

How can Community-Based Participatory Research Address Hate Crimes and Incidents?

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

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How Can Community-Based Participatory Research Address Hate Crimes and Incidents?

Landon Turlock, Maria Mayan

ABSTRACT Reports of hate crimes in Canada have increased by 72% from 2019 to 2021 (Moreau, 2022). Hate crimes harm those directly victimized and members of targeted communities (Erentzen & Schuller, 2020; Perry & Alvi, 2011). Many Canadian stakeholders advocate for increased community engagement in preventative and responsive interventions to this increasing concern. This article poses that Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is an appropriate approach for further exploring hate crimes and incidents and suggests strategies for this area of study, including: building community partnerships; advocating for trauma-informed practices; prioritizing cultural humility and intersectionality; preparing for lengthy pre-participation communication with potential participants; anticipating out-of-scope volunteer participants; and accounting for unanticipated actions of participants.

KEYWORDS community-based participatory research, hate crimes, hate incidents, community-based research, Canada

Reports of hate crimes to police in Canada have increased by 72% from 2019 to 2021 (Moreau, 2022). Hate crimes harm both those directly victimized as well as members of targeted communities (Erentzen & Schuller, 2020; Perry & Alvi, 2011; Perry, 2015). Many Canadian stakeholders advocate for increased community engagement in preventative and responsive interventions to this increasing concern. Considering this advocacy and the impacts of hate crimes and incidents on communities, there is a space for Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) to address hate crimes and incidents. However, there is little guidance or discussion about conducting CBPR in this field. This article argues that CBPR is well-positioned to further explore hate crimes and incidents as well as offering strategies to approach this area of study.

Definitions and Impacts of Hate Crimes and Incidents on Communities

It is challenging to define hate crimes (Chakraborti, 2015). Although there is no shared definition of hate crime in Canada or elsewhere, Perry (2001) offered this definition:

acts of violence and intimidation, usually directed toward already stigmatized and marginalized groups. As such, [a hate crimes is] a mechanism of power,

intended to reaffirm the precarious hierarchies that characterize a given social order. It attempts to recreate simultaneously the threatened (real or imagined) hegemony of the perpetrator's group and the appropriate subordinate identity of the victim's group. (p. 10)

However, Perry's definition is not a legal definition. Some scholars point out the weaknesses of a legal definition in Canada by suggesting that legal definitions of hate crimes individualize these behaviours instead of locating them socio-politically in contexts of power imbalances and inequality (Bell & Perry, 2015; Mercier-Dalphonnd & Helly, 2021; Perry, 2001). Mercier-Dalphonnd and Helly (2021) suggest that hate crime definitions fail to recognize the cumulative impacts of repeated, often daily, exposure to harassment on individuals and communities, and do not adequately address online hate crimes. Chakraborti's (2015) and Mason-Bish's (2015) observations of the intersectional nature of hate crimes reveal a potential deficit in how hate crimes are currently defined legally in policy, and in research. There are further criticisms of Canadian definitions of hate crime for not directly addressing "the complex, layered, and historical issues that affect [Indigenous] people, distinct as these issues are from those facing any other population living in Canada" (McCaslin, 2014, p. 22).

While there is no central legal definition of hate crimes in Canada (Camp, 2021), four specific charges in the Criminal Code of Canada are often associated with hate: Section 318(1): Advocating genocide; Section 319(1): Public incitement of hatred; Section 319(2): Willful promotion of hatred; and Section 430(4.1): Mischief relating to religious property, educational institutions, etc. There is also the 718.2a1 sentencing principle, which facilitates a court's ability to increase sentencing if the prosecution can prove that an offence was motivated by hate or bias.

In addition to hate crimes, Bell and Perry (2015) observe that many noncriminal acts motivated by hate also cause significant harm and should be taken seriously. These noncriminal acts are defined as hate incidents, as articulated by Chaudhry (2021) and Facing Facts (2012). Facing Facts (2012) offers this definition of hate incidents

an act that involves prejudice and bias-motivated by hate, based on race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or any other similar factor but which does not amount to a crime. (p. 9)

The direct impacts of hate crimes and incidents on victimized individuals have received considerable attention in research (Perry & Alvi, 2011). However, in addition to the effects on individuals, hate crimes and incidents can also severely impact members of the affected community (Perry & Alvi, 2011). In this way, hate crimes send an exclusionary message to members of communities that experience marginalization (Perry, 2001).

When hearing about hate crimes targeting a member of their community, research participants in earlier studies indicated feeling emotional and psychological harm, reduced safety, fear, vulnerability, suspicion, shame, a sense of being unwelcome, a lack of trust in the

community of the perpetrator, concern that people did not intervene to stop the incident, and fear that a similar incident could happen to themselves or other community members (Mercier-Dalphonnd & Helly, 2021; Perry & Alvi, 2011). Many felt fearful of other people in the perpetrator's community, a lack of belonging, a desire for revenge, that they did not have the same rights as others, and doubts about Canada's multiculturalism and tolerance (Perry & Alvi, 2011). As a result, people from communities targeted by hate may engage in behavioural change, including altering their appearance, their schedule, where they spend their time, how they travel (with others as opposed to alone), to whom they disclose their identity, and with whom they associate (Bell & Perry, 2015; Mercier-Dalphonnd & Helly, 2021; Perry & Alvi, 2011). At the same time, many felt motivated to become involved in stopping harassment and discrimination (Perry & Alvi, 2011).

Defining Community

Hacker (2017) and Yoshihama and Carr (2002) discuss the complicated pursuit of defining the term community. Geographic and political boundaries, common interests and perspectives, and social ties are elements considered in various understandings of the term (Hacker, 2017). For the purposes of this article and the study we discuss, the community we refer to largely is limited to the geographic area of the city where our study took place, but specifically considering groups and individuals impacted by hate crimes and incidents and the organizations seeking to support these people within this city.

Community-Based Participatory Research as a Way to Address Hate Crimes and Incidents

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is a collaborative and equitable research approach that brings researchers and community stakeholders together to address social inequities facing community members (Janzen & Ochocka, 2020). Alternative but comparable terms like "community-engaged scholarship," "community-based research," "action research," and "participatory action research" are also used (Janzen & Ochocka, 2020, p. 5). Janzen and Ochocka (2020) note that unifying elements of this type of research includes being action-oriented, community-driven, and participatory. This kind of engaged research involves working in collaboration with people impacted by an issue to define a research problem, conduct a study, and use insights gained from the study to benefit the participating community (Checkoway, 2015; Janzen & Ochocka, 2020). Considering the community impacts of hate crimes and incidents, CBPR seems well-suited to exploring and identifying various ways to address the harms resulting from these issues.

The scholarly CBPR literature on hate crimes and incidents is minimal. Gauthier et al. (2021) identified using a CBPR approach to understand the experiences of victimization and reasons for underreporting hate crimes amongst members of the transgender community in Los Angeles. They created an advisory board of service providers serving transgender people who co-developed the research design, supported participant recruitment, provided venues for focus groups, offered context and recommendations based on the study's outcomes, and

assisted in disseminating findings. The available paper did not provide a significant discussion of using a CBPR approach to study hate crimes, but researchers did note that theirs was the first study they were aware of that used CBPR to study hate crimes.

Burch (2022) worked with six organizations in England to research disability hate crime. Burch explored the importance of relationship building, informed consent, flexibility, and arts-based “mood boards” to facilitate participants being treated as experts on their own experiences. Burch (2022) reflects upon this methodological approach to support meaning-making, and facilitate more collaborative, participatory research processes while using the mood boards to disseminate knowledge in meaningful ways.

Although there is a lack of scholarly CBPR literature on hate crimes and incidents, several community organizations have worked to fill this gap. For example, some Canadian reports discuss victim support and referrals, university campus responses, media appearances, community dialogues, vigils, restorative justice, and peer-to-peer support (Archway Community Services, 2019; Coalitions Creating Equity, 2020; Kochar et al., 2019; The Lead Fund, 2019,).

However, roles for community engagement to respond to hate crimes and incidents are not limited to community organizations. A lack of trust between police and communities may limit the kind of collaboration, dialogue, and information-sharing necessary for police to address hate crimes in a way that reflects the voices of community members (Perry & Samuels-Wortley, 2021). Angeles and Robertson (2020) and Erentzen and Schuller (2020) outline how some people do not report hate crimes to police due to fear of experiencing racism from police, or a lack of faith in the efficacy of police or that the perpetrator would be prosecuted. Perry and Samuels-Wortley (2021) identified that police must build relationships and trust with diverse communities to respond to hate crimes effectively. To do this, Perry and Samuels-Wortley (2021) recommend that police commit to inclusivity while understanding and recognizing the harm caused to individuals and communities victimized by hate crimes. The researchers further recommend that police practice increased awareness building, public education, outreach, and transparency.

Considering the ways communities and institutions in Canada call for community engagement to respond to hate crimes and some emerging scholarship in this area, there is a clear space for the application of CPBR to address hate crimes.

CBPR Study Design on Participants’ Experiences Reporting Hate Crimes and Incidents

One of the two authors has dedicated much of their professional and volunteer work and research career to preventing and responding to hate-motivated violence, while the other has pursued engaged scholarship at the intersection of government, not-for-profit, and disadvantaged communities. Together, alongside research partners, we used a CBPR approach to answer the following research questions: What are the experiences of people who report hate crimes and/or incidents to organizations in Edmonton? How do individuals who have reported hate crimes and/or incidents experience organizational responses to these reports? What are the policy and practice implications of these experiences for organizations that respond to hate crimes and/or incidents?

A descriptive qualitative research method was the most appropriate to answer the stated research questions. A descriptive qualitative method may provide a basic summary and description of the studied phenomenon (Sandalowski, as cited in Mayan, 2009, p. 52). Healy (2020) noted that a qualitative methodological approach better captures hate crimes and incidents' emotional and psychological impacts. Consistent with a descriptive qualitative method, sampling in this study was purposeful (Sandalowski, as cited in Mayan, 2009, p. 53). We recruited 18 participants who met the following criteria: participants were 18 years old or older; spoke English, or spoke a language that ____ partners could translate, or had access to someone to translate; and had reported hate crimes or incidents to organizations in the city within the last five years. As research partners, we prepared and disseminated a social media graphic, email and email address, and recruitment script to recruit participants. Study participants then emailed us to participate in the study. Study participants also recommended additional participants with similar experiences, incorporating snowball sampling.

We completed 20 semi-structured interviews with 18 participants over five months. Consistent with a descriptive qualitative method, we decided that qualitative content analysis was a coherent approach to analyzing the data gathered in this study (Sandalowski, as cited in Mayan, 2009, p. 53). Once we determined the initial themes, we shared them with research participants and partners to ensure validity, accuracy, and clarity in alignment with a CBPR approach (Janzen & Ochocka, 2020). Consistent with the online nature of our data collection, we contacted participants via email to ask for their input on the findings, recommendations, and knowledge mobilization tactics. Ten of 18 participants responded, and all shared a high degree of agreement with the themes as presented. Participants also shared input that led to clearer and more comprehensive theming. Once we received feedback on the themes from participants, we shared the updated themes with research partners to gain additional thematic clarity and specificity of the recommendations. This approach aligns with Janzen and Ochocka's (2020) recommendations for CBPR rigour and trustworthiness. Interpretations have been co-constructed by the research participants and researchers. We have taken steps to ensure rigour in the findings according to both qualitative descriptive methodology and principles of CBPR. The findings and recommendations of this study are the subject of a separate published work, but taught us lessons on conducting CBPR in this field that will be discussed in the following section.

Community-Based Research Strategies for Studying Hate Crimes and Incidents

We learned a number of lessons about how to approach CBPR and qualitative research as it pertains to hate crimes and incidents while conducting this study. Some align with existing best practices in the field, such as determining appropriate compensation for participants (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2018), practicing reflexivity and concurrent data analysis (Mayan, 2009), planning for appropriate knowledge mobilization (Gauthier et al., 2021), and accounting for the emotional nature of researching acts of violence (Cullen et al., 2021). The following section outlines emerging learnings that will advance CPBR in the area of hate crimes and incidents and possibly related emerging areas, including: building community partnerships; advocating for trauma-informed practices; prioritizing cultural

humility and intersectionality; preparing for lengthy pre-participation communication with potential participants; anticipating out-of-scope volunteer participants; and accounting for unanticipated actions of participants.

Building Community Partnerships Prior to the Research

A consistent feature of CBPR is that an equitable partnership should exist between community partners impacted by the research issue and researchers along with an understanding that such research should be in the service of community members (Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Hacker, 2013; Janzen & Ochocka, 2020). Checkoway (2015) poses research as an approach to community building, which begins by determining how a problem is defined and approached. To begin, we approached a network of community organizations and stakeholders that one author has been involved with for several years to discuss if there was any research that would benefit their work in anti-racism and responding to hate-motivated violence. Interest arose and we struck an informal subcommittee of eight members that assisted with defining the scope of the study, research design, data collection materials, compensation, recruitment, and analysis. The members in our partnership had worked for years in anti-racism and preventing hate crimes and incidents. Most had lived experiences as members of communities affected by hate crimes and incidents, with some also having lived experiences of hate crimes and incidents. Working together with community partners to establish our research questions and ways to answer them helped ensure that this research study could help gather information that would support survivors of hate crimes and incidents, and the organizations who serve them in providing high quality evidence-based practices.

One author had been a member of this network of organizations for nearly three years in a professional capacity before their role changed to a researcher. As such, by the time the initial conversations about this research began, meaningful relationships had been established among participating research partners. It may not always be possible for community-engaged researchers to build multi-year working relationships with community partners prior to conducting research, even though CBPR processes often grow out of existing community relationships (D'Alonzo, 2010). However, a meaningful working relationship will likely be needed for research on a sensitive topic such as hate crimes and incidents. In our experience some effective ways to build relationships with community partners include: being open-minded, humble, and willing to learn; practicing transparent communication and openness; being present frequently at community events, spaces, and initiatives in alignment with Yoshihama and Carr (2002); volunteering to support initiatives with community partners even when they do not specifically benefit our research purpose in alignment with D'Alonzo (2010); and finding ways to add value to the work of community partners that pertain to your skillset (for some researchers, this may include public education and facilitation, completing literature reviews, or supporting funding applications). Checkoway (2015) discusses building community relationships through collaborative projects such as collaboration-oriented university courses. D'Alonzo (2010) and Hacker (2017) discuss how 'Community Advisory Boards' or 'steering committees' that are formalized or fluid can also be effective ways to be engaged throughout a CBPR project. In

our case, as described above, a relatively informal research subcommittee grew out of a more formalized coalition of community organizations to collaborate on our study.

Incorporating Trauma-Informed Research Practices

Trauma-informed practice is typically applied in social work and social service settings (Levenson, 2017). However, recognizing that research participants likely have lived experiences of trauma, defined as, “an exposure to an extraordinary experience that presents a physical or psychological threat to oneself or others and generates a reaction of helplessness and fear” (American Psychological Association, as cited in Levenson, 2017, p. 105), it was necessary to apply a trauma-informed lens to this research. Our research design incorporated principles of trauma-informed practice like trust, safety, collaboration, choice, and empowerment (Levenson, 2017). While some of the approaches described below align with existing best practices in community-based and qualitative research, we suggest that these practices should be viewed and enacted through a trauma-informed lens when studying hate crimes and incidents. Similar trauma-informed practices have been previously utilized in Ahmad’s (2019) study with Muslim women regarding their experiences of Islamophobic violence.

We applied a trauma-informed lens to the development of the interview guide. This guide was created in collaboration with community partners to ensure questions were strengths-based and as minimally invasive or distressing as possible, aligning with Levenson’s (2017) trauma-informed principle of empowerment and Isobel’s (2021) perspectives on trauma-informed qualitative research. In addition to establishing a sense of comfort and rapport, we followed typical informed consent protocols (e.g., discussing the research project with participants, outlining how their information would be used, and how confidentiality would be maintained through not sharing contact information, using code names to link individuals to their data, and storage of data using encrypted software) (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2018), aligning with Levenson’s (2017) principles of building safety and trust. Furthermore, ensuring each participant knew that participation was voluntary, they could skip any questions they chose to, and they could withdraw their information from the study upon request, incorporated the trauma-informed principle of choice and trauma-informed research methods (Ahmad, 2019; Isobel, 2021; Levenson, 2017). Finally, we offered participants a role in interpreting data and knowledge mobilization, aligning with trauma-informed principles of collaboration and empowerment (Levenson, 2017).

As per Gill et al. (2008), participants also had the opportunity to choose the interview location, with flexibility for online or in-person options due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We also offered participants the opportunity to have a support person present during the interview due to its sensitive nature, aligning with the trauma-informed principle of safety (Levenson, 2017) and Isobel’s (2021) writing on trauma-informed qualitative research. However, no participant opted to have a support person present during their interview. We provided a brief list of local resources that support people victimized by hate crimes and incidents to participants in advance of the interview and checked in with participants within twenty-four hours after each interview.

While the above-established research practices mirror trauma-informed practice, we encourage further training and professional development for researchers in this area. However, a trauma-informed lens does not just apply to interactions with participants. We suggest that a trauma-informed lens be brought to bear on the overall purpose of the research. We do not need more research on the existence – or prevalence and incidence – of, for example, domestic violence, houselessness, or substance dependency for the sole purpose of knowledge creation. Continuing to ask groups who are marginalized about their experiences of marginalization and trauma, without working alongside them to remedy their concerns, can be voyeuristic and retraumatizing (Isobel, 2021; Newman et al., 2006). What we need is research with built-in knowledge mobilization or action so we can learn about the processes that will work to address these issues. This is why CBPR is a promising approach to hate crimes and incidents research, as well as other research involving participants who have lived experience of trauma. Since CBPR aims to address social issues affecting participating communities, we have a responsibility to conduct trauma-informed research to support the people impacted by hate crimes and incidents in meaningful and tangible ways. Practicing this way of research means prioritizing practical and applicable research that centres the voices and needs of people who have survived victimization from perpetrators of hate crimes and incidents.

Prioritizing Cultural Humility and Intersectionality

Cultural humility can be understood as, “[the] ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the [person]” (Hook et al., 2013, p. 2). Study participants experienced hate crimes and incidents due to their identities and may lack confidence in institutions or researchers (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2018).

Recent Canadian studies on hate crimes regularly focus on the experiences of a specific demographic group experiencing the phenomenon (Angeles & Robertson, 2020; Mercier-Dalphoné & Helly, 2021). In the proposal stage of the research, an academic committee encouraged us, for methodological purposes, to narrow our focus to a particular demographic group. However, since people are often victimized by hate crimes based on the intersections of their identities (Erentzen & Schuller, 2020), our partner organization research subcommittee opted not to limit our research to a particular group. This decision was further supported by the observation that several local organizations supporting people who report hate crimes and incidents do not specialize their services to one demographic group. Indeed, this study involved participants who reported hate crimes and incidents related to transphobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, ableism, and sexism as well as at the intersections of these motivations. When cultural or linguistic interpretation was required, partner organizations were available to support. Future CBPR on hate crimes and incidents should be guided by culturally informed and intersectional research practices developed alongside community partners.

Anticipating Out-Of-Scope Potential Participants

There is no widespread awareness or agreement on what constitutes hate crimes. Inconsistent understandings of the concept, and a lack of legal definition, have led to various interpretations and applications across countries (Chakraborti, 2015) and local jurisdictions (Alberta Hate Crimes Committee, 2009). Even among police officers who ultimately need to assess and charge individuals with hate crimes, there is a lack of familiarity or confidence with these concepts (Perry & Samuels-Wortley, 2021).

When conducting CBPR on hate crimes and hate incidents, it is vital to anticipate how the ambiguity of these terms can impact the research. In developing our study, we were guided by Perry's (2001) definition of hate crimes and the four entries in the Canadian Criminal Code pertaining to hate crime (see above). We were also informed by definitions of hate incidents as discussed earlier in this paper (Chaudhry, 2021; Facing Facts, 2012), especially recognizing that many harmful acts motivated by hate are not necessarily criminal (Bell & Perry, 2015). However, we did not opt to provide these definitions in our recruitment materials. As a result of this decision, research participants were recruited based on their self-definition of their experience as a hate crime or incident.

While the decision not to define hate crimes or incidents for prospective research participants was intentional, a complication that arose from this decision was that it was occasionally challenging to screen potential participants for inclusion in the study. It was clear that many of the potential research participants who contacted us to participate had encountered some very challenging and traumatic experiences. Many expressed a passion for sharing their stories. However, not all potential participants fit the study's criteria (in this case, having reported a hate crime or incident to an organization in Edmonton over the past five years). There were three issues.

First, some individuals had made reports outside of Edmonton, made a report more than five years ago, or had not reported their experience at all. Second, others had experienced crimes while being a member of a community often targeted by hate crimes but did not believe their victimization was hate-motivated. For example, an individual whom another member of their same community had assaulted was unsure whether or not such an assault, because it involved members of the same community, would be considered hate-motivated. This observation suggests a lack of certainty about how hate crimes are defined. Third, there was significant interest from individuals who encountered self-defined hate crimes while in foster care and considered the foster care system the perpetrator of the crime. While we had not considered a system in the context of our research, there is an opportunity here to reconceptualize who or what may be considered capable of committing a hate crime or incident. This observation has the potential to generate new scholarly discussion about hate crimes perpetrated in other systems or institutions.

If a study is proposed on a sensitive topic, it is advisable to work alongside community partners to discern whether a definition is appropriate to provide to participants and agree upon a working definition of the phenomenon being researched. If research partners decide to provide participants with a definition, recruitment and data collection tools should then clearly

communicate that definition while also clarifying inclusion and exclusion criteria. For example, in their CBPR study to understand experiences of hate crime victimization and underreporting among the transgender community in Los Angeles, Gauthier et al. (2021) provided research participants with a definition of a hate crime before participants completed a survey.

Planning for Extensive Communication Prior to Data Collection

Because our study occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic when in-person contact was limited, we exclusively communicated with potential research participants in advance of data collection via email or phone. Much like Burch's (2022) study, it was a priority that potential participants were well-informed about the study in advance of their participation and had opportunities to ask questions. Many potential participants emailed a great deal of information before their interviews, including excerpts from memoirs or screenshots of communications related to their experiences. Further, some communication with potential participants involved research partners who assisted in coordinating the interview, providing a venue for the interview, and acting as interpreters. Lessons learned from these experiences include that it is crucial to anticipate lengthy communication in advance of data collection, approach these communications in a trauma-informed way, include permission in ethics to use these materials (e.g., screenshots) as data, and ensure informed consent both before and throughout participation in the research.

Recognizing Potential Unanticipated Actions and Responses of Participants

CBPR research participants are co-creators of knowledge (Janzen & Ochocka, 2020). In this way, how participants choose to act or respond throughout the research process is meaningful to consider. For example, participants had several unanticipated responses to the research process in our study. One participant asked a researcher to attend court with them and validate the participants' experience. Another participant shared their experience being interviewed for this study through a video they posted on social media to an audience of over one thousand followers. Others expressed that participating in the interview motivated them to move forward on a complaint process related to their experience or start a book about their lives. In situations where we were unsure how to navigate these situations, we sought advice from fellow research partners and debriefed the situation while identifying potential next steps. These internal discussions helped us to identify that a priority in addressing these situations was open communication and transparency with research participants about the research and the confines of our roles as researchers. While none of these actions have directly impacted the research study, they certainly have the potential to, and additionally they illustrate ways knowledge co-creators can engage with the research process.

Conclusion

Hate crimes and incidents can cause significant harm to individuals and communities (Bell & Perry, 2015; Iganski & Lagou, 2015; Mercier-Dalphonf & Helly, 2021; Perry & Alvi, 2011). Further, the reporting of hate crimes in Canada has been increasing (Moreau, 2022).

Academic, community, and institutional actors have called for community engagement as one vehicle for addressing hate crimes in preventative and responsive ways. However, there is limited CBPR on hate crimes and incidents, and even less available literature on how to approach CBPR on these topics. As literature in this area develops, more researchers may recognize the importance of applying CBPR to hate crimes and incidents and pursue this type of research, while considering the above-mentioned issues and practices. Considering the complex community impacts of hate crimes and incidents, as well as the ability of CBPR to address social inequities, CBPR is a research approach well-suited to exploring and addressing hate crimes and incidents.

About the Authors

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