

Role Play: The Domestic Violence Call

Set Up

Instructors will need the following cast of role players/actors: two females (race not relevant) and one male (race not relevant) to portray the “callers/victims” as well as two “responding officers” (the recruits). The instructor plays the role of the dispatcher.

Review the scenario with the role players/actors prior to the role play. Instruct the “victim” that she should NOT verbally respond to any questions that the “responding officers” ask her. She is to cry throughout, shake periodically and remain unresponsive to any questions posed to her by “responding officers” or to comments made by the other role players. She is to appear frightened and confused. The other two role players’ behaviors and comments are similar to each other and provide no clues as to which one abused the victim. The set up is designed to confuse the “responding officers” as to who is the “abuser”—the female or male role player/actor.

The Scenario

Dispatcher: “Any car, Victor Sector. Female caller at approximately 12:15 a.m., crying/screaming and incoherent; appears to be victim of domestic violence. She is requesting police assistance to get to a hospital for medical assistance. Offender is still on-scene.”

When recruits arrive at the scene, they find the victim crying and in a fetal position. There is a female on one side of her and a male on the other. The female is hovering over the victim with her hands gently on the “victim’s” shoulders. She says, “I am so sorry, I am so sorry. This will never happen to you again.” The male is kneeling next to the victim, saying...“it’s OK, the police are here—everything will be fine.”

Police Response: Ask the “responding officers” to respond to scene. Ask the trainees to observe the response of the “responding officers.” Allow approximately 5 minutes for the entire role play.

Note to Instructors: In this scene, the male is not the abuser; the second female role player/actor is the “abuser” and the “live-in partner” of the “victim. Observe carefully how the “responding officers” respond to the scene, attending to whether or not they assume that the offender is the male role player/actor. Refer to the discussion questions to debrief the scenario.

Role Play: Woman/Man with a Gun²

The purpose of this scenario is to show that recruits/officers' biases about gender and weapons could impact their own safety. Often recruits/officers do not react to the "woman with a gun" call the same way they react to the "man with a gun" call that follows.

Note to Instructors: BOTH role plays should be completed before the instructor engages the class in discussion/debrief. Otherwise, the debriefing on "Woman with a Gun" will negate the potential impact of "Man with a Gun." Instructors should conduct the "Woman with a Gun" role play first.

Woman with a Gun

Set Up

Instructors will set up to run this role play twice, but can choose not to run the role play with the second of two teams if the first team behaves in a manner that highlights key teaching points. To prepare for two role plays, select two male recruits and two females to form two male-female teams of two. Select recruits who have *no previous police experience*. Give the first team (that includes one male and one female) radios and guns. The second team will receive the equipment after the first team finishes the scenario.

The instructor should send both teams of "responders" out of the classroom. Brief the two female role players about the scenario and its purpose. Have one of the female role players conceal the gun (most training academies will have access to plastic weapons used for recruit training) and take a seat in a chair in the front of the classroom. Place the second female either outside the classroom or a far end of the classroom—to give her ample room to run toward the seated female.

After verifying that role players are in place, the instructor should bring the first group to the classroom door. Have them clear.

The Scenario

Call: Instructors should create a call, using code and district/sector assignments reflective of their city/county: "Respond to [provide location]. A nearby store owner thinks he saw a concealed weapon on this woman. He's been robbed several times recently. He reports that the woman is now sitting on the bench at the bus stop. Woman is dressed in black" (or whatever the role-player is wearing at the time)."

² This scenario was developed by the Chicago (IL) Police Department (CPD) as part of their academy training. We are grateful to Curriculum Design Team member, James Ramos, CPD for permission to use this scenario.

Instructors may change the nature of the call; however, the information provided by "dispatch" must be such that the officers *would be authorized to legally detain the woman and conduct a frisk*. It should not, however, provide information that would authorize an immediate arrest.

The officers enter the classroom, which is supposed to be the cross streets identified in the "call." A well-groomed, middle-aged woman is sitting alone in the room reading a newspaper. She is carrying a concealed weapon.

A second woman, similarly dressed, comes into the room behind the officers (or through another door). The second woman is talking in a very animated/agitated fashion, telling the woman reading the newspaper, that a car which looks similar to the one belonging to the first woman's husband has been involved in a serious accident on the Interstate Highway. She is insistent that they must go to the scene of the accident immediately. This woman should not seem threatening to the officers; her purpose is to be a distracter. The objective of this second role player is to get the first woman away from the location and police.

Man with a Gun

Set Up

The set up and scenario are the same as with "Woman with a gun," except that the two role players are men of color, instead of women. Again, the instructor develops two teams of recruits to respond to the scenario; s/he gives the same "call" except that the suspicious person is a male of color.

Observations

When observing the scenario the instructor might take note the following:

- Do the trainees see the second person approaching?
- Who actually controlled the situation? The trainees or the role players?
- Are the two women/men able to leave before the officers *let them go*?
- Are the women searched properly? Are the men?
- Do the officers call the dispatcher to find out about the accident?
- Do they call a female officer for a search of the female(s)? [Are they supposed to?]
- Do they offer to drive the man/woman to the accident site?

After the women/men leave the scene, they are frisked, or the interaction has otherwise run its course, stop the role play and have the women/man with a gun pull out and show the gun if it was not found by the trainee teams.

Discussion/Debrief

A key to the discussion is whether/how the gender of the subject impacted the officers' response. It is important for the trainer to hold off on comments pertaining to general tactics. These could be covered, as necessary, after the discussion here that is linked to the main points of this training.

Start by asking the trainee role play teams to discuss what they did and why. "Start with the "Woman with a Gun" team(s), followed by the "Man with a Gun" team(s).

It may also be effective during the discussions to have the role players provide their own perspective. For instance, the women role players might observe, if it is the case, that the recruits seemed reticent to touch them in any way, much less frisk them.

If the recruit team(s) responding to the women were less vigilant than the recruit team(s) that responded to the men:

Quite often with this scenario, the recruits do not frisk the woman in "Woman with a Gun" and therefore do not find the gun; in contrast, the "man with a gun" team(s) might be more vigilant—conducting the search or otherwise being more aggressive with the men. This may be due to the officers' implicit bias that men are more dangerous than women—more likely to carry a concealed weapon. Discussion questions might include:

- Why do you think the recruit teams acted differently with the female versus the male subjects?
- With what societal stereotypes is this behavior consistent?
- What is the potential ramification to the officers of their erroneous "blink response"?

If the recruit teams responded with similar vigilance to the women and men:

This role play can produce a successful discussion even if the teams do not respond differently to the "woman with a gun" and "man with a gun" calls. If there is no difference in response, the discussion can take the form of how these officers did not succumb to a stereotypical "blink response," but that "some officers" might respond differently to women than men. Discussion questions might include:

- Do you think some officers might have responded differently to the females than to the males?

- With what societal stereotypes would that behavior be consistent?
- What danger would they put themselves in?

*As directed above, the instructor needs to have the “woman/man with a gun” role players produce the concealed weapons (if the police recruits did not find them during the scene) to show the danger associated with their lack of vigilance.

Note to Instructors: While tactics are an inevitable aspect of the discussion, instructors should refrain from letting the discussion of tactics overwhelm the “blink” take-away lesson. Separate any discussion of tactics from the “blink” discussion.

Man on the Porch, Participant Handout

The Neighborhood. The 1100 block of Holbart Street in Seattle's Rainer Valley, is a narrow street of small, modest homes. The neighborhood, along with most of Seattle, was developed in the early 1900's and now boasts a vibrant commercial avenue, parks, and growing redevelopment, including a newly developed light rail system that links the once isolated neighborhood with downtown. The neighborhood is comprised of predominantly poor and working class residents who represent African American, Asian-Pacific Islander, and immigrant communities from East Africa and the Caribbean.

The South Precinct is one of the busiest within the Seattle Police Department (SPD). The neighborhood continues to experience the city's highest rates of both violent and property crimes. Drug and gang-related shootings, homicide, sexual assault and domestic violence are among the most common calls for service. Within the last few weeks a number of strong-arm robberies, allegedly committed by a group of young white males in their twenties, have been reported. Suspects from these robberies as well as two sexual assaults and a drive-by shooting have eluded arrest.

The Officers. In an effort to address the criminal activity in the neighborhood, the SPD has formed a special Street Crimes Unit (SCU), dedicated to patrolling crime "hot spots." Four, plainclothes officers, between the ages of 26 and 35 years are assigned to the Rainer Valley. They are usually dressed in jeans, sweatshirts, and bullet-proof vests; they carry 9-millimeter semiautomatic handguns. They drive unmarked vehicles.

Segment 1

Just before midnight, the officers of the SCU, in an unmarked car, turn down Holbart Street and see a 5'6" black man standing alone on a porch looking up and down the street. "Hold up," one officer says to the other officers in the car. "What's that guy doing there? He is looking up and down the street, peeking his head out and then stepping on and off the porch."

- What do you think is going on here and why? What is another explanation?
- What are the various options that the responding officers have?
- What are the consequences for the various options?
- What would you do and why? That is, what option do you choose?

Segment 2

Officers stop the car in front of 1157 Holbart Street. The black man sees the car come to a stop but does not move. All four of the officers get out of the car. There is no radio communication before the officers approach the man. Officer Scott holds up his police badge and calls out “police, can we have a word?” Officer Scott and Officer Dovidio begin moving toward the porch steps. The man does not respond but moves onto the porch.

- Discuss and evaluate the decision of the four officers to all get out of the car and approach the man. What are the possible consequences of this action?
- What other options do the officers have? What are the possible consequences of these options?
- What are possible explanations for why the man on the porch does not respond to the officers?
- What would you do and why?

Segment 3

Officers Scott and Dovidio accelerate their move up the stairs and toward the porch. The black man grabs the doorknob with his left hand and attempts to push the door in (the door is apparently stuck). He turns his body sideways and begins digging in his pocket with his right hand. Officer Scott yells, "Show me your hands--NOW!" Officer Dovidio yells, "Get your hands out of your pockets...don't make me f-----ing kill you." The man is agitated and shaking. He continues to hold the doorknob with his left hand and starts removing a black object from his pocket with his right hand.

- What do Scott and Dovidio think is happening that would lead them to accelerate up the stairs?
- What are other interpretations of what was happening?
- Do they have other options? What are they?
- What are the possible consequences of their interpretation and actions?

Man on the Porch, Instructor Notes

This case study exercise is intended to engage recruits in a series of decisions in responding to the facts in a real-life case that produced a tragic outcome. The recruits will have adequate time to think through various options and their consequences. Following their reporting, the actual result of this real-life case will be shared. The intent of this lesson is to convey how the real-life situation might have produced a less tragic outcome if the officers had “slowed down” to produce more thoughtful, deliberate decisions.

Instructors, if they choose, may adapt the case study to reflect an actual neighborhood in the local jurisdiction (and its associated crime problems) or sufficiently describe a neighborhood to which the recruits can relate.

Set Up

Divide the class into small groups of five or six recruits. Ask each group to select a recorder (who should record the outcome of the discussions of the group) and a reporter (who will provide the group’s feedback to the entire class).

Give each group a copy of the case study, “Man on the Porch.” The case study should be distributed in segments so that recruits cannot read ahead. Do not disclose, at the outset, that this is based on the case of the NYPD shooting of Amadou Diallo.

Case Study

The Neighborhood. The 1100 block of Holbart Street in Seattle’s Rainer Valley, is a narrow street of small, modest homes. The neighborhood, along with most of Seattle, was developed in the early 1900’s and now boasts a vibrant commercial avenue, parks, and growing redevelopment, including a newly developed light rail system that links the once isolated neighborhood with downtown. The neighborhood is comprised of predominantly poor and working class residents who represent African American, Asian-Pacific Islander, and immigrant communities from East Africa and the Caribbean.

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The Officers. In an effort to address the criminal activity in the neighborhood, the SPD has formed a special Street Crimes Unit (SCU), dedicated to patrolling crime “hot spots.” Four plainclothes officers, between the ages of 26 and 35 years are assigned to the Rainer Valley. They are usually dressed in jeans, sweatshirts, and bullet-proof vests; they carry 9-millimeter semiautomatic handguns. They drive unmarked vehicles.

The Incident. The incident is presented in segments. Instructors should distribute each segment of the incident sequentially, allowing the incident to “unfold.” Each segment contains a series of decision-making questions, such as: What do you think is going on here and why? What options do you have? What are the consequences of each option? What do you do and why?

Segment 1: Just before midnight, the officers of the SCU, in an unmarked car, turn down Holbart Street and see a 5’6” black man standing alone on a porch looking up and down the street. “Hold up,” one officer says to the other officers in the car. “What’s that guy doing there? He is looking up and down the street, peeking his head out and then stepping on and off the porch.”

Discussion:

- What do you think is going on here and why? What is another explanation?
- What are the various options that the officers have?
- What are the consequences for the various options?
- What would you do and why? That is, what option do you choose?

Have the class share their answers. If any of the small groups report “leaving the scene,” instructors can continue the case study with only the small groups that “remain on the scene.” The other group(s) can either assume the role of “observers” or change their response and “remain on the scene.”

Segment 2: Officers stop the car in front of 1157 Holbart Street. The black man sees the car come to a stop but does not move. All four of the officers get out of the car. There is no radio communication before the officers approach the man. Officer Scott holds up his police badge and calls out "police, can we have a word?" Officer Scott and Officer Dovidio begin moving toward the porch steps. The man does not respond but moves onto the porch.

Discussion:

- Discuss and evaluate the decision of the four officers to all get out of the car and approach the man? What are the possible consequences of this action?
- What other options do the officers have? What are the possible consequences of these options?
- What are possible explanations for why the man on the porch does not respond to the officers?
- What would you do and why?

Have the class share their answers.

Segment 3: Officers Scott and Dovidio accelerate their move up the stairs and toward the porch. The black man grabs the doorknob with his left hand and attempts to push the door in (the door is apparently stuck). He turns his body sideways and begins digging in his pocket with his right hand. Office Scott yells, "Show me your hands-- NOW!" Officer Dovidio yells, "Get your hands out of your pockets...don't make me f-----ing kill you." The man is agitated and shaking. He continues to hold the doorknob with his left hand and starts removing a black object from his pocket with his right hand.

Discussion:

- What do Scott and Dovidio think is happening that would lead them to accelerate up the stairs?
- What are other interpretations of what was happening?
- Do they have other options? What are they?
- What are the possible consequences of their interpretation and actions?

Have the class share their answers.

What Really Happened

The instructor reports that this was a real event with a horrific outcome.

The Outcome: Officers Scott and Dovidio fired 16 rounds each; the two backup officers fired a total of nine shots killing Mr. Akpan. When they approached his body, he was holding a black wallet in his right hand. During the trial, Officer Scott testified that when it was all over, he sat down on the porch steps, next to Mr. Akpan's bullet-ridden body and started to cry. Officer Dovidio later stated that when the ambulances arrived, he was so distraught, he couldn't speak.

Let's back up and see what happened.

Re-read Segment 1.

During trial testimony, "Officer Scott" noted that he had two impressions as he assessed the situation. One, he thought that the subject (Mr. Akpan) might be serving as a look-out for an ongoing robbery; and two, that the subject may have fit the description of a suspect of the recent sexual assaults.

Discussion:

- Given the facts in the case, are these reasonable assumptions?
- What in "Mr. Akpan's" behavior would lead "Officer Scott" to surmise this?
- What other possible explanations are there for "Mr. Akpan's" behavior?
- Other observations/thoughts?

The purpose here is to allow the students to reflect on the various ways that the same set of facts might be interpreted. The questions above may raise issues with which the groups have already dealt; in that circumstances, a single question might suffice: "What are the various other interpretations that your groups came up with?"

Re-read Segment 2

During trial testimony, we learned that the subject had a stutter and his English was not perfect. He may have attempted to communicate with the officers. It was also rumored that an acquaintance of the subject had recently been robbed by a group of men. The subject may have thought he was about to be robbed.

Discussion:

- How might the officers have acted differently if they had known about or considered the possibility that there were communications issues?
- How might they have acted if they had considered the possibility that the man was fearful of local robbers?

Re-read Segment 3.

During trial, Officer Scott testified that his prior experience and training led him to believe that Mr. Akpan was reaching into his pocket to pull out a gun. He fires his weapon. Simultaneously, Officer Dovidio instinctively jumps backwards, firing his weapon as he falls. Officer Scott believes that Officer Dovidio has been hit by rounds from Mr. Akpan's gun.

Discussion:

- Given the facts in the case, is there evidence that the actions of the officers are consciously racially-biased or motivated?
- Could implicit bias have conceivably played a role?

Scenario #1: Men at the Door

You and your partner are newly assigned to the Whitehills neighborhood. This is an affluent community of large, newly constructed homes. The neighborhood is relatively safe from violent crime, although property crimes, especially burglaries and car thefts, over the past six months have been on a steady rise. The Captain of the Whitehills division has been under considerable pressure to reduce the rising rates of property crimes and is placing increased emphasis on rapid response to calls for services and on proactively educating the community about potential risks and safety measures to prevent burglaries and larcenies.

While on routine patrol, you and your partner observe two late model cars parked in front of 3342 Whitehall Drive—one of the newer homes on the block that is for sale. Two dark-skinned men are on the porch of the house; one man is standing in front of the other and he appears to be struggling to open the front door.

Discussion:

1. List any biases that might impact you.
2. What do you do? Would you be responding this way but for the fact that these are two dark-skinned men? What circumstances (e.g., added facts), if any, might justify enhanced scrutiny on the basis of race?
3. The men accuse you of racial bias. How do you respond?
4. Would you respond any differently to this situation if the people on the porch were white women?

Note to Instructors: The final question under #2 is an opportunity to apply the agency's biased policing policy to the situation. In an agency with a suspect-specific policy, police interventions based in part on race would be within policy if these individuals fit specific suspect descriptions (relevant to crimes in *this area* that might encompass *this activity*) that included reference to race or "dark skinned" individuals. In an agency that has a PERF model policy, the police intervention could be based *in part* on race if credible, locally relevant information links a person or people who are "dark skinned" to unlawful incidents, criminal patterns, or schemes that, again, could reasonably be linked to the current situation (e.g., burglaries in this particular area).

Scenario #2: Photographers

Three 9-1-1 calls at approximately 12:10 p.m., describe three scraggly teenage males with long hair and low rider pants, taking pictures of a residence at 2233 Smith Street—the home of the police chief. Callers all report that one of the subjects has been taking numerous pictures of the home over the past 15 to 20 minutes.

Callers identify themselves as neighbors and they report that the chief and his family are out of town.

Discussion:

1. List at least three explanations for what might be going on.
2. List any biases that could have impacted the callers and might impact you.
3. You and your partner respond to 2233 Smith Street and see the three young males. What do you do? Would you be responding this way but for the fact that these are three scraggly teenage males? What circumstances (e.g., added facts), if any, might justify the enhanced scrutiny of them on the basis of youthfulness, gender and/or dress?
4. The boys accuse you of picking on them because of the way they are dressed. How do you respond?
5. Do you think you would have gotten the call if the photographers were three adult women in tailored pant suits? Would you respond any differently if you had gotten such a call?

Note to Instructors: This scenario is based on an actual incident from Seattle (WA). The photographers turned out to be architect students who were studying the Craftsman style homes, which are abundant in many Seattle neighborhoods. Again, the last question in #2 is an opportunity to apply the agency's biased policing policy to the situation.

Scenario #3: Partner's Tickets

Your partner is in the lead on this day and decides to ticket stop sign violators at a particular intersection. During the course of 4 hours at this location you determine that he is pulling over and ticketing all of the Hispanic drivers that run the stop sign, but is not pulling over the Caucasian drivers who do so—even though the nature of the violations are not different across the groups.

Discussion:

1. Is this racially biased policing? Can a person be a subject of biased policing even if s/he did commit a crime or traffic violation?
2. List three different ways you might respond to this observation. List the pros and cons of each option.

Scenario #4: Woman Looking over a Fence

You are driving through a mixed race, middle class neighborhood and see a Caucasian woman dressed in a sundress looking over a fence. She appears to be looking around as if not wanting to be seen. She is holding a Macy's shopping bag.

Discussion:

1. List at least three explanations for what might be going on.
2. List any biases that might impact on how you perceive this situation and how you might respond.
3. Will you and you partner approach the woman? Why or why not? If you do approach her, what will you do and say?
4. You did not get a call about this woman. What dress and demographics of this person might have produced a call from the neighbors? Would you respond any differently than outlined above if you had gotten such a call? How and why?

Scenario #5: The BOLO

While on patrol, dispatch announces a BOLO for a suspect in a robbery that took place 30 minutes ago in your area. You see a young Asian male standing at a bus stop. His physical characteristics and dress are consistent with the BOLO, except that he does not have on the black coat described in the BOLO.

Discussion:

1. Will you approach and communicate with the man at the bus stop? Why or why not?
2. Let's say that you do approach the man and ask him questions. His answers dispel your concerns that he might be the suspect. He is angry and accuses you of bias against Asians because of recent publicity given to Asian gang activity. How will you respond to these accusations and what are your goals in designing this response?

Scenario #6: Routine Patrol

You are on routine patrol in a busy downtown area. It is a sunny, early afternoon day with shoppers and pedestrians filling the street. As you approach an intersection, a middle-aged Native American man slowly walks in front of your patrol car. He appears inebriated and he is holding a knife in one hand and a long piece of wood in the other hand. He turns slightly to look at you, sternly, through your front windshield.

You stop the car and get out. The man continues his slow walk past you. You order him to stop. He ignores the order and continues to walk toward a nearby park where you can see children and other people enjoying the afternoon sunshine. You order him three more times to stop and drop the knife. A small crowd of about 20 people have now gathered to "see what is happening." He continues to ignore your commands.

Discussion:

1. Provide an explanation for why the man might be acting this way. (Who is he? What is he doing? Why is he not responding to your commands?) How might you respond to him based on this understanding of his behavior? What are the potential positive or negative outcomes of your response?
2. Provide another explanation for why the man might be acting this way? How might you respond to him based on *this understanding* of his behavior? What are the potential positive or negative outcomes of your response?
3. What will you do?

Note to Instructors: This scenario is based on an actual incident in Seattle (WA). The Native American woodcarver was shot and killed by the officer. Internal investigation found the shooting to be "a bad shoot." The officer subsequently resigned from the department. The case provided the catalyst for the USDOJ Civil Right Division investigation of the use of force within the Seattle Police Department. In responding to the question, "what will you do," officers might indicate how they would attempt to gather more information before deciding how best to respond.