

Policing Different Racial Groups in the United States

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This essay presents a set of findings from the authors' empirical studies of police relations with different racial and ethnic groups in the United States. The findings pertain to the role of race and ethnicity in policing practices and in citizens' perceptions of and encounters with the police. The data are derived from multiple levels (national, city, neighborhood) and both qualitative and quantitative findings are presented. Comparisons are made between three key groups in the United States: whites, blacks, and Hispanics. The essay concludes with a consideration of policy implications related to the findings.

1. Introduction

Race and ethnicity condition policing in societies throughout the world. Where minority racial or ethnic background are coupled with low socioeconomic status, it is typically the case that such populations are treated worse by the police and view them more critically than individuals in the higher-class racial group. This pattern applies to societies with extreme economic inequality and/or ethnic polarization as well as societies where economic and ethnic divisions are less severe (Goris, Jobard & Lévy, 2009; Miller, 2008; Milton-Edwards, 1997; Weitzer, 1985; 1995). This essay presents findings from several studies, conducted by the authors and their colleagues, of police relations with racial and ethnic populations in different contexts within the United States.

We focus on police relations with whites and blacks, and include Hispanic Americans insofar as our research included this group (see Weitzer, 2014). Hispanics now comprise 17% of the American population; African Americans are 13%, East Asians 5%, and whites 63%. The Hispanic population is concentrated along the southern border with Mexico, in states such as Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas; many Hispanics also live in Florida, after migrating there from Cuba. A segment of the Hispanic population in the United States consists of unauthorized immigrants: about 6 million persons of Mexican origin are residing in the country illegally, out of a total of 53 million Hispanics (USA population in 2013 was 316 million). Their migration/citizenship status renders their relations with the police somewhat different than whites and African Americans.

In general, Hispanics have a worse relationship with the police than whites but better than African Americans. This pattern can be traced to both the historical conditions under which each group entered the country as well as their contemporary treatment

by officers and their group-level perceptions of the police. Rather than a single ‘minority group’ orientation to the police, the general pattern is a *racial hierarchy* taking the form of a white/Asian/Latino/black continuum (see Weitzer & Tuch, 2006).

In several research projects, the authors have examined the following issues:

- police behavior during contacts with civilians;
- citizens’ perceptions of the police and the sources of those attitudes – including personal encounters and vicarious experiences communicated by third parties or reported in the media;
- the influence of individuals’ age and gender in interaction with race;
- the role of neighborhood context in shaping residents’ relations with the police;
- the role of police officers’ own racial background in shaping how they treat civilians and how they are perceived by the public;
- the kinds of reforms in police practices that people want to see in their neighborhood or city or the entire nation.

The paper covers each of these issues.

2. Personal and vicarious experiences

It is well known that an individual’s racial and ethnic background affects his or her perceptions, contacts, and experiences with the police. Many studies have found that blacks and Hispanics in the United States have more negative views of the police than their white counterparts – and they are much more likely to believe that they have been racially discriminated against by a police officer. A 2006 national study found that 43% of blacks, 26% of Hispanics, and 3% of whites believed that they had been stopped by the police just because of their race or ethnic background. When asked about their encounters with the police in their city of residence (rather than more generally), 34% of blacks say they have been stopped without good reason, compared to 20% of Hispanics and 13% of whites. Blacks and Hispanics are equally likely to say that they have been verbally abused (18% of both groups) and physically abused by the police (9% of both groups), compared to 6% and 4% of whites, respectively (Weitzer & Tuch, 2006, 53).

Interestingly, these findings are *very similar* to the results of surveys conducted in the USA in the 1990s, demonstrating continuity over time. For example, a 1995 poll found that 38% of blacks and 7% of whites felt that a police officer had ‘ever treated you unfairly because of your race’ (CNN, 1995), and a 1999 poll reported that 40% of blacks and 5% of whites believed that they had ever been stopped by police ‘because of your race’ (Gallup, 1999). The most recent poll, in August 2014, reported very similar numbers when respondents were asked whether they had ‘ever felt discriminated against by the police because of your race’: 45% of blacks, 7% of whites (*New York Times*, 2014).

Moreover, the *nature of the stop* makes a difference. A recent study reported that the race of the driver is not a factor in routine, ordinary traffic stops (e.g., for speeding or other driving infractions), but drivers’ race is a predictor of ‘investigatory stops,’ which are based on more minor violations and conducted in the hope of making an arrest or for the purpose of harassment. Such stops are a pretext intended to uncover other offenses (such as the possession of illegal drugs or weapons) rather than simply

a driving violation. Such investigatory stops are largely targeted at young black males (Epp, Maynard-Moody & Haider-Markel, 2014).

A racial-hierarchy pattern is evident not just in whether a person is stopped by police but also in what happens during the stop. A national survey of Americans who were stopped by the police in 2008 reported that race made a difference in whether or not they were searched by a police officer: black drivers were three times more likely than whites (12.3 and 3.9%, respectively) and twice as likely as Hispanics (5.8%) to be searched during a traffic stop (BJS, 2011). Of those who experienced any kind of face-to-face contact with the police in 2008, blacks were also more likely than Hispanics or whites to be the recipients of force or threatened force (3.4, 1.6, 1.2%, respectively [BJS, 2011]). A study of 732 Hispanic and African American high-school students in Chicago found that black students were more likely than Hispanics to say they were treated disrespectfully when stopped by a police officer (62% and 45%, respectively) (Lurigio, Greenleaf & Flexon, 2009). And a survey of 1,375 Hispanics reported that 5% had been stopped by police in the past year and asked about their immigration status (Lopez, Morin & Taylor, 2010). The question of immigration status is not salient for whites and blacks in the U.S. and few of them are questioned by police about this.

Direct personal experience is only one influence on attitudes toward the police. Individuals' opinions are also shaped by *vicarious experiences* – i.e., what they learn from other people's encounters with police, either directly communicated to them or from more indirect, remote sources such as mass media reports on policing problems and specific incidents (Rosenbaum, Schuck, Costello, Hawkins & King, 2005). A national survey asked respondents whether someone in their household had ever told them that they were a victim of a racially motivated police stop. More than one-third of blacks (35%) answered affirmatively, compared to 24% of Hispanics and 3% of whites (Weitzer & Tuch, 2006, 87). When the question is limited to vicarious experiences (someone in respondent's household) within one's own city of residence, the prevalence figures are significant: for unwarranted police stops, 31% for blacks and 21% for Hispanics; for verbal abuse 19% and 18%; and for physical abuse 13% and 10% (Weitzer & Tuch, 2006, 55). Fewer whites report that anyone in their household had told them about these kinds of experiences with police officers: 5% had been told about an incident of excessive force and 7% verbal abuse by a police officer in their city.

These nationally representative findings are consistent with qualitative data on selected cities. In interviews with black adults living in East St. Louis (Illinois), we found that older cohorts, and especially elders, actively teach young people methods of avoiding the police entirely or, if one is stopped by an officer, of preempting an altercation. We document an *intergenerational transmission of conduct norms*: black adults counsel young people in the proper etiquette to use during contacts with the police (Brunson & Weitzer, 2011). This code-of-conduct includes instructions to refrain from congregating in groups in order to avoid being stopped altogether and, if stopped, to show respect toward the officer, keep hands in plain view, avoid any sudden actions, and never run from the police.

One of our interviewees, Kurtis, offered the advice he gives to his two sons in his effort to protect them from police abuse:

I tell them if you're driving and you're pulled over by the cops, make sure you're in an area with people; then you pull over and put your hands out the window, and don't make no move until they get there. I don't care if they're pulling you over for a driving violation. Put your hands out the window. Hold your hands up in the air. That's so there won't be no mistakes ... I talked to my sons about it ... Don't run, because things can happen and it's their word against yours, and if you're young and black, you're going to lose that argument.

These discussions may include revelations about one's previous encounters with the police, thus helping to explain why blacks report higher levels of indirect, vicarious experience than is true for Hispanics or whites. There is no evidence that adults in other racial groups feel the need to teach youths a similar kind of etiquette. But this has long been prominent within social networks in the African American community.

Just as some individuals form attitudes toward the police based on their direct association with others, people can also be influenced by remote sources, as differential-identification theory holds (Glaser, 1956). For those who have never had any personal interaction with a police officer or direct association with someone who recounted their own experiences, their views are shaped by other sources, especially media reporting on controversial incidents involving the police. Research has found that both a single incident and a succession of incidents reported in the media can have a major influence on a person's opinions of the police. A single controversial incident (such as the videotaped beating of Rodney King in 1991 or a killing perceived as unjustified, such as Michael Brown in Ferguson in 2014) can have a strong negative impact on popular confidence in the police (and not just in the city where the incident occurred) (Weitzer, 2002). National survey data show that repeated exposure to media stories involving police abuses of ethnic minorities is a strong predictor of perceptions of racialized policing, assessments of the prevalence of several types of police misconduct, and support for a variety of reforms in police practices (Weitzer & Tuch, 2006). These media effects were found for whites, Hispanics, and blacks, but on some issues media exposure had less affect on whites than the other two groups. For those who have had direct encounters with the police, the experiences, especially of other same-race individuals, can magnify the significance of their own past experiences as well as influence their general attitudes toward the police.

3. Race, age, and gender

In addition to a person's racial background and socioeconomic status, age and gender shape a person's attitudes toward and personal experiences with the police in the United States. Age is one of the most consistent predictors of both individual attitudes and personal contacts with the police, with young people much more likely to have an encounter with officers and for these encounters to be involuntary and unpleasant. Women and girls are less likely to experience any kind of contact with the police, and when they do, they are less likely than males to have a negative experience. But a person's race is an important part of the equation as well.

Research shows that *young ethnic minority males* in the United States and other countries are uniquely susceptible to being stopped, interrogated, and searched by the police (Epp et al., 2014; Goris et al., 2009). The widespread 'stop and frisk' practice in New York City has been largely applied in high-crime, poor, and non-white neighborhoods in the

city, causing much public controversy (Fagan, Geller, Davies & West, 2010). Regarding the argument that such stops are due solely to local crime rates, the study found that the stops increased 500% over the past decade while the city's crime rate declined; that the efficiency of the stops (the arrest rate) decreased by 50%; and that this decline was disproportionately concentrated in black neighborhoods. A national study found that young Hispanic males were significantly more likely than young white males (ages 18-29) to report that they had been (1) stopped without good reason, (2) verbally abused, and (3) physically abused by a police officer within their own city (Weitzer & Tuch, 2006, 54). Compared to black males of the same age, the Hispanic youths were less likely to be stopped without good reason (29 vs. 62%) or physically abused (5 vs. 14%), but more likely to say they had been verbally abused by the police in their city (31 vs. 21%). Another question asked in this study was more general: whether the person felt that he or she had been 'treated unfairly because of your race.' Young black males were the most likely (41%) to answer affirmatively, compared to 26% of Latino and 3% of white young males. In an earlier national study, 73% of black males 18-34 years old believed that they had been stopped by the police at some time in their lives only because of their race. This compares with 40% of black males ages 50 and older, 38% of same-age black females, and 11% of same-age white males (Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). The 7:1 ratio between young black and white males is a massive difference.

In our interviews in St. Louis with black and white youths (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009; Weitzer & Brunson, 2009), most blacks reported being frequently stopped and questioned by officers:

Mike stated:

People I know, every time they see [the police], they just run. I run sometimes because I don't know what kind of day the police is having. They have pissed-off days when they just come through [the neighborhood] ... trying to lock everybody up ... People [are] scared to come outside in the neighborhood. They think they are going to get locked up.

Some of these individuals may be officially wanted by the police, with warrants for their arrest, while others may simply wish to avoid any contact with police officers. Will described one incident:

A friend of mine and me were outside late night, and I guess the officer that approached took us as gang bangers. He asked us what we were doing and we said, 'Nothing,' and he [said] that we looked real suspicious ... He used the excuse that we had drugs in our mouths and told us to take whatever we had in our mouths out. We had grills [decorative dental molds] in our mouths and he made us take them out. We showed them to him in our hands and [the officer] smacked them out and when they [hit] the ground, he stomped on them and laughed. But he was showing us that he had more power, authority over us at the time, so there was nothing we could do or say.

White respondents mentioned considerably fewer involuntary police stops.

Moreover, many young black and Latino males recount being stopped *repeatedly*. In addition to the sheer quantitative aspect of this, our interview data reveal *how it feels* to be repeatedly stopped and questioned by the authorities, to be searched in public,

and to be treated with a presumption of criminality. Research with Hispanic youths (Puerto Rican and Dominican) in New York City illustrates the kinds of indignities experienced by ethnic minority youths (Solis, Portillos & Brunson, 2009). For example, Eddie believed that the police view Hispanics with a presumption-of-guilt: 'Since I'm Spanish, the police thought I was up to no good. It didn't matter what I [would have] said. I was Spanish, so I must be guilty.' Other youths agree that New York officers consistently view and deal with Hispanics as outsiders due to officers' suspicions of Latino residents' immigration status. For instance, Elena stated,

I'm Puerto Rican, I live in Washington Heights ... Cops around here have no problem throwing people up against walls, stores, cars, and even the floor. They always ask all us Spanish people ... for some kind of [identification]. Why do I need to walk around all the time with [identification], like I'm some kind of illegal person? ... My family has lived in this neighborhood for over 30 years and things haven't changed very much, my mom and grandma tell me. They tell me how in the old days the cops used to ask everyone around here for visas. It didn't matter; if you were Spanish, they didn't know who was American, who was Dominican, or who was Puerto Rican.

Zoriada's response further highlights the anxiety shared by many Dominican interviewees regarding the police:

Many of us Dominicans, at least in my community, are afraid of the police, because even when we are citizens, the police just continue to stop us and not respect us, and so many people end up in jail having to prove they are citizens without needing to. It's like what we worked so hard for is second-class citizenship. In this neighborhood full of poor but hardworking people, citizenship sometimes does not matter.

Individuals who have such experiences report feeling racially profiled, demeaned, and dehumanized – and our findings are consistent with other research on this phenomenon (Epp et al., 2014; Sharp & Atherton, 2007; Williams, 1997). But much more research is needed to document the *cumulative effects* of multiple encounters with the police, and the dimensions along which these experiences vary between racial and ethnic group. Do some individuals or neighborhoods *expect* poor treatment from the police as a result of their previous personal experiences or observations of police conduct toward others?

Gender is important in another respect. Young African American women are at greater risk of police mistreatment than young white women. In the same national survey cited above, 38% of black females ages 18-35 stated that they had been stopped by police just because of their race, compared to only 3% of same-age white females. Older black women (50 and over) were less likely to be subject to this racial profiling (15%) but much more likely than same-age white women (1%) (Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). The findings on women demonstrate the importance of the intersection between race and age: They are subject to *double jeopardy*, given that their risk of being racially profiled is based on both their race and age.

Research in St. Louis and Chicago found that although young black women living in disadvantaged neighborhoods were not the primary targets of aggressive policing tactics, they reported being routinely stopped on suspicion of status offenses such as truancy and curfew violations (Brunson & Miller, 2006). For example, Kristy explained, 'Police

are harassing you constantly. If they're not trying to get you for truancy, [they're] trying to get you for curfew.' She provided details of a recent stop:

It was eleven o'clock at night and I was getting off the Lake Street bus. I walked down the street, police put their high beams [car lights] on me, they said, 'Where you going?' And I said, 'Man, I'm going home; leave me alone.' They said, 'Don't talk to us like that. We are the police, we deserve respect, we here to protect you all.' I'm like, 'Man, you ain't doing nothing but bothering me.'

The officers became more agitated when Kristy questioned the legitimacy of the stop:

They said, 'I heard you fit a description. Assume the position, hands on the wall, hands behind your head.' I'm saying, 'I ain't doing nothing.' They said, 'You must want us to put your little black ass in jail.' ... [I said], 'Just let me go home, that's all I'm trying to do; I got school in the morning.' ... They said, 'Well, fuck her. We got better things to do.' So they let me go. I walked home mad as a dog.

According to Kristy, the officers' concern about her wellbeing quickly dissipated after she expressed skepticism regarding their true motives for stopping her. From that point onward, Kristy said that the officers treated her as a suspect.

Kristy's account was in sharp contrast to young men's descriptions of their involuntary police experiences. Male respondents reported being treated as criminals from the beginning of their encounters with police. In comparison, young women were more likely to be treated as suspects in two situations: when in the company of young black men and when they were engaged in crime (Brunson & Miller, 2006). Young black females also complained about police sexual misconduct.

Young black women on Chicago's Southside reported that their primary police contacts involved curfew enforcement efforts (Brunson & Stewart, 2006). For instance, Carmen explained that the police 'don't care about the people around here. You only see them when they [are] messing with us; but try and call them when you really do need something and see what happens.' Shanice remarked, 'That's why I don't like the police. They assume [all] people in Mt. Olive are drug dealers.' And Naja agreed, '[The police] might ride around looking for somebody to swoop down on, but they are never around when stuff really jump off [serious crimes].'

4. Neighborhood context

Police executives typically claim that their officers treat all civilians alike and operate similarly in all kinds of neighborhoods. But the evidence is not consistent with this proclaimed universalistic impartiality. Patrol officers learn to differentiate among neighborhoods according to the race and class of the occupants as well as the local crime rate, even in communities where they make some limited distinctions between different kinds of residents (law abiding vs. troublemakers) (Easton & Ponsaers, 2010). American studies have found that police officers:

- typically stereotype the residents of ethnic minority neighborhoods as uncooperative, estranged, or hostile and, in general, treat most residents similarly—what is known

- as ‘ecological contamination’ of residents because of where they live (Werthman & Piliavin, 1967; see also Moskos, 2008; Sykes & Clark, 1975);
- use coercion more often toward residents of nonwhite or ethnically-mixed neighborhoods than in white communities (Smith, 1986);
 - engage in more misconduct (unjustified stops, corruption, verbal abuse, excessive force) in disadvantaged, nonwhite neighborhoods (Epp et al., 2014; Kane, 2002; Mastroski, Reisig & McCluskey, 2002; Terrill & Reisig, 2003). This includes ‘stop and frisk’ practices in poor ethnic-minority communities, as research in New York neighborhoods demonstrated (Fagan et al., 2010).

These studies demonstrate that policing is typically more aggressive in neighborhoods that are both economically disadvantaged and populated by a subordinate ethnic minority.

If police practices vary across different types of communities, residents’ views of the police can reflect this – although their attitudes may be influenced by other factors as well. Comparisons of white, black, and Hispanic neighborhoods confirm that neighborhoods vary tremendously in their modal relationship with the police. Community-level orientations toward the police are generally more lukewarm or even hostile in economically disadvantaged black or Hispanic neighborhoods than in white neighborhoods. One reason is that a large number of residents of minority neighborhoods feel that the police crime-prevention efforts are lacking, that officers do not respond quickly to calls for assistance, and conduct inadequate investigations of crimes that occur in their neighborhoods (Jacob 1971; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998; Velez, 2001). A 1993 survey reported that 72% of blacks believed that ‘police protection’ was worse in black neighborhoods than white neighborhoods, and 47% of whites agreed (CNN, 1993). These complaints may be rooted in actual police practices in many minority neighborhoods, but it is also possible that residents’ unmet expectations can be a result of difficulties police officers face in getting residents to provide information that can be used in court against offenders. Research indicates that many residents of these neighborhoods fear retaliation (from offenders) if they report crimes or testify against offenders in court.

Inadequate crime control is part of the explanation for neighborhood differences, but real or perceived *violations of due process or procedural justice* is another part of the explanation. Residents of minority neighborhoods are much more likely than residents of white neighborhoods to complain about various types of police misconduct, as noted above, whether they have personally experienced this, heard about it from others, or observed it in public from a distance. Our studies address each of these factors. We have conducted qualitative research in diverse neighborhoods in St. Louis (Missouri) and Washington (DC). This work represents our attempt to disentangle the neighborhood-race/class relationship regarding urban young men’s attitudes toward the police. In particular, our findings reveal that whereas black and white youths alike reported experiencing unwelcome police encounters, they occurred less frequently for whites, who primarily risked being stopped in a more limited set of situations than was true for black youths.

Our study of St. Louis focused on three disadvantaged neighborhoods that differ by racial composition: Mayfield (mostly white), Barksdale (mostly black), and Hazelcrest (racially mixed) (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009). Holding neighborhood-level socioeconomic status constant, we found that race matters regarding how youth are treated by the police. For example, the vast majority of study participants, black and white alike, took

exception to what they considered unlawful police stops and highly intrusive searches. It is important to note, however, that white youths were subjected to such involuntary encounters far less often. Further, the vast majority of black respondents were doubtful that officers would ever see them as anything other than criminal suspects.

White respondents, by contrast, concluded that they were in jeopardy of being stopped by police under certain circumstances: (1) while associating with black males, (2) when visiting or traveling through black or racially-mixed neighborhoods, or (3) when they were dressed in attire commonly associated with urban youth gangs and/or ‘thug culture.’ White youths stopped by officers in majority black and racially mixed neighborhoods reported that officers initially expressed concern for their wellbeing – apparently being viewed as ‘out of place’ by officers – but if observed repeatedly in such places, officers became suspicious of them as well (see also Waddington & Braddock, 1991). White Mayfield youths reported having few firsthand negative experiences with officers in their neighborhood and were more likely to give police the benefit of the doubt regarding the lawfulness of stops. In fact, these youths called for more interface between Mayfield residents and the police. Mayfield youths’ views of officers patrolling their streets were counter to those expressed by the overwhelming majority of Hazelcrest and Barksdale respondents who were frustrated by routine and seemingly indiscriminate police stops, imploring police to stay out of their neighborhoods altogether unless requested.

Along with being upset by repeated pedestrian and vehicle stops, black male respondents were very critical of what they described as officers frequent use of verbally demeaning language – often consisting of racial slurs, profanity, and name-calling. Hazelcrest and Barksdale interviewees were especially troubled that officers commonly used such tactics in the hope of provoking youths into responding in such a manner that would lead to them being physically assaulted and/or arrested by officers (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009). For example, Kyle said that the police will drive by and yell, ‘You get off the corner or we’re going to whoop your asses,’ and Antwan had heard officers say, ‘Get your asses off this corner. What the fuck are you big, stupid motherfuckers doing?’ While both black and white young men complained about discourteous officers, they explained that the most despicable comments were reserved for black males. Such degrading language has the potential to diminish officers’ moral authority in the eyes of community residents and reduce their willingness to obey police commands.

The St. Louis study examined three disadvantaged neighborhoods that differed in racial composition, whereas the Washington DC study included a social class dimension as well (Weitzer, 1999; 2000a; 2000b). Overall, residents’ relations with the police were much better in a middle-class black community (Merrifield) than in a highly disadvantaged black community (Spartanburg). In fact, on some issues, the middle-class black neighborhood registered more positive views of the police than the third neighborhood, a middle-class white community (Cloverdale):

- Asked if at least half of the city’s police officers would need to be replaced to produce a ‘good police force,’ 40% in Spartanburg, 22% in Merrifield, 14% in Cloverdale agreed.
- Asked whether they thought that police ‘stop people on the street in this neighborhood without good reason,’ *seven times more* residents of the lower-class than in the middle-class black neighborhood answered ‘yes’ (35 vs. 5%), and twice as many residents of the middle-class white neighborhood agreed (11%).

- A virtually identical pattern was found for another question: whether the police ‘use insulting language against people in this neighborhood’: 35% (Spartanburg), 7% (Merrifield), 9% (Cloverdale).
- Results for a third question also showed a stark difference between the two black communities. Asked how often they thought ‘incidents occur in this neighborhood when the police rough up or use excessive force against residents,’ 28% in Spartanburg answered ‘very often’ or ‘fairly often,’ compared to 4% in Merrifield and 6% in Cloverdale. The majority in Merrifield (57%) answered ‘never,’ compared to 17% in Spartanburg and 40% in Cloverdale.
- Respondents were asked to compare police-community relations to what they imagined was the case in other neighborhoods. Residents of the two black neighborhoods were asked whether they thought the police ‘get along better, worse, or about the same’ with them compared to residents of white neighborhoods in the city, and residents of the middle-class white neighborhood were asked to compare their community with black neighborhoods. The question sought to determine the degree to which residents believe that entire neighborhoods are discriminated against, not individuals per se. The results are telling: 50% of white Cloverdale residents thought that their neighborhood had *better* relations with police than black neighborhoods, and 22% believed they were similar. By contrast, 62% of black Spartanburg residents believed their neighborhood had *worse* relations with the police than in white neighborhoods, while 61% of black Merrifield residents selected the *about same* option. On this issue, both neighborhood-racial and -class composition are structuring residents’ views of the police.

It is not known whether these results are generalizable outside the three study sites – to other neighborhoods in Washington or to other cities – because there has been so little qualitative research that systematically compares different types of neighborhoods. An exception is Jacob’s (1971) study of three neighborhoods in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; in the poor black community, the negative reputation of the police was so widespread that even people who had no contact with the police viewed them poorly – a finding that was not replicated in the other two study sites: a working-class white neighborhood and a middle-class white neighborhood. In general, the middle-class neighborhood had a better opinion of the police than the working-class white neighborhood and the latter had a more favorable relationship with the police than the poor black neighborhood – indicating both race and class effects in this early study.

Especially missing from the literature are studies focusing on *middle-class* black and Hispanic communities in the USA. Some quantitative studies, however, do lend support to the finding that socioeconomically disadvantaged black neighborhoods are more critical of the police, in terms of crime-control practices, than middle-class black neighborhoods (Sampson & Bartusch, 1998). A study of three American cities (Rochester, St. Louis, Tampa), for example, reported an average difference of 18 percentage points separating low- and extremely-disadvantaged neighborhoods in terms of residents’ satisfaction with the quality of police services to the neighborhood; a 14-percentage point difference was found on the question of whether police provide the kind of services community members desire (Velez, 2001).

Police *accountability* is important for the general public, but race and class influence residents’ assessments of accountability. The three neighborhoods in Washington

differed on the question of whether police officers who violate the law ‘usually get away with it’: 72% in Spartanburg, 49% in Merrifield, and 57% in Cloverdale agreed with this statement. An important issue is whether neighborhood residents have the capacity to hold officers accountable for inadequate police protection or for instances of misconduct. Residents of disadvantaged, minority neighborhoods typically lack this kind of clout – having few if any ties to local authorities who might be able to help improve police practices – and the interviewees in Spartanburg were quite adamant that the community lacked the connections and capacity to reduce police misconduct or demand better protection. The two middle-class neighborhoods, however, demonstrated much stronger ties to city officials and believed that their demands would be taken seriously; a police officer who works in Merrifield confirmed that its residents had ‘pull’ with city officials and the police hierarchy. A Cloverdale resident believed that because his neighborhood was ‘well off and powerful,’ the police were aware that ‘they wouldn’t get away with’ abusing residents.

Even if poor neighborhoods were able to organize collectively to challenge police abuses of power, residents of such neighborhoods have little confidence that their complaints will be taken seriously. In our study of East St. Louis (Illinois) – a different study than the St. Louis (Missouri) study – black respondents were almost unanimous in their belief that they had no capacity to restrain police misconduct. We asked whether they would file an official complaint if they were mistreated by a police officer, almost no one said they would do so. They took the view that the system was rigged against them and that filing a formal complaint would either do no good or might prove counterproductive if the accused officer retaliated (Weitzer & Brunson, 2013, 257). As Alton remarked regarding the accountability unit inside the police department (Internal Affairs): ‘I feel that Internal Affairs in East St. Louis works more hand in hand with the police department [rather] than trying to solve the problems of the police department. They’re more on the policemen side than they are on the citizen side.’ Alton further stated that if he had a complaint, he would attempt to bypass the police department altogether with the hope of increasing the odds that the complaint would be properly handled. He stated:

If I was going to file a complaint [against an officer], I would go to City Hall and I would have my complaint in writing. I would put it in an envelope and have the clerk give it to the mayor himself. I would not deal with anybody on the police force, because I feel that all of them work together and your paperwork might get ‘misplaced.’ So I would put my paper right in the mayor’s secretary’s hand so it can go straight to the mayor.

Gail explained why she believes that an independent review board might be ineffective in East St. Louis:

If a citizens’ group is going to be [part of] the same old network, then it’s not going to be effective. If the chief appointed them, if they’re all political allies, then it’s not going to make a difference – because you’re dealing with the same group, just called something else.

By contrast, residents of more affluent neighborhoods typically have connections to local elites, who can be called upon to hold officers accountable for their practices (Kane, 2002).

Some studies find that, net of other factors, racial composition is a predictor of neighborhood-level patterns of police behavior and/or residents' views of the police, but other research suggests that racial composition recedes in significance once other neighborhood-level variables are included. The Washington study found that residents of the black middle-class neighborhood held much more favorable views of the city's police than residents of the black lower-class community and, on some issues, were more favorable than residents of the white middle-class neighborhood (Weitzer, 1999; 2000a).

These results are consistent with quantitative studies in several other American cities, where the social-class composition of a neighborhood had as much explanatory power as its racial complexion (Sampson & Bartusch, 1998; Schuck, Rosenbaum & Hawkins, 2008; Schafer, Huebner & Bynum, 2003; Holmes, 1998; Wu, Sun & Triplett, 2009). In some of these studies, neighborhood-class was a more significant predictor than neighborhood-race for at least one of the racial or ethnic groups studied, while race remained the prime factor for the other communities. Both patterns were documented in a study of El Paso, Texas. Hispanics living in a middle-class community were about as likely as Hispanics living in a poor neighborhood to believe that the police engaged in misconduct toward city residents (abusive language, excessive force, illegal searches). At the same time, whites living in a poor neighborhood were more likely than middle-class whites to perceive police misconduct, lending credence to the views of Hispanics in the poor area. In other words, social class made a difference for whites, but not for Hispanics (Holmes, 1998).

Another study demonstrated the importance of both race and class. When residents of the black middle-class community in Washington traveled outside their neighborhood, they were 3.4 times more likely to be stopped outside their neighborhood than inside, whereas the difference was much narrower for middle-class whites and for lower-class blacks in the study (Weitzer, 1999). Their middle-class status lowered police suspicion inside their neighborhood – where their class position was obvious – whereas race trumped their (invisible) class status when they were stopped outside their community. Moreover, when they encountered police outside their community they reported much more negative treatment from officers than what they received inside their neighborhood. Living in a middle-class neighborhood provided residents with a halo-effect in terms of how they were perceived by police officers, but the halo disappeared when they encountered officers outside and the salience of race increased.

It seems important to study the impact of *neighborhood type* on residents' relations with the police in European societies, to determine if neighborhood context is of similar importance as it is in the United States.

5. Race of police officers

Most research shows that black and white police officers differ little in how they actually *treat* citizens. The demands of the organization and the subculture of the police are conducive to learning similar conduct norms, irrespective of one's racial or ethnic background. One exception is a study in two American cities (Indianapolis, St. Petersburg) that found black officers being more likely than white officers to engage in supportive behavior in black neighborhoods: offering information, providing assistance, comforting victims, and making referrals to other agencies (Sun & Payne 2004). But, other studies

report that most white and minority officers behave similarly in both their *interactions and in applying the law* to civilians (Moskos 2008; Riksheim & Chermak 1993). For example, a study of police stops of vehicle drivers found that the race of the officer had no effect on ‘the officer’s demeanor toward the driver and the officer’s investigatory intrusions and sanctions’ (Epp et al., 2014, 105).

How does the public view the racial background of police officers? Divergent opinions were discovered in both the Washington study and the national survey, where a proportion of whites, blacks, and Hispanics thought that the race of a police officer was important in how he or she treats civilians, whereas other respondents did not regard officer-race as important (Weitzer 2000b; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006, 98-105). The latter subscribed to the ‘blue cops’ position – that the color of the uniform was the only color that mattered. This race-neutral view was held by a majority of whites and Hispanics and a third of blacks when asked whether there are differences in the way white and black officers treat civilians, and a majority of all three groups when the comparison was between white and Hispanic officers. At the same time, the majority of all three groups felt that an ethnically diverse police department was important for *symbolic* reasons, i.e., in positively reflecting the diversity of the nation; between 70-80% of all three groups take this position. The *police department* should reflect the racial composition of the city’s population, but *individual officers’* race was less of a concern for many respondents.

One important question remains unanswered: do police departments that have a majority of black or Hispanic police officers operate differently than majority-white departments? Today, several American cities have either majority-black or majority-Hispanic police departments – including Atlanta, Detroit, Washington, Miami, El Paso, and Santa Fe. Given the lack of research, it is unknown whether this type of factor (racial composition of the police) has an influence on either police behavior or civilian opinions of the police, but a study comparing Chicago and Washington suggests that composition may indeed have some effect on public confidence in each city’s police department (Weitzer, Tuch & Skogan, 2008). In Europe, the ethnic composition of police forces may be an important factor in influencing residents’ attitudes toward and treatment by police officers.

6. Policy implications and reforms

Our research has implications for policy and practice in America and in areas of Europe with significant populations of ethnic minorities (Easton & Ponsaers, 2010; Goris et al., 2009; Junger, 1990; Miller, 2008; Weitzer, 1985; 1995). Almost all of the previous research on police-citizen relations focuses on general satisfaction or on specific kinds of policing problems, rather than on corrective measures that might reduce misconduct or improve policing generally. Our studies point to a set of reforms that register great public approval. Where popular support for a specific change is widespread and intense, this may be symptomatic of a problem that needs to be fixed. If implemented, the reform may (1) reduce the amount of police misconduct or improve police practices more generally, (2) increase public confidence and bolster the legitimacy of the police, and (3) increase citizens’ willingness to cooperate with individual officers.

The national survey asked respondents a set of questions related to police practices and the kinds of reforms that citizens would support either for their own city’s police department or for policing throughout the United States (Weitzer & Tuch, 2006).

Regarding the behavior of officers during encounters, 90% of respondents agreed with the statement, ‘When a police officer stops a person on the street or in a car, the officer should be required to explain to the person the reason for the stop’; more than three-quarters agreed that, ‘When a police officer stops and searches a citizen and his or her vehicle, and finds no evidence of a crime, the officer should be required to apologize to the citizen for the inconvenience of the search.’ More than 90% also want to retain the legally enshrined right to remain silent when questioned by police and to have access to a lawyer. Sensitivity training for officers – to improve their treatment of civilians – is favored by most Hispanics (75%) and blacks (85%), as well as a majority of whites. These results demonstrate the importance of *being treated fairly and respectfully, being told the reasons for officer actions, being informed of their rights, and receiving due process*. Citizens’ demands for these procedural-justice practices are not only widespread but also intense: most whites, blacks, and Hispanics *strongly agreed* with each of these policies.

Other reforms have less potential to influence face-to-face interactions, but they may still boost public trust and confidence in the police – both in the United States and in parts of Europe. Even if the reform does not change police practice, it may pay important symbolic dividends. Most Americans value racial diversity in police departments. In multiracial cities and communities, very few people want the police department to be populated by a single race or want only one racial group policing their neighborhood. Instead, blacks and Latinos want racially-mixed teams of officers to be assigned to neighborhoods, whereas a majority of whites say that officers’ race does not matter. Similarly, few Americans believe that officers are sufficiently accountable for their behavior, which explains widespread support for additional mechanisms to monitor police conduct and stiffen punishment for guilty officers. Two-thirds to four-fifths of white, black, and Hispanic respondents favor equipping police cars with video cameras, creating an early-warning system to identify bad officers, and independent civilian review boards responsible for reviewing citizen complaints against police officers. On the question of whether there should be ‘stronger punishment for officers who engage in misconduct against citizens,’ this is endorsed by 70% of whites, 81% of Hispanics, and 80% of blacks (Weitzer & Tuch, 2006, 147).

Just because ethnic minorities in America tend to be more critical of the police than whites, this does not mean that the former are ‘anti-police’ or indifferent to crime-control practices. The latter may be true for a *small segment* of the minority population – who want the police out of their neighborhoods or have lost all confidence in the authorities – but it is also true for a segment of the white population, as recent politically motivated assaults on police officers by anti-government white militants attests. Indeed, a substantial *majority* of blacks and Hispanics desire robust law enforcement. According to the national survey, 73-80% of whites, blacks, and Hispanics wanted more police patrols; 81-88% favored more police surveillance in high-crime areas; and 34-35% of blacks and Hispanics wanted the police to stop and search people on the street more often, a view shared by 18% of whites (Weitzer & Tuch, 2006, 151). On the third issue, the differences between the three groups were statistically significant, whereas they were not on the first two issues, where the overwhelming majority of all groups favored such enhanced actions. When asked whether they thought each change would improve policing ‘a lot’ in their city, the two minority groups were more likely than whites to answer affirmatively. Research on the ground reflects these national-level patterns. At police-community meetings, for example, African Americans have been vocal in

demanding more police patrols and proactive measures to fight crime. There is also overwhelming support – across all three racial groups – for community policing, in the form of active engagement in identifying local problems and in working together to resolve them.

We can summarize popular preferences for reforms in policing by observing that people want both robust and improved policing. They want the police to be responsive to individual and community needs, which would mean both enhanced crime control and more respectful and less aggressive treatment of individuals. These twin concerns were repeatedly highlighted in both the qualitative and quantitative findings presented in this paper.

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