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Understanding Youth Perceptions of Police Legitimacy

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Abstract

Police-community interactions became a highly publicized topic in the United States following several recent police-involved shootings. Previous research shows several factors predict attitudes and behaviors toward police, including neighborhood context, race, offender status, and experiencing procedural justice. Contact with actors in the criminal justice system can begin at a young age. Based on these issues, the current study focused on two primary research questions:

What are youth's perceptions of police legitimacy? What experiences have shaped those understandings? Using semi-structured interviews with a sample of 28 youth ages 13-17 from diverse backgrounds and neighborhoods, the current study sought to identify the ways young people conceptualize police legitimacy and rationalize the attitudes they hold. The study explored how direct and indirect experiences as well as acculturation shape youths' understandings of the police and policing.

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE LEGITIMACY

BY

SARA MARGRET HOCKIN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
of
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ACCEPTANCE

This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Thesis Committee. It has been approved and accepted by all members of that committee, and it has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Science in Criminal Justice in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies of Georgia State University.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	8
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology.....	26
Chapter 4: Results.....	29
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	68
References.....	78
Appendix.....	78
Bibliography.....	80
Vita.....	88

Chapter 1: Introduction

There has been a recent increase in public awareness about policing due to highly publicized incidents of police brutality and misconduct. People in the United States are asking more questions about the relationship between police and community members and about the impact that these stories can have on the way people in general view the police. Given the increased exposure to instances of police misbehavior through mainstream news media and online social media applications, many people who do not typically interact with police are exposed to more information about the experiences of those who live in areas with a greater police presence. Opinions are formed based on what information is available from others, as opposed to first-hand experiences, though stories of unfair police practices are not a new phenomenon to people living in those communities.

Following the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, new research questions were asked about differential public attitudes toward and experience with the police, and about why those attitudes and experiences happen (see, for example, Walker, Richardson, Denyer, & Williams, 1972). Those questions continue to be asked today by researchers in the United States and other countries around the world. Despite the seeming importance of tracking and reporting incidents of police misconduct, there are no national databases or official organizations charged with that task. Several organizations and individuals collect data about people who die during encounters with police from an assortment of available sources, such as police reports and local news reports. *The Washington Post* (Kelly, Lowery, Rich, Tate, & Jenkins, 2016) reports that 957 people were killed in police shootings in the United States in 2016. *The Guardian* (Swaine, & McCarthy, 2017) reports the number as 1,091 when including other deaths in police custody, including death following the use of a Taser or vehicle crash.

Relationships between the police and the community are dynamic and often fragile. More methodical quantitative data collection about police misconduct and police-involved deaths may reveal the extent to which the United States is experiencing problematic systemic issues around police violence, but qualitative research may be more useful in understanding and explaining the role of thoughts, emotions, and other internal psychological processes in shaping how police violence and misconduct impact perceptions of police legitimacy in the community.

Police are government actors given the responsibility of ensuring the safety of the community, but “protecting and serving” looks different in each community, and some residents may not feel the police are fulfilling that obligation. Even officers acting within their discretionary power can be perceived as using unnecessary force, which severely undermines police legitimacy (Brunson & Miller, 2006). When laws are applied discriminately and arbitrary rules are enforced, exactly whom the police are protecting and serving becomes unclear. This paper will turn directly to community members to seek answers regarding their views toward the officers who police their neighborhoods and toward police as a legitimate authority.

Shedd (2012) points out that many youth are exposed to the criminal justice system without ever having been arrested or facing a judge, so opinions about the criminal justice system begin forming at a young age. Youth in many urban areas experience a continually high level of scrutiny and surveillance, including metal detectors in schools and cameras in public housing projects. Young people also establish their worldviews based on experiences of those around them, such as parents, teachers, peers, and people in the media (Fagan and Piquero, 2007). Thus, it is important to understand youth’s perspectives, the mechanisms that lead to those perspectives, and the impact that those perspectives can have on future behaviors and ideas. Though much research is done *about* or *on* youth, little is done *with* them, so their voices

are often silenced in conversations with practitioners, scholars, and experts. Open-ended interview questions can provide an opportunity for young people to share their stories in a meaningful way. The themes that emerge may provide new insight that is beneficial to improving relations between the police and younger members of the community.

Police Legitimacy

When an authority or institution is viewed as legitimate, coercion is not needed for compliance because people feel an ethical responsibility to show deference. Because of this, Hawdon, Ryan, and Griffin (2003) suggest that when people believe the police are legitimately exercising their authority, they will be more likely to cooperate with police, such as providing information about a suspect, and obeying the law in general, even when police are not present. Police can also be more flexible in resource distribution when there is buy-in from community members about how the agency uses its power.

Research has demonstrated that legitimacy is established through the use of fair procedures. Tyler and Wakslak (2004) outline three components to fair police procedures: quality of decision-making, quality of treatment, and trustworthiness. Tyler and Huo (2002) describe the process-based model as one that focuses on the psychological underpinnings of perceptions of fairness. This model suggests that compliance is “powerfully influenced by people’s subjective judgments about the fairness of the procedures through which the police and the courts exercise their authority” (Tyler, 2003, p. 284). Similarly, fairness heuristic theory proposes that people use cognitive shortcuts to evaluate whether cooperation is deserved in a given situation (Lind, 2001). Past experiences and available knowledge are used to assess future situations and make split-second decisions about how to behave.

Scholars have theorized and tested several factors that may influence perceptions and behaviors. At the neighborhood level, social disorganization lessens informal social control exerted by community members, which in turn prompts an increase in formal police control and consequently an increase in non-voluntary contacts (Wu, Sun, & Triplett, 2009). In disorganized neighborhoods, police tend to project the signals from “bad” neighborhoods onto people in the neighborhoods (Terrill & Reisig, 2003). Police concentrate resources and patrol in places where crime rates are higher. These hot spots are often located in minority neighborhoods, so some residents may interpret the more frequent contact between police and community members as being racially motivated. The perception that the contact is racially motivated—even when there is little evidence to suggest it actually is—can create further barriers to establishing police legitimacy. Attributes of the individual officers can also contribute to various perceptions about the police in general (Brandl, Strohshine, & Frank, 2001). Studies frequently explore outcomes by race, pointing to the overall importance of race in the discussion of police legitimacy. For example, a 2006 study by Brunson and Miller explained that young black men who reported harassment or misconduct by the police often felt that their mistreatment was tied to their race. Studies focusing on youth experiences with and perceptions of police are less common than studies focusing on adults, but similar themes have emerged (Carr, Napolitano, & Keating, 2007; Weitzer & Brunson, 2009). These studies tend to focus on males, minorities, and those in low-income neighborhoods because they are most likely to have contact with the police. The current study also seeks to understand the experiences of females, white youth, and those who live in affluent neighborhoods and how those experiences shape their respective beliefs about police legitimacy.

The Current Study

This study utilized a nonrandom sample of 28 adolescents who live in the Atlanta metropolitan area. The study focused on the various channels through which people might form attitudes toward the police, including direct interactions with officers, media coverage of police, and adopting attitudes from peers and family members. The purpose of the study was to understand how youth form their attitudes toward the police by examining narratives around lived experiences using open-ended qualitative interviews. The study expanded on Tyler and Huo's (2002) process-based model to understand how these youth form perceptions of police legitimacy. This study sought to answer two primary research questions and three secondary questions:

1. What are youths' perceptions of the legitimacy of the institution of policing?
2. In what ways do youth explain their perspectives on police legitimacy?
 - a. What role does fairness have in shaping perceptions of legitimacy?
 - b. How are specific events and experiences connected to overall perceptions of legitimacy?
 - c. How do learned cultural attitudes or assumptions shape the way youth view those specific incidents?

By focusing on these questions, this study examined the experiences that are most salient to youth and what changes they believe can be made to increase buy-in to police authority and ultimately impact cooperation with the police in the future.

Specifically, emphasis was placed on interpretation of police officer behavior when directly interacting with youth, and how those interpretations influence beliefs about police legitimacy. Because young people are in a position of less power than adults, especially those

who police them, and because those living in neighborhoods with high police presence are often minorities, youth may describe their experiences in terms of what Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez & Wills (1977) call microaggressions, or “subtle... often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’” by people who perform them. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2001) suggest that experiences with microaggressions and their effects tend to be cumulative; that is, behavior that alone may be perceived as innocuous or accidental is experienced regularly enough that it begins to feel intentional and harmful.

In addition to direct interactions, this study explored how vicarious experiences and attitudes are learned through peers, family, and media. Learning about others’ encounters with police shapes attitudes and behaviors (Rosenbaum, Schuck, Costello, Hawkins, & Ring, 2005) and can influence attitudes in the same ways as personal experiences. Though there is mixed evidence regarding the influence of media coverage of police misconduct, this study is being conducted during a time when mainstream media outlets and social media users are giving unprecedented attention to these issues. Along with specific incidents of misconduct, this study explored the cultural understandings of and assumptions about the police that are learned from families, peers, and the media and that influence perceptions of police legitimacy.

Youth with a wide range of demographic characteristics were interviewed with the intention of capturing both universal themes and unique narratives. Previous research indicates that age, offender status, and neighborhood context are important variables to explore. However, much research focuses specifically on the experiences of minorities and typically sought to explain negative attitudes toward police. This study aimed to target both white and minority youth from disadvantaged and affluent backgrounds as a way to understand the perceptions of

not only those who experience discrimination or excessive force, but also those who may benefit from current police practices.

Chapter two will provide a comprehensive review of the literature on factors that have been found to be related to perceptions of police legitimacy and the theoretical foundations underlying these relationships. Chapter three will then describe the qualitative research design including sampling methods and the collecting of interview data; analysis procedures will also be outlined. Chapter four will examine the most salient themes presented by the participants in this study. Finally, Chapter five will conclude by discussing potential theoretical, empirical, and policy implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Scholars have argued that with improved perceptions of police legitimacy comes added citizen cooperation and greater obedience to the law. Legitimacy can promote deference both in individual encounters, such as during a traffic stop, and overall through general compliance with the law (Tyler & Fagan, 2012). Even in situations where police are not present, individuals who perceive the police as a legitimate authority are more likely to obey the law, meaning legitimacy could directly impact crime rates on top of its indirect impact through cooperation and obedience (Tyler, 1990).

Several studies have suggested that community policing tactics best serve to increase perceptions of legitimacy among community members. Community policing is especially useful in becoming familiar with the informal networks within a community, knowledge of which could aid police in understanding their community and reaching out to them (Hawdon, Ryan, & Griffin, 2003). Cordner (1995) suggested that community policing is advantageous in creating a sense of legitimacy through non-crime-control activities such as “order maintenance, social service, and general assistance duties” (p. 2). However, many evaluations tend to fall short of selecting the particular behaviors or techniques under the umbrella of “community policing” that may foster perceptions of legitimacy in community members.

Hawdon, Ryan, and Griffin (2003) found that knowledge of community policing tactics and informal contact with the police were not predictors of trusting the police, suggesting that police presence may not be enough to establish trust in the community. Despite the evidence suggesting the importance of non-traditional or community policing tactics for establishing cooperation, officers tend to rely on traditional tactics (Mastrofski, Snipes, and Supina, 1996).

Citizen cooperation is necessary for co-production of safety. Police rely on citizens not only to report crimes but also to provide informal social control and to act as a source of information. Voluntary compliance is useful because it is more cost effective and communities can work with authorities to police themselves through informal social control (Tyler, 1990). Renauer (2007) found that both informal social control exerted by neighborhood residents and formal social control exerted by police impacted residents' fear of crime. The study also found that formal social control was tied to a fear of police encounters.

When the public is more supportive of police, "the police have more flexibility to concentrate their resources on hot spots or on repeat offenders" (Tyler & Fagan, 2012, p. 31). Additionally, perceptions of legitimacy can lead to public support for policies that empower the police (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). This suggests that there may be ways to foster beliefs of police legitimacy amongst residents in ways that do not restrict a department's ability to carry out its essential functions.

Legitimacy and Procedural Justice

Sunshine and Tyler (2003, p. 514) define legitimacy as "a property of an authority or institution that leads people to feel that that authority or institution is entitled to be deferred to and obeyed." Legitimacy leads to deference without coercion because it is seen as deserved and people feel an ethical responsibility to comply with the authority figure. In the case of law enforcement, legitimacy means that the community members believe the police are properly exercising their power.

Tyler and Fagan (2012) reported that procedural justice, or fairness of police procedures, was a key antecedent to perceptions of legitimacy among a large sample of New York residents. In particular, residents often viewed the city's stop-and-frisk policies as heavy-handed and

insensitive. Regardless of their impact on the crime rate, frequent stops, frisks, and arrests for minor offenses undermine the trust the public has for the police.

Tyler and Wakslak (2004) suggest that there are three components to fair police procedures:

- (1) [Q]uality of decision making—perceived neutrality and consistency;
- (2) quality of treatment—being treated with dignity and respect, having one’s rights acknowledged;
- (3) trustworthiness—believing that the authorities are acting out of benevolence and a sincere desire to be fair (P. 25).

Similarly, Tyler and Fagan (2012) laid out four issues that shape procedural justice. The first is that people want to present their side of story; second, people look for evidence of bias in behavior; third, people want to be treated with dignity, politeness, and respect; and fourth, people assess the trustworthiness of the officers with whom they interact. While people generally consider these issues when assessing the fairness of police behavior, the assessments being made are unique to the individual’s circumstances. What is fair to one person may be offensive to another person or in another situation.

Tyler and Fagan (2012) noted that there is a difference between outcomes being seen as *fair* and outcomes being seen as *favorable*. It is entirely possible for someone to have an interaction with law enforcement that produces an unfavorable result, such as receiving a ticket for littering or a parking violation, but that the offender believes the officer was fair in making that decision. This is the central idea around which the concept of procedural justice is shaped. Fair procedures lead to outcomes that are perceived as deserved. In order to be viewed as legitimate by the people they serve, it is imperative for the police to demonstrate fairness when

interacting with community members, both while stopping or arresting an individual and during calls for service.

The Process-Based Model

The process-based model (Tyler and Huo, 2002) is a psychological model of legitimacy and procedural justice that suggests both compliance in specific law-enforcement encounters and general compliance with the law are “powerfully influenced by people’s subjective judgments about the fairness of the procedures through which the police and the courts exercise their authority” (Tyler, 2003: p. 284). Placing an emphasis on subjective judgments of fairness, as opposed to another standard of decision-making such as legality of the officer’s behavior, takes into account that humans are not always rational, logical thinkers.

A psychological model focuses on the role of emotions and thoughts and does not assume that all individuals would make the same choices given the same circumstances. This approach is useful to understand how people explain or rationalize their own behavior. As opposed to focusing on how threats and coercion can force compliance, this model highlights the role of attaining buy in from the community and the factors contributing to perceptions of fairness that lead to buy-in. This study will look at both those who do buy in to the idea that the police are a legitimate authority to be deferred to, and those who do not. For some, especially those who are not often the subject of police surveillance, buy-in may be assumed from a young age, whereas others see buy-in and trust as something that needs to be earned.

Tyler’s shift toward perceived fairness echoes Runciman’s (1966) concept of relative deprivation. In general, relative deprivation refers to when a person or group of people feels denied access to something desirable to which a more favorable group or person is privileged. Specifically in the context of the criminal justice system, relative deprivation can manifest itself

in certain groups feeling that they are denied access to fair treatment by authorities. Like the process-based model, relative deprivation highlights the importance of subjective judgments based on an individual's worldview. While the concept of relative deprivation focuses on those who are in a relatively lower social position comparing their experiences to those in a relatively higher social position, this study will also examine this gap from the perspective of those in the more privileged position.

Defiance theory (Sherman, 1993) is also useful in seeking to understand the psychological basis of compliance. This theory posits that a punishment can increase, decrease, or have no effect on crime. However, when a punishment that is meant to shame a person into compliance is perceived as unfair, it can lead to feelings of anger and pride as protection from feelings of shame. In the context of interactions with police officers, previous punishments that are perceived as excessive or unfair may contribute to defiance toward the police, especially when a person is not strongly bonded to society. People without strong bonds to society “[substitute] pride in their bold disrespect for the would-be shaming agent” (Sherman, 1993, p. 459). This defiance may manifest itself in non-compliance with police directives when stopped by an officer, or a general attitude of defiance and lack of trust toward the police as an institution.

Interactions with the police are interpreted through a preexisting perspective about the legitimacy of the police (Tyler, 2003). A person with a positive perception of police authority will view the same interaction with police in a much different light than would a person with a negative perception. As Shedd (2012) suggested, people actively evaluate a situation and make a decision about whether it is proper to comply, with one focus being on *how* legal directives are given. This can lead to a cycle or spiral where pre-existing negative views lead to interpreting the

situation as unfair, which in turn creates *more* negative views over time. Conversely, approaching a situation with the expectation of fair treatment may lead a person to give an officer the benefit of the doubt about his directives. One can imagine that a lifetime of direct and indirect negative experiences would contribute to perceived relative deprivation of fair treatment by police. Tyler (2003) also notes how, over time, it may become harder for police to gain back trust. While fair treatment creates compliance by “affirming the legitimacy of law enforcement” (Sherman, 1993: p. 446), when people do not believe there is much legitimacy to affirm, even respectful actions are met with resistance. In a shorter timeframe of a single interaction between an officer and a community member, this same pattern may occur when each person is reacting to the perceived negativity of the other.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are “subtle... often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’” by people who perform them (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez & Wills, 1977). Often research on microaggressions is done in the context of race or sex (see, for example, Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, 2010), but the framework has been applied to a variety of marginalized groups, such as people with mental illness (Owen, Tao, & Rodolfa, 2010) and transgender people (Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012). People who experience microaggressions rarely try to redress their experiences because they are often in a position of lesser power and status than the aggressor (DeJesus-Torres, 2010), but people who perform them are rarely aware of how their words or actions are perceived (Sue, et al, 2007).

As previously mentioned, an important aspect of procedural justice is feeling as if one’s “side of the story” is being heard because, logically, in order to make a fair decision, all perspectives of the issue should be examined (Tyler and Fagan, 2012). Because youth are

typically in a position of lesser power than adults in general, and especially police, their experiences and thoughts are not valued or weighted as heavily in the decision-making process. If at all given the chance to share their side of the story, it would be reasonable for a young person to assume their words are not going to be given serious consideration by the decision maker—the police and courts. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2001) suggest that experiences with microaggressions and their effects tend to be cumulative, that is, behavior that alone may be perceived as innocuous or accidental is seen as a pattern of behavior linked to a marginalized identity. Similarly, because microaggressions are so subtle, trying to explain the impact to a police officer may be taken as an act of contempt that would justify more coercive or aggressive action from the officer.

Especially in areas of concentrated disadvantage, people may interpret microaggressions as a sign of disrespect. Anderson's (1999) *Code of the Street* described the almost unnoticeable behaviors that “might seem petty to middle-class people,” but can easily be interpreted as a sign of disrespect that acts as a forewarning to physical confrontation. Those that live in disadvantaged conditions have a loose, shared understanding of what constitutes disrespect in their communities that outsiders (including the police) lack. Anderson suggested that part of the code of the street is that when you are disrespected, retaliation is considered as potential response. During encounters with the police, disrespect from an officer, even unintentional, could be met with retaliation in the form of defiant behavior (Sherman, 1993).

Microaggressions by police are often experienced when officers use their discretionary powers as an explanation for their actions, for example, during a stop and frisk (DeJesus-Torres, 2010). Sue and colleagues (2007) identified nine categories of microaggressions experienced in everyday life: alien in one's own land, ascription of intelligence, color blindness,

criminality/assumption of criminal status, denial of individual racism, myth of meritocracy, pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, second-class status, and environmental invalidation. These behaviors are not often explicitly discriminatory, though they can be, such as using racial slurs. This study will take into account the microaggressions performed toward the participants that may have influenced their perceptions of legitimacy.

Fairness Heuristics

Fairness heuristic theory discusses the psychological underpinnings of why people give others authority, why that authority is seen as legitimate, and why people obey rules even in the absence of authority figures (Lind & Tyler, 1992; van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997). The theory was originally proposed in the context of organizational justice and the way organizations play a role in shaping individuals' behaviors (van den Bos, 2001). This theory asserts that people use the information available to assess how to react, but that when critical information is missing, heuristics are used to make judgments upon which behaviors are based. Psychologists Tversky and Kahneman (1974) defined a heuristic as a cognitive process used to make decisions in uncertain circumstances. However, they state, “[t]hese heuristics are highly economical and usually effective, but they lead to systematic and predictable errors” (p. 1131), or cognitive bias. Information can be obtained by social comparison to others (van den Bos, 2001), and this information—even when inaccurate or incomplete—is used as a basis for action.

This theory has two main assumptions: first, apparent fairness is a sign that a person can be trusted and shown cooperation; second, people use heuristics to make decisions about whether situations are fair and if cooperation is deserved (Lind, 2001). In the case of police legitimacy, fairness heuristics are used as a basis for developing perceptions and opinions about the legitimacy of the authority assumed by the police.

Lind (2001) suggested that a typical dilemma people face is deciding whether to cooperate in a social interaction: “If one chooses to behave cooperatively, one would like some guarantee—or at least some expectation—that others will not exploit their cooperative behavior” (p. 62). Beliefs about future fairness directly impact decisions about cooperation and compliance. When interacting with a police officer, an individual will cooperate if they expect that their cooperation will be followed by fair treatment. If the expectation is unfair treatment, cooperation is not seen as deserved, because the outcomes will be negative regardless of compliance.

Especially in high-stress situations like interactions with the police, heuristic judgments may be relied on more heavily for decision-making; however, decisions based on heuristics can lead to cognitive bias (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Instead of rationally assessing the individual factors present in a situation, a person may make false generalizations based on knowledge, assumptions, and past experiences. A person handled roughly by an officer is not going to consider whether the officer’s actions are due to being tired or having a bad day when that behavior from officers is assumed to be common. Van den Bos and Lind (2002) noted that people strongly believe that their perceptions are true and unbiased representations of reality. Over time, interactions that are consistently perceived as unfair shape heuristic processes that lead people to expect future interactions to be unfair. These expectations prevent the buy-in and trust required for cooperation, particularly in non-voluntary interactions with police.

Social Learning Theory

When examining attitudes and opinions in general, it is important to note that they are shaped not only by direct experiences but also learned from others. Social learning theory (Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1977; Bandura, 1977) focuses on cognitive processes and posits that people learn attitudes and behaviors from those around them through

conditioning, observation, and imitation. Vicarious reinforcement of attitudes and behaviors can occur by observing the consequences of others' behavior. This study will take into account how youth learn from both personal experiences and the experiences and attitudes of others. In learning about others' experiences, individuals are also able to compare their own experiences and expectations, which could shape perceptions of fairness.

Because young people spend most of their time at home and school, peers, friends, and family play a key role in youths' social learning processes. At a young age, most children learn about the police in the same way they learn about other groups of people. Connotations about these groups are also learned; for example, doctors are *good* because they cure sickness. Parents may teach varying connotations about police based on their own experiences and attitudes.

Peers, as opposed to parents, become especially influential for teenage youth. Brick, Taylor, and Esbensen (2009) surveyed a sample of juveniles and found that those with more delinquent peer associations and weaker ties to the community had more negative attitudes toward the police. Additionally, young people, some of whom have had little direct contact with police, may hear stories or opinions from their siblings and relatives which they then use to form their own attitudes.

Studies about the role of media in shaping attitudes toward police have shown mixed results. A study by Chermak, McGarrell, and Gruenwald (2006) suggests that consuming news coverage of a police misconduct trial does not influence general attitudes toward police. However, Callanan and Rosenberger (2011) found a significant positive relationship between attitudes toward police and watching both news media and crime-based reality programs. These findings only hold for people who were not victims of crime or who did not have an arrest

experience, “suggesting that first-hand experiences with crime were more important than the media in shaping individual's opinions of the police” (p. 167).

Factors Impacting Attitudes Toward Police

Research has indicated that there are several factors that consistently show a relationship with attitudes toward the police. In considering how these factors may influence perception, it is noted that differences in perceptions may come from individuals' surroundings, psychological development, neighborhood ecology, pre-existing beliefs, etc., which give people a unique worldview and perspective from which they understand experiences. It is also the case that differences in perception stem from fundamentally different experiences. That is, the young people in this study may recall similar events that affect them in contrasting ways, or they may have actually experienced contrasting treatment, which then leads to different opinions. With this caveat, research on several factors found to be related to attitudes toward police are reviewed below.

Officer Attributes

Most studies that examined citizen-police interactions and experiences have focused on the attributes, background, or actions of the citizen that could lead to negative or positive perceptions of police. One study by Brandl, Stroshine, and Frank (2001) looked instead at officer attributes that are associated with citizen complaints about excessive force. Compared to officers with low rates of citizen complaints, officers with the highest rate of citizen complaints tended “to be younger, less experienced, ... assigned to the highest crime areas.... [and] made twice as many index arrests and nearly three times as many total arrests” (p. 525). The authors interpreted this finding by stating that not only are young, male officers more likely to make arrests, but they may be quicker to use physical force during arrest, which may be due to the police subculture

where “kick[ing]-ass” is valued amongst males, whereas female officers may better avoid or de-escalate potentially violent situations.

Minority Status

Tyler and Wakslak (2004) proposed that there are important research implications in the difference between actual racial profiling behaviors by police and citizens perceptions of racial profiling by police. Especially because neighborhood residents are not familiar with everything the police do, they make judgments about racial profiling based on their own knowledge and experiences. While a department may not show racially-biased practices overall, individuals’ own and vicarious experiences may still cause them to feel that race is a factor. They suggested, “[T]hose stopped by the police must infer why they were stopped, often based on unclear, ambiguous cues.” (p. 254). In a series of four studies, they examined the relationships between personal experiences with being profiled, general perceptions of profiling, and support for police. The results indicated that community members’ beliefs about prevalence of profiling behavior, both based on lived experiences and general evaluations, are negatively correlated with support for the police.

Weitzer and Tuch (2002) looked at perceptions of racial profiling by police and found that race and personal experiences both influenced public perceptions of profiling. Their findings show, however, that within the black population, class is also a significant predictor of perceptions of profiling. In an earlier study, Weitzer (1999) suggested that disadvantaged black people hold less favorable views of police than middle-class black people because they have come to develop a belief through personal experience and observations that police routinely engage in physical and verbal harassment of people in their communities.

In a qualitative study of young black men's experiences with police, Brunson and Miller (2006) described how pervasive proactive policing in a neighborhood can lead to distrust and negative attitudes toward police. Many respondents reported routine police sweeps of their neighborhood where officers would stop them or their friends for "hanging out" on the street or while walking to school. They felt that the police were suspicious and disrespectful toward everyone, even those without a criminal history, and some described experiencing harassment and more serious misconduct. The authors found that many of the respondents felt that their mistreatment was tied directly to their race and their "distressed neighborhood."

In addition to race, nationality may also play a role. A survey of immigrants and non-immigrants examined factors that may determine attitudes toward police and found differences between the groups on several of the variables measured (Correia, 2010). Among immigrants, influential factors included "previous experiences in their home country, the acculturation process, religiosity, and the ability to engage in civic activities" (p. 106). Correia suggested that many immigrants come from countries where police are corrupt or lack respect, so their views about police in the United States are relatively more positive, a perspective referred to as a "bifocal lens." However, attitudes are worse among immigrants who have lived in the neighborhood longer, suggesting they may be exposed to realities of American policing they were not expecting, such as a lack of desirable services.

Finally, the findings of a study by Menjívar and Bejarano (2004) consisting of in-depth interviews with Latina and Latino immigrants echoed the ideas suggested by Correia. Though having varied experiences with the criminal justice system in their home countries, participants used comparisons with their past experiences as a way to judge their current experiences. The authors also found that contact with immigration authorities was commonly cited as a factor used

to explain attitudes toward police. Fear of deportation was linked to fear and mistrust of the police and the greater criminal justice system.

Offender Status

Lee, Steinberg, and Piquero (2010) used survey data from African American juvenile offenders to examine how ethnic identity is related to perceptions of police among these youth. They found that youth who scored higher on the measures of ethnic identity were more likely to have unfavorable opinion about police. The authors did not expect nor find a relationship between sense of ethnic identity and direct experiences with procedural justice, although, like other studies, they found a correlation between experiences with procedural justice and perceptions of legitimacy. They found that sense of ethnic identity was a stronger predictor of perceptions of police legitimacy than experiences with procedural justice. The sample in this study was limited to juvenile offenders because they are targets of many criminal justice policy decisions, but it provides insight into the importance of an individual's ethnic identity in predicting perceptions of police that may be applicable to non-offenders.

Another survey of opinions of active offenders about police legitimacy was done as part of the Chicago Gun Project (Papachristos, Mears, & Fagan, 2012). As expected, the offenders displayed an overall negative opinion of the law and legal authority. The findings indicate, in particular, that offenders believed they were more likely to comply with the law when they saw the police as legitimate actors. The authors also discussed the role that social networks saturated with "criminal associates" can play in forming a person's perspective of the law and the legal system. The stories of those in an individual's close social network serve as vicarious experiences of procedural justice upon which conclusions are drawn about the general fairness of the law and police.

Youth Perspectives

Using a survey with a sample of eighth graders in 11 US cities, Taylor, Turner, Esbensen, and Winfree (2001) examined attitudes toward the police amongst juveniles. They concluded that attitudes amongst youth in their study were much more indifferent than previous studies on adults, which showed more favorable attitudes. Similarly, Hurst and Frank (2000) surveyed 852 high school students and found that less than 40% of the youth surveyed reported favorable attitudes on any of the measures, and youth frequently responded with the “neutral” response option for most questions. Both studies found that attitudes varied by race, with students of color responding significantly less favorably than white students overall.

Carr, Napolitano, and Keating (2007) examined the experiences youth in Philadelphia had with police through in-depth interviews and self-reports on how their experiences were related to their attitudes about police. Amongst youth who held a negative disposition toward the police, many described actual negative interactions with officers. This result was found for both delinquent and non-delinquent youth across gender and neighborhood racial composition, although the sample was nonrandom. Another common theme was that youth described their negative disposition in terms of ineffectiveness of police. Less common but equally important themes emerged around “crooked cops” and excessive use of force. The authors concluded that there was support for a “procedural justice approach that views negative disposition toward police not as indicative of a wholesale rejection of formal control but as transitory and context-dependent” (p. 469). That is, experiences that are perceived as unfair based on the situational factors lead to generally negative views of police, but not to views that policing is altogether unnecessary. They found support for enforcement-focused solutions amongst those with negative

views, again pointing to the importance of context in shaping how police actions are interpreted in a given situation.

Weitzer and Brunson (2009) provided a different perspective about how youth manage their interactions with police from using interviews with young males in disadvantaged neighborhoods. They found that youth generally tried to avoid police contact when at all possible, a technique they referred to as systematic evasion, because they expect the contact to be negative. While this typically involves only providing the minimal response to an officer when approached, for some youth avoidance meant running away, even if they had no criminal reason to run. The youth also noted that people who were seen talking to the police are viewed as “snitches,” an identity they want to avoid. There was awareness among the youth that their actions and behaviors influenced the outcomes of the situations, they explained their actions as a result of the constant pestering by police and as being provoked by the officers’ demeanor.

Neighborhood Context

Neighborhood characteristics mediate the effects of individual characteristics on community members’ perceptions of police legitimacy (Wu, Sun, & Triplett, 2009). Wu, Sun, and Triplett argued that a relatively low class position due to concentrated disadvantage can create both more mistrust of institutions in general, including the police, and harsher reactions from police. They found that the effects of individual-level variables, such as race, age, and contact with the police, were non-significant after controlling for neighborhood-level racial composition and class. This suggests that the makeup of the neighborhood in which someone lives has more influence on his or her satisfaction with police than personal characteristics. However, the data also revealed that, while black and white respondents in disadvantaged

neighborhoods showed similar levels of satisfaction with the police, black respondents in advantaged neighborhoods showed significantly less satisfaction than their white counterparts.

In socially-disorganized neighborhoods, the weak institutional support and low political influence of the neighborhood leads to low levels of informal social control amongst residents, therefore prompting a greater imposition of formal control (Wu, Sun, & Triplett, 2009). In an observational study of police, Terrill and Reisig (2003) found that officers used higher levels of force in disadvantaged neighborhoods regardless of suspect behavior. They suggested that police might use force in these neighborhoods because force is a perceived to be a more normal method of conflict resolution in socially-disorganized neighborhoods, or because they see people in high-crime neighborhoods as deserving to be punished. If there are neighborhoods in which police use their authority more forcefully, it follows that people in those neighborhoods may feel differently about the police. Residents within socially-disorganized neighborhoods also tend to be less bonded to traditional society, so when police officers react forcefully, defiance is a likely response (Sherman, 1993).

Werthman and Piliavin (1967) theorized that “ecological contamination” occurs when a person who passes through a suspicious place becomes viewed as a suspicious person. When in a neighborhood deemed “bad,” police have a tendency to react more consistently to the signals of a bad neighborhood than to individuals’ behaviors (Terrill & Reisig, 2003). Thus, the same situation in a disadvantaged neighborhood may provoke a very different reaction than it would in a higher socioeconomic status neighborhood. When a resident and a police officer bring assumptions and expectations about the other to an encounter, both are primed to react in negative ways: the resident expects disrespectful treatment so he or she is more likely to exhibit a

defiant attitude, and the officer expects that the person they are approaching is likely to be causing trouble.

Summary

This chapter has reviewed several factors that may influence perceptions of police legitimacy as well as the underlying theoretical arguments as to why certain people hold certain views of the police. Experiences with procedural justice, or subjectively fair processes, have been shown to be more influential on attitudes than favorable outcomes. Because both positive and negative contact with actors in the criminal justice system can begin at a young age, it is important to understand how young people form opinions about the police. While many studies focus only on those who have negative attitudes toward the police, this study sought to understand how young people with both positive and negative attitudes explain their beliefs about police legitimacy. The following chapter will discuss the research design and methodology used to achieve this goal.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This study employed a qualitative design using semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Interviews can provide key insights about how youth frame the details of their experiences within each of their unique circumstances. Semi-structured interviews allow the research to be conducted around general concepts that are further understood by asking follow-up questions that are prompted by participants' answers. This method allows participants to use their own language to describe their perspective and to elaborate on topics that the existing literature does not reveal.

The interview guide (see Appendix) consisted of questions focusing on the participant's attitudes and experiences. While it is impossible to predict all of the domains that participants may focus on, past research on the subject of police legitimacy was used as a foundation for developing interview questions. The participants were asked about their personal experiences with police in their neighborhood as well as what they learned from their peers, family, and the media about policing. Participants were also asked to connect these experiences to their attitudes and opinions. As new domains emerged throughout the set of interviews, the researcher added questions on these subjects to the proceeding interviews when it was deemed relevant. The audio files were transcribed and entered into NVivo, a computer program used for coding and analysis, along with any observations written down during the interviews. After interviews were completed, a member check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was conducted with participants to establish validity of the analysis and to address any inaccuracies in understanding.

Subjects

The sample size in this study was determined by an attempt to reach saturation within the data, meaning "no additional data are being found whereby the [researcher] can develop

properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 65). 28 youth were recruited in total. The sample was a non-probabilistic purposive sample of youth who live in Atlanta-area neighborhoods. The youth were between 13 and 17 years old; two participants were 13 years old, three were 14, six were 15, ten were 16, and seven were 17. Because the purpose of this study was to understand the formation of attitudes for both white and minority youth from both disadvantaged and affluent neighborhoods, the sample was drawn from two different sources. The first source of participants was Visions Unlimited, a local community-based organization serving disadvantaged youth. Youth who attend the organization and are within the age range being studied were solicited to participate in the research. 15 youth from this program were interviewed: three black females, eleven black males, and one Latino male. The second source was a snowball sample of younger siblings and peers of university students (who are more likely to have come from more privileged backgrounds). Students were asked to pass on information about the research to their younger siblings and peers, whose parents then contacted the researcher if they wanted to volunteer to participate; 13 youth recruited through this method participated: four black females, two black males, five white females, and two white males.

The sample was drawn from adolescents who live in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Youth who are between 13 and 17 years old are not only likely to have formed some opinion about the police, but they can more clearly conceptualize how different experiences have led to their current understandings and perceptions. Though youth begin to understand how their personal experiences are related at a young age, people who are in their teenage years are still seen as children by most adults, and therefore their experiences with police authority may be unique

compared to adults' experiences because police approach them differently than they do adults. Within this age range, the study sampled across a variety of demographics in order to create contrasts and draw upon an array of experiences and explanations of perceptions of police legitimacy among youth.

Analysis

Analysis was conducted using a multiple case study design where themes were analyzed within and across participants. Coding and analysis was ongoing once the interviews begin. By doing this, data from each interview were able to be integrated into the questions of the subsequent interviews, allowing for replication that provides a more refined understanding of the mechanisms being studied (Small, 2009). Using the research questions as a guide, initial codes were anticipated to center around perceptions of police legitimacy and the factors that are used to explain attitudes, including fairness, direct and vicarious experiences, and socialization. Following Spradley's (1979) developmental research sequence, a domain analysis was conducted using the main research questions as guides to identify broad themes. The relationship between the domains were explored and more detailed themes were developed within the initial domains identified. The following chapter will both outline the major themes that emerged and explore in detail the codes within each theme.

Chapter 4: Results

Learning about the Police

Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences as a young child and the things they thought about police when they were five or six years old, an age where most children have not had any personal interactions with police. Participants recalled that early knowledge about the police often came from information their families conveyed to them, including who the police are, what they do, and how to behave around them.

Manners

Some participants, notably all of which are Black, described having a conversation with their parents or other family members about how to behave around the police:

Yeah my mom taught me to say “yes ma’am, no ma’am, yes sir, no sir.” (*Prompt: And what would happen if you didn’t?*) I get hit in my mouth. So I got the manners. It was no big deal of me learning the rights and the wrongs.

Another participant described a similar conversation with her mother, again emphasizing the importance of displaying manners:

My momma always told me that when the police talk to you, make eye contact with them, talk to them, because if you don’t talk to them, they’re gonna think something up. They’re gonna think you doing something that you ain’t got no reason doing or whatever so you got to make eye contact with them or whatever.

These types of conversations were not limited, however, to happening in early childhood. One participant who is black and lives in a middle-class suburban neighborhood explained,

I was told, let's say in a traffic stop, of course, keep my hands on the wheel, don't be aggressive with the police officer, basically listen to what they have to say and just get it over with. Don't do anything stupid.

Discussions like these about what to do or avoid doing around the police are an idea presented in Brunson and Weitzer (2011). They suggested that that kind of discussion can (unintentionally) teach children that the police are dangerous and can be harmful if one does not act within a restricted range of behavior. While this conversation is often framed as being about respect for authority, one participant recalled that she was told that if she is not respectful to police "they try to do something crazy."

Police as Crime Fighters

Some participants expressed that when they were young, they thought the police protected the community because people would call for them when there were problems. One participant explained, "I just heard people's arguments and fights, shooting, 'call the police!' So eventually I'm thinking, 'Okay the police are gonna solve all the problems that's going on.' That's how I figured out what the police was." Another participant noted that seeing the police in his neighborhood made him feel "safe" because potential criminals are deterred when they see the police, explaining, "The police are the people that have legal guns, when people see the police they know it's time to straighten up or you'll go to a place you don't want to be."

First Encounters

Early Adolescence and Changing Views

Many participants that held positive views of the police as small children went on to express that their views began to change as they grew older. One reason views changed over

time is that they were more directly exposed to the crime in their neighborhoods and the police reaction to it. One participant explained,

But until I got older, I grew into seeing what the police really does on an everyday basis, what happened on the news, what happened in the streets... [but] I was taught that the police were supposed to help situations.

Others suggested that their attitudes changed due to their own personal experiences with the police. These attitude changes tended to happen around the time that many young people in distressed neighborhoods begin to interact more frequently with the criminal justice system. One participant explained how he felt when he saw police patrolling and arresting in his neighborhood:

It made me feel good until I see it start happening to me. *(Prompt: So you felt like you were protected when you were little?)* Yeah. But when you get of age and they get to wanting to ask you questions and harass you and all that and I ain't like that. *(Prompt: Do you feel like there was a certain specific experience that changed you mind?)* The first time the police stopped me, I was just walking and they say I matched the description of someone, but I know I didn't, but they just wanted to search me, get my name, make sure I didn't have any warrants. But it was just for no reason. They just wanted to mess with me because they think I'm just a statistic.

As subjects began to experience the variety and nuance of police encounters, they started to see the role of the police through a more complex lens. For example, after a participant stated that his parents taught him that the police were there to help, I asked, "Did you believe [what your parents said] when you were little, that the police were really on your side?" To which he responded, "I did when I was little until I grew up and saw not all [police are on my side]."

Direct Experiences That Changed Beliefs

Police Misconduct

Some participants described particular experiences they had in their early adolescence that stood out as ones that did not align with what they were taught about police, and these experiences began to shape their perceptions. Paralleling previous research (for example, Brunson, 2007; Gau & Brunson, 2010), participants in this study who lived in disadvantaged, high-crime neighborhoods reported negative treatment by the police that included physical harm. Participants recalled experiences of being pushed around by police, handcuffed too tight, and otherwise treated aggressively. One participant elaborated:

For instance... I was on my knees and everything, put my hands behind my back, cops still punched me, I fell to the ground. They keep punching me, punching me. They had me in handcuffs. I said, "I'm not resisting, I'm not resisting.... It might look like I'm resisting because you're punching me and kicking me in my stomach." I'm moving 'cause it hurt.

Additionally, some participants reported police behavior that included manipulating information represented on reports in order to charge them with crimes they were not involved in. For example, one participant explained a situation that unfolded after police stopped a car he was in and found marijuana and a gun:

So what they did, they asked us, they asked the three of us, they asked each person whose weed and whose gun it is, but we said nobody... So in the report, they made it look like I handed them the weed, when in reality I hadn't touched it.

Doing Extra

While some participants did describe experiencing physical injury at the hands of police or observing police misconduct, the overwhelming majority of negative encounters experienced by participants were much less severe. These actions are not necessarily illegal, and some of them are an essential part of policing. However, participants described these experiences as the police “doing extra.” In essence, doing extra is when participants perceive that the officer they are interacting with is using more physical aggression or psychological intimidation than necessary to achieve cooperation, or when an officer makes a stop that is perceived to be unnecessary altogether. One participant who elaborated on this idea stated,

I guess you could say, the ones that are more aggressive, just extra. It might be something not even that serious but they make it a big deal, make it just, blow it out of proportions, when it's not that big of a deal.

“I Fit the Description”

Many participants described situations where they were approached by a police officer in public who stated they “fit the description” of a suspect the police are searching for. For example, one participant recalled, “So one day he pulled up, it was confusing, like, ‘oh you fit the description of this person.’ Then they bring the witnesses and all them out, ‘Oh that wasn’t him.’” Limited physical descriptors that are supposed to fit a suspect of a crime are sometimes the only information that police have to connect an individual to a crime; however, these descriptors are typically vague and could describe a large number of people on any given day. Participants expressed frustration at this being the only reason given for a stop, though they recognized that a physical description is a useful tool:

We got similar people maybe look like you, some people look like me. Because of how we look, you shouldn't just pick a random person up and say oh you fit the description. If a person just committed a crime I don't think he would be walking down the street.

Questioning Why They Are There

Participants described instances where police stopped them and they felt that they were not displaying any kind of illegal or suspicious behavior. Being "messed with" or "harassed" in this manner typically involved questioning why they were walking or standing in a space that the participant perceived to be a public space where walking or standing was allowed. For example, one participant recalled,

I'm walking in the middle of the street, so I see them coming so I get out the way so they can go on past because I think they're just riding by, but they stopped. They do the same thing, "Where are you going? What are you doing?" "Oh I'm going to my friend's house." "What'd you just put in your pocket?" "What *did* I just put in my pocket? If you seen something you would've seen it." They get out, "Oh you're getting smart, you getting smart." "What are y'all talking to me for?" "Oh, you were jaywalking." They were trying to say I was jaywalking 'cause I was in the middle of a rocky road. Well this is not the street, clearly and I got out y'all way as soon as I seen y'all coming.

Though clearly exaggerating to emphasize her point, another participant described a hypothetical scenario to explain how trivial the reason for a stop can be in some instances,

Just say I'm walking down the street right now and the police just pull me over, or stop me while I'm walking home, or whatever. "Ma'am, I've got to lock you up 'cause you're walking home. You're walking too fast." I'm walking! I'm walking home. You didn't

stop nobody else walking past me, I'm walking home minding my business and you want to mess with me today.

Catching Blessings

Participants' experiences also include instances where they were stopped and let off with only a warning when they were engaging in illegal behavior. One participant recalls,

My daddy's friend, he a police officer. He works for Georgia State Patrol, he pulled us over one time, me and my sister, she was going like 100. He asked my sister, "What's your name?" She said it. He was like, "Man, I know y'all daddy. You better slow that car down. I'm gonna call y'all daddy." It's a blessing that you got some cops out here like that.

Interestingly, another participant also described being treated especially leniently by a police officer in terms of "blessings." These experiences seem to arise unexpectedly and without intentional action by the participant:

Yeah, see, we call stuff like that blessings. Black people call that blessings. I done caught a couple blessings from the police.... I done caught a couple of 'em.... The truancy van, they see you, they give a little sheet of paper, write down your phone number, they pull off and let you walk. They know what you doin'. Smoking a little weed, going back to school.

The Approach

While some participants did describe experiences of being physically injured or observing police misconduct, participants more frequently recalled negative interactions where officers were not necessarily acting illegally. The initial moments of these encounters played a significant role in establishing the participants' perspectives on the rest of the interaction.

Participants noted that the language and tone officers used when speaking to them during their initial approach was a signal about the officers' attitude toward them. Some officers did not begin the encounter with a greeting or courteous acknowledgement, instead asking accusatory questions. One participant recalled,

Sometimes you just be walking and they be like, "oh come here, where's your ID?" For one, I don't have to show you my ID, so why are you asking for my ID? Two, what am I doing? Walking down the street, breaking no laws. Three, am I being arrested? Nope. Alright so then I'll talk to you later.

Body Language

Participants who have had interactions with the police express the usefulness of being able to read and interpret body language. For example, several participants suggested that they felt discomfort when an officer approached them with their hands on their gun, appearing ready to use the weapon. Comparing his own feelings to what a police officer might experience, one participant recalled,

I told the police, I'm like, "I ain't got no gun in this car but I'd appreciate if you take your hand off your gun, you ain't gonna walk up on me like that. I fear for my life right now, okay, and when y'all fear for your life, what y'all do? Y'all shoot.

Other participants did not articulate specific behaviors that they interpreted, instead suggesting that an officer's overall "vibe" or projected image is negative and that their reaction is instinctual:

If it's a welcoming attitude then I'll be the same way, but once I get that vibe that it's not that way, my whole attitude changes. (*Prompt: What do you mean by "that vibe"? What*

does that look like?) Sometimes it's like an arrogance or like an "I'm gonna tell you what to do" kind of thing.... Makes me want to whoop their ass.

Being able to read an officer's body language allows participants to make assumptions about the officer's demeanor and behavior during the impending potential encounter. Participants acknowledged that in situations where they were around police events unfolded quickly, so making predictions about police behavior is necessary in order to exercise any control over the situation.

Communicating Police Intentions

Participants see the approach as communicating several different things about the police officer. First, it communicates the behaviors an officer intends to carry out in the immediate future after the initial stop. Participants seem to anticipate a general course of action when approached aggressively, for example:

They start going in your pockets, you're gonna move, they're gonna move your pockets, you're gonna move, and then another cop will be like, "Stop resisting!" and I swear that's how it starts. Like how my man got choked out, I swear that's probably how it started, just like that. Another cop starts checking his pockets then another cop touched him, he moved—"Stop resisting! Stop resisting! He's moving!"

Participants acknowledge that police escalation is sometimes in reaction to defiant behavior, but the participants claim that the defiant behavior stems from the initial police actions, which were perceived as excessive. They also suggest that had the officer approached them differently, they would not act defiantly:

I think he shouldn't approach me how he approached me, I probably never would've gotten an attitude with him. I'm stubborn with the police when they approach me like he just knows already: "If you don't tell me this, you going to jail."

Importance of Age Difference

Participants explained that the language an officer uses with them can demonstrate whether or not the officer sees them as a child whose opinion is insignificant. One participant stated, "And it kind of sets me off when an officer tells me to shut up. I understand if you want me to be quiet. Say, 'quiet down,' but don't tell me to shut up. I'm not a little kid." Similarly, another participant summarized her experiences with how police officers speak to her:

They treat you any kind of way, they talk to you any kind of way, like you're garbage on the street, like you're a child. I'm not your child. I don't even know you. I'm not your child. You ain't gonna talk to me any kind of way.

Especially among adolescents, being seen and treated as someone with agency and an opinion is important to self-image. When police approach these young people with aggressive language and directives, the young people interpret it as meaning the officers do not believe they can conduct themselves appropriately. An already tense situation is then made tenser as the young person tries to protect his or her own self-esteem.

Communicating Police Motivation

The approach does more than communicate intended actions; participants also use the approach to decipher police motivation. Participants recall trying to figure out why a police officer in a given situation is approaching in a particular manner. They explained that this often began with being judged from a distance based on their appearance, including their skin color, mannerisms, or clothing choices. One participant explained:

Just because you see a group of black kids and some of them got their shirts off, and they're walking down the street, laughing. The energy might just be too high for the police and the police just be like "what they got going on?"

Others believed that police try to judge citizens' level of education or gang status based on their appearance, which they suggested was not possible despite police attempts. One stating, "Just because of how you carry yourself doesn't mean that you didn't graduate, that you didn't do this or do that. So that's what police do; they judge you." And another pointing out, "Unless you have a case going against me or have surveillance on me, then how would you know? Assuming is different from knowing."

Thinking I'm Lying

Several participants also gave examples of instances where they were confronted by police and felt that the approach communicated that the police officer was not going to believe that they were telling the truth. They explained that this often occurs when a police officer stops a person under vague circumstances. One participant explained how this encounter typically progresses and his internal monologue during these circumstances:

He was like, "oh I can check you, it looks like you got something on you. You look like you're up to no good." Well, we all can look like that. But I'm going to my house, I don't have nothing to do out there, I'm going to my house. "What you got right there, can I search you?" No you don't have consent to search me. You didn't even have a reason to stop right here and talk to me first of all.

Another participant explained that police also work together catch them in a lie, demonstrating that the police officers did not believe they were telling the truth, "They'll come up and they ask

you a question then another cop will come up and ask you the same question and they trying to see if you lying.”

Messing with Me

An aggressive approach from a police officer is seen as having a purpose; specifically, participants suggested that police officers are “messing with” them and intimidating them into consenting to a search. Another participant explains how a situation might develop while walking in a neighborhood:

They think we’re supposed to get so scared when they pull up and slow down. They do this little thing where they pull up beside you and they smash on the brakes just to see if you’re gonna run. I stop and I look at them like, “You ain’t catch him yet? Who are you looking for? It’s me right here.” They pull up trying to make you run.

Participants believed that this type of action was done to elicit a response that could be interpreted as suspicious and serve as a legal reason for the stop. They believe that police apply this practice indiscriminately, knowing that eventually someone they stop can be charged with some minor offense:

See, I’m a young black man, that’s number one, and I’m walking in a community where crimes happen every day. They say like, “oh, we’re gonna see what he did. We’re gonna see what he’s doing. We’re gonna run his name and see if he got warrants or anything like that. We’re just gonna stop and see if you’re gonna handle yourself right.

Internal Emotional Reaction

Beliefs about police officer’s intent and motivation are often coupled with an emotion-based response. For example, several participants described feeling nervous or afraid when they see the police. One participant described how she feels when police are present, “It make me feel

nervous. When I see the police, I just feel afraid, scared, like they're gonna lock me up, they're trying to lock me up for something.”

Another common emotional response was a more withdrawn feeling of worthlessness or being misunderstood. Police actions conveyed to participants that their needs were not considered important and that their viewpoint is not valuable. One participant explained how he feels when police officers “do extra” by messing with him: “It make me feel like I'm back in jail. Like I'm not no person like you're a person. They be trying to talk to us because they know we can't do this and say that.” Participants expressed that police stereotyped them and in doing so were not sympathetic to their behaviors and feelings: “Because at the end of the day they don't see the struggle, ‘Oh, these motherfuckers are just drug dealers, I hate them awful drug dealers.’ Man you've got to understand why I'm selling these drugs.”

Respect

The emphasis on non-verbal communication during a police encounter is reminiscent of the way that Anderson (1999) describes the importance of non-verbal communication in *Code of the Streets*. Like Anderson's participants, subjects in this study who lived in disadvantaged neighborhoods suggested that giving and showing respect is a process that is navigated during the initial moments of an interaction. Participants often focused on body language, tone of voice, and other non-verbal cues as a way to interpret what a police officer is thinking and what his or her next actions might be. One participant explained:

I don't even have to say anything, you can tell by their body language.... They're coming at you in an aggressive way, an aggressive manner. Like they on the bullshit. (*Prompt: What does their body language look like? How are they standing, what do they say that reads aggressive to you?*) It's kind of hard to explain but it's like, say for instance, you

just coming from the store and the police and they partner in the store. They hop on out and ask you do you have ID, you got to have ID, so they hop out on you and just be walking up to you with they hand on they firearm. If you get wrong on them they might Tase you or try to slam you or anything. That's the first thing that let me know that the officer gonna be aggressive, how they hold their firearm.

(Prompt: What else that kind of reads aggressive to you?) The words that come out they mouth. *(Prompt: Like what?)* Like, profanity, they come out the top with profanity.

The give-and-take of respect in an interaction with police is made more complicated when police immediately show signs of disrespect and expect the citizen in the encounter to be submissive. One participant notes, "It's like they be having their mind set up and once they mind set up, it's over with. You're going to jail." Similarly, another participant explained,

And it seems that if you don't do it their way, it's the wrong way. You've got the upper hand [if] you're law enforcement. But some of the ways that some officers have, I just don't agree with—calling me the b-word the p-word. It doesn't take all that.

Participants recall how the words that officers use and the things they communicate non-verbally affected their emotional and mental state even though they are not physically harmed. This concern is also tied to feelings of a need to protect oneself from a potentially harmful situation: "If someone assumes something about me I feel like they trying to figure me out too much, I kind of feel paranoid, he trying to set me up, he trying to get me hurt, so I go on the defense."

Even participants who did not have frequent interactions with the police expressed the importance of the communication of respect during the initial encounter. One participant recalled the only time he had ever been confronted by a police officer—a school resource officer at his

high school. The manner in which he described his interaction paralleled that of the participants who were approached by officers on the street. He stated:

I'm thinking that the officers on the streets have an attitude where they want to get something soft; they don't want to approach you in a respectful manner. The way he came to me about it, I didn't know anything about it first off, he didn't address the situation, he didn't address what I was being pulled in for. My friend was the main person they wanted to question, they just wanted me, he was like, "I don't want to hear anything else, just cut to the chase, did your friend do this and that?"

This participant expressed an overwhelmingly positive attitude toward police, but his retelling demonstrates that even those with generally positive attitudes can feel slighted by the manner in which an officer approaches a citizen.

Strategies for Interacting with the Police

Typologies

One way that participants attempt to predict police behavior is by establishing their own schemas or typologies of officers. Not only is body language important, but participants also considered physical attributes of the police officers as a way of predicting their behavior.

The officer's gender is one of the factors that participants used to try to predict police behavior. Female police officers are seen as less likely to act aggressively and easier to out-run if that becomes necessary. One participant explained,

I had a female police but she wasn't as rough as male police officers. If there was a group of female police officers, I don't think they would do what male police officers would probably do. Female police officers—they probably wouldn't catch me anyway unless she some real fast track star.

Although female police officers were described as preferring “talking,” some female participants noted that this actually created tension in some situations: “Women have attitudes and we don’t like for anybody to talk to us any kind of way. We’re not gonna let anyone talk to us any kind of way so we’re always gonna bump heads.”

Participants also made distinctions between Black and White police officers, but schemas seemed to be individualized based on personal experience, instead of being shared between peers. For example, some participants suggested that they thought Black officers were more sympathetic to young Black people who get in trouble with the law because of their own background, while others felt Black officers treated them more harshly or suspiciously than White officers did. Some participants suggested that Black officers behave aggressively when they are around White officers to show off and be more like the White officers. For example, one participant stated:

Sometimes I think black cops—they have white cops; they became friends with them.

They’re partners. They feel like they the same as them, so when they feel like they’re the same as them, they have their own rules in their head.

Participants also distinguished between young and old officers. Younger officers were seen as “rookies” with little experience, while older officers were interpreted to be veterans of the force who would interact differently with minority community members. Because of their lack of experience, rookie police officers operate “by the books.” One participant described a hypothetical scenario to explain the difference:

There’s the rookies and there’s the veterans. The rookies, they’ve got their books sitting right there, and when they see anything out of place or it’s in the book that said they can lock you up, they’re gonna do it. A veteran—you might be walking down the street

smoking your little weed, the veteran's gonna sit right there, tell you to put it out, stomp it out so you can't grab it up, and you go back to your business.

Some participants suggested that having little experience means that rookie officers rely more on race-based judgments, for example, "The newcomers don't know too much about the law. They just think that cuz you black and you young you breaking the law." Participants expected the more senior officers to be less aggressive. One participant, for example, expressed a belief that older officers are more "lazy, laid back.... They don't want to do the paperwork on something that gonna process you and then let you back out two hours later."

Knowing the Law

Another way participants attempt to proactively manage their interactions with police officers is by learning the laws and policies by which police operate. In knowing what police are supposed to do or not do, participants believe they can avoid being deceived or physically harmed by officers, for example, one participant stated, "Me, I know my rights and I can use it against them, tell them, 'you don't have consent to check me, you don't have consent to question me,' and all that so, it's just they're not right sometimes."

In knowing the law, participants are able to compare their own experiences to what they believe should have transpired. For example, participants often expressed that police officers judged people negatively because of their appearance or social status and use their appearance as the sole reason for a stop or search: "Y'all want to pick on us because he had dreads and golds in his mouth and I looked like a dope dealer and the person in the back looked like one. So that's why y'all carried on with that." On occasion, however, participants recalled law or statute that was not true, but the belief that those laws are true is nonetheless the important factor here because that is the standard to which the experience is being compared.

Avoiding the Police

Many participants noted that an effective way to limit direct contact with the police is to avoid them by leaving or going in the opposite direction, even when this involves taking a longer route or leaving a store without purchasing anything. For example, after being asked about his behavior when he crosses paths with a police officer in public, a participant said, “I stay away from them. As soon as I see them coming I go the other way. I don’t mess with the police period.” Explaining this further, another participant stated:

Not in a, like, “I’m guilty” sense. I just want to avoid it. If they stop this person right here when I’m walking down the street, I might, depending on where I’m at, if there’s a store right there I might go into the store or go right here if I see somebody I know. Try to get around instead of going past.

Alternatively, when they choose not to physically avoid the police by leaving, they intentionally subdue their behavior so as to not draw police attention. One participant, for example, stated, “If I was to see them I probably got kind of nervous but I wouldn’t try to do anything to bring attention to me or nothing.” Another believed avoiding wearing certain clothing in public would limit unwanted attention: “Don’t wear hoodies I guess, change your clothing.... You’ve just got to look a different way, wear appropriate clothes.”

Differing Views of Police among Youth from Advantaged Backgrounds

Learning from Parents

Although many participants who live in wealthier neighborhoods stated that they did not often see the police in their neighborhood when they were growing up, they remembered learning about what the police do and how to respond to them from their parents and from books and nursery rhymes. One participant recalled:

“We had this song that my mom used to sing to us and it was like a nursery rhyme and what it basically said was that if you’re ever in stranger danger, go to the police. I’m sure we had talks about the police being someone you can trust.”

However, participants reflected that these conversations were not necessarily around how to act around the police, and that the information passed down was fairly basic. One noted, “My parents haven’t really talked to me much about the police. Where we grew up was such an affluent place that there were really never a lot of issues.” Another stated:

I’m sure that when I was younger there was a book that had different occupations and the police officer wears the blue hat and their job is to protect people... Beyond that I really don’t hear much about that.

Limited Police Encounters

Among participants who describe growing up in the wealthier suburban neighborhoods, direct contact with the police also tended to begin in early adolescence, but the experiences were often in a school setting or with parents.

Several participants relayed similar stories of being a passenger in a car that a parent was driving when the police stopped them for speeding. Some were given a ticket and others a warning, but none of the participants believed that anything unusual or unexpected happened during those interactions. These participants noted that being in a car when their parents were pulled over did not make them think any less or more of the police. One participant also recalled parties she attended to which the police were called:

I’ve been to parties where they’ve gotten shut down and the police always show up. They have to play the bad guy and shut it down but he explained to us, he’s like, it’s just because it’s loud and this is a private neighborhood so y’all just have to go.

Her response to the police showing up was similar to that of the participants whose parents were stopped for speeding: she was not surprised by the reaction of the police and none of their behaviors stood out as particularly unfair.

No Assumptions about Police Behavior

Unlike participants who often see the police in their neighborhoods, participants with less police experience do not have a strategy for interpreting police behavior and did not report the inner monologue about how to approach the situation as some of the other respondents did. Although they acknowledge the “good and bad” policing that does happen, they instead suggest that they can only know a police officer’s intentions after actually speaking with them. I posed a hypothetical situation about coming in contact with a police officer in public: “When you see a police officer and you’re walking down the sidewalk in downtown Atlanta, how do you determine whether the police officer is going to be good or not? Does that go through your mind?” To which the participant responded, “No it really doesn’t, I don’t think I would know until I talk to the person or they talk to me.” To a similar question, another participant responded: “I wouldn’t be able to tell if I just see one chilling right there, I wouldn’t be able to tell.”

Participants who did not regularly encounter police typically had as little to say about specific positive interactions as they did about negative ones. Encounters that were not voluntary tended to occur in instances of traffic violations, school trouble, or parties being shut down. These participants also occasionally reflected on instances where they approached a police officer for help. For example, one participant recalled, “I missed the bus, so the school resource officer ended up taking me home—me and bunch of other kids. So that was really the first time that I actually sat in a police car.”

Social Media

Participants who did not experience frequent police contact were aware of the existence of police brutality, racial profiling, and other issues surrounding police-community relations. Typically, this awareness arises from media and social media coverage of police-involved shootings and the protests that have occurred in response. One participant explained:

Social media, for me, that's helped me... figure out more about what is going on in the world and with the Black Lives Matter movement because I support it. It helps you find out about protests and stuff that we are doing to try to change it so black men aren't being killed just because of the color of their skin. (*Prompt: Do you feel like those kinds of conversations make a difference?*) I think if you bring more awareness to it people will try to make a change. We'll be mad about for a week, then we'll go on about our lives and forget about it. But this time, our minds are still on it.

Participants who are exposed to policing issues through social media tended to also believe that the exposure changed their understanding of policing and created a stronger belief that changes need to be made to policing because "it's not like the police are coming out saying this." One participant gave an example of how social media broadened her exposure to variations in police-citizen encounters:

I saw this video of a white man and he was waving the gun around and they still didn't shoot them after he fired the gun off. So I'm like, this man didn't even pull a gun out before he gets killed but this man gets to pull it out and wave it around and he gets this whole chance to survive.

Participants who did have direct experiences with the police still emphasized that social media plays a role in how they see the police, especially because it allows them to see the

similarities and dissimilarities between policing in other communities and their own. For example, one participant questioned:

I'm like, that never happened to me but it happened to somebody I know that was just suspicious. And it kind of put the thought in my mind like what if that happened to my little brother or my older sisters?

Only Seeing Extreme Instances

Social media sometimes serves as a filter that highlights the most extreme instances of violence, which is especially impactful for people whose direct experience with police is limited.

One participant described what she sees about police interactions by stating:

I mean I think that a lot of media, what they project and show are negative things and so I think that when it comes to police on social media, you see a whole bunch of murders by police officers and police terrorizing people.

This phenomenon of over-emphasis on the most spectacular or “viral” events has been documented in other fields, so it is not surprising to see it here as well. Social media also highlights events that might not otherwise be covered by traditional media sources. As another participant explained,

I use social media a lot, I've got pretty much everything, I see the most on Tumblr. It's all very negative toward police and it brings light to a lot of negative situations that people might not have been talking about before.... I think it's just making people even more afraid of the police.

Participants who learn about the police through social media framed their discussion around police violence, especially shootings, and typically did not discuss the less severe instances of “being picked on” or “doing extra” that many of the participants with frequent

police contact described. One participant reflected on her experiences of seeing students at school searched for drugs, “I understand why some people have a negative opinion. Nobody, as much as you might be carrying drugs, nobody wants to be patted down, nobody wants to be searched. I can understand where they’re coming from.” This statement reflected an understanding that less severe acts like a search can still create negative sentiments, but was experienced directly and not on social media.

Avoiding Vicarious Experiences

One theme that was uniquely seen among participants who did not have much experience with the police was the ability to disengage from discussions about police violence at their choosing. One participant noted, “I see people talk about it in school but my friends don’t really talk about it much beyond that if some particular case comes up or something like that.” Another participant who lives in a suburban neighborhood and participates in a police-run program for youth suggested that his positive attitude toward police does not align with his friends’ negative attitudes and thus, “I just tell them I don’t want to talk about it and it’s to the point where we don’t even discuss it anymore.”

Sympathizing with Minority Communities

Participants often claim that social media has broadened their understanding of what police behavior looks like in different communities. Police-involved shootings that are widely discussed on social media led many participants to express feeling sympathetic to minority community experiences and more skeptical of police behaviors. One participant reflected, “The one video, where he was shot in the back while he was running away, or the video of people in their car that get pulled over and shot, that is awful and there’s no way to justify that.” Similarly, another participant explained:

A lot of the news about the Africans Americans being killed by police made me view the police a little more sort of as a bullying force or a little over the top and that made me concerned for if they're doing this, are they really protecting us or are they doing it their way.

Sympathizing with Police Officers

While participants from suburban neighborhoods overwhelmingly expressed that recent police-involved shooting are problematic and need to be reduced, participants rationalized police behavior during encounters with minority citizens as often as they rationalized the anger felt by minority communities. This was often described in terms of safety of the officer. One respondent stated:

There was an alumni from my school, a police officer, so we met with her, and then a district attorney and public defender. The police officer we met with, she was a woman and she was maybe 5'4. It's easy to say a police officer shouldn't pull out their gun unless they have to, and I agree with that, but hearing her talk about how sometimes the person she's going up against is a man who's 6'2 and off his meds and all this stuff—it's a lot easier to sympathize and realize that yes they need to be looking out for people and not necessarily harming them but you also have to look out for your own safety.

It was clear that participants knew that what they saw on social media was not “the whole story” and that police-citizen encounters vary. Support for police was often followed by acknowledgement that police do behave inappropriately in some situations, and sympathy for the negative experiences of low-income minority communities was coupled with a belief that interactions and intentions are not always clear-cut and that policing high-crime areas is challenging.

“The Theoretical Police”

Participants from suburban neighborhoods recognized that police interactions were more negative for some people, but they believed that the police they see in their own neighborhoods were not the ones that would commit misconduct or violence against a citizen. One participant suggested in particular that she envisions police violence being committed by “the theoretical police,” meaning departments and officers in places that are far away from where she lives:

When I say, I can blame the police for all of these interactions, but I’m not blaming certain people, I’m not blaming the person I see driving down the street in the police car, I’m blaming like the theoretical police. For some reason, I thought of the police in the Midwest or the police in the north.

Similarly, another participant suggested that police violence happened in big cities, but police in her neighborhood were different:

If I’m thinking about the police in my neighborhood—my neighborhood is kind of small—the police in my neighborhood, if you’re out of town you can ask the police to come check on your house. I think that’s more of a personal relationship, I think that if it’s a big city where there’s a lot more crime and they are spread more thin, I would expect maybe a more harsh interaction, more businesslike.

Participants believed that not only neighborhood and location contributed to different policing styles, but some also stated that race played a direct role in the reason some people do not experience police violence or harassment. In describing the only time she has been stopped by police, one participant explained:

I think there was a time where a police officer did talk to me but in that situation I was with a group of people but I don’t think a cop has ever directly talked to me. (*Prompt:*

Why do you think that is?) Well first of all, I'm white and I'm a female, so I don't think they see me as any sort of threat.

Another participant recognized that policing in her neighborhood changed over time as the racial composition of her neighborhood became more diverse (and less white). She recalled:

When I was younger, I lived in a new neighborhood, it was just now getting built, it was the suburbs and we were one of the first or second houses there, so there really wasn't anybody. But the majority of people that were there were not diverse yet. It was probably a couple black families and us and the majority white. It was a small little town and neighborhood at the time.... In middle school, it was more people coming into our neighborhood of color, so more people started coming in, the neighborhood got bigger, and we had more kids around. We used to walk around the neighborhood and that's when we saw the police coming around more.

“Good and Bad Police”

Given Taylor, Turner, Esbensen, and Winfree's (2001) findings in combination with studies demonstrating that many young Black people do have frequent unfavorable experiences with police, one would expect that the young Black participants who experience frequent police contact in this study would have generally negative (but not necessarily strongly negative) views of the police. However, it seems that these participants have more nuanced ideas of the police than is suggested by survey data. In particular, nearly every participant stated that they hold a range of attitudes toward police, and expressed that departments have good and bad officers and that an officer can exhibit both positive and negative traits. For example, one participant noted that the diversity of officers that can exist within a department, stating:

You got rookies, you got older cops, you got cops just trying to prove points, you got cops just trying to get strikes, you got laid back cops, you got cops that came from where you came from and understand.

Individual officers can embody both “good” and “bad” policing, one participant suggesting, “You got some bad police officers. There be good police officers but they still do they dirty ways, find a way to argue with you or something like that.”

Participants who have more frequent contact with the police usually initially responded with a negative perception, but then went on to articulate that the opposite is true on some occasions: “The police ain’t there to help you. The police *is* there to help you, but at the same time they’re not. Some of them... I guess some police are nice.” In contrast, those who do not experience frequent police contact similarly expressed a belief in a range of types of police but often began their statements by framing policing in a neutral or positive light. A participant living in a more affluent suburb stated, “I don’t think they’re bad people some of them are over the top.” Another noted:

I think there are good policemen and women out there, but I also think there are bad policemen out there, too. Not everyone is waking up thinking, ‘I’m gonna go serve the community in the best way I can.’ Some people are just in it for the wrong reasons. So I think police are good to certain extent but there’s also bad police.”

Participants who reside in low-income neighborhoods and experience more frequent police contact associate their understanding of the range of policing styles with their own experiences. Those who recalled negative experiences in detail also recalled positive interactions with as much detail. For example, one participant recalled how the police treated her when they arrived at her home for a domestic violence call:

Yeah the second time, me and my mom again. My mom's got a habit of throwing things, and I ain't want to get hit so the police came. When they come, they take up for the parent; they don't really take up for the child. They really don't care or whatever. So he came, he was a nice person, he seen that my mom was drinking, he was telling her, you can't do that, I feel like he was on my side."

Similarly, participants often described hypothetical scenarios with police behavior that they would see in a positive light. These behaviors centered on officer's body language and verbal commands. When asked to describe what a respectful officer would say after pulling him over, one respondent explained,

"Hey, how are you doing, sir, the reason I'm pulling you over is because you don't have a seatbelt on. The reason that I pulled you over is that your tag is expired." That's how I know they're willing to give respect.... "You know you ain't supposed to be walking on the sidewalk smoking weed, you know weed is illegal, I'm gonna have to take you in." Not like, "Freeze, stop, put your hands up!"

Familiarity with Individual Officers

Having a personal relationship with individual officers has contributed to several participants understanding of the variety of officers and policing styles that exist. One way this happens is through recognition that police officers come from different backgrounds, some of which are similar to their own, which lends an element of humanity to the police and a sense that some police officers understand the struggles the participants face. One participant explained:

I know a couple police officers, my auntie, her husband was one. When I found that out, I understand that the police can be anyone. It can be someone that you know, it can be

family, too; so you got to look at that, too. How to look at it is, before they're police, they were trying to get them some money, too, they know what's going on.

Participants also suggested that a personal relationship with individual officers led the officers to reveal that not all police are motivated by the same righteous causes. One participant describes what he learned from a police officer who is a family friend:

He tells me about the police officers. He says, "Some of them want to be dirty, some of them want to do their job. Some of them want a check." That's the things the police there for. They're gonna enforce the law, some of them want they check, some of them just want to be a dick.

In addition to learning about the different types of police officers that exist, familiarity with an individual officer has led some participants to develop a mentoring or guiding relationship where the officer gives the participant life advice. This action, again, emphasizes the humanity and personality characteristics of officers that might not be present in non-voluntary interactions between unfamiliar people. One participant reflected on the positive relationships he has had with specific officers, stating:

I talked to my—he used to be the officer in my middle school, he talked to me every day but I still know that I was a knucklehead. He always was on my case about—one time he put me in handcuffs, he just—I ain't gonna say he did nothing bad but he showed me how to try to control your ways. Sometimes you got to let people sit down and talk to you. Even with him, you got to sit down and talk to him. Then, my uncle, I sit down and talk to him every day. I just talk to him yesterday, telling him I was in school, making sure I was good. You got the good police officers and the bad police officers.

Doing Their Job

Despite having experiences that are perceived as negative or knowing other people who have had harmful experiences, many participants did not place full blame or responsibility on the individual officers carrying out the acts. Participants, for example, acknowledge that sometimes people do participate in behavior that might arouse suspicion, and so the subsequent questioning is valid: “They do their job in certain cases. I feel that if you do something, you got to pay for it. So they do their job in certain cases but not all the time.” Participants from suburban areas reflected this sentiment as well:

I feel like they—for me—they’re just doing their job. Many people have a negative opinion, I’ve seen a lot of people around me have a negative opinion just because they do certain things that are unfair in their eyes, like pat them down or catch them skipping class, it’s kind of redundant, because if you’re doing something bad then I don’t understand.

A common explanation that participants gave for officers’ actions that reduced individual responsibility is that an officer in a given situation was “doing their job,” meaning that they were given a set of tasks by someone in a higher position of authority and are carrying out those tasks as part of their employment, even when it involves discrimination based on appearance or a stop for a minor cause:

I should know that’s it’s a 80-20 chance that I’m gonna get pulled over. I’m underage, I look young and I’m driving, I’m probably speeding, I probably got my music blasting, they’re gonna pull me over. So why would I fault them for doing they job? That’s their career path that they believe in. I wouldn’t fault a fireman for kicking down my door when my house is on fire. That’s what they’re trained to do.

One participant rationalized this belief by seeing the fairness of laws as a different concept than fairness of an individual's actions:

They did their job. I can say that. I don't agree with what they got going on, I don't agree with the laws, but that's a whole 'nother topic. You know, they did their job, they did what they're paid for and that's the only thing that I can respect about that.

Often the idea of doing their job and following orders is closely related to the fact that policing is a job and therefore those who participate are paid. One participant suggests, "I don't think they're just trying to get people in trouble, not everybody. They're just getting people in trouble for the sake of money or however many people they have to write up in a certain amount of time." Participants from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds have more direct understanding of living paycheck-to-paycheck and therefore understand that a job is a means of providing food and shelter: "I ain't got nothing against the police, it's a job, they out there to feed their family." Negative experiences with the police are rationalized or neutralized by believing that the officer is causing harm in order to create a greater good for his or her family.

The Role of the State

Many participants recognize that the way police go about their job on a daily basis is determined by departmental policies that are shaped by local, state, and federal law and government actors. The government is the entity that gives police officers official permission to use force; therefore these participants see the government as the reason for their negative experiences. One participant stated:

They got the power on they shoulder. The state gave it to them. Whoever they work for, the state gave it to them. That badge basically tells them that they can do what they want.

That's why most of the time they're doing horrible stuff or horrible stuff happens with them.

Even participants whose direct experiences with police were seen as fair expressed a belief that the criminal justice *system* is complex and can be problematic: "My first instinct when I think of police is negative and that's not to say that I think all police are equal, I think there are a lot of flaws in the system."

Legitimacy is about an entity acting in a way that appropriately upholds agreed-upon norms and values (Suchman, 1995). In this case, the participants saw the government as ultimately responsible for upholding those values, and the exercise of excessive force does not align with their values. One participant went as far as to express a belief that the government is explicitly creating policy to target black people:

I feel like this country is raging war on black people and they using the police as they pawns in the chess game. (*Prompt: Who's "they"?*) The powers to be, the government things like that, the people running this place.

This understanding of policing and the criminal justice system that focuses on power structures and occupational hierarchy may underlie the feelings that some participants expressed around officers "doing their job" and needing to "get money." The individual officers, while carrying out behaviors that are seen as unfair, are believed to be doing so to ensure they can support their family, not because they necessarily believe in the same motives that drive people in power to create laws that impact disadvantaged black youth. In some ways, this expression that individual officers are not ultimately responsible for their behavior resembles Sykes and Matza's (1957) neutralization techniques of denying responsibility and appealing to higher

loyalties: they can articulate what “bad” policing looks like but those doing the bad policing are not necessarily evil people intending to do harm.

Potential Solutions

Communication Skills

Participants offered a number of ways to potentially improve interactions between police and community members, many of which revolved around training officers in a way that minimizes their “doing extra,” especially in situations that are relatively minor. This was often framed as improving communication skills to create trust and common ground:

Training that is mostly outreach to the community and based on skills like communication. Basically the way you approach and the way you get that bond with the community. If you get that bond with the community, with that trust, you won’t have anything to worry about.

Some participants gave examples of hypothetical police encounters to illustrate what an appropriate interaction might look like. One, for instance, suggested, “I would like them to say, ‘we know y’all tail light out but we’re gonna let you go get it fixed. We’re just gonna give y’all a warning and next time we’re gonna give y’all a ticket.’”

Restrained Use of Physical Force

Aside from being more aware of verbal and nonverbal communication, participants suggest training and policy could be used to reduce unnecessary physical force exerted by officers on citizens. One participant emphasized that officers use verbal warnings and only escalate to more forceful actions once they have attempted less forceful methods of stopping them:

I guess you could say fairness is that they take all the necessary steps. I don't know them all but I know there is a couple. I know you don't just go straight to pinning someone on the ground. I know you have to give them at least a couple warnings, and I think that would be fair. To take those necessary steps before you take it to another level like shooting or Tasing or pepper spray.

Another participant focused in particular on the methods that police officer use force to restrain citizens:

The physical aggression... alright, it don't take you putting me in a chicken wing if I'm already in handcuffs laying on the ground. It don't take your knee all in my back and my neck just to handcuff me. I understand that's how you were trained or that's what you prefer but it should be a less aggressive way of arresting me or detaining me... but if I'm just sitting on the curb and you arrest me, you don't have to shove my head into the window, you don't have to pull your Taser out. If I'm not resisting I don't see why you should pull it out.

Offering Opportunities to Interact with Police

Some participants also suggested that a better relationship can be built between the police and the community if there were more opportunities for citizens to voluntarily interact with police officers. One participant recalled, "Last year, they had where you can take food to the fire fighters, we like doing stuff like that, giving back to our community so I would love to see more of that." These opportunities would not only allow participants and police to interact in less tense settings, but also show that police are concerned about the community. Another participant suggested that working with the homeless would similarly show that police care.

Addressing Systemic Root Causes

Finally, as some participants acknowledged the system that structures the way that police officers go about their job on a daily basis, they also acknowledged that policy has to address systemic problems. When asked what the police could do to improve, one participant immediately responded, “Retire. Just get some new people.” When I asked her, however, if she thought the new police would be any different, she responded, “No, I think the system is so behind them, the laws are so behind them that they feel like they can do whatever they want because they are the law, but if some of these laws change....” Another participant believed there was a need to address systemic racism:

I think it’s trying to understand where people of color come from. It’s not like... I feel like if certain people understood where pain comes from when it comes to certain topics and subjects like this, they would have a different outlook and opinion of it. If an officer is going on trial for shooting an innocent kid, they’re gonna understand that you’re angry, that they hurt somebody you cared about, but they’re not gonna know what it feels like to struggle. It’s hard to be in the minority, if you’re a woman, especially if you’re a colored woman, yes they outlawed segregation but it’s still an issue today. It might not be me not being able to sit at a restaurant but it’s guns and words and how people approach you.

Belief in Change

Fatalism

Participants who experienced more frequent police encounters expressed a belief that laws and government remain and will continue to remain the same despite efforts to change it. For example, when asked about whether the Black Lives Matter movement would create lasting change, one respondent answered:

There's marching and all that... but at the end of the day, ain't nobody but the government got the right to say, "yeah okay, we gonna change this, yeah we gonna do this, yeah we gonna do that." There's some officers that done got away with stuff. To this day, this stuff that's been happening these last two years, it was stuff that was happening way before that that was never brought up.

In a similar vein, another participant went further to suggest that Black Lives Matter protests are secretly organized by the government:

Y'all ain't doing nothing, all they're doing is walking around and hollering. What are y'all doing? (*Prompt: That's not gonna create change?*) No, it never did. Martin Luther King did that his whole life, what happened to him...I feel like some of them are working with them people probably. (*Prompt: With the government?*) Yeah, what do you call it, COINTELPRO? So I don't know about them either.

Participants acknowledged that their belief that nothing is going to change has led them to "brush off" negative experiences: "I don't think, see you can't, this is my thing, you can't be mad at a system that wasn't designed for you. So how could you be mad, you just here." Participants acknowledged that an excessive emotional focus on police behavior is not healthy nor will it create any impact on future experiences. One participant stated, "Yeah, it's wrong what they do out there but, hey man, ain't no use in you keeping paying [attention] because it's just gonna suck you in into it." Another recalled his reaction to a particular police encounter: "I took it on the chin because what doesn't kill me makes me stronger... I get up, I brush it off, I laugh, like, 'punk-ass police.' I could care less about that, I'm gonna keep on living my life."

“Anything Can Happen”

Participants who experienced more frequent interactions with the police explained that there is a wide range of potential results of a police encounter and that police behavior in any given situation is difficult to predict. One participant described, “You have certain situations: somebody in their car, gets pulled over, very dark place. They’re one-on-one with the police. Anything can happen. You never know. The police can really just kill you and call that junk in.” Participants believed that the outcome of any given police encounter is difficult to control, and that even when the citizen in the encounter is behaving lawfully they risk being shot.

When they pull out the guns and they got you stuck right there. What are you gonna do? ...You say, “don’t move,” we just trying to flinch, and then you pull it too soon, we might flinch and move and you might shoot us them because you told us not to move.

Participants believed that attempting to express their discontent in a police encounter would only result in more trouble, as opposed to resulting in a police officer listening to them. Participants stated that they have learned from their own experience that talking back or swearing at an officer will lead to more negative treatment, but that acting calm and reasonable will not diminish the possibility negative treatment either. One participant said,

I say to just keep quiet because nowadays you have officers that think that if you curse at them, that gives them the right to hit you. So I just say keep quiet because I’ve learned that just talking and going back at it is not going to get you nowhere but in jail or hurt or something.”

However, participants also suggest that even in instances where they did not display defiant behavior, the outcome might not be in their favor and police will end up doing extra:

“Sometimes the officers do too much. You could be walking down the street minding your own

business and the police pull you over because you're walking. What am I doing to you? You want to mess with me today."

One explanation that participants gave for unpredictable police behavior is that police officers bring personal emotions and experiences into encounters with citizens. One participant suggested:

I think, even when we were talking to them outside the program, they're regular people they act just like us. Say they have a bad day with their wife or something and they come in, they're gonna have an attitude and they're gonna take it out on folks."

Capacity for Change

On the other hand, participants who have not had much direct experience with the police seem to be more optimistic about the ability of police-community relations in the United States to improve. Social media plays an especially important role in this change because it creates a constant awareness of the problem among people who might not otherwise pay attention. When asked how conversations around race might impact people, one participant replied:

I think if you bring more awareness to it people will try to make a change. People, we'll be mad about for a week, and then we'll go on about our lives and forget about it. But this time, our minds are still on it. These shootings—this happened like two weeks ago—usually we would've forgotten about it by now. I feel like this movement is bringing more awareness to it so people are starting make a difference, boycotting and stuff. Like people are trying to put their money into black-owned banks and stuff, so I do think so, it's starting to.

Some of these participants also suggested that minority communities and people with negative attitudes toward the police also have a responsibility to work toward better police-

community relations, and that an effort must be made from police *and* the community if substantial improvements are to be made:

I think it's gonna take a long time for people's perceptions or people's point of view to change of the police. Even though there are good police out there, people think every police officer is out to get every black person that walks on the sidewalk. It's hard, it's gonna take a long time to change the negative attitude toward the police because all people know of the police is them shooting unarmed black guys when that isn't necessarily happening for everyone.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study examined the attitudes and perceptions that young people hold about the police and their explanations for why they have those attitudes and perceptions. Using semi-structured interviews and a grounded theory approach, a thematic analysis was conducted based on responses from 27 participants from the metropolitan Atlanta area. Some common themes and contrasts were discovered across participants from different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. Below, I summarize discuss some of the overarching themes that were most salient throughout the analysis.

Separation of Paths in Early Adolescence

Regardless of their background, participants often articulated similar experiences at an early age when it came to learning about the police and their function. Family and teachers were mainly responsible for communicating this information, and it was generally positive. Young children have a crude understanding of “good” and “bad;” participants were told that people committing crimes are bad, therefore the police stopping them are good. As in previous research (Brunson and Weitzer, 2011), some participant recalled that they also had conversations around how to act when a police officer approaches them, which may unintentionally communicate that police think they are dangerous or threatening.

Two of the main functions of the police are to provide formal social control and to provide service to community members. For some participants, early adolescence became a time when direct experiences made them question those police functions. They felt as if some police tried to exert an unnecessary amount of control while simultaneously not providing help when called upon. Those who lived in neighborhoods where police were less visible and had less direct

contact with the police, on the other hand, did not experience this dissonance, so the police continued to be seen as generally helpful.

Microaggressions and the Approach

The results presented here have demonstrated that the very first moments of an interaction—before any verbal information is exchanged—can communicate a wealth of information about police behaviors in the immediate future. Participants were perceptive to the motivations and intentions of the police officers they interacted with, and this instilled them with a sense of agency or lack thereof. Even if these interpretations of motivations are inaccurate, they are used to “size up” the officer and draw conclusions about how to react. Experiences with microaggressions seem to be cumulative. Participants recognize that any given slight might be accidental, due to the officer having a bad day or not understanding cultural values; however, when these experiences happen over and over again, their impact is not inconsequential.

Automaticity and Scripts

Participants who have had more direct experiences with the police and know others who have had direct experiences with police are more familiar with the range of actions that a police officer might take during a given encounter. By drawing on this pool of knowledge and experience, some participants have developed schemas or scripts for interacting with police. These scripts allow participants to anticipate police behavior and attempt to mitigate the risk of harm during encounters with police or at least mentally prepare themselves for being treated poorly. More affluent participants who did not have as many direct experiences with the police lacked a framework for interpreting police behavior. The few interactions they did recall typically aligned with the messages they received about police from a young age—that they are there to help and to stop people from breaking the law, thus they stated they would not typically

anticipate harm or aggression unless the police officer clearly demonstrated that behavior first and they did not have assumptions about police behavior based on officer characteristics like age or gender.

Social Media as a Filter and Magnifier

Social media is a ubiquitous tool of information sharing for today's population, especially young people, and participants use of social media has played a key role in shaping the way that they understand policing. Videos and stories that "go viral" on social media tend to be those that end in serious injury or death of the citizen involved, not those in which a teen is questioned and released for walking through a private lawn. While people who do not have direct experiences with police are being exposed to the frequency with which police misconduct happens, they are not similarly exposed to the microaggressive behaviors police exhibit toward some citizens. This has resulted in participants being opposed to excessive force but still seeing disadvantaged neighborhoods as quite dangerous and places where police officers *rightfully need* to react harshly to protect themselves.

For participants who have direct experience with being stopped by police and acquaintances who share similar experiences, social media was not as common of a theme. They did express that it was important in sharing information about the police that some people might not otherwise be exposed to, but they did not rely on social media to learn about the police because they had direct experiences of their own. Interestingly, some also expressed a lack of belief that the Black Lives Matter movement (which has a strong social media presence) is not more than people "yelling," a common criticism of online "hashtag activism."

Institutions and Legitimacy

When discussing “the police” participants from all backgrounds often conceptually differentiated between the local police that they experience in their neighborhoods and the institution of policing as part of the larger criminal justice system. This is an important distinction when it comes to explaining how people who see the system as unfair can still interpret the actions of individual officers as just. Participants recognize that the officers they interact with are low on the chain-of-command compared to the people who ultimately make law or direct police resources. This allows participants to neutralize the behaviors of the individual officers by explaining their behavior as a reaction to a superior. They believe that the officers are carrying out those harmful actions as a means of making money—a goal participants strongly identified with—and that the officer must choose between either getting fired or arresting their neighbors.

Fatalism

Participants who live in disadvantaged neighborhoods have a different outlook on the potential for improvement of police-community relations compared to those who live in more advantaged areas. These participants seemed to lack a sense of control over their outcomes when it comes to interactions with police—regardless of the sequence of actions carried out in an individual interaction *or* the sequence of actions carried out at the level of the political system, participants felt they were still going to experience tension in police interactions. They recognized that change takes time and consists of failures, as is demonstrated by the lack of success that previous reform movements have had.

Participants also seemed to have developed an acceptance of the lack of change as a coping mechanism. They saw dealing with the police as a part of life, and as a consequence have

learned to “take it on the chin” and have come to terms with the level of policing they experience. They see putting effort into creating change with the police as fruitless, thus they choose to expend their effort making money or helping their families. Even in their discussion of “catching blessings,” positive outcomes are talked about as a product of luck or holy intervention, not of personal effort to improve the situation.

Fatalism is connected to legitimacy and procedural justice because they are both related to the perception of not being listened to or valued by those in the decision-making authority position. While participants who have little direct experience with police have no reason to believe that police officers would not listen to the people with whom they interact, participants who interact with the police more frequently have drawn on their lived experiences to conclude that, while the police *should* listen to citizen, often they do not. Fatalism also seems to prime participants for a tense interaction before the encounter has begun, which may contribute to a lack of cooperation and, consequently, further tension.

Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study is the sample. An attempt was made to recruit young people from diverse backgrounds and contexts, but most participants were either white or black and come from urban or suburban locations. Therefore, it is unclear as to whether perceptions are different for young people of other racial/ethnic backgrounds and from more rural areas. The methodology of the study is also limited in that participants were asked to reflect on past experiences, some of which were emotionally intense or exciting, which might have had an impact on the ways in which they remember and describe how events unfolded. However, perceptions seem to be most influenced by these narratives that participants have established for themselves, regardless of the reality of encounter.

Another limitation of this study is political and social context of the time period in which it took place. Especially in regard to the themes related to social media consumption, the current climate of protest and the popularity of the Black Lives Matter movement must be considered. Even over the course of the study, media attention has shifted slightly away from police violence and onto other political topics. It is unclear if the surge of viral videos and posts on social media will have a long-term impact on attitudes or if the impact was short-lived.

Implications for Policy

As many participants suggested, training around interacting with community members is an important step to improving relationships and gaining cooperation during encounters. Specifically, the results suggest that the first moments of an interaction are critical for establishing in the mind of the citizen what the officer's intentions and motivations are. They also use these first moments to determine their potential course of action in a fight-or-flight type of response based on previous experiences. Participants noted that personal greetings (or lack thereof), body language, and tone of voice are key factors in decision-making during the officer's approach, therefore training should emphasize officer's exercising control over their self-presentation during the initial moments of an interaction. Although serious physical force was a much less common experience than "being messed with," participants from all backgrounds suggested that police be more wary of the amount of force they are using to gain compliance versus the minimum necessary to gain compliance. This speaks to the importance of standards and training around escalation of force, especially with young people.

More broadly, participants from all backgrounds recognized the value of collaboration between the community and the police. Participants often expressed that the police do not care about them and/or do not understand the struggles they face on a daily basis. Collaborative

projects between police departments and the community—lead by community members—would both give the community members a sense of agency and demonstrate that the police are willing to serve. As participants expressed that they believed some officers are most concerned with “getting money,” it is important that these community collaborations are not gimmicky—young people are quick to notice insincerity. These collaborative projects would allow for opportunities to interact in a voluntary setting where community members can get to know individual officer that serve their neighborhood.

Finally, the results here suggest that police departments might benefit from using social media to improve their image, but this must be coupled with improvements in their personal interactions and consideration of a “customer service” orientation of policing. People who have little direct experience with police learn on social media that policing is violent and dangerous in disadvantaged neighborhoods; so social media could be used to learn about the more complex experiences of young people in disadvantaged neighborhoods, including the “good” police. People who have direct experiences might be less convinced by this approach because their direct experiences are more salient, so police must also practice using their body language and tone of voice to communicate a willingness to listen.

Future Research

The results of this study demonstrate that young people hold nuanced attitudes and complex ideas about the police, thus future research should examine the subtleties of these attitudes and ideas. For example, participants expressed that they believed some police were good and some were bad under various conditions. They also conceptualized a difference between the local police that they see in their neighborhoods and “the police” as an institution given power by the state. These results additionally suggest that they ways that researchers

currently quantify perceptions of police in many survey instruments might not be sufficient as they lack nuance. Asking survey participants to select a response that implies generally positive or generally negative perceptions may lead researchers to draw false conclusions about the perceptions that people have of the police.

Future research should also examine the role that social media plays in shaping attitudes and perceptions. Previous research in a variety of fields has linked media exposure to attitudes and perceptions (see, for example, Gilens & Bartels, 1999; Pfeiffer, Windzio, & Kleimann, 2005). Some research does exist on the influence of social media on attitudes (e.g., Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010), but little exists in relation to policing (Hockin & Brunson, 2016). The results of this study suggest that the influence of social media may be different for individuals who regularly experience police contact and who frequently see the police in their neighborhood versus those who live in places where police contact is relatively uncommon. Social media seems to serve as a filter to what types of police-citizen encounters to which people are exposed. Research on vicarious experiences of police contact have focused on the ways that people identify and empathize with the citizen, but little focus is given to how people might identify and empathize with the police officer instead. Some participants suggested that the impacts of viral events on social media are short-lived because attention is not sustained. Future research should explore the relationship between attitudes and exposure to information through social media as they change over time.

The results of this study suggest that the way participants assigned motivations and intentions to police behavior affected their evaluations of fairness, but little research exists on citizen's explanations for police behavior. For example, participants seemed to neutralize an individual officer's behavior and instead blame state powers when they felt that officers were

motivated by making money to feed their families or following orders/meeting quotas. On the other hand, believing an officer's motivation was to mess with neighborhood residents elicited different cognitive and behavioral reactions among participants. Future research should examine the ways in which interpreting motivation and intention are linked to cooperation or defiance and perceptions of legitimacy.

Research on police-citizen interactions often comes from survey data asking people to recall past experiences or from official records such as police reports. While this data is useful for understanding encounters in general, it often does not capture the details of body language or tone of voice that seem to have a sustained impact on the way participants in this study thought about the police. This area of research would benefit from utilizing ride-along or field observation data to learn about the small behaviors that influence an interaction and perceptions of the interaction. Future research in this area might also consider pairing field observations with survey data so we can explore the link between behaviors/actions and attitudes immediately following the interaction.

Conclusion

Research on police-citizen encounters has grown rapidly in the past several decades; however, this study adds to the literature by addressing several gaps. Research typically highlights the experiences of minority youth in high-crime areas; this study also included youth from more affluent and suburban neighborhoods. Additionally, this study took place amidst a social-media spotlight on policing and race following several highly publicized police shootings. Little criminal justice research exists on the ways social media might influence perceptions, so this study included questions on young people's social media experiences. It is clear that there is much to be learned about the ways the young people form perceptions of the police, especially in

a time when access to information through social media and the Internet is greater than it has ever been. In combination with the current political climate's emphasis on criminal justice reform, now is an opportune time to explore social constructions of policing, justice, and legitimacy.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

The following questions will be used as a foundation for structuring each interview. The questions listed with the highest-order bullet points are the main questions that will be asked. Potential prompts and follow-up questions are nested below.

Part 1: Neighborhood

This interview is about your personal experiences and stories, so I'd like you to set the scene for me.

- Tell me about your neighborhood and what I might see or hear if I walked through it.
 - Who would I see?
 - Where?
 - What are they doing?
 - Do people know each other?
 - How often do you see police?
 - What would I observe?
 - Describe the houses/apartments
 - What other buildings (schools, businesses) are there?
 - What does the physical landscape (sidewalks, lawns) look like?
- How might someone else coming into your neighborhood for the first time see it? What would they notice first?

Part 2: Overall Perception

- What is your “gut reaction” when I ask, “What do you think about the police?”
 - Are you thinking about the police that enforce the law in your neighborhood or “the police” in general (police departments across the state/country)?
- Do the police do a good job (when called or help/when stopping someone)?
 - Many police departments have a motto of “to protect and serve,” do you think they actually do that? Why/Why not?
 - Do you respect the police? Why/Why not?
- If you went to another city in the United States that you've never been to, what expectations do you have about how the police would act?

Part 3: Specific Events/Experiences

Now that we have talked about your overall opinion of the police, let's explore the “why?” question. I am going to ask you some questions about how your experiences and others' experiences have shaped your mindset about the police.

- Can you tell me an interaction with a police officer that sticks out in your mind the most (non-voluntary)? I want to learn about both what happened (behaviors) and how the events have affected your attitude toward police (thought process).
 - What were you doing?

- What were your expectations about what would happen?
- What did the officer do?
- Why do you think he/she did that?
- How did that make you feel?
- What did you do in response? Why?
- What would you want to be different?
- Do you think what happened was fair? Why/Why/not?
 - Does it matter that it was/wasn't fair?
- (If they have had other experiences) Is this experience similar to other times you have interacted with a police officer?
- Has there been a time where you or someone you were with called the police for help?
 - Explain the situation.
 - What were your expectations about what would happen?
 - Do you think what happened was fair? Why/why not?
- What do your friends and family tell you about their experiences with the police?
 - How are they similar to and different from your own?
 - In what ways do their experiences impact your beliefs about the police?
- Shifting the focus slightly, let's talk about how the incidents of police violence or police involved shoots that are frequent topics on the news and social media. What do you see?
 - What do these events mean to you in terms of how you view the police?

Part 4: Acculturation

When we are young, we learn about the police (who they are and what they do) from our family, teachers, and friends.

- What were you told/taught about the police when you were younger?
 - Who did you learn these things from?
 - How does what you learned affect your mindset when you see/are approached by a police officer?

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Vita

Sara Margret Hockin was born in Detroit, Michigan, on July 31, 1991. After graduating from Walled Lake Western High School in 2009, she attended Michigan State University, where she majored in Psychology and Criminal Justice with a Peace and Justice Studies specialization. During her time at Michigan State University, she conducted research with Dr. Pennie Foster-Fishman in the Ecological-Community Psychology department. In 2013, she received her Bachelor of Arts degree with honors.

In 2014, Sara was accepted into the Criminal Justice and Criminology graduate program at Georgia State University, where she currently attends. She worked as a research assistant with Dr. William Pridemore, which resulted in two publications currently under review. She also published an article with Rod Brunson in 2016 in *Race and Justice* entitled “The Revolution Might Not Be Televised (But It Will Be Live Streamed) Future Directions for Research on Police–Minority Relations.” She has presented her work at national academic conferences including the annual meetings for the American Society of Criminology and the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences. Currently, she works as the managing editor for *Criminal Justice Review* and *International Criminal Justice Review*. In 2016, she received the Graduate Academic Achievement award for maintaining the highest GPA in the Criminal Justice and Criminology department. She plans to continue graduate school, pursuing her PhD in Criminal Justice and Criminology.

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