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Wendell C. Wallace*

ABSTRACT

By their very nature, policing and mediation are viewed as disparate professions. However, since the inception of policing, police officers have traditionally been involved in managing and handling conflict situations and thus, mediation type interventions have historically been an important component of police work. For the most part, police officers are untrained in mediation; however, many police officers are comfortable serving as go-between for neighbors, families, and communities in conflict using their intuition. As a result of acting as a 'mediator' for conflicting parties, without any formal mediation training, many former and current police officers eventually engage in mediation training and become certified mediators, as I did. Despite this occurrence, there is sparse scholarship on police officers who become mediators. As a result of this lacuna, the current study describes my journey from being a police officer to becoming a certified mediator. In this article, I

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describe how I utilized my intuition and police training to resolve conflicts without being a certified mediator; successes and failures encountered; community and organizational impacts; and how the conduct of informal mediation facilitated my eventual transition to a certified mediator with the Mediation Board of Trinidad and Tobago. Using evocative autoethnography as the fulcrum of inquiry to analyze aspects of myself, I trace my circuitous journey to becoming a mediator.

I. INTRODUCTION

I am a criminologist, barrister, certified mediator, and coordinator of the Mediation Studies Unit at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus.[1] I took a rather circuitous route to becoming a mediator, applying my training and intuition as a police officer to the discipline of conflict resolution.

The disciplines of policing and mediation are often viewed on different ends of the employment spectrum. However, police work has traditionally involved managing a host of situations and people in conflict and historically, mediation type interventions are a key component of the daily regimen of policing and police officers.[2] In fact, police officers have been conducting informal conflict resolution for as long as policing exited, just without any formal training.[3] Indeed, this statement resonates deeply with me as I reflect on my time as a police officer where I conducted "mediated" settlements without any formal mediation training, but rather using my policing intuition. This involved instructing parties that one person must speak and the other must stay silent while listening, otherwise: "If we all talk at the same time, this would become a fish market." I would also tell the parties that: "this is your conflict; I am just the peace maker. You must live with one another, so you must work it out [reach an agreement]."

Little did I know that I was conducting mediation among disputing parties. I am certain the aforementioned is not new in policing, nor am I the first person to engage in such practices in the field of policing. However, I hope to contribute by chronicling and sharing my story of moving from the police profession to mediation profession using an academic forum, specifically, a peer-reviewed journal, through an evocative autoethnographic approach.

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[1] *See Mediation Studies*, UWI ST. AUGSTINE, https://sta.uwi.edu/fss/behaviouralsciences/mediation-studies (last visited Apr. 22, 2024).
[2] *See generally* HERMAN GOLDSTEIN, POLICING A FREE SOCIETY (1977).
[3] *See generally* Christopher Cooper, *Patrol Police Officer Conflict Resolution Processes*, 25 J. CRIM. JUST. 87 (1997).

This article traces my journey and shares my story, via my lived experiences, of using mediation-like practices to resolve a range of conflicting situations while employed in my former profession as a police officer in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS).[4] This article has three aims. First, this exposition aims to trace my journey from police officer to certified mediator. Second, this article aims to demonstrate the nexus between policing and mediation, highlighting successes and failures of my work as a police officer attempting mediation practices, albeit, without any formal training. The final aim of this article is to describe my lived experiences and reflect on how I was able to perform mediation (or "talk," as my colleagues referred to it) in an environment of arrests, convictions, and clearance rates and share the satisfaction it provided to me and to the disputing parties. My heuristic study is undergirded by two research questions, namely: (1) what occurred when I, as a police officer, attempted to incorporate mediation practices into policing without being trained in mediation? and (2) how did my journey from police officer to certified mediator evolve over time?

Based on the two questions, my study aims to interpret and derive meanings from my personal experiences.[5] Instructively, I am not testing hypotheses, measuring variables to generalize my findings, nor attempting to construct objectifiable evidence about my practice.[6] Rather, this autoethnographic-based article begins with a description of my personal and professional background. I then move onto narrating my attempts at applying mediation-like practices to resolve conflicts between disputing parties while being employed as a police officer. This is followed by an evaluation of challenges, successes, failures, and reactions to my attempt at "police-mediation." I conclude by proffering some thoughts on heading the Mediation Studies Unit at my home University and offering some reflections and conclusions.

II. PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

Before delving into the crux of my narrative, it is important I provide the context of my personal and professional backgrounds as the researcher and individual authoring the autoethnography so

[4] For more information about the force and its aims, *see About the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service*, TRINIDAD & TOBAGO POLICE SERV., https://www.ttps.gov.tt/About/About-TTPS (last visited Apr. 22, 2024).
[5] *See generally* HANDBOOK OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH (Norman K. Dezin & Yvonna S. Lincoln eds., 3d ed. 1994).
[6] *See generally* EVIDENCE BASED COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPIES: RESEARCH AND APPLICATIONS (Nancy Rowland & Stephen Goss eds., 2000).

that the environment that informs my work is neither mysterious nor esoteric. Additionally, this background information will provide an enhanced analysis of my journey to becoming a mediator and thereby facilitate an enhanced understanding of my cultural experiences.[7]

A. PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I am the second of five children of my parents Ann Eastman-Wallace and Codrington Wallace. I was born at the Scarborough County Hospital in Tobago, the smaller and more tranquil island of the twin-island Caribbean Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I spent my early life in the remote fishing village of Castara where I attained my primary school education. My parents raised me in a stable, loving, respectful, and generally conflict free home, though my community was rife with conflict.

After my primary school education, I attended Bishop's High School in Scarborough, which is where I had my first major contact with conflict. At my high school, I witnessed a plethora of discord within the following relationships: student and student; student and teacher; teacher and teacher; teacher and parent; student and community resident; and student and business owner. Additionally, as I progressed through my adolescent period, I observed a host of strife situations within my community, many which festered for years and remained unresolved, leading to families being at "war" with each other and innocent children thrown in the middle.

It was a combination of these school and community disputes that caught my attention as I consistently felt the urge to settle them. According to my mother, "I was always playing lawyer for somebody and taking up somebody's cause." Maybe my mother was correct, as the first occupation that attracted me was the legal profession—I had this burning desire to become a lawyer. It was early point of curiosity for me and after my secondary school education ended, I entered policing. It was these experiences that would influence my decisions to attempt mediating disputes, even though I was a police officer operating in an environment of arrests, convictions, and detection rates.

[7] For more on the method and use of autoethnography as a form of teaching, *see generally* CAROLYN ELLIS, THE ETHNOGRAPHIC I: A METHODOLOGICAL NOVEL ABOUT AUTOETHNOGRAPHY (2004).

B. PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

I began my policing career on August 2, 1989, when I was twenty years old. I entered the Police Training College (PTC) in St. James, Trinidad, and left policing approximately eighteen years later. During that time, I worked at different locations including the St. James Police Station, Carenage Police Station, Special Branch, Crime and Problem Analysis (CAPA) Branch, and the Criminal Investigations Department (CID). My duties included general policing, patrolling, clerical and administrative work, surveillance, intelligence gathering, data collection and analysis, and investigating criminal activities.

After leaving the police force, I held many different job titles: Human Resource Manager, School Manager, Security Coordinator, Adjunct Lecturer, and Businessperson. Instructively, in all these capacities, I always found myself 'outing fires' and having to conduct mediations between disputing parties. Since then, I have become trained and certified in the field mediation. In 2009, I studied at the University of Windsor Law School, Canada and received a Certificate in Alternative Dispute Resolution. In 2013, I was awarded a Post Graduate Diploma (BPTC) from Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK, where I received training in mediation as a component of the course. In 2016, I received two certificates, namely: (1) Certificate in Practical Mediation Skills, and (2) Certificate in Mediation (Train the Trainer), both from The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. In 2017, the Mediation Board of Trinidad and Tobago certified me as a civil mediator.

At the time of authoring this article, I wear many hats. For instance, I am a lecturer in criminology and criminal justice at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago; a barrister (called to the Bar in England and Wales and Trinidad and Tobago); a certified mediator with the Mediation Board of Trinidad and Tobago; the head of the Mediation Studies Unit at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago; and a researcher at the aforementioned institution. As a researcher and academician, I supervise theses and dissertations for a range of students, including, graduate students in mediation, criminology and criminal justice, social policy, and gender studies. I also conduct mediations and mediation-based trainings as well as drafting legislation (in one instance) on mediation and restorative justice. Additionally, I have published scholarly articles on mediation in

international peer-reviewed journals and books,[8] and another article forthcoming.[9]

III. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In this study, I utilize a qualitative and not a quantitative research method. I premise this research method on a notion similar to Giacomini[10] in that my current exposition, "neither presumes that . . . causal relationships exist, nor tries to find them."[11] The qualitative approach that I utilize to share my lived experiences is autoethnography[12] which is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that can be written by one participant, namely the author.[13]

In this study, I use an evocative autoethnographic approach to study and analyze my journey from policing to mediating. Autoethnography is relatively new compared to other qualitative approaches and is critiqued by some scholars who view the approach as a self-consciously reflexive authorial subject and naive in its assumption of agency.[14] However, autoethnography is particularly

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[8] *See*, *e.g.*, Wendell C. Wallace, *Mediation*, *in* THE PALGRAVE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF GLOBAL SECURITY STUDIES (Scott Romaniuk & Péter Marton eds., 2019); Wendell C. Wallace & Karen Lancaster-Ellis, *Mediate or Litigate: An Evaluation of Citizen and Police Officer Perspectives on the Use of Mediation to Resolve Citizen-Police Conflict in Trinidad and Tobago*, 18 ISLAND STUD. J. 99 (2023); Wendell C. Wallace, *Mediating Citizen Complaints Against Police Officers: Community Viewpoints From Trinidad and Tobago*, 35 CRIM. JUST. POL'Y REV. 22 (2023).

[9] Wendell C. Wallace, *An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Mediation Practitioners and Teachers of Mediation during the Covid-19 pandemic: A Case Study from Trinidad and Tobago*, CONFLICT RESOL. Q. (forthcoming).

[10] *See* Mita K Giacomini, *The Rocky Road: Qualitative Research as Evidence*, 134 ACP J. CLUB. A-11 (2001).

[11] *Id.*

[12] *See* Azam Naghavi & Samaneh Salimi, *An Autoethnography of Vicarious Trauma and Vicarious Growth in the Context of Rehabilitation Counselling*, 12 IRANIAN J. PSYCHIATRY BEHAV. SCI. 1, 3 (2018) ("Autoethnography is an opportunity for professionals to scientifically explore, explain, and analyze their own experiences. Autoethnography is an incorporation of auto, ethno, and graphy that places the self (auto) in a sociocultural context (ethno) and explains (graphy) it.").

[13] *See, e.g.*, Jean Halley, *To Speak of My Mother*, 9 QUALITATIVE INQUIRY 49 (2003) (using personal experiences as a lens to explore childhood trauma).

[14] *See, e.g.*, Susanne Gannon, *The (Im)possibilities of Writing the Self-Writing: French Post-Structural Theory and Autoethnography*, 6 CULTURAL STUD. CRITICAL METHODOLOGIES 474 (2006); Alecia Y.

useful "to learn about the general . . . through an exploration of the personal."[15]

I use autoethnography as a legitimate research method as a "postmodern moment of experimental ethnographic writing."[16] Additionally, I use autoethnography because of its increasingly recognized research value as well as the fact that researchers are increasingly using this method to shed light on the researchers' introspection.[17] Further, I find autoethnography to be a useful research tool as it provides "an opportunity for professionals to scientifically explore, explain, and analyze their own experiences."[18]

In this article, I make use of one typology of autoethnography, namely, evocative autoethnography. Evocative or emotional autoethnography is a qualitative research method aimed toward researchers' introspection on a particular topic, allowing readers to make a connection with the researchers' feelings and experiences.[19] As a primary method of inquiry, evocative autoethnography facilitates in-depth connections between readers and researchers.[20] Thus, in this study, I provide autoethnographic descriptions and analyses of my experiences as I journeyed from police officer to certified mediator.

Instructively, these methods are premised on the notion that I have a personal connection to the phenomenon under inquiry, and the experiences I am sharing are shaped by individuality of personality, context, culture, social milieu, epoch and my past and

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Jackson & Lisa A. Mazzei, *Experience and "I" in Autoethnography: A Deconstruction*, 1 INT'L REV. QUALITATIVE RSCH. 299 (2008); PATRICIA TICINETO CLOUGH, THE END(S) OF ETHNOGRAPHY: FROM REALISM TO SOCIAL CRITICISM (1998); Patricia Ticineto Clough, *Comments on Setting Criteria for Experimental Writing*, 6 QUALITATIVE INQUIRY 278 (2000).

[15] Kirtina Douglas & David Carless, *A History of Autoethnographic Inquiry, in* HANDBOOK OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHY 84, 84–85 (Stacy H. Jones et al. eds., 2013).

[16] Norman K. Dezin & Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research*, *in* HANDBOOK OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH 1, 17 (2d ed., 2000).

[17] *See, e.g.*, Victor G. Devinatz, *What Makes a Good Mediator? Insights from a Mediation Training Program Participant*, 30 EMP. RESPS. & RTS. J. 181 (2018).

[18] Naghavi & Salimi, *supra* note 12, at 2.

[19] *See* Mariza G. Méndez-López, *Autoethnography as a Research Method: Advantages, Limitations and Criticism*s, 15 COLOMBIAN APPLIED LINGUISTICS J. 279, 281 (2013).

[20] *Id.* (noting how autoethnography helps to "bridg[e] the gap between researchers and ordinary people").

present occupations.[21] As I use autoethnography to undergird my work, it is important to understand the understandings, perceptions, thoughts, ideas, and knowledge shared are completely reliant on my subjectivity and personal vantage points regarding the fields of policing and mediation as well as the potential nexus between the two. With this in mind, I make use of an interpretive approach to the current scholarship.[22]

Several aims are at the heart of designing this research. First, a major aim of this study is to describe, share, and analyze my experiences in a manner that would help make sense of my role as a mediator within the context of policing. Another aim is to share my experiences in a manner that reflects my personal experiences from an interpersonal and reflective perspective to demonstrate that mediation is not an alien concept in policing. Third, my self-reflective research approach is aimed at highlighting the efficacy of my usage of mediation in policing and to indicate that while such an approach worked in my favor, it may not necessarily work for other individuals.[23] Instructively, I am not aimed at establishing "truths" about mediation and/or policing or generalizing the findings of this study.

Fourth, I use autoethnography with the aim of finding healing and emancipation as autoethnography can be both emancipatory and healing for authors as well as serve as great utility to other individuals in similar situations.[24] I am interested in sharing my journey from police officer to mediator using an approach that seeks to critically analyze my personal and cultural experiences. Therefore, I believe autoethnography is the ideal research tool to achieve this study's goal and is in line with the pronouncement by other scholars who submit that autoethnography is "an approach to research . . . that seeks to analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience."[25] In this regard, the experience in this article is using police intuition to resolve disputes as an untrained mediator, while the cultural component refers to mediation in the late 1990s and early 2000s in Trinidad and Tobago.

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[21] *See generally* KIM ETHERINGTON, BECOMING A REFLEXIVE RESEARCHER: USING OUR SELVES IN RESEARCH (2004).

[22] *Cf.* LINDA FINLAY & KEN EVANS, RELATIONAL-CENTERED RESEARCH FOR PSYCHOTHERAPISTS: EXPLORING MEANING AND EXPERIENCE (2009).

[23] *See, e.g.*, Sue Wilkinson, *The Role of Reflexivity in Feminist Psychology*, 11 WOMEN'S STUD. INT'L F. 493 (1988).

[24] *See generally* Naghavi & Salimi, *supra* note 12.

[25] Carolyn Ellis et al., *Autoethnography: An Overview*, 36 HISTORICAL SOC. RSCH. 273 (2011).

IV. SOME EXPERIENCES OF CONDUCTING "INFORMAL" MEDIATION

As a police officer, I used my police training coupled with intuitive beliefs to address social interaction disputes. These included public disputes, community-based disputes, familial disputes, workplace disputes, boundary disputes, bad debt disputes, and interpersonal disputes that were occurring within my social milieu. As previously mentioned, I did not have even a modicum of mediation training, so the results espoused in this article might be purely accidental and/or co-incidental. Because I detail only a handful of lessons from my own experiences of conducting informal mediation, readers should be cautious as those shared are not the sum of what I have learned.

My first mediation occurred on my very first day performing duties. I was on station diary duty when a female entered and lodged a report of domestic violence (DV). This was my first encounter with DV as it was not something that ever happened in my familial home, but I was familiar with the harm and its impact as it occurred in my community. I took the report and advised the female on required actions, like seeking medical attention and counselling for battered women. Shortly after, I interviewed the alleged offending husband as required by law. After interviewing both parties, I realized neither individual wanted legal action, but rather desired a resolution to the underlying circumstances that caused friction in their home. Therefore, I spoke to both parties separately and then jointly to obtain a better understanding of the source of the disputes.

Having gathered enough evidence from both parties, I worked with them to come to an amicable solution, specifically tailored to their conflicts. Both disputing parties (husband and wife) provided me with an oral agreement on a way forward. I then encouraged them to visit the police station where I was employed so that I could assist them with any further issues. Both parties conformed to the agreement and for approximately one year after the fact, they continued to visit together as well as individually to check in. Eventually, I lost touch with both parties as I was moved from that police station. However, ten years after my move, I ran into the female at a function, and she informed me she was still happily married to her husband, and they always wanted to thank me for helping facilitate their "talking" instead of encouraging them to pursue legal action.

In another incident at the first police station where I was employed, I held a mediation between two brothers. During a street

festival in the lead up to Carnival,[26] I arrested one brother (A) for obscene language, indecent exposure, and resisting arrest. While processing A, his brother (B) arrived at the station, identified himself as a soldier, and began demanding that A be released. Police escorted B from the station and A was charged and taken to court the following day. In court, A plead guilty to all charges and informed the magistrate he was intoxicated at the time he committed the offenses. During the trial, A apologized to me and asked the magistrate for placement at a rehabilitation center, instead of a custodial sentence. As the magistrate is the final decision maker as to whether an offender receives jail time or not, the magistrate granted A's request, sent him to a rehabilitation center and the matter was closed.

On exiting the court, I observed both brothers in a heated argument that seemed destined for violence, so I intervened to settle their conflict. B informed me that A lived with him, and A was an alcoholic. B explained he was always risking his job to save A, and this was the last straw; A would no longer be welcome at B's family home. Using my police training and informal mediation skills, I helped resolve the conflict, working with both parties to allow A to continue to reside with B until A's rehabilitation sentence was complete. I continued to actively follow up on the case and was happy to learn that A remained clean, alcohol free, and started a business selling fruits in his community.

In my time as a police officer, some of my colleagues referred to me as the "talker" when I entered the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) in the city (Port of Spain) for a brief spell before exiting the TTPS. On one occasion, two juveniles were arrested for possession of weapons. As they entered the CID and were about to be charged, I asked the Sergeant in charge if I could have an informal conversation with the two juveniles while they awaited their parents' arrival, which the Sergeant granted. I spoke to the two juveniles who informed me they were from community A and had to traverse through community B to visit the father of one of the juveniles who resided in community C. On one occasion, when attempting to visit his father, the younger of the juveniles was attacked and chased. He was afraid to go to his father to collect monies for school and thus, solicited his friend (the other juvenile) to help. They decided to arm themselves with knives in the event that were attacked. As an individual with a mediator's

[26] The Carnival is an annual event emanating from the African tradition held on the Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday where participants' parade in colorful costumes and have cheerful celebrations. *See History of Carnival and its Elements*, NAT'L CARNIVAL COMM'N OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, https://www.ncctt.org/new/index.php/carnival-history/history-of-carnival.html (last visited Apr. 23, 2024).

mind, I spoke to the Sergeant and informed him of the juvenile's rationale and plead with him to not charge the juveniles as doing so would have long-term consequences for their education. The Sergeant responded "Wallace, this is your call" and as the arresting officer, I allowed them to leave with a stern warning in their parents' presence who were very grateful for how I handled the case. Both juveniles were tasked to report to the CID once every week for the next three months to monitor their progress. The juveniles kept their end of the bargain and up until the time of authoring this article, I am aware that juvenile 1 migrated to Canada and is in the military, while the other juvenile still resides in his community of origin and is not involved in any criminality.

In another incident, I was employed at a state agency in the police department which constantly dealt with residents squatting on the land and demanding jobs for which they were not qualified. The agency's work was often disrupted as it had to remove squatters from the land before embarking on sensitive work. Additionally, on several occasions, there were work stoppages as community residents would show up on the site demanding jobs. As a result, I was asked to intervene and to bring some relief to the conflict as previous interventions failed where police used force to remove protesting individuals, which peeved community residents blocked the roads. As a result, there was longstanding animosity between the agency and community residents. I summoned the HR personnel of the agency and the community residents to a meet at the job site. At the gathering, I had HR explain the job's sensitive nature and the requirements for employment (certification in hot welding and a certificate of being drug-free) to the residents in the presence of the community agitators. After HR completed their task, I asked the community residents and their leaders if they understood the employment requirements, further asking them to state their position in the dispute. The community residents explained they understood the requirements and ensured the residents would be compliant if the agency guaranteed that some residents would be employed. This intervention brought a halt to the ongoing community resident-agency feud. In my estimation, it was my ability to mediate that bought an end to this situation of conflict. Again, at this time, I was still untrained in mediation practices.

V. BENEFITS OF CONDUCTING INFORMAL "POLICE" MEDIATION

After providing these concrete examples of informal mediations conducted while being untrained in mediation practices, I now provide my perspectives on the personal, organizational, and communal benefits of my untrained mediation efforts. I am of the

firm conviction that due to my passion for conflict resolution, I witnessed many tangible results. I received personal gratification in seeing people go from not speaking to one another to conversing and shaking hands after my intervention. It was also gratifying to observe people saying they now understand each other's perspective of the conflict that kept them on adversarial paths for years.

From an organizational perspective, the major benefit of my use of mediation to settle conflicts between colleagues was the sense of comradery that returned to police officers who were a source of dispute yet were expected to be their brother's keeper in volatile and hostile situations. As policing is based on rank structure, ordering, and power, there is little room for explanations regarding why police officers are asked to perform certain tasks. While this still largely remains the norm, another miniscule organizational benefit that accrued was my attempt to have senior officers explain the rationale behind certain decisions.

When examining the communal benefits in Trinidad and Tobago, inter- and intra-community conflicts are prevalent due to the existing gang "warfare" between rival gangs who fight for control of turf and the drug trade.[27] Despite this prevalence, some community residents are more amenable to settling inter-community conflicts using mediation. In my time as a police officer, I was able to leverage this amenability to resolve conflicts between youths and elders, like, for example, when youth insisted on playing loud music late into the night or playing sports on the streets, which caused damage to residents' vehicles or incessant noise by setting off the alarms on vehicles.

VI. GENERAL LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE POLICING/MEDIATION NEXUS

There are many lessons to be learned from my journey of police officer to mediator, including possible missteps I took, failures, corrective actions, and potential successes. Importantly, I must credit my "success" as a mediator to the formative years of me practicing "mediation" in an informal manner to the use of my police communication skills. While many persons will not view me as a

[27] *See generally* Ericka B. Adams et al., *Interrupting Gang Violence in Urban Trinidad through Conflict Mediation*, 3 CARIBBEAN J. CRIMINOLOGY 69 (2021); Ericka B. Adams et al., *The Impact of Gangs on Community Life in Trinidad*, 4 RACE & JUST. 543 (2018); Adam Baird et al., *"Breaking Bad"? Gangs, Masculinities, and Murder in Trinidad*, 24 INT'L FEMINIST J. POL. 632 (2021); Wendell C. Wallace, *Gangs, Gang Dynamics, and Gender: Exploring Gangs in Trinidad and Tobago*, *in* THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF AFRICANA CRIMINOLOGIES 187–204 (Biko Agozino et al. eds., 2020).

successful police officer because I was not the typical crime fighting agent with hundreds of arrests and convictions, I view myself as successful across both fields as I was able to conduct arrests and secure convictions, when necessary, while simultaneously providing resolution to conflict situations that had the potential to explode into criminal activities. Interestingly, the usage of my police communication skills as a mediation tool is corroborated in the literature on police/mediation nexus. In fact, for police officers, "communication can be a method of mediation, problem solving, and creating safety."[28]

Quite often my colleagues chastised me for being a talker in situations they viewed as warranting an arrest. For instance, at the CID, I often heard this from my colleagues: "Wallace, just arrest the man nah. This set ah talking won't work." However, for me, I wanted to understand why the individuals did what they did, and why they could not have used another softer approach to resolving the conflict situation. Indeed, I gained a reputation of being "a talker," however, that did not preclude my arresting of individuals in some instances. Yet, I still conversed with arrestees in an attempt to stymie further conflicts after they were charged for the committed offense.

As an individual who was untrained in mediation, but skilled in policing, I was able to use my policing skills to defuse and de-escalate conflict situations. These conflict skills continued after I became a certified mediator, even in situations involving police officers. The true essence of police officers' knowledge to mediate became abundantly clear to me as I was sitting in the waiting area of the Police Headquarters in Port of Spain when I observed a potentially explosive situation unfold. In the lobby area was an individual who appeared to be having a mental health episode. The individual was clearly aggrieved that he (a former police officer) was not allowed to enter the building to conduct business regarding his pension, complaining of receiving the "run-around." As a result, he became loud and aggressive, which resulted in the uniformed police officers on duty attempting to force him out of the building. I sat in awe as this lone individual resisted the attempts of at least five police officers (with exposed firearms) to evict him from the building. I became fearful that the apparently mentally ill individual would get hold of one of the officers' firearm and start randomly shooting. I approached the police officers and the individual and asked what was happening. Reluctantly, the police officers allowed me to intervene, and I was able to walk the apparently mentally ill

[28] Perfecta Delgado Oxholm & Jack Glaser, *Goals and Outcomes of Police Officer Communication: Evidence from In-Depth Interviews*, 26 GRP. PROCESSES & INTERGROUP RELS. 875, 880 (2023).

individual out of the building to the embarrassment of the police officers.

Instructively, I used mediation practices while being an untrained mediator by simply applying my policing skills to resolve situations of conflict. In fact, since time immemorial, police officers have been resolving conflicts, and policing and mediation are inextricably linked.[29] Additionally, I used my police intuition to develop into a mediator without the requisite training. However, in the intervening period, I made use of my policing intuition and skills to resolve communal, workplace, familial, and organizational conflicts. It is my considered view that in so doing, I was able to build trust, empathize, show understanding, assist in peacebuilding, and guide persons to provide solutions to their conflict situations even in instances where an arrest or legal action could have been initiated. In sum, as a police officer conducting mediation, my aim was to create community peace and respectful living, which in my view increased police legitimacy, enhanced community/police relationships, and decreased fear of police among community residents.

My view that I was successful as a police officer/mediator has found favor with previous research expounding upon the virtues of police/peace officers as mediators.[30] In fact, in their work, researchers Mayer, Paul, and Grant explored a Navajo peace-making program in the United States, interviewing Navajo law enforcement personnel to discuss the benefits of using mediation and other peace-making approaches in the community they policed.[31] The researchers concluded the use of mediation and peace-making approaches in Navajo policing represent a way for police officers to move from their primary concern of keeping the peace to creating it.[32]

Often, "[t]here is a notion in police work that cops do not have time to be analytical and hence, are unable to employ nonconventional conflict resolution skills such as mediation."[33] While not generalizable to all police officers, the outcome and results that I achieved as a police officer conducting mediation without any formal training demonstrates that police officers can use their intuition and policing skills to resolve conflicts and mediate disputes. Indeed, this form of conflict/dispute resolution used by

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[29] *See generally* Cooper, *supra* note 3; GOLDSTEIN, *supra* note 2; MARIA R. VOLPE, MOVING TOWARD A JUST PEACE: THE MEDIATION CONTINUUM (2014).
[30] *See* Jon'a F. Meyer et al., *Peacekeepers Turned Peacemakers: Police as Mediators*, 12 CONTEMP. JUST. REV. 331, 331–44 (2009).
[31] *Id.*
[32] *Id.*
[33] Cooper, *supra* note 2, at 87.

police officers is "very consistent with the pragmatic realities of policing."[34] Further, evocative autoethnography also demonstrates that police officers can improve their effectiveness not only by reactively arresting errant and law-breaking citizens but achieving policing objectives through becoming trained mediators. I achieved that goal unconsciously; however, this goal can be achieved by police officers' effective planning.

In this article, I have described myself, my personal and professional background, a host of events, and my journey to becoming a certified mediator. In so doing, this article contains several elements of reflectivity as I looked inwards on myself and shared my lived experiences and personal perspectives on these events.[35] While this article may be enriching to many police officers, I anticipate a slew of questions and potential negative comments as the basic premise on which policing is built is arrest and conviction, and not mediation. However, as we move towards proactive, preventative, and solution-oriented policing, the ability to mediate disputes will inexplicably become a valuable tool for police officers. Further, managing disputes has traditionally been an integral component of police work.[36]

Based on the tenets of autoethnography, I attempted to clarify the cultural and social milieus in which I performed my tasks and examine the impacts of these tasks on myself and my local communities over the past three decades. I narrated the successes, failures, challenges, resistances, and hostilities to my approach of talking (mediating) to settle citizen disputes, some of which were borderline criminal in ontology. While many individuals are more familiar with policing as they encounter police or agents of the state on an almost a daily basis, understanding mediation is not as commonplace.[37] In light of this, I have taken time to explain mediation and policing, so the concepts are not mysterious to readers. By using this approach, hopefully readers will have a better understanding of how policing and mediation intersect.

VII. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this article, I used autoethnography to trace my journey and the transition from being a police officer to being a certified mediator in Trinidad and Tobago at a time when crime rates were

[34] *Id.*
[35] *See* LINDA FINLAY & BRENDAN GOUGH, REFLEXIVITY: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR RESEARCHERS IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (2003).
[36] *See generally* Cooper, *supra* note 2.; GOLDSTEIN, *supra* note 2.
[37] *See, e.g.*, Mike Talbot, *Gestalt Psychotherapy, Conflict and Resolution: An Autoethnography*, 8 EUR. J. FOR QUALITATIVE RSCH. IN PSYCHOTHERAPY 43 (2018).

increasing, crimes were becoming increasingly heinous, youths were turning to gangs and violent crime (shootings, robberies, extortion, kidnapping for ransom, murder) which increased the murder rate[38] and the populace has called for harsher penalties for persons convicted of criminal offences. As previously mentioned, my journey to becoming a certified mediator in Trinidad and Tobago was non-conventional, circuitous, accidental, and perhaps, a product of trial and error. Nonetheless, the journey was an eventful and highly rewarding one, which demonstrates there is no singular route or profession that leads to mediation. Further, my journey towards mediation, as contained in my narrative, highlights the notion that policing and mediation are inextricably linked[39] and that police officers can use mediation as a tool of dispute resolution in their personal and professional lives, which can lead to successes in both spaces.

In conclusion, I must extend two words of caution to police officers who are: (1) mindful of using mediation as a component of their daily regimen of policing, and (2) to individuals who may frown upon the use of autoethnography as being "a queer methodology."[40]

This is because, while mediation can be rewarding and fulfilling, it may not be compensated by promotion and upward mobility in police departments in small island developing states (SIDS) where effective policing is viewed only in terms of arrests and convictions, not in preventative policing using mechanisms like mediation. Despite this, I suggest the use of mediation as illustrated by the police technique in China via the "Fengqiao Model" (Fengqiao Jingyan reforms) presently implemented through the new Social Governance Scheme.[41] This technique has shown moderate success by repairing many grassroots conflicts through the production of depoliticized good faith and sincerity which upholds

[38] *See* Adam Baird et al., *supra* note 27, at 633.
[39] *See* Maria R. Volpe, *Police and Mediation: Natural, Unimaginable or Both*, *in* MOVING TOWARD A JUST PEACE: THE MEDIATION CONTINUUM 91, 91–105 (Jan Marie Fritz ed., 2014).
[40] A queer methodology is an approach that goes against the grain of established canonical methodological traditions by objecting established notions of orthodox methodologies while shifting its focus to fluidity, inter subjectivity and responsiveness to particularities. *See* Tony E. Adams & Stacy Holman Jones, *Autoethnography is Queer*, *in* HANDBOOK OF CRITICAL AND INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGIES 373, 373–390 (Norman K. Denzin et al. eds., 2008).
[41] *See* Jeffrey T. Martin & Lingxiao Zhou, *Restoring Justice or Maintaining Control? Revolutionary Roots and Conservative Fruits in Chinese Police Mediation*, 18 ASIAN J. CRIMINOLOGY 133 (2023).

good social order.[42] The success of the "Fengqiao Model" has both societal and judicial benefits as it aids in judicial reformation in China while transitioning from a hard approach to one that is premised on balancing leniency with severity.[43] Second, autoethnography, as used in this study, is an extremely valuable research method because it "recognizes self-experience as a social phenomenon valuable and worthy of examination" and therefore should be favored.[44]

For me, being a police officer did not preclude my usage of mediation practices to informally resolve disputes, though at the time, I was untrained in mediation. My colleagues referred to me as a "talker" because in instances where they would arrest without conversing with the arrested individuals or where the conversation would revolve around the legal processes, I instead took the opportunity to have discussions with these individuals to find out why they did what they did, while offering to them alternative means for solving their conflicts. There is no doubt in my mind it was my formative years as a police officer that informally honed my mediation skills and facilitated my eventual transition from being a police officer to a trained and certified mediator in Trinidad and Tobago. This approach worked for me, but the potential for other police officers to use mediation in the current environment of arrests, convictions, and clearance rates should be further assessed.

[42] *See id.*
[43] *See generally* SARAH BIDDULPH, THE STABILITY IMPERATIVE: HUMAN RIGHTS AND LAW IN CHINA (2015).
[44] Jane Edwards, *Ethical Autoethnography: Is it Possible?* 20 INT'L J. QUALITATIVE METHODS 1, 1 (2021).