

Statement Regarding the Loss of George Floyd

Minnesota Psychological Association Diversity Committee

May 29, 2020

The Minnesota Psychological Association seeks to add to the voices recognizing the horror and injustice of the death of George Floyd and see this unjustified killing as an act of racism that may eventually be classified as a hate crime. We realize that there is an increase in the presence of racism, hate and discrimination in our society and that the Dept. of Justice has identified that the majority of hate crimes (59.9 percent) continue to be those around the issue of race/ethnicity/ancestry.¹ Of the hate crimes around race, most are against African Americans. African Americans also experience the most incidents of discrimination² and become the victims of “mentalcide,” the psychological process of treating them as “less than human.”³ Consequently, African Americans have endured the brunt of inhumane treatment by law enforcement officers in our country.

Our research shows that police officers speak with consistently less respect toward black versus white community members and invariably, African Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at a rate that is 10 times the imprisonment of whites, and are more likely to die at the hands of law enforcement than their White counterparts,⁴ even if they are unarmed.⁵

The impact of these injustices in the name of law enforcement must be viewed in light of historical trauma for the African American community as well as the future implications of long lasting psychological, emotional and physical distress. The compounded effects of direct and vicarious dehumanization, historical trauma, microaggressions, invisibility, intersectional oppression, and discrimination create biological markers similar to physical assault⁶ and may contribute to a level of racial trauma that can be life threatening.⁷

Furthermore, Anxiety, Depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are some of the mental health disorders that follow individuals who bear witness to this kind of inequity and brutality. Let’s not forget the implications for our children, who stand to have difficulties with concentration, learning, sleep, and generally feeling unsafe in their own homes and communities. Those of us who witnessed George Floyd taking his last breath, as he yelled “I can’t breathe” are left to make sense of his demise.

The Minnesota Psychological Association supports George Floyd’s right to breathe in the state of Minnesota. We recognize that if George Floyd and communities of color cannot breathe in our state, it is an injustice that we must confront. In accordance with the 2017 APA Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct, psychologists strive to avoid harm and to uphold the dignity and worth of all individuals. The Minnesota Psychological Association would like to add our voices to others recognizing the brutality of this unjustifiable act. We encourage the Minnesota community to stand together in processing the residual effects of this event on our psyche.

We stand in support of Minneapolis Police Chief Arredondo, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, St. Paul Police Chief Todd Axtell, and St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter for their swift and decisive response to the four police officers involved in the incident. We stand in support of, and solidarity with, the Minneapolis community in their effort to seek justice for George Floyd. We stand in support of the close examination and reform of racial bias and police brutality in the Minneapolis Police Department.

References:

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