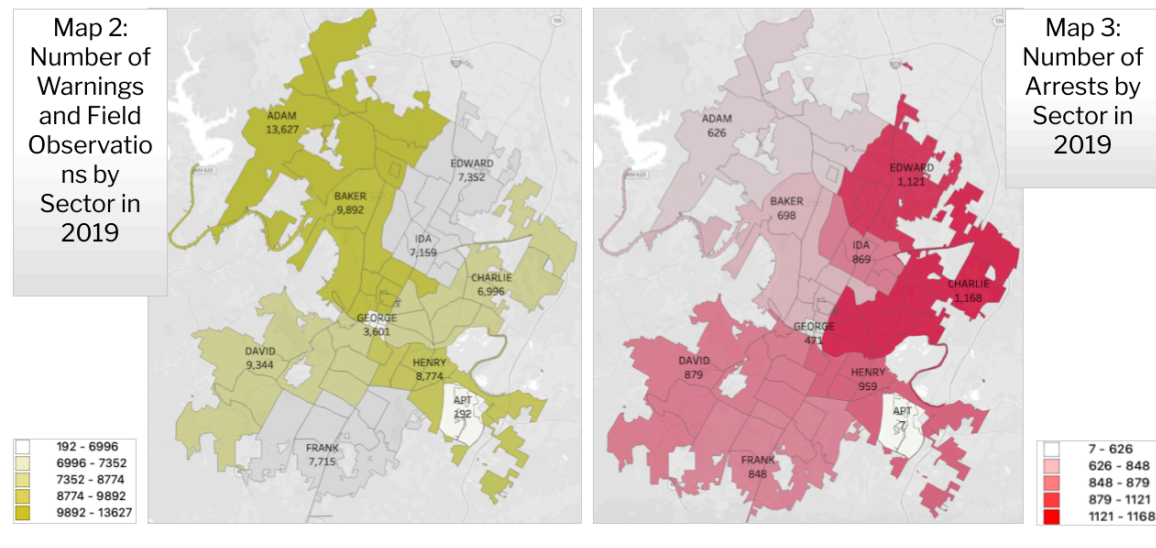
## **Working Class and People of Color Seen as Threats**

There was a clear pattern, both explicit and implicit, of different communities being offered different degrees of understanding and grace by officers. Police interactions with upper-class, White communities were noticeably absent in the videos. White people were often given considerable grace and understanding even when they demonstrated dangerous behavior, while People of Color, in particular Black men, were given little to no grace or understanding even for minor and less threatening actions. For example, one video of an armed White man showed an officer speaking calmly and reiterating the person's right to carry a firearm. In contrast, in videos where People of Color were armed or even unarmed, police officers treated them as threats and moved towards use of force with great speed. ***Such patterns echoed and reinforced popular narratives about, and attitudes toward, communities of color as more “dangerous” in clear distinction to White people.*** In the training material, class markers also clearly assigned “dangerousness” to less affluent socio-economic groups.

We know that this pattern is not only reflected in the curriculum, but also in current Austin policing. Graphic D below, taken from a [recent analysis of racial disparity](#) in policing in Austin by the City of Austin's Equity Office, Office of Police Oversight, and Office of Innovation, shows the tangible result of this kind of biased training combined with deep historical inequities in policing. The map on the left shows that warnings and field observations were disproportionately represented in 2019 police interactions in the predominately White and affluent areas of West and North West Austin. In contrast, 2019 arrests were concentrated in East Austin (Central, North, and South) and areas of South Austin--areas with the highest concentration of Black and Brown residents. This data clearly shows the implications of unequal policing, specifically with officers giving more grace, in the form of warnings, in more affluent and Whiter communities; and giving less grace, in the form of over-policing and arrests, in working class and Black and Brown communities.



## Geographic Analysis



**Graphic D** - (Graphic from the 2019 Analysis of APD Racial Profiling Data by the Office of Police Oversight, Equity Office, and Office of Innovation.)

### Gendered Stereotypes

**Patterns of gender stereotypes across different modules displayed frequent and unacknowledged gender biases.** Female officers were rare, and when one was present, we witnessed her judgments and strategies disregarded by her male peers. Descriptions of effective officer presence and posture were often described in masculine ways, such as an emphasis on perceivable upper-body strength. Women were most visible in the Crisis Intervention section--both as officers and community members--reinforcing the “feminized” stereotypes of care and stereotypes that view women as “victims” of “hysteria.” While women, both as community members and officers, were absent in most of the Arrest and Control and De-Escalation videos, we did see disturbing moments of violence and “what not to do” examples from White male officers toward Black women civilians. When Black women were featured, the impetus to control their bodies and dominate the interaction was clear, with officers justifying force due to “angry” and “sassy” stereotypes.

A lot of the videos perpetuated toxic masculinity and continued to show a disregard for nuance in what it means to be masculine and in what it means to be a police officer. In their interactions with community members, we repeatedly watched officers cling to ideas of control that perpetuates the need to be an aggressive, alpha male and having to assert dominance. We saw little to no room offered for police officers to turn aside from a “need” to be dominant in order to better connect to, and work with, the community on a human level.

## Who Is Allowed To Be In Crisis

Some of the videos, many in the Crisis Intervention section, gave cadets an opportunity to hear personal storytelling and build empathy for people's problems and difficulties. However, this storytelling came almost exclusively from White men. This leaves a gap in knowledge of how mental health issues may show up differently for women and gender-non-conforming community members. ***Instead, women and men of color were rarely allowed to speak for themselves and were portrayed almost exclusively in footage that cast them in uncritical narratives about their needs from the point of view of those who assumed the authority to speak for them.***

This difference in whose perspectives are valued and highlighted in the videos correlates to the stark differences in police responses that we witnessed. It was a very evident pattern in the videos that White male community members tended to receive empathy and the benefit of the doubt from police officers while communities of color were treated as threats. In one example, we watched a police officer give a White-presenting man seven minutes of grace and conversation despite his suspicious behavior, while in several other videos a Black man was shot within seconds of being approached by an officer. The pattern we witnessed was that White community members in crisis are allowed to be in crisis; whereas Black community members, whether in crisis or not, are perceived with suspicion as threats.

Throughout this process, the training curriculum lacked substantive content on how to effectively interact with people with disabilities. There was little to no information provided about the ways in which crisis can present differently for individuals across the spectrum of neurodiversity and ability. There were some videos in the Crisis Intervention section that highlighted information on different abilities and mental health issues, but no clear advice was offered on how to best accommodate a range of abilities or what to look for when approaching a crisis situation. Without this training, officers may not have the tools to recognize the various ways that ability and mental health impact an individual's responses. In some cases, behaviors that may be perceived as "aggressive" by officers may in fact be indicative of mental health crises or disability.

Outside of the Crisis Intervention training section, there was no mention of how to adequately serve and protect community members with disabilities. There were a few videos that appeared to show people experiencing mental health crises; however no explicit mention was made of the role mental health played in the interaction, and many such instances resulted in excessive use of force by an officer. A 2018 audit of [APD Response to Mental Health- Related Incidents](#) highlights the lack of implementation of peer-city best practices in APD crisis intervention training. This panel similarly identified these patterns and need for improvement.

### **Particular Crises Are Validated; Racialized Trauma Is Not**

We also observed dramatic differences between the strategies taught during Crisis Intervention and the strategies taught in the other modules. The crisis intervention strategies encouraged officers to consider different factors that may influence a person's responses in a given situation. Trauma responses, developmental disabilities, and neuro-atypical behaviors were discussed and considered.

Dementia, autism, and Alzheimer's were highlighted in particular. It was emphasized that people dealing with these issues deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. ***These strategies were nowhere to be seen in any of the other modules nor was their absence deemed relevant in processing the content of the other videos. Limiting these strategies to a particular module can have the effect of contradicting and devaluing those strategies and skills.***

We are concerned that such dignity and respect seemed largely restricted to people in recognizable mental health crises, but not other people in different forms of crisis, particularly those still largely unrecognized and produced by the allostatic load brought on by the stress and trauma of racialized poverty in our society. The emphasis on broadly supported mental health issues made stark the absence of recognition and support for these other serious and prevalent mental and emotional health issues throughout the videos.

This lack of recognition contributes to the patterns of violence which have resulted in police killings nationally of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Elijah McClain in 2020 and the following deaths at the hands of the Austin Police Department from 2000-2020: Mike Ramos (2020), Mauris DeSilva (2019), Hugo Alvarez (2018), Aquantis Griffin (2018), Victor Sanchez Ancira (2018), Leslie Salazar (2018), Thomas Alvarez (2018), Landon Nobles (2017), Morgan Rankin (2017), David Joseph (2016), Larry Jackson, Jr. (2013), Ahmede Jabbar Bradley (2012), Maurice Paladino (2012), Byron Carter Jr. (2011), Devin Contreras (2010), Nathaniel Sanders Jr. (2009), Kevin Brown (2007), Daniel Rocha (2005), Michael Clark (2005), Jesse Lee Owens, Jr. (2003), Lennon Johnson (2003), Sophia King (2002), Jose Navarro (2001), Joel Hernandez (2001), Kevin Scott (2000), to name a few.<sup>5</sup>

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- There needs to be explicit acknowledgement of the embedded racism and cultural narratives in the videos. Issues of White supremacy, as well as race, gender, class, and other inequities in our community, should be explicitly

---

<sup>5</sup> "Use of Force Deaths in Austin, TX," National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) – Austin branch, <http://www.naacpaustin.com/use-of-force-deaths-in-atx.html>. City of Austin 2018 Officer-Involved Shooting Report, Office of Police Oversight, June 2020.

discussed throughout the training modules, not just included in one or two sections.

- Find new training videos that offer a much more diverse representation of the demographics of both the Austin community and the APD force. Videos should portray multiple points of view and depict a diversity of community interactions, for example with women, the elderly, youth, LGBTQ, etc as well as different ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, individuals who are non neurotypical, etc. Special attention should be paid to the types of interaction portrayed so as not to overrepresent communities of color in violent interactions or overrepresent White community members in storytelling.
- Support APD trainers to build their capacity to analyze videos more fully and critically in terms of race, class, and gender equity. This capacity should be built in collaboration with community experts who are well versed and experienced in facilitating these conversations and integrating this type of analysis.
- Ensure that the privacy and dignity of all persons depicted in videos are upheld by blurring faces and nudity and deleting names.

### **Pattern: Overrepresentation of “What Not To Do” Videos**

Over half of the videos that we reviewed displayed officers engaged in behaviors and practices they should NOT be doing, and a large proportion of those videos displayed officers using excessive force or making other grievous mistakes. We have termed these videos as “What NOT to Do” videos. These videos are very problematic. ***The continuous repetition of ‘What NOT to Do’ interactions actually reinforces negative behavior; can lead to officer desensitization about abuse, injustices, and corruption; and dehumanizes the community that the officers are sworn to protect.*** Only a very small percentage of videos we reviewed were examples of what officers SHOULD be doing, and even those contained content that was sometimes deemed problematic by the review board.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Integrate adult education methods that prioritize methodologies that support adult learning. Watching videos about “What NOT to do” is not the best approach. APD should emphasize videos that demonstrate and reinforce positive behaviors rather than videos that display and reinforce bad conduct.
- Prioritize a few “What NOT to do” videos that could be part of a deeper analysis and discussion in the classroom about the larger dynamics that tend to produce undesirable results.
- When we encouraged the trainers to identify positive, intentional ‘what to do’ videos, we were told that they would be hard to find. This serves as an argument for allowing time and resources for trainers to research material and to engage in creative strategizing to create, identify, or locate the types

of videos instructors need. The difficulty in finding such material quite likely also speaks to a broader nationwide dearth of appropriate, good quality police training videos and would suggest the need to review other police department training materials.

- Make de-escalation a much higher priority in the training and include more videos that demonstrate de-escalation without the use of a firearm.

### **Pattern: Ineffective Language and Neglected Power Dynamics**

In all modules, but especially in the Tactical Communications section, we observed that the attempt to demonstrate professional verbal interaction often portrayed that communication unrealistically, with an emphasis on repeated stock phrases that have limited use in reality. Impersonal recurring phrases included: “cooperate so we can get you out of here quickly,” “we want to get you home,” “we’re on your side,” and “we want to hear your side of the story.” Such examples not only come off as artificial and contrived but as essentially dishonest. The portrayal of them in the videos was stilted and reinforced that these ways of talking are not natural to the officers employing them.

We noted a stark contrast between the examples offered in the videos and the examples offered by the training officers themselves in our discussions. The instructors were able to demonstrate the sorts of communications they would offer in ways that were quite natural and believable. Our concern is that such examples as presented in the videos discourage rather than model the training of effective non-biased communication.

We also observed that the phrase “stop resisting,” while frequently heard in videos, is not used in everyday language. In videos it was not clearly understood by community members with whom officers were interacting and tended to escalate the situation. More often it seemed to be used as a technique to justify use of force: in a number of videos we saw police officers shout it to people who were not resisting and were trying to comply with the officer’s instructions. Police officers need to be trained in more effective, relatable language and strategies.

***In particular, generalized instructions on compliance seem particularly ineffective with communities who are traumatized by the hyper-criminalization of their neighborhoods and whose families and communities have been disproportionately negatively impacted by the criminal legal system. This reinforces a dynamic of dominance which requires total submission in order to survive while more privileged communities are treated with respect and dignity.*** Even when officers in video footage communicated what appeared to be a genuine and sincere desire to help, they seemed unaware of their unmistakable position as representatives of state authority and how that authority creates a barrier, at least, to providing that help.



They did not portray an understanding of the unequal power dynamics inherent between police and members of the public.

Cadets need to be educated about these obstacles and provided with tools to navigate both the relative power dynamics between officers and the public and their own trauma and emotions. The phrase “I’m here to help” simply will not be heard the same way from a uniformed officer with a gun and the power of arrest as from a neighbor or a social worker. Given this power differential, any such offers of help may be perceived as orders. Furthermore, if a civilian is exhibiting fear or trauma responses because of the power differential, those responses may be perceived as suspicious or threatening by the police officer who may escalate the situation. Expectations formed from the other training videos that reinforce the perception of certain community members as more dangerous, as well as the lack of a fully effective Crisis Intervention Training, exacerbate this likelihood.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Trainers need to explicitly acknowledge race, class, and gender dynamics at work in the interactions with community members displayed in these videos. Trainers should not avoid these dynamics or focus, as they currently do, solely on an individualized framework; i.e. a police officer’s “professional” versus “personal” face.
- Inculcate a culture of attention to social and emotional intelligence and develop successful coping strategies for officers throughout an officer’s service through consistent policies and practices.
- Include explicit training in how to build rapport with the community and connect with community members in ways that are honest, transparent, and authentic rather than using detached, formal “police” language.

### **Pattern: “Us Versus Them” Mentality**

One of the more pervasive biases we observed is the us-versus-them mindset. This bias existed at a fundamental, pervasive level, further informing other biases with respect to race, ethnicity, class, gender, and ability, and affected officers of color and female officers in the same or similar ways as White male officers.

The us-versus-them bias was explicit in some of the videos--i.e. police work is “the deadly game of cops and robbers”; however, much of it was implicit. This bias manifested in the following ways:

- An enhanced focus on officer safety over the safety of the community as a whole,
- A “warrior” versus “service” mentality in which officers see themselves as the “good guys” and the public they interact with often as “bad guys,”

- An emphasis on a kind of impossible objectivity and “professionalism” in which officers are expected not to have or show emotions and to view emotions from members of the public as problematic, and
- Most importantly, a view of the profession as primarily concerned with exercising and maintaining control, where officers are the agents of control and the public stands in need of being controlled.

Primarily this bias manifested in a focus on police officers “winning” by overcoming resistance and threat from the community or by prevailing in court or in grievance and complaint hearings. **It is counterproductive to frame interactions with the public as a contest in which the police should focus on “winning.” This cannot help but set up the public in the position of “losing” in encounters with the police.** The focus turns from compassion to conquest as officers see community as a roadblock in their effort to control and “win.” In the end, communities will continue to suffer, as there is no viable way to “win”--not only against police officers, but also against the system that continues to protect police officers in this us-versus-them framework.

We also observed evidence of the growing militarization of policing in the videos. The significant number of military veterans serving as police officers has influenced police/community relations in ways evident in the training videos. Many police organizations actively propagate the idea that our cities are a kind of “war zone” rather than communities in which (mostly diminishing rates of) crime takes place, and the public contains a significant number of “bad actors” which must be treated as enemy combatants rather than citizens with shared rights. Such a dramatic and important shift only exacerbates the us/them dichotomy.<sup>6</sup>

We would like to call attention to Dr. Sara Villanueva’s report referencing the paramilitary culture of both APD and particularly the training academy. We observed a paramilitary training style in some of the videos we reviewed. Dr. Villanueva states:

*There is an apparent mismatch between a typical paramilitary format and effectively preparing cadets to work in a manner consistent with the community-oriented police service model. A growing body of research has shown that paramilitary-structured academies do not align well with the*

---

<sup>6</sup> In the past few decades, since 9/11, for a variety of reasons and by means of a number of local, state and federal programs, police departments, including APD have grown more militarized, not only or even primarily in terms of equipment, but also in terms of broad perspective. One of the most problematic dynamics of the national funding sources for the increased militarization of police departments is the way it skews accountability away from the local community and toward the broader state or federal sources of that funding. Cf. Also, <https://www.pnas.org/content/115/37/9181> (actual report) <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/police-militarization-fails-to-protect-officers-and-targets-black-communities-study-finds> (easier to read report) <https://www.aclu.org/issues/criminal-law-reform/reforming-police/war-comes-home?redirect=war-comes-home-excessive-militarization-american-policing>

*principles of community policing and problem solving which are based on collaborations and partnerships.*<sup>7</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The training and training videos should be more focused on serving and protecting the community instead of its current focus on the “warrior” mentality which views the community as the “enemy.”

## **Pattern: Dramatic Reinforcement of the “Danger Imperative”**

Connected to both increasing militarism and the us-versus-them dichotomy, which we believe is at the heart of the repeated instances of police overreactions to threat and use of excessive force, is what researchers have called the “danger imperative”—a belief in a constant and prevalent danger for police officers. APD is not unusual in this regard. A significant number of training videos in most police academies focus on interactions where officers’ lives are under threat or in significant danger. Several of the descriptions of the training materials in use at the APD academy state this plainly. However, statistics from both the FBI Uniform Crime Reports (compiled by departments’ self-reporting nationwide) and the US Bureau of Statistics show this emphasis to be disproportionate to the actual danger an officer is likely to face. Policing is among the top 20 most dangerous occupations, but it is near the bottom of that list, according to Department of Labor statistics.<sup>8</sup>

Violence against police has been dropping for the past five decades, while police violence against the public remains steady. Ambush killings of the police are down 90% since 1970 according to a longitudinal study in the *Police Quarterly*.<sup>9</sup> Police officers are several times more likely to die in an automobile accident, but still routinely refuse to wear seatbelts because they don’t want to be hindered from exiting a vehicle should they be threatened with deadly force, a far less likely occurrence.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Villanueva, Sara, et. al., *Review Analysis and Strategic Plan for the Austin Police Department Training Academy*, May 2020 (p.10).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/iif/oshcfoi.htm#rates>

<sup>9</sup> White, Michael D., “Ambush Killings of the Police, 1970–2018: A Longitudinal Examination of the ‘War on Cops’ Debate,” *Police Quarterly*, 0(0) 1–21, Sage, 2020. Between 1980 and 2014, an average of 64 law enforcement officers were feloniously killed each year. There are over 600,000 police officers in over 18,000 agencies in the US. Construction workers and farm laborers have similar rates of on-the-job deaths. Steel workers, truck drivers, and farmers/ranchers die on the job at twice that rate. Trash collectors and roofers die three times as often. Airline pilots and fishery workers die four times as often. Loggers die seven times as often on the job. With the exception of truck drivers, none of those other dangerous occupations kill others frequently in the performance of their duties. Cf. also, “Disaggregating the Police Function,” [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3564469#:~:text=It%20proposes%20a%20totally%20novel,safety%20from%20the%20ground%20up](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3564469#:~:text=It%20proposes%20a%20totally%20novel,safety%20from%20the%20ground%20up)

<sup>10</sup> Sierra-Arévalo, Michael, *American Policing and the Danger Imperative* (November 1, 2016). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2864104> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2864104>



However, despite the statistical evidence, officers are trained to view every encounter as potentially life-threatening. While any given encounter with the public may indeed pose some degree of danger to an officer, the fact that across the United States 600,000<sup>11</sup> officers constantly ready to escalate situations out of fear for their safety poses a much greater threat to the public they serve. If officers are trained to view every person they encounter as a potential “cop-killer,” then bodies already perceived by our larger society as inherently dangerous, such as young Black males, will inevitably bear the brunt of that fear. Further, the central dynamic of policing--to control the public in every encounter with them--will tend toward unnecessary escalation when that control is perceived as being resisted, something that occurs far more frequently when officers interact with People of Color.

One of the training officers acknowledged that there has been an overemphasis on an officer “going home at the end of the shift” for some time in policing and police training. The training we reviewed, particularly the training highlighting the danger imperative, definitely emphasized the safety for the officer above all else. ***We believe the emphasis should be on maintaining the safety of everyone in police interactions with the public. The goal should be for everyone to go home safely.***

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The curriculum needs to address the impacts officers’ choices have on individuals in the community. Cadets need to be continually reminded that their actions and choices may have profound and lasting impacts on individuals’ lives.
- Introduce explicit and in-depth training in ways to mend relationships and rebuild trust with the community after bad actions by the police: from empowering individual officers to speak out after witnessing behavior ranging from merely inappropriate to criminal, to articulating the responsibilities, institutional expectations, and departmental practices in relation to the community when community standards are transgressed.

## **Pattern: “A Few Bad Apples” Theory of Police Accountability**

We noted in our review the way in which examples of bad or even criminal behavior on the part of police officers in the videos was explained as being the result of individual bad actors. Repeatedly, the training officers expressed surprise over how officers in the videos acted, claiming they did not understand what those officers were thinking or why they were acting the way they acted. This is part of a nationwide trend to excuse this behavior as the product of a few “bad apples” rather than as the natural, even inevitable, consequences of larger biases and power

---

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/191694/number-of-law-enforcement-officers-in-the-us/>

dynamics at work across police departments and society more broadly and of the structures and traditions of policing itself. The view that systemic problems are the result of individual police officers not properly following their training or lacking the appropriate attitude or temperament for policing prevents departments from properly addressing these prevalent and continuing patterns.

From what we observed in videos and with conversations with instructors, we contend that the structure of policing as a whole, particularly the focus on control and the warrior mentality, reinforces the us-versus-them dichotomy in ways that tend toward escalation and grievous mistakes in judgment. These patterns of police behavior are inseparable from the history of policing and how police practices have evolved to the present day. It is also tied to larger cultural narratives which engender perceptions of People of Color, women, gender-expansive individuals, the differently abled, and working class people as inherently less worthy of respect, or inherently suspicious, dangerous, and in need of “control.”

A lack of awareness of these broader cultural biases that influence interactions with the public in ways unconnected to individual professionalism underscore the need for incorporating the proposed course on History of Police and Race in America course into the training academy curriculum. ***Without this foundation training that addresses racism and other forms of oppression and an awareness of and sensitivity to the intersectional identities that people live, the training will fall back on the popular narratives and frameworks that it already presents throughout the training modules***

If we continue to treat the problem as individual aberrant behavior and try to address it through individual disciplinary actions that clearly are not working even when they are (rarely) imposed, we will make little progress. The problems are systemic and must be addressed through cultural change and system-wide training that recognizes the role that police structure and history plays in producing them.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- We wholly support the addition of the proposed course on History of Police and Race in America into the training academy curriculum.
- The proposed training in the history of policing should be a foundational module which precedes the skills-building training modules. We would recommend that additional coursework be incorporated that addresses implicit bias and cultural humility.
- In a hierarchical organization like APD, incoming, lower-ranked cadets are not effective levers of cultural change. In addition to revamping the cadet training academy, APD needs to undertake retraining of current officers to

respond to these critiques of the current training. It is not enough to revise the training solely for new staff.

- New cadets are being introduced to an established system with an entrenched ethos and worldview. The police department leadership would need to commit and follow through with cultural change through policies, practices, and expectations in order to change the academy. The department can't change through training alone.

### **Pattern: Emphasis on Transactional Interactions**

Many videos emphasized a “transactional” approach to interacting with the community, rather than long-term relationship building to develop genuine, authentic relationships; i.e., “The Memphis model.”<sup>12</sup> ***The main goal of many of the videos appeared to be teaching officers how to protect and safeguard themselves against complaints, reduce potential liability, and be prepared for court appearances rather than engaging with the community authentically, humanely, and ethically.***

This transactional approach was evident across modules, where cadets were encouraged to perform a show of humanity or behave in productive and community-oriented ways in order to gain compliance or avoid fallout from community complaints or legal action against them. The theme, explicit in several videos, was clearly that officers should treat people with respect for a specific and self-interested goal, rather than teaching that officers must treat people with respect because that is what they are due. It is deeply problematic to train cadets that acting appropriately with the public has a price tag in the form of some expectation of return.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- What was apparent throughout the videos was wide-scale dehumanization and a lack of community accountability. We encourage APD to explore what community accountability should look like in direct consultation with the most directly impacted communities.
- Undertake a community review of the academy training, including a review of all videos every two years until APD has established trust with the community, after which the review process could be extended to every five years.

### **Pattern: Inappropriate Use of Mass Media News Clips**

---

<sup>12</sup> The Memphis model was cited in one of the Crisis InterventionI training videos, but it was unclear whether APD has fully adopted and integrated this model. We believe it should be a priority orientation for all units, not just Crisis Intervention. The ethos of the Memphis model --“they treated me like a human not a perpetrator” -- should be for everyone.

A final pattern we noted concerns the source of the video clips. It appears that APD acquires some core sets of training materials from third-party sources, with individual training officers given the option to find any additional or alternative material. It does not appear that they are provided with a great deal of support or resources in their quest to find appropriate materials; it appears they often resort to reaching out individually to colleagues within APD or in other police departments to identify body cam footage that may be applicable to their teaching objectives. As a result, a number of the videos were gathered from very problematic video sources. In addition to Verbal Judo, T-COLE, PERF--many of which were outdated and were rife with stereotypes--we saw footage that was taken from questionable websites such as [www.TheYnc.com](http://www.TheYnc.com) and Thin Blue Line.

Many of the training videos used are sourced from mass media news clips and other online or social media outlets. There are several problems with using such material. First, mainstream journalists' primary priority is capturing and holding attention, often accomplished by stirring fear or otherwise sensationalizing interactions. Frequently, videos were overlaid with sensationalized music as well as explanatory commentary which was, at best, tangential to the training needs of the curriculum, and, at worst, actively working against the objectives of the training by skewing and dramatizing the material. Even if such narratives are challenged by the trainer, the cadets will still hear the commentary which speaks in the voice of the "public" tacitly or explicitly authorizing the police behavior. The commentary often borrows from and perpetuates popular narratives about both the world and certain "kinds" of people, offering a cartoonish breakdown of people as either "good guys" or "bad guys," usually simply on the basis of their roles or racial/class/socioeconomic status. The commentary exaggerates danger in ways that feed into narratives the public already accepts about what kinds of people are "dangerous." This reinforces unquestioned biases the cadets may bring with them into the training. It is not possible to tell a complex story about historical structures and dynamics in a two-minute news clip. Instead, news outlets recycle the same stereotypes and stories we already know and believe. ***The point of the training videos is to educate; using sensationalized news clips is counterproductive to that goal due to the "reality effect" that visual media imparts.***<sup>13</sup>

Some of the training material was even taken from Hollywood movies. ***No serious or real training value can be gleaned from Hollywood fantasies about the world.***

Training material should remain focused on the actual world. A particularly problematic example was drawn from *The Last Samurai*, exemplifying the cherry-picking of Eastern Cultures out of context (also present in several forms in

---

<sup>13</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, *On Television* (New York: New Press, 1998), 21. Bourdieu argues "that images...show things and make people believe in what they show." Not seeing images has the effect of hiding them not only from our view, but from our consideration as a part of reality.

other training material, such as “Verbal Judo” and “Mushin”). **Training material should avoid cultural appropriation.**

A number of the videos depicted outdated and stereotyping pop culture. The “humor” clips included cultural appropriation, and/or reinforced dated notions of policing, masculinity, gender norms, People of Color stereotypes, veneration of guns, etc. The comedy clips would likely appeal to particular audiences and would not necessarily resonate with a younger, more diverse cadet class. These videos need to be updated and made more inclusive, if used at all.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Overall, the APD videos need to be updated and refreshed. The training team should look for more interactive, engaging training videos with more dynamic storytelling. We recommend utilizing fewer, high quality videos for multiple modules which allows cadets to focus on different aspects of learning using the same scenario. While each module has distinct learning objectives, reemphasizing important skills like tactical communications, crisis intervention, and de-escalation strategies should happen continuously throughout the training so cadets can more fully integrate those skills into their approach to each situation that arises.
- The APD Training Academy should rely less on videos and instead facilitate more interactive roleplay as a more effective teaching tool.

## **III. INSIGHTS INTO THE APD TRAINING ACADEMY CURRICULUM AND PROCESS**

In addition to watching the videos individually, the review process gave the panel a window into the overall training framework. We have the following observations about the training structure and the sequencing of the training modules, and also about our review process:

### **Ineffective Adult Pedagogy**

While training officers are clearly interested in and working at developing better adult learning pedagogies, Dr. Sara Villanueva’s report to the APD clearly articulated a series of steps to improve this effort for the academy.<sup>14</sup> We recommend that the APD Training Academy reach out to and utilize the expertise to be found at the University of Texas, Huston-Tillotson University, Southwestern University, St. Edward’s University, and Austin Community College for help both in finding or

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf., Villanueva, Sara *Review Analysis and Strategic Plan* for the Austin Police Department Training Academy, May 2020

developing training materials and videos and facilitating training pedagogy and curricula including training the trainers.

Our review of the videos and concomitant interaction with APD trainers also made clear to us that the trainer is critically important. The trainer should be versed not only in the penal code but also in broader human interaction skills and psychology as well as the larger cultural issues so instrumental in shaping how police interact with the public.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The APD Training Academy curriculum should be extensively revamped, as outlined in Dr. Villanueva's report.
- Properly vetted subject matter experts outside of the department (including community members with lived experience and expertise in these areas) should be brought in as trainers to augment the APD training team and help train the trainers.
- The Austin City Council should create a paid community advisory board that serves as a resource to APD on an ongoing basis to develop trust and transparency with the community about its policing policies, training and practices, and facilitate the broader use of community resources.

### **Lack of Overall Coordination**

There appears to be a lack of overall coordination, communication, and shared learning techniques among the trainers. Each training module appears to be very siloed. Trainers do not have a clear idea what is being taught in other sections and don't appear to regularly communicate with each other in order to reinforce and integrate previous learnings into the training content. As a result, the training modules are somewhat repetitive without building and expanding on each other. More worrisome, as mentioned above, is that training videos seem to contradict each other when a video shows what NOT to do from a previous module but then is left unaddressed in the current module.

The lack of coordination between trainers of different modules exacerbated this dynamic of overrepresentation of People of Color in disturbing situations and "What NOT to Do" videos by allowing for a perhaps unintended proliferation of these kinds of videos without a specific awareness of the pattern on the part of the academy as a whole. This kind of unintended result argues forcefully for better coordination of the curriculum and closer interaction among the trainers. Too frequently over the course of this process we repeatedly heard the phrase from the trainers: "I don't teach that section... I don't know what they do in that section."



## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The training would benefit from less siloing and better integration among the training modules and better communication among the trainers so that they are aware what each trainer is teaching and how best to sequence the videos.

### **Ethics and Crisis Intervention Training Isolated**

According to the training officers, “ethics in policing,” including when and how officers should intervene when a fellow officer is doing something wrong is addressed in a separate half day “ethics” unit. Treating “ethics” as well as the Crisis Intervention Training as isolated and tangential aspects of the training and police work is a problematic approach that fundamentally misunderstands the way ethics works in society and for individuals. In all of the many “what NOT to do” videos, NONE of them shows any fellow officer intervening.

In general, we observed an overall lack of discussion about whether a particular action or response was ethical.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Rethink the order of the training. **The order in training matters.** Tactical communications and Crisis Intervention should be shown early on and be better integrated, and later interactions in subsequent videos should be evaluated based on Tactical Communication and Crisis Intervention tools. Ethics training should permeate every section.

### **Concerns About Process**

In the beginning, as participants engaged in the video review process, there was confusion over our role and how much control/influence that we would have over the process. Many of us assumed that we would be seen as consultants and would be able to let our coordinators know what we needed in order to do our jobs well. However, we quickly ran into problems with being denied information that we requested. The academy trainers emphasized several times that we were unable to grasp the full context because we were only seeing some of the videos or the training material, but we were then denied access to the other material that would have helped us gain a greater understanding of the training.

Additionally we encountered other barriers to full participation. We understand that for many anti-racist initiatives, information is collected in a report and put in a drawer never to be seen again. We watched videos with extremely traumatic content and subsequently engaged in detailed and explicit discussions; it was important for us to make sure it was worth it. We wanted to be clear about where

our analysis and feedback was going, how our recommendations would be implemented, and how the process would be transparent to the community.

During the beginning of the process, our group experienced two major obstacles:

1. Unrealistic timeline laid out by the City of Austin
2. Austin Police Association intimidation tactics

At the beginning of this process, our group was tasked with an impossible two-month timeline for reviewing all the videos. We knew we could not possibly provide the level of quality feedback we felt was warranted given this rushed process. The City of Austin has a reputation for appearing to rush community input in order to provide a stamp of “good faith” effort, engaging in little to no communication as to how these recommendations would be implemented to generate much needed change. After several discussion sessions, we agreed to extend the process and enlist a new vendor to assist with facilitation; namely, Life ANew. Our group facilitators from Life ANew were Sherynn Paxton and Randy Chivas. Thanks to them, the relationship between APD and the community review board dramatically improved.

It should be noted that during the process of raising our critiques and adjusting to new procedures, we also experienced an attack from the Austin Police Association (APA) regarding our process. This led to further distrust in an already sensitive relationship between the community review board and APD staff. Our group made a good faith effort to engage in this review process after watching several community organizations terminate their relationship with the APD. This attack from APA demonstrated the existence of a faction within policing that is opposed to the transformation we are attempting to facilitate and is intentionally spreading a very different message than APD and city leadership have communicated about the need for change.

**It is a devastating commentary on the current police-community relations that community members felt endangered while involved in this review process.**

Several community members were actively threatened by APA representatives. APD and the Austin City Council need to hold APA accountable.

After finalizing our panel's work, we continue to have questions about the transparency and accountability of this review process as well as the broader review process outlined in Resolution 66. Some questions are:

- How will the results of this review be presented to the community?
- What is the timeframe and process for APD to review, respond to, and implement the recommendations made by this panel?



- How do APD and the City of Austin plan to hold themselves accountable and be transparent to the community?

While this process was challenging, we were able to engage APD instructors who answered our questions patiently and offered creative solutions to implement the changes we were suggesting. There were indications that some of the APD staff were listening to the concerns we raised and working to understand the perspectives offered. Several of the trainers were present for almost all of the sessions, and collaboration with them helped to achieve better results. We believe such officers demonstrate a growing desire to engender important and essential change within the academy and the police department as a whole and share our vision of better training for future cadets and a better police department for Austin and its diverse communities.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

While this process has given us valuable insight into the cadet training videos, the contributing factors that led to the formation of this panel review and to Resolution 66 are much bigger than video selection. The patterns and biases that we witnessed in videos were pervasive through each module because they are reflective of the patterns and biases we see everyday, everywhere. These patterns and biases are indicative of the systemic racism that corrodes the integrity of our institutions in Austin and across the country, *including* the police. They cannot simply be edited out of a video. They cannot be “trained” away if there are no changes in how the department is structured and how police work is done. Changing these patterns and biases cannot solely be the responsibility of the newest, lowest ranked officers who are entering a well-established, hierarchical culture that was founded on and continues to perpetuate systemic racism.

Accountability is a foundational requirement in all of our recommended changes. While we fervently hope that APD leadership agrees to make the changes we have outlined in the detailed list of recommendations, the culmination of a thorough seven-month review process, we know that nothing will fundamentally change unless APD also implements a detailed accountability framework, the specifics of which are necessarily outside the parameters of this report. **We recommend that APD collaborate with the City of Austin’s Reimagining Public Safety Taskforce to develop further recommendations for an accountability framework.**

Undoing systemic racism requires systemic changes. It requires a cultural shift towards community respect, accountability and trust. It requires showing trustworthiness before a crisis occurs, not in a slapdash effort after the fact. It requires deep listening, authentic dialogue, and consultation with the communities most directly impacted by police violence. It requires the courage and skill to hold

difficult conversations throughout the department and confront world views that perpetuate these biases rather than take a colorblind approach. It requires a shift from “what can I legally do?” to “what does the community need me to do?”

This video review process is but a step in the right direction. Implementing the recommendations from this process is another step. The department will have to decide how far it is willing to walk to make systemic change happen.

In conclusion, we would like to thank the following people who joined us in this review process: Kellee Coleman, Rocio Villalobos, Sherwynn Patton, Randy Chavis, Dr. Sara Villanueva, Anni-Michelle Evans, Gary Carillo, Patricia Bourenane, Lt. Eve Stephens, Farah Muscadin, and Veronica Ferren.