What's Your Number? An Example of Micro and Macro Practice in the Era of Police Accountability

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Abstract: This is a reflective narrative regarding the work that I did with a colleague on issues of race and violence. In my macro practice regarding such tenuous issues, it is imperative to include the micro aspect of work with individuals. This article provides an example of using self-assessment of individuals during a workshop with a macro focus that can be replicated by others involved in this work.

Keywords: police accountability, privilege, micro and macro social work practice

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to provide an example of macro practice that includes a micro focus on the individual through the use of self-assessment. To tackle the largest macro issues in society, including race and violence, bringing communities together to talk about issues must involve individual engagement in the work. This is a narrative discussion of my experience planning a macro project and grappling with how to make it meaningful to individuals. I describe how I created a micro tool of self-assessment, the resulting project, and the continued positive reception and replication of this work. Those interested in macro work must understand that to truly have the broad influence desired, individuals and families must be fully engaged in the larger cause. In particular, race and violence are not often approached at the micro level, which allows individuals to evade the intrinsic work of anti-racism. The description that follows is of an event that was planned in a 2-week time frame that brought over 100 diverse individuals together to look at their impact on racial violence in their community.

The Plight

Since the murder of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager in Sanderson, Florida and the subsequent acquittal of his murderer, the plight of Black America has again been thrust into the nation's spotlight. The nationally covered deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and others at the hands of police have sparked outrage. As a result, there has been a movement in the United States that calls for increased accountability of police officers and citizens around the killing of unarmed Black people. This movement is called Black Lives Matter, and it attempts to apply political pressure to the justice system to create a fairer application of justice in officer involved shootings of Black people. This movement has uncovered deep divisions and heated rhetoric, even including the dialogue within the 2016 presidential campaign. Candidates expressed support and opposition to this movement, and opponents of the movement called for more law and order rather than more accountability. There are very few stages in modern day America where this plays out more vividly than on social media.

In the age of social media, it is usually a Facebook post or tweet that starts an hours long argument about whether Black Lives Matter is a valid movement or whether one's version of a gingerbread house should be ranked highest. And so, a model of macro and micro practice for bringing communities together around issues of race and violence was born on social media.

The Pressure

In the wake of a local shooting of an unarmed Black man, I began to feel like there was nowhere one could go to escape the seeming epidemic of lethal force by cops against unarmed Black men and women. The summer of 2016 had been deemed by some as the "summer of hate" due to the multiple killings of unarmed Black men as well as police officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge. As a native of Baton Rouge, I felt a particular sense of despair at the lack of ability to overcome issues of racial animosity. Since I had moved to a smaller town to begin a tenure track position at my university, I thought problems like this in urban areas would be minimal if not absent in the small town of my new residence. Yet, here I was in this small town of about 38,000 people and it happened. An unarmed Black man was killed by a White police officer and was presumed to be justified in the shooting. This, along with the years-long national spotlight on this topic were at the forefront of my mind when in my hometown, Baton Rouge, an unarmed Black man was killed and the videotape was released. I wondered how these things could be happening in my hometown. Before I could grapple with this question, another shooting of a Black man with his wife and her daughter in a car in Minneapolis was live-streamed on Facebook. As a Black American citizen and social worker, I could only think of Ida B. Wells and the despair she must have felt at the stubbornness of society to acknowledge and address lynchings of Blacks. I knew I wouldn't launch an international campaign like she did, but the least I could do was speak out. So, a historic Facebook post was born.

This is what I wrote and posted on my Facebook page:

> So Philando Castile did everything he was supposed to and has no criminal past...we've talked to our kids about what to do in police encounters...it's time for White parents to talk to their kids about being aware of subconscious bias and unfounded fear of Black and Brown people! (Personal communication, July 2016)

This post received 61 likes, 5 shares, and a firestorm of comments. It set off a Facebook war. Literally over 50 comments, mostly in support of the post, were written. One of my high school classmates completely disagreed with the idea of White parents educating their children specifically about race. And an amazing thing happened, both White and Black people all helped to explain to her about white privilege and how bias works. It was an amazing phenomenon to watch so many people come off the sidelines to engage this topic. It showed me a hunger in society to tackle these issues, and I began to feel the pressure to create a platform for folks to engage. That post was made on July 7th. What would follow would be a model of community macro and micro practice that is still opening doors of opportunity for dialogue in communities.

The Process

Less than 24 hours later, I got a text from one of my White male colleagues who had lent his privileged white voice to the Facebook debate the night before. He asked what I'd think of putting together some kind of public forum around law enforcement and race in the area and that we could invite law enforcement and the community to attend. My reply was literally "YAAAASSSSSSSS!!!!!"

Our text communication continued as we contemplated ideas about what it was exactly that we wanted to do. I kept thinking of Ida B. Wells and her international work. Within 4 days, my colleague walked into my office to make specific plans.

He smiled and said, "I'm here," and sat in one of the two chairs in my small office. He wrung his hands as I rocked back in my office chair facing him and away from my desk. As Tony leaned forward, he told me about backlash he experienced on Facebook after urging others to have compassion for Black people killed by police.

"Well this could go south," I said, and we both laughed.

"But it seems like White people attack me and other Black people when we discuss white privilege. My friend who attacked me on Facebook was forced to actually look at the substance of what was being said because you and other WHITE colleagues pointed out privilege to her. That's what I want to happen in the workshop: people really looking at themselves," I said.

"Exactly what we need." Tony agreed.

I continued, "White people may dismiss it if it comes solely from me, and Black people may dismiss if it comes solely from you. So, having a Black woman and White man should cover the male, white, black, and woman demographics for folks to be able to feel like they're represented in some way."

He nodded, "I think that's what we have to offer that others working on these issues lack."

During that meeting, we had more questions than answers it appeared. How could we use our skills as social workers to bridge such a large chasm in larger society, and more specifically in our community? Will anyone come? If no one comes will it still be worth it? How much are we wedded to this cause? Would this be an opportunity to provide social work continuing education? How will we get law enforcement on board? Who needs to be at the event? Where will it be? How will we advertise? How will White citizens acknowledge that racism and privilege exist? Or will they?

There were so many questions to answer, but Tony stressed, "Even if only five people show up, it's worth it!"

So, we went to work doing macro practice. What follows is a daily description of our activities

to make this event occur within a very short timeframe.

July 12, 2016: Drawing on the community resources to support this project, Tony found us a place that was willing to host the event for a nominal fee. And after sharing the information with a local pastor, we were able to get that fee donated by a local church. I also reached out to our department to see if we could sponsor this event with the university's name on it. The university in particular has had to grapple with race and violence, so I thought getting this approval would be difficult. It turned out that our chair loved the idea, and the dean of our school did as well. He even offered to fund refreshments and attend the event, and he spoke with the provost who also supported the idea.

July 13, 2016: We got approval for the location. Tony asked "Do you mind calling a reporter to talk about the event and try to get it promoted? This is someone I know." I replied, "Of course, we need to get on a news station to promote it too!" We provided details about the event and our photos to the reporter to write a feature story about it in the paper.

July 14, 2016: Tony made a Facebook page that started to garner substantial likes. When we went to look at the space, we had nearly 71 people going and 150 interested. We had to move to a larger part of the building because it quickly grew to 155 people attending and 300 people interested on Facebook. We decided we'd both focus on our own racial groups to try to recruit attendees. I would target Black clergy and community members and Tony would target White clergy and community members. We also explored how to offer continuing education units for social workers. I looked at the list of pre-approved institutions so that we could see if someone would sponsor us in case our university did not.

July 16, 2016: We had more technical discussions about structure.

"Okay, we don't want this thing going off the rails or fights breaking out," Tony said.

"True. I'm sure we may have some people there who are angry and unwilling to follow the process," I continued. "So how about we don't allow question/answer time, but just lecture. Maybe they can talk in small groups?"

"I think that works. So no passing the microphone. We can get wireless headsets," Tony offered.

On this day, our event also made the front page of the local newspaper. I got at least three copies of the paper and had people stop me during shopping trips to Walmart to say they were interested in coming.

July 17, 2016: During a conversation with the director of the event venue, we discussed how to address guns in this small town.

The venue director said, "We talk about this all the time and I'm comfortable with making it a gun-free zone if that works." Tony and I both looked at each other and said, "YES, PLEASE!"

July 18, 2016: We contemplated involving other community members in the presentation. Someone we didn't know had expressed interest in helping to lead the presentation with us. We decided that given the tenuous nature of the topic of racial violence, we would limit the presenters to Tony and me because we knew each other and worked together. We wanted to ensure that the main focus would not be jeopardized by someone being off message.

July 18, 2016: The mayor of the city confirmed attendance on Facebook (and I actually called his office to confirm his attendance).

At this point, I was energized seeing the emergence of a diverse community event, but until now we still had a macro perspective. My next task was to consider how we would get people to engage in introspection around these taboo issues in our society. After thinking throughout the entire day and night, I thought about the unique power of self-assessment to assist individuals and families with identifying their current functioning and planning treatment goals (Berg-Weger, 2013; Toseland & Rivas, 2012). Having seen evidence of this in my practice experience with individuals and families, I made a plan to develop a self-assessment that would draw participants into the discussion of the larger topic based on where they stood in terms of privilege. I developed the privilege survey that would allow participants in our workshop to check whether or not they had experienced a particular situation based solely on their families' standing in society and/or the circumstances of their birth. My initial goal was to destigmatize discussions of "white privilege" by broadening the understanding of privilege as something everyone has, but at different levels. The result of my planning was a 35-item list of statements that respondents had to review and whether or not each statement applied to them (see Figure A).

What's Your Number?
Place a check by each statement that is true ABOUT YOU. At the end, add up the number of checks you have and write down the total number.

I am…
_____White
_____male.
_____tall.

As a child I
_____Was born in the United States of America.
_____Was born without a disability (physical or mental).
_____Had two parents with college degrees
_____Had one parent with a college degree.
_____Both of my parents attended college.
_____Was raised by my biological family
_____Had low crime in my neighborhood.
_____Had parents that never had to worry about paying rent/mortgage.
_____Had parents who owned a home.
_____Lived in a house.

_____Lived with both of my parents.
_____Had parents that were married to each other.
_____Had parents who bought me my first car.
_____Had parents that could read and write English fluently.
_____Was never the only person of my race in a classroom.
_____Was never called a racial slur.
_____Was never told I am attractive "for my race."
_____Had Christian parents.
_____Knew one or more elected officials by name.
_____Had positive interactions with police officers.
_____Had parents that were allowed to vote.
_____Was never told to enter through the back door of a business.
_____Was never refused service because of my race.
_____Was never abused physically or sexually.
_____Had access to quality schools in my community.
_____Always had health insurance.
_____Was given a job by someone who knew my parents.
_____ Had parents that owned a car.
_____Had parents that owned multiple cars.
_____Never had to wonder if I would have enough to eat and drink.
_____Visited the dentist at least once a year.
_____Had swimming lessons.
_____Had art classes (dance, drama, drawing).
_____Played on a sports team.
_____Could get hot water from the faucet in my home.
_____Was able to go to school instead of working for the family.

Place your total number of "checks" here:_____

Figure A. Survey created to measure individual levels of privilege at workshop.

July 19, 2016: The event was publicized on the radio. I thought of a method to have participants take home a "charge" to continue the conversation after the workshop had ended. So, I decided to order buttons that refer to the privilege survey, "What's your number?" To be sure we would minimize arguments during the event, we updated the Facebook page to say:

> We want to emphasize that this event is a workshop and connector/community building event. For the sake of structure and time, this will not be an open floor forum or platform for debate. But we encourage constructive discussion with the presenters and other attendees during brief small group discussions and activities and also at the close of the event. Attendees should look forward to a lineup of great activities including looking at race relationship though the lenses of recover model and family systems model and the "What's your number?" group activity. (Personal communication, July 19, 2016)

We also hired security for the event. Our department and university was supportive and wanted to be sure there would be security for the event before they agreed to sponsor.

July 20, 2016: Tony invited the local leaders of the NAACP. I invited my preacher and congregation, and my preacher agreed to invite other local clergy.

July 21, 2016: I located a sound engineer to control sound for the event and ordered two wireless headset microphones to lessen the chances of sharing or passing the mike. The mayor's secretary confirmed it was on the mayor's calendar.

July 22, 2016: I participated in a radio interview with a local activist preacher to promote the event. During the interview, he got off topic and criticized the city's response to the shooting of the unarmed Black man this summer. So, I tried to redirect the discussion to the event, while thinking that this must be how politicians feel. I also recruited social work graduates and current students within our department to help with registration, distribution of the "What's your Number?" survey, and setting up refreshments, which were cookies from a local Subway. The email read:

> Hi social work students/graduates!
>
> I've heard from many of you about attending our Tupelo Together event next Tuesday night at the Link Center, but just wanted to send a reminder for those who haven't heard about it or seen it anywhere. It's also on Facebook.
>
> Mr. Tony and I are moderating this workshop on building relationships across racial divides, and it's open to the community. It would be great to see as many of you there as possible! Here's the article from the daily journal. [Link to article.]
>
> Also, we could use 5-6 of you as volunteers for signing people in that evening and handing out info as needed. If you're available and interested, reply to this message or message us on Facebook and let me know by Monday 7/25.
>
> Enjoy the rest of your summers! (Personal communication, July 22, 2016)

Within three days this email generated more than enough volunteers for the project. One student reported that she would bring her entire family in addition to helping volunteer, responding how the event was "much needed." I created a group text to ensure I had everyone's phone numbers correct and sent out two text reminders about arriving at the location by 6:00pm.

The "What's Your #?" buttons arrived in the mail.

July 24, 2016: We announced the offering of continuing education credits on the Facebook page.

July 25, 2016: I completed another local interview with a civic education focus. It was conducted at a local park. We chose that location because my 4-year-old son would need to be

occupied during the interview. Later, Tony and I were looking for a song to end the workshop, and while we were talking, "Lean on Me" by Bill Withers came on the radio. That's the song we selected. We started to get nervous because the event looked like it would be large. There were 155 people going, 348 interested, and 748 shares on Facebook.

July 26, 2016: We did a trial run of the workshop at 9 a.m. An hour before the event that evening, the media had arrived, and I was sending Tony text messages to find out his location. We provided three different interviews that night and were photographed throughout the night. I met with our 6 student volunteers for a short volunteer training in the galley of the center where we were holding the workshop. I instructed:

> I'll need two people to give out pens and copies of the 'What's your number?' survey to every person that enters the auditorium. Then I need three people at the sign-in table. If someone wants to leave his or her email address they can; if not, we're just looking for names. Lastly, we need two of you to set up the cookies on a table along with the water, napkins, and plates, but do this a few minutes after the workshop has begun so people will not grab something on their way in. (Personal communication, July 26, 2016)

They split up and decided what roles they'd each play saying, "We've got it, Dr. Crutch."

The mayor arrived. The hall began to fill up, and it was time to begin.

The Presentation

With a lot of fear and trepidation mixed with excitement, we began the workshop. As people came in they were given the "What's your Number?" survey and asked to complete it and hold the results for the second half of the presentation. I opened with a Facebook introduction, since it was a Facebook post that was the impetus for this project. People giggled as I established rapport with pictures and silly stories displayed on the large projector screen. This set the positive tone for the night, and then Tony began with his portion of the presentation focused on viewing community violence from a family recovery model.

Then it was my turn. Prior to the event, I had placed ranges of numbers on the walls around the room: 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, all the way to 35. I asked everyone to look at their surveys and identify their "number." Then I asked them to move to their numbers and sit down. The result was a clear visual of how white privilege works in society. Groups with the highest numbers (25+) were mostly White and mostly male. Groups with lower numbers (15 and below) were mostly minority. I took the time to have each group stand up so others in the room could see the visual. I explained that it was a representation of privilege. I reviewed the statements on the "What's Your Number?" survey and discussed how these were circumstances beyond the control of any individual, but that had given them a certain level of privilege. Then I had participants dialogue about the specific circumstances that led to their privilege numbers. I had them dialogue with individuals who did NOT have the same number as they did, whether those numbers were lower or higher. While the majority of those who attended were White, the dialogue with those of different privilege numbers created several racially diverse dyads. Given that many people spend

time with others who are similar to them socially, economically, ethnically, and in levels of privilege, these dyads may not happen in normal silos of society, and they were a unique part of the micro approach to this workshop. I talked to them about how they had no contribution to their numbers, so they could not be blamed for being given the privilege they had, nor should they accept praise for what they had not earned.

Then I announced, "I'm going to say something that may sound foreign to the American ideal, so don't attack me." I tiptoed behind the podium as if I were hiding and said "Hard work, in and of itself, does NOT guarantee success." I walked out from the podium and repeated this, as I saw people nodding in agreement or just staring at me.

I talked about dismantling this system and realizing that hard working people exist at all levels of privilege, but that those whose number is 30 are closer to the finish line than those with an 11. So, when those at 30 finish the race first, it appears that they worked harder when in actuality, they were born closer to the finish line, with an advantage. An example that drew applause from the audience was my mom's privilege number. I explained that my mom worked hard and even integrated an all-white high school, was the first to graduate from college in our family, and landed a good job. I talked about how the fact that she was born with the number 11 limited all of her hard work to the point that her daughter (me) was only born with a 17 privilege number. I discussed how all of her hard work still didn't get her to the 35 and thus, those with more privilege must reach back to close the gap between the higher and lower numbers. I talked about how those with more privilege could reach back to others with less privilege by simply having more respect for them and seeing them not as "other" but as another hard-working person born into a different set of circumstances.

My closing statements were, "Before there is ever a police officer or a Black citizen, there is a child born with a privilege number that represents low or high levels of privilege." And this privilege is the basis for the socialization that happens as we grow, whether we are socialized to value those with less or not. This numeration of privilege elicited a great response. People left with buttons that read, "What's your #?" Numerous people asked for copies of the survey to give to family members, and I left feeling very excited that there was such a positive response. The event ended at 8:00 p.m., but we stayed in the auditorium talking to participants for another 30-45 minutes. An elderly White gentlemen shared his thoughts with me:

> This is exactly right. It's so powerful. I was adopted into a family that gave me so many privileges, but my siblings were not. It's obvious that while we were biologically related, there was a difference in how we grew up. Circumstances mean everything. (Personal communication, July 26, 2016)

A young White woman who came with her son said, "I want my husband to see this, is there a way to get a copy of this?"

A middle aged White man also shared, "I've never thought about it being a privilege to know police officers and elected officials by name, but I had the police chief living in my neighborhood. I was given several jobs by politicians who were friends of my dad. But you

never think that those basic experiences are a privilege."

A middle aged Black man shook my hand and said, "This is powerful, showing more than telling us how the world works."

The Promise

Tony and I thought the event was well attended as evidenced by the comments from participants in person, on social media, local news media, and our colleagues at the university. Tony and I have replicated this event on the main campus of the university with similar positive reactions. We felt that people wanted more as even some folks asked "What's next?," "Are you repeating this?," and "Is there a part 2?" Doing this type of work has expanded both our professional and personal relationships. Professionally, Tony and I have committed to offering this workshop where requested and to respond to any calls for diversity training, privilege training, or other work in racial equity. We spend lots of time in each other's offices talking about the next project with which we've been approached, whether or not we're going to take it on and how. Personally, we've become closer friends, and our families spend more time together.

The success of the workshop at the micro level was partly due to the representativeness Tony and I offered to a large group of diverse participants. The modeling of a Black woman and White man joining an effort to bridge divides on race was something that could have been attractive to the group. To create personal reflection and growth, however, the micro focus on individual assessment, small group dialogue, and one-to-one dialogue were key strategies for this workshop.

From the work that we did at both the micro and macro level, numerous dialogues and opportunities for more of this work have presented themselves. Several weeks after the presentation, a local leader who had attended our event approached us about meeting with clergy who attended a monthly lunch meeting. He said that it had always been his hope that the church could continue conversations about how to bridge racial divides in the community. We have presented to this clergy lunch group twice and have had this work with the group featured in the local paper.

The state in which we've done this work has recently received a grant from the Kellogg Foundation to address issues of racial equity. Because of the work we've been doing, a grants man has reached out to us to help train others in the work of racial equity.

Our university is conducting a month-long series of workshops and seminars to address progress in the region that acknowledges issues of oppression and discrimination and showcases efforts to dismantle these. Tony and I have been invited to share the model from the workshop this summer.

In addition, our department of social work has asked Tony and I to conduct a repeat of the workshop at the main campus of the university. All of these functions are scheduled for 2017.

Not only is there promise for more community work when the micro and macro are melded together, but perhaps the most rewarding part of this is the individual or micro level transformations that occur. These efforts are what will truly influence the larger cause of racial justice. The clearest example of this is from a blogger. His parents had attended the workshop, and they brought home the "What's Your Number?" survey. The blogger completed it and had been extremely impacted. He wrote, "I've known for a very long time how lucky and wonderful my life is. But ever since I took that privilege quiz, I've begun to constantly think about what it means for where I am in my life right now." Whether it's called the "Privilege" quiz, "What's your number?" survey, or any other name, the usefulness of such a scale was dynamic in this effort. To make outcomes based on the tool even more meaningful, social work researchers who desire to support macro/micro work can contribute by examining the psychometric properties of those like the "What's Your Number?" survey. This could be a useful model of "evidence-based practice," in which practitioners more readily engage. Indeed, to develop similar projects, social workers involved in micro/macro practice can collaborate with researchers throughout the process of building surveys and self-assessment tools. Social work researchers even have the opportunity to contribute to these efforts by developing scales and examining the psychometric properties of non-standardized surveys like the "What's Your Number?" survey.

These are the promises of work that marries macro and micro practice: That individuals will come to a realization of their current status and contribution to the system of racial violence within society and, thereby, be committed to working to dismantle it. This is how practitioners can help individual cases to influence the larger cause.

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