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# Police Relations with Black and White Youths in Different Urban Neighborhoods

Rod K. Brunson

*Southern Illinois University, Carbondale*

Ronald Weitzer

*George Washington University, Washington, D.C.*

Much of the research on police–citizen relations has focused on adults, not youth. Given that adolescents and particularly young males are more likely than adults to have involuntary and adversarial contacts with police officers, it is especially important to investigate their experiences with and perceptions of the police. This article examines the accounts of young Black and White males who reside in one of three disadvantaged St. Louis, Missouri, neighborhoods—one predominantly Black, one predominantly White, and the other racially mixed. In-depth interviews were conducted with the youths, and the authors' analysis centers on the ways in which both race and neighborhood context influence young males' orientations toward the police.

**Keywords:** *police–community relations; police misconduct; disadvantaged neighborhoods*

Research has consistently found that age is a predictor of citizens' attitudes toward and personal experiences with the police. Young people have more frequent contacts with the police than adults due to their disproportionate involvement in law breaking and their greater presence on the streets (amplifying accessibility to the police) (Leiber, Nalla, and Farnworth 1998; Snyder and Sickmund 1996). In encounters with officers, youths' age translates into disempowerment, another factor shaping interactions with the police. Race makes a difference as well: Minority youth in

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**Authors' Note:** Please address correspondence to Rod K. Brunson, Center for the Study of Crime, Delinquency, and Corrections, Southern Illinois University, 1000 Faner Drive, Carbondale, IL 62901; e-mail: [brunsonr@siu.edu](mailto:brunsonr@siu.edu).

the United States are more likely than Whites to be viewed with suspicion and stopped by the police (Black and Reiss 1970; Hurst, Frank, and Browning 2000; Leiber, Nalla, and Farnworth 1998; Piliavin and Briar 1964) and to report negative personal experiences with officers (Hagan, Shedd, and Payne 2005; Taylor et al. 2001). Unfortunately, most studies documenting age effects do not include respondents younger than 18 years of age, leaving out a critical group.

In addition to demographic characteristics such as race and age, a growing body of literature shows that citizens' relations with the police are also ecologically structured. Specifically, neighborhood context shapes both police practices and police-citizen relations. A popular perspective in criminology, social disorganization theory highlights a set of neighborhood structures that increase the likelihood of street crime, and some scholars have applied the theory to policing as well (Kane 2002; Reisig and Parks 2000; MacDonald et al. 2007; MacDonald and Stokes 2006; Sampson and Bartusch 1998; Velez 2001). Social disorganization theory holds that certain neighborhood conditions (poverty, unemployment, single-parent households, etc.) weaken social ties between residents and decrease their willingness to engage in social control over offenders, hence increasing neighborhood crime rates.

Neighborhood disadvantage and disorganization also appear to be associated with certain patterns in police operations and in residents' orientations toward the police. First, police presence in economically distressed, high-crime neighborhoods is typically greater than in middle-class and affluent areas (Kane 2002; Klinger 1997; Terrill and Reisig 2003), which increases the likelihood of recurrent, unwelcome police attention and the potential for tenuous police-citizen relations. Second, the amount of street crime characteristic of these communities offers plenty of opportunities for police corruption and other forms of malfeasance. Scholars have found that aggressive policing strategies are disproportionately concentrated in disadvantaged, crime-ridden communities (Fagan and Davies 2000; Kane 2002; Reisig and Parks 2000; Smith 1986; Terrill and Reisig 2003). Living in such neighborhoods can have adverse outcomes for residents, whom police tend to distrust and treat less respectfully than residents of tranquil neighborhoods (Klinger 1997; Smith 1986; Werthman and Piliavin 1967).

In addition to greater opportunities for abuses of police power in disadvantaged communities, the residents also have little capacity to hold officers accountable. The same conditions that increase crime in a neighborhood may also foster police misconduct (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003). Specifically, community disorganization undermines not only residents' capacity to intervene

against crime and disorder, but also increases residents' powerlessness in the face of abusive police practices (Kane 2002). Stated differently, residents of socially disorganized neighborhoods have low "collective efficacy" (Sampson 1997), insofar as they lack the mutual trust and collective willingness to intervene in response to both law breakers in their midst and to abusive police officers. Residents of more affluent communities, however, can draw on organizational resources and connections to local elites that can be leveraged in demands for police accountability (Weitzer 1999, 2000).

If neighborhoods with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage and disorganization are typically areas that register higher rates of police misconduct toward residents, this raises the question of whether racial composition makes a difference. In other words, do socioeconomically similar but racially distinct neighborhoods differ in terms of the quality of police services or the frequency of police abuses of citizens? This question has rarely been examined by scholars.

A few quantitative studies suggest that neighborhood socioeconomic status may be more important than racial composition (Reisig and Parks 2000; Sampson and Bartusch 1998; Velez 2001). However, these studies are too few to draw definitive conclusions, and more important, in most American cities, the number of Whites living in highly disadvantaged neighborhoods may be insufficient to sustain multilevel models comparing Whites with disadvantaged Black neighborhoods and individuals (MacDonald et al. 2007). Moreover, by aggregating the data and identifying predictors across many neighborhoods (of the same general type), these large-scale studies mask potentially important neighborhood-specific patterns in police–community relations. This points to the need for contextualized, qualitative research comparing disadvantaged communities of different racial compositions. The closest any studies have come to comparing these particular contexts are Jacob's (1971) research on one working-class White and one poor Black neighborhood in Milwaukee (this was a limited quantitative analysis) and Foster's (1989) comparison of one White working-class and one disadvantaged Black neighborhood in London (examining police behavior, not residents' attitudes). In neither investigation were the study sites well-matched disadvantaged neighborhoods, perhaps because of the lack of a comparable disadvantaged White neighborhood in either city. To further explore the ecology of race, the present study examines the perceptions and experiences of young residents of three similarly disadvantaged communities that differ in racial composition—White, Black, and mixed.

**Table 1**  
**Neighborhood Racial Composition and Socioeconomic Profile**

	% White	% Black	Median Household Income	% Families in Poverty	% Female-headed Household <sup>a</sup>	% Unemployed
Mayfield	85.6	7.4	\$22,861	26.3	37.8	11.8
Barksdale	1.5	97.2	\$24,099	26.5	44.7	15.2
Hazelcrest	50.2	39.8	\$24,933	26.1	55.4	11.8
St. Louis	43.9	51.2	\$27,156	20.8	47.5	11.3

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census (2000).

a. Single-parent household with children under 18 years of age.

## Study Setting and Methodology

Most of the literature is quantitative, and it is important to complement these studies with qualitative research to document complex and nuanced citizen understandings of police practices. Only a handful of qualitative studies of either adults or youth exist (Brunson 2007; Brunson and Miller 2006a, 2006b; Carr, Napolitano, and Keating 2007; Ellison 2001; Sharp and Atherton 2007; Weitzer 1999, 2000). The present article contributes to this body of literature.

Data for this article are drawn from in-depth interviews with male adolescents living in three highly disadvantaged neighborhoods in St. Louis, Missouri: one Black (Barksdale), one White (Mayfield), and one racially mixed (Hazelcrest, 40% Black, 50% White).<sup>1</sup> Table 1 provides census data on respondents' neighborhoods and for St. Louis. The three neighborhoods are almost perfectly matched on socioeconomic indicators: poverty rate (26%), median household income (\$23,000-\$25,000), and unemployment rate (12%-15%). (The racially mixed community was selected from a set of census tracts comprised of nearly equal numbers of Black and White residents.) In other words, the study sites allowed us to hold neighborhood socioeconomic status constant while varying on racial composition—a design advantage not present in most other qualitative studies of police–community relations (e.g., Carr, Napolitano, and Keating 2007; Sharp and Atherton 2007).

The three neighborhoods also fit the criminogenic profile identified by social disorganization theory. All three neighborhoods register higher rates than the city average for at least some index crimes (see Table 2). Street crime and disorder were also described in our youths' accounts

**Table 2**  
**Neighborhood and City Crime, 2005-2006**

	Homicide	Rape	Robbery	Aggravated Assault	Burglary	Larceny	Auto Theft
<b>Number</b>							
Mayfield	2	8	34	82	138	738	145
Barksdale	18	10	104	325	405	522	302
Hazelcrest	6	29	378	607	881	1390	842
<b>Rate<sup>a</sup></b>							
Mayfield	.66	2.67	11.35	27.37	46.07	246.41	48.41
Barksdale	3.43	1.90	19.82	61.96	77.21	99.52	57.57
Hazelcrest	.34	1.68	21.94	35.24	51.15	80.71	48.89
<b>St. Louis City</b>							
Number	260	613	6,112	9,941	15,723	46,409	16,791
Rate <sup>a</sup>	.74	1.76	17.56	28.55	45.16	133.30	48.23

Source: St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, 2005 and 2006.

a. Mean rate per 1,000 population in 2000.

and in our interviewers' descriptions of neighborhood conditions. In addition to serious physical decay and social disorder in Hazelcrest, respondents told us that robberies, assaults, shootings, and car thefts were not uncommon. Similar problems afflicted Barksdale, but it stands out in its high homicide rate. Mayfield was noted for certain kinds of street crime (vandalism, drug use) and disorder manifested in unsupervised youth, stray animals, abandoned vehicles, debris, vacant lots, and derelict buildings.

Although the article is focused on citizens, some aspects of policing in St. Louis can help contextualize our study. Community policing is fairly limited in the city: Monthly neighborhood meetings are held, and a public affairs officer is assigned to each of the nine police districts. Traditional policing is the norm, which means that police work largely consists of responding to calls and proactive patrolling rather than developing police–community partnerships to prevent crime and deal with disorder. In our three study sites, in particular, residents reported that officers were mainly involved in patrolling and surveillance and engaged in frequent stops and searches of pedestrians and motorists. Finally, there appears to be some racial disparity in police stops of citizens in St. Louis. According to police department data, African-American motorists in the city are somewhat more likely to be stopped by police than White motorists (Missouri Attorney General 2005-2007). It should be noted, however, that most of our

study participants who were stopped were too young to drive at the time and were instead stopped as pedestrians.

The current study is based on information obtained from 45 male adolescents living in the three study sites. The interviews were conducted between fall 2005 and spring 2006.<sup>2</sup> Respondents range in age from 13 to 19, with a mean age of 16. Participation in the study was voluntary. The young men were paid \$25 and promised confidentiality.

Three community organizations working with adolescents at neighborhood recreation centers helped to recruit study participants—a strategy used in some other studies (Carr, Napolitano, and Keating 2007; Sharp and Atherton 2007). Our data collection strategy was designed to enlist a wide range of youth. One of the centers was run by the St. Louis Public School District and provided after-hours GED classes to school dropouts. Another center was jointly operated by a grassroots community organization and the public schools. This site hosted an “open gym,” but the sponsors’ ultimate goal was to deliver social services to at-risk neighborhood youth. The remaining center was funded and operated by the city’s Parks and Recreation Department.

Sampling was purposive: Counselors were asked to identify and approach young males for participation in the study, persons who were known to live in the neighborhood. The goal was to interview young Black and White males who live in comparable disadvantaged neighborhoods and are at risk of or involved in delinquent activities, as these youths would likely have more contact with police. In other words, sampling was designed to include youths who may have had personal experiences with the police, but we did not specifically select youths known to have had bad experiences or who had previously expressed animosity toward local law enforcement. As it turned out, about half (46%) of our sample reported that they had been arrested by the police at some time, and 22% had been arrested within the previous six months.

Young males are the focus here because research has identified them as the group for whom involuntary police contacts are most frequent in the United States (Hurst, Frank, and Browning 2000). Few studies have offered an in-depth examination of the nature of young men’s experiences with the police and their perceptions of these interactions. Our study allows for a detailed examination of these issues with both Black and White youth. The interviews explored not only youths’ attitudes toward the police but also their personal experiences and observations of officers, including detailed accounts of their encounters. Reliability was enhanced by cross-checking and probing the youths’ responses to the interview questions. Interviews

lasted approximately one hour, and all except one were conducted in private offices at each location.<sup>3</sup> The tapes from those interviews were transcribed and analyzed by the authors.

The data are limited to respondents' self-reports—their attitudes toward the police and their accounts of encounters with and observations of officers. In the analysis, we selected statements that illustrated themes consistently found throughout the data. The quotes used were not atypical, with the exception of a few issues that we indicate only a few respondents mentioned. We do not assume that young men's version of events is accurate or that in all cases they have provided full disclosure. In fact, citizens may misconstrue police actions and intentions. What is most important for the current study, however, is specifically how respondents characterize their experiences with and perceptions of the police. Nonetheless, we attempted to strengthen the validity and reliability of the data by asking study participants about their views several times during the interview, by inquiring about their personal encounters and direct observations of police officers, and by requesting detailed narratives of incidents. The data analysis was conducted with great care to make certain that the themes we discovered accurately represented young men's descriptions. This was accomplished using grounded theory methods, by which recurrent topics were identified along with less common but important issues (Strauss 1987). Each author independently coded the data and subsequently categorized it into themes and subthemes. In the presentation of study findings, we consider young men's racial backgrounds and draw comparisons based on where they live. Any conclusions from these comparisons, however, must be regarded cautiously, given the modest numbers of respondents across the three study sites. Nonetheless, future research comparing Black, White, and mixed neighborhoods can be used to corroborate our results.

## Results

The data point to both racial and neighborhood differences on the experiential questions. In general, (1) White youth had a less troubled relationship with and more positive views of the police than Black youth, and (2) police treatment of residents appeared to be less problematic in the White neighborhood (Mayfield) and more problematic in the Black neighborhood (Barksdale), with the mixed neighborhood (Hazelcrest) falling in between. Black youth in Barksdale were much more likely than Whites in Mayfield and Hazelcrest to report personal and vicarious experiences with police

abuse. In addition, within Hazelcrest, White residents fared better than Blacks, and Blacks in Barksdale were more likely than Blacks in Hazelcrest to report personal negative experiences with officers, while Black youth in Hazelcrest were more likely to know someone who had been mistreated by police. The vast majority of Barksdale and Hazelcrest respondents reported that policing in their neighborhoods primarily consisted of pedestrian and vehicle stops by patrol officers and specialized units. While a handful of our youths thought that proactive police actions were intended to address particular neighborhood problems, respondents also considered this style of policing as overly aggressive and confrontational. The following discussion examines youths' accounts of their own experiences as well as the experiences of others that were either directly observed by or communicated to them.

## **Unwarranted Stops**

Unwarranted stops of citizens by officers are those where the officer lacks any indication of illegal conduct or those based entirely on a vague intuition that something may be awry. There is no way of knowing what proportion of stops is proper and what proportion unlawful or otherwise unwarranted. We do know, however, that African-American motorists are somewhat more likely to be stopped by police than White motorists in St. Louis and much more likely to be searched following a stop than White motorists (Missouri Attorney General 2005-2007). Research indicates that citizens hold varying definitions of whether a stop is justified, both in the abstract and regarding their own experiences (Weitzer 1999). What matters for the present analysis is whether citizens believe they have been stopped without due cause.

Several of our respondents reported being routinely stopped in situations in which they believed there was no basis for suspicion. Jamal recounted such a stop: "The [police] stopped me and they ran my name and said I needed an [identification card] 'cause I wasn't in the system. [The officer] was like, 'I'm not arresting you, [but] can I put you in handcuffs and run your name?'" Jamal's account illustrates what many young males consider arbitrary police decisions to stop and question them. And even though he realized that he was not under arrest, Jamal said that he took particular exception to being placed in handcuffs "like a common criminal" while the officer processed his information. Similarly, David reported, "Me and my friends was walkin' and I guess [the police] thought we was hangin' on the corner. [The police] rode up and pulled us over. First thing they said was,



‘Get on the hood [of the patrol car].’ . . . They told us to spread our arms and legs and then searched us.’ Police were depicted as overreaching: Officers “lock you up for anything” (Darius) and “harass us constantly” for “no reason” (Derek). Will described one incident:

A friend of mine and me were in the community, we were outside and it was a late night and I guess the officer that approached took us as gang bangers or whatever. He asked us what we were doing and we looked at each other and we said, “Nothing,” and he [said] that we looked real suspicious. . . . He used the excuse that we had drugs in our mouth[s] and told us to take whatever we had in our mouths out. We had grills [decorative dental molds] in our mouth[s] and he made us take them out, we showed them to him in our hand[s] and [the officer] smacked ’em 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.

Respondents were particularly annoyed at unwelcome police attention when engaged in law-abiding behavior. Todd and his friends were detained by officers as they walked home from school: “The police got out of the car and were like, ‘What ya’ll doing?’ I said, ‘We’re coming home from school.’ [The officer] was like, ‘What’s in the book bags?’ He came over and started checking but couldn’t find nothing but books.” And Martez and his friends were subjected to a series of physically intrusive searches:

We was playin’ basketball and [my friend] put a wristband in his gym bag. . . . The police thought it was some crack so they stopped him and was harassing him, like, “Where its at?” He was like, “I ain’t got nothin’.” After they checked him, they checked all of us. Only thing they found was wristbands, white wristbands. . . . [The police officers] took all six of us in [to the station] and was checkin’ our mouth[s] and [other body parts] . . . to see if we have drugs and they found out [that] we didn’t.

The majority of Black youths said that they routinely attracted police attention regardless of whether they were involved in criminal or suspicious activities.

White youths reported fewer experiences, overall, with police stops. In Mayfield, White youths reported few contacts of any kind with police officers. But White youths’ risk of being stopped was heightened in three specific situations: (1) while in the company of young Black males, (2) when in racially mixed or majority-Black neighborhoods, or (3) while dressed in hip-hop apparel. It has been argued that Whites enjoy a “racial halo effect”

that reduces the chances of being viewed with suspicion by police officers (Weitzer 1999), but this halo appears to dim in these three situations of guilt by association.

Such incidents were reported by several White youths. For example, Ed explained, "If White [police officers] are pulling over Whites they are probably nicer than if they are pulling over Blacks, but if they are pulling over Whites and Blacks together . . . a White cop is going to treat a White kid with Black kids just as bad or worse than he would treat Black kids." Ed had been stopped while driving through a Black neighborhood with Black friends: "I probably stood out because I was a White driver and had two Black guys and a Black girl in the car with me." And Toby explained how he and his friend were treated when the police encountered them in a majority-Black neighborhood:

[We] was on a corner during school hours and a cop talked to us about what we were doing, and then took us back to school. We got in trouble for it at school, it sucked. . . . The cop that stopped us was being a dick at first. He kept asking us if we were going on a booty call together. You know, like we were gay. Then kept making jokes about booty calls and then ask[ed] if we left school because of the "brothers." Then he asked if we were scared of the "brothers" and if that is why we left school or if the "brothers" booty call[ed] us and that is why we left. The cop finally quit giving us shit, took us back to school, and we got three days of in-school suspension.

While Toby and his friend were offended by the officer's comments, they decided against reporting him because they "kinda got off easy."

Toby's account is consistent with those provided by other White youths in Hazelcrest and Mayfield. Several Whites reported that when officers found them in majority-Black neighborhoods, they initially expressed concern for their safety. That is, police wanted to make sure that White kids understood the potential danger of such settings. However, White youths who frequented certain Black neighborhoods were more likely to be viewed suspiciously by officers. For instance, Kyle observed,

[The police] asked me what I was doing in a Black neighborhood, 'cause I'm a White boy. They said, "You ain't sellin' drugs are you?" and he tried to plant drugs on me. I didn't have weed on me 'cause I never sold it or smoked it but the [officer] put it in my pocket, put his hand in my pocket and pulled it out. I felt his thumb was folded under his hand, there's a lump. And then when he touched me I felt a bag under his thumb, he pulled it out and then said, "Aha, what's this?"

In addition, police officers appeared to be bothered by White youths' fondness for urban clothing and argot. As James observed, "It don't depend on what race you are, it depends on what you wear. . . . [If] a White guy is wearing hoodies, brand new Jordans, a tank top, [the police] gonna harass him too." Nate agreed that "it's the way we dress and talk. [Police] pretty much stereotype people. . . . They think if kids do saggin' pants and grills, gold [teeth] in they mouth, [that] we punks or we ain't no good." Kyle, who had grown up in a Black neighborhood, said that police think "we look thuggish, so they treat us like thugs. . . . But if you grew up in a perfect neighborhood, the [police] treat you like you're a human being." And finally, Maurice noted,

[The police] assume you run the streets, steal cars, or smoke weed because you dress a certain way, like baggy pants or a long T-shirt and Nike brand shoes. They consider you as a gang member just because of what you were wearing or how you talk.

This is a perfect illustration of Skolnick's (1966, 45-48) "symbolic assailant"—an individual whose mere attire, demeanor, or language is construed by police as a cue that the person is a potential threat or involved in illegal activity.

The White respondents did not necessarily claim that police treated them the same as their Black associates, who remained officers' primary targets, but they made it clear that they were treated differently in these situations because of guilt by association with Black kids, Black neighborhoods, or Black youth culture. Such experiences occurred when officers encountered White youth in Black or mixed neighborhoods. In Mayfield, White youth reported having little contact with officers, primarily observing them on patrol. Limited contact meant fewer occasions for unpleasant encounters, with the result that Mayfield youth were more likely than other youth to believe that most police stops were justified. In fact, some respondents expressed a desire for a greater police presence in Mayfield and for more face-to-face contact with officers—also a finding in a Philadelphia study of youth (Carr, Napolitano, and Keating 2007). One youth said officers should "ask residents how they are doing," and another said, "Cops should get to know people in the neighborhood more." This contrasts with the views of Black youth in Hazelcrest and Barksdale, who were frustrated by officers' widespread, unjustified stops and, because of these stops, wanted police to stay out of their neighborhoods altogether unless summoned. Black youth, in other words, expressed "legal cynicism" and lacked confidence in the police (Sampson and Bartusch 1998).

## Verbal Abuse

Most police departments prohibit officer use of insulting language toward citizens, yet derogatory language remains part of the everyday discourse of police officers (White, Cox, and Basehart 1991). Offensive or condescending language may help an officer gain control over an unruly citizen or may prove counterproductive. Both survey data and formal complaints filed against officers suggest that verbal abuse is common (Weitzer and Tuch 2006), and some of this discourse reflects racial animus on the part of police officers.

Several youths were especially troubled by the manner in which officers spoke to them. They reported that—especially in Hazelcrest and Barksdale—officers frequently were discourteous, used inflammatory language, racial slurs, and engaged in name-calling. Police will drive by and yell, “You get off the corner or we’re gonna . . . whoop your asses” (Kyle) or “Get ya’ll asses off this corner. What the fuck are ya’ll big, stupid motherfuckers doing?” (Antwan). And Lorenz said,

We was [sitting] in the car; we was just sittin’ in there. [Police] got us out the car, check[ed] us and said he found some drugs in the car. And [the officers] said, “One of ya’ll goin’ with us.” [To decide] they said, “Eeny, meeny, miny, moe, catch a nigga by his throat,” and locked up my friend because he was the oldest.

While many of our White respondents said that police on occasion spoke harshly to them as well, they believed that officers reserved the most demeaning and offensive language for Blacks:

[Police might call me] “boy” or say, “You’re a stupid one, aren’t you?” or “You’re being a real smart ass, huh?” And ask me if I want to go down to jail and get raped. I’m White so there usually isn’t a lot of race stuff. I haven’t had a Black cop call me honky or anything like that. But I have heard White cops call my Black friends nigger and “boy” like how they say “boy” in the South. (Ed)

Black respondents also said that officers frequently used racial slurs. Police “like to curse at people for no apparent reason,” said Bob. “They shout bitches, hoes, niggers.” But others thought the reason—racism—was apparent: “I think cops [are] racists,” said Martez. “That’s what I think because they call us niggas.” The use of racial slurs appeared to undermine police legitimacy by weakening officers’ moral authority in the eyes of respondents, and even nonracist but disrespectful language was viewed as dehumanizing.

Antwan complained that “I’m a citizen and a human being just like [them]. I deserve respect.”

Prior research has shown that citizens’ demeanor is often influenced by police officers’ behavior (Wiley and Hudik 1974). Aggressive or demeaning police actions have the potential to easily escalate and expose citizens to more serious kinds of abuse (Mastrofski, Snipes, and Supina 1996). This dynamic is abundantly illustrated in our data. For example, Tommie noted, “There was a fight in the neighborhood and a bunch of people was standing around. [The police] was like, ‘Ya’ll gotta go home,’ and somebody said, ‘We ain’t gotta go nowhere.’ They thought it was me and the officer said, ‘I’ll have you missing [cause your disappearance].” Officers also took exception to being questioned about the legality of their actions. For instance, Jamal observed, “I guess [the police] thought we were fina run. He was like, ‘Why you guys walkin’ away?’ My friend kept asking, ‘What did we do?’ The police was like, ‘I should punch you in the mouth.” Respondents argued that officers routinely provoked youths to have a reason to assault them:

It was the Fourth of July, and the police thought I had been shooting off fireworks. When they jumped out I didn’t have no fireworks, but I did have a lighter. [One of the officers] was like, “We should beat your ass [just] for having this.” I just looked at him. . . . I wasn’t gonna respond to him like, “Yeah right,” [because] he would have just hit me. (James)

Derek suggested that a change in policing tactics might yield greater citizen compliance and lessen the chances of clashes:

I guess [police officers] think that if they don’t talk [harshly] people might not take them seriously, but they ought to know that if you talk like [that to people] then people are gonna talk like that to you. [On the other hand], if you just come to people in a calm way then people will [respond] like, “Yeah, yeah we’ll move off the corner.” But when you come around, flying down the street, throwing your brakes real hard and jumping out [the police car] like, “You guys need to get your asses off this corner or all you motherfuckers are gonna be locked up,” man we ain’t going nowhere.

Youths who had a history of contacts with the same officers were harassed because of their previous misdeeds. Officers who were aware of their arrest histories frequently reminded them of this and used the information to belittle them. For example,

if [the police] know you've been in jail, or they think you've been in jail, or they catch you doing something . . . They caught my friend gambling [one time] and now they won't say "Hey young man"; they'll say, "Hey, gambler. You still in trouble?" Or they'll say, "Hey jailbreak, what you been doing? You staying out of trouble?" I can't really say what I want to say to them, so I just keep walking. (James)

Interviewees also said that officers often sought to humiliate or embarrass them in front of their peers by making young people engage in degrading acts. Examples included making people pick up trash, perform risky physical stunts, and forcing them to remove their shoes and run down the street barefooted.

### Physical Abuse

Excessive force is legally defined as more force than is necessary under the circumstances to accomplish a lawful objective—the standard established by the Supreme Court in 1989 in *Graham v. Connor*.<sup>4</sup> What is excessive, therefore, depends on the specific circumstances of an encounter, including whether the citizen is unruly, poses a threat to others, or resists arrest. While some citizens are inclined to construe any use of force as excessive, others are more generous toward officers even when they are the recipients. Our study investigates respondents' accounts of the circumstances where undue force occurred and the meanings attached to such events.

Police stops of our respondents were often associated with some type of bodily contact (i.e., rifling through pockets, restraining action, and forcibly undressing suspects). While most of these involuntary police contacts did not result in any serious physical harm, the young men reported that excessive force was used on numerous occasions. The most common forms of force that young males reported included shoving, punching, kicking, and the use of mace.

Several young males considered police violence a routine aspect of neighborhood life. In addition, they came to understand that law-abiding status alone could not protect them from physical abuse. For example, Darius described how an officer "threw my face up against the [car window]." Martez recounted that "me and my brothers was sitting out one summer just chillin.' The police came up outta nowhere and just slammed my brother face in the dirt. . . . I'm like, "Dang, what's the problem?" And [another officer] pulled out a nightstick and hit me four times in the chest." And Ed described how an officer who mistakenly believed he was concealing drugs choked him in an attempt to obtain evidence:

We were just sitting in the car and he walked up to the window and shined the flashlight in my face. I was like, "Get the flashlight out of my face." I got out of the car and the cop was like, "You think I am a chump don't you?" And he started choking me and was holding me, yelling, "Spit it out! Spit it out!" I couldn't breathe, so I couldn't tell him, "I'm not swallowing anything!" Finally, he let go of me.

Nate made the mistake of attempting to steal a police sergeant's personal vehicle. In addition to being assaulted at the scene by the sergeant's son (who was also an officer), he was later beaten at the police station:

I was still gettin' [processed]. . . . I was askin' the police lady, "What's gone happen to me now? I'd appreciate if you could walk me through step-by-step what's gone happen 'cause I ain't never been arrested before." After she got finished talkin,' [the sergeant who owned the car] came out of the back. . . . As I was turning around, he threw a blow at me, and the [female] police officer was tryin' to put me in between her and him, apparently so she wouldn't get hit in the mix, but she definitely wasn't tryin' to push me away or [restrain] him. Now that he committed a crime, [she asked me], "You alright?"

Nate's outrage about the incident was multifaceted: Not only did he feel that the female officer should have tried to protect him, he was angry that she would feign concern afterwards. And the female officer allowed the sergeant to again beat him while en route to the juvenile detention center:

The female police officer let [the sergeant] in the car wit' me, in the backseat, to assault me some more. They took me to [a parking lot] across the street from the [police station] and they threatened me by puttin' a gun in my mouth, tellin' me he was crazy and he'll kill me and wouldn't nobody care that I was dead. And then he wanted me to snitch on the other person that apparently was stealin' the car, that I was [supposedly] lookin' out for and they didn't like [it] when I told 'em that I don't know who it was because I wasn't there.

Physical abuse can also take the form of forced removal from one's neighborhood. Several young males reported that when officers lacked the physical evidence to arrest them, they engaged in summary justice by driving them to another neighborhood and then abandoning them. This tactic seems designed to expose youths to potential dangers in unfamiliar or inhospitable areas of the city. "They'll just cuss you out or take you somewhere," said Martez. "Take you down to the Riverfront, to the Arch, [where] they beat you and let you walk back home." Other officers threatened to use this strategy in an attempt to gain compliance. Kyle and his friends were told by an officer, "We ought to

take you to Blood territory, 'cause we already know y'all [are] Crips [a rival gang]." And Nate explained,

I know this one guy who went to my school and he was talkin' 'bout how he was in a gang and [officers] took him to one of his rivalry gangs and dropped him off on their block, right in the middle of it! [They] just told him to walk home. They took his shoes and socks and told him to walk home.

The police know that abandoning people in unfamiliar neighborhoods can have potentially dangerous consequences, and at the very least, such street justice substantially inconveniences the recipients. This is one type of physical abuse that has not been explored in the research literature, so there is little data on its prevalence.

## Corruption

Corruption involves the abuse of power for personal gain, which includes accepting or demanding money or goods for doing something improper or for doing something that one is obligated to do anyway. Examples include bribery, extortion, stealing from suspects, resale of seized goods, and so forth. Almost no surveys have explored citizens' perceptions of police corruption, but one recent study found that many Americans view it as widespread. Nationally, almost half of African-Americans thought corruption to be common in their city's police department, as did about one-third of Hispanics and one-sixth of Whites (Weitzer and Tuch 2006, 51). Many of these incidents involve drugs being stolen from suspects, planted on them, or used or sold by officers (General Accounting Office 1998; Mollen Commission 1994). Blacks are more likely to witness drug-related police corruption because poor Black neighborhoods are often the sites of street-level drug markets.

Most Barksdale and Hazelcrest youth said that their communities were plagued by some "crooked cops"—a term frequently used (see also Carr, Napolitano, and Keating 2007). Martez observed, "They'll sell you crack, weed, X [ecstasy], and then will turn around and have you locked up." And David explained, "If somebody got pulled over and they had drugs and money on them, a lot of times the cops will search 'em and take the drugs and money and then lock 'em up. . . . They don't turn it in for evidence; they keep it for they self." "The undercover ones is crooked," Kyle observed. "The undercover ones get away with it because we can call the station up and report the [officers] in uniform, but we can't report the undercover ones" because their identities are often masked. The conclusion that undercover



vice officers engage in more frequent and serious corruption than their uniformed peers is well supported in the policing literature (Rubenstein 1973; Sherman 1978).

Several young males stopped short of asserting that corruption pervaded the police department, and distinctions were drawn between different types of officers:

I would say among all cops there is a little corruption; among some cops there is moderate corruption; and in a few extreme cases, severe corruption. I wouldn't want to say about the captain and chief, because I don't know. A certain chief could have been corrupt and then the next one might not have been at all. I assume it is possible, and highly probable, that a lot of them are more corrupt than we know, but I can't say for sure and I don't want to [defame] anyone that isn't corrupt. I don't want to smear anyone. (Ed)

Instead of making blanket generalizations about police corruption, people in all three neighborhoods identified specific officers as corrupt (Mayfield residents, however, were less likely to report having personal contact with these officers). An officer we call Furillo was roundly identified as a rogue:

Everybody knows [that] he a snake, he sneaky. (Lorenz)

People run from [him] 'cause he's known for killing kids and selling drugs on the side. (James)

Last year my brother's friend was shot by a police that everybody in this neighborhood knows. (Chris).

Darius elaborated:

He's very dangerous. My friend's brother was in a gang and [Furillo] wanted to lock him up for no reason but he could never catch him 'cause he always ran from him. One day he got tired [while] runnin' and he [came to a] dead end. . . . [The officer] shot him and said [the youth] had a gun on him and he was shootin' back but [Furillo] planted that gun on him. He a crooked cop! . . . One day, we was comin' home from school, and [Furillo] came up and told me, "Come to the car" and I was like, "Naw, 'cause I know what you do to people." He was like, "[If] you don't get over here you know what's gonna happen." I kept walkin,' so he stopped his car and I just ran. . . . He will plant crack on you or somethin' like that. If he want you, he gonna find a way to get you.

People's evaluations of officers are sometimes based on what others have told them rather than what they have personally experienced or observed.

Despite having no personal contact with Officer Furillo, Ed held a strong opinion of him: “I’ve heard about a cop named [Furillo] in this city apparently going around selling cocaine and beating the hell out of people and stuff. [However,] I’ve never encountered this cop.”

The youths also expressed grave concern about police tampering with evidence. They frequently described officers planting illegal substances and firearms on people to justify an arrest. Several respondents described what they called a “free case,” where planted evidence might give officers a conviction without having to produce genuine evidence of a crime—hence, free of legal requirements. “Sometimes [the police] put drugs on you,” said Leanard. “It’s a free case. We got stopped and . . . my brother didn’t run and they put two stones [crack cocaine] on him.” An acquaintance of Bob’s had a similar experience: “A couple months ago, they planted a gun on my cousin’s friend and took him to jail because they thought he was in a gang.” The youths believed that officers were more likely to manufacture or tamper with evidence when dealing with persons they believed were guilty of some crime but lacked the legal grounds to arrest.

## **Racially Biased Policing**

Racially biased policing takes several forms, including the use of race in stops of vehicles and pedestrians, discriminatory police conduct toward individuals, and differential services to and protection of neighborhoods populated by different racial groups. Survey findings indicate that many Americans believe that racialized policing is common in their own neighborhoods, in their cities, and in the nation as a whole (Weitzer and Tuch 2006), and research has documented higher levels of police misconduct in minority neighborhoods (Fagan and Davies 2000; Kane 2002; Smith 1986; Terrill and Reisig 2003).

Asked whether police treat residents of White, Black, and racially mixed neighborhoods the same, the majority of our respondents believed that residents of White communities fared much better. In Mayfield, the majority attributed interneighborhood differences in police practices to different levels of crime and perceived dangerousness to officers. For example, Dale said, “The cops in a White neighborhood are going to treat [the residents] cool because they don’t have a lot of action [here]. They have a lot more action in Black neighborhoods.” And Carter thought that the police failed to draw distinctions between residents living in certain communities: “In a bad neighborhood—with drugs and graffiti and that’s loud—[the police] will treat some good people bad because they are suspicious [of them].”

Finally, a few Mayfield youths felt that Blacks were hypersensitive and prone to racialize routine police practices, and they thought that officer behavior was simply a response to citizen behavior regardless of race. Shannon expressed this view:

Whatever you say to [Black people], they take it in a racist way. Whenever I say something to [Black] people in my school or we're in the neighborhood, they'll be all, "Well what the heck is that supposed to mean?" or "What the hell?" and start cursing me out for no reason. [They need to] calm down. . . . If a White police officer sees a Black kid walk by and do something stupid it's the same kind of thing. I think the [White] officer is trying to do his job. If it's a White [person], he might talk nicely because they're the same. If it's a Black person, [the officer] might think they're too ghetto [to understand him].

Residents of Hazelcrest and Barksdale were more likely to assign differences in policing to racist typifications of minorities. Police misconduct was reportedly more common in neighborhoods with Black residents, whether mixed or all Black. Comparisons were made not only between neighborhoods but also longitudinally for the same neighborhood over time. This is captured in Chris's account for why the police assigned to Hazelcrest had become more aggressive as the number of Black residents grew. He explained, "My neighborhood is [now] mostly Black. It didn't used to be; back in 1998 it was dominated by Whites. The police wasn't as strict back then when there wasn't a lot of Black people. Now all you see is police." Finally, several White youths who had been detained by police while in mixed-race groups believed that they were tainted by suspicion applied to young Black males. Prior research points to a similar dynamic for Black females when in the presence of Black males (see Brunson and Miller 2006b).

Young males from all three neighborhoods believed that residents of White neighborhoods received better police services and quicker response times. Perceived police underprotection or poor service in poor, minority neighborhoods has been complained about for generations, and some of our respondents made the same complaint: "Usually in a Black neighborhood there's always trouble and [the police] are not gonna care if somebody reports a [crime]," Shannon stated. "They might rush [the handling of the call] just to get it over with." According to James,

[the police] react faster if somebody called from a White neighborhood, say somebody getting shot. They gonna get there faster and they gonna treat them with more respect. . . . They gonna be like, "Well, do you have any suspects? Do you know what happened or how it happened?" They gonna try to get to

the point. But if they go through a Black [neighborhood] or if it's over here [in Hazelcrest] they say, "Well, they kill each other off anyway, so there ain't too much you can do about it."

A final way in which race can affect policing is through the racial backgrounds of officers themselves. The literature shows that citizens vary in their perceptions of White and minority officers and in whether they believe officers of a certain race behave differently than other officers (Weitzer and Tuch 2006). Most of our respondents felt that an officer's race was not a factor in how they treat citizens. Instead, the youths believed that the only color that matters is the color of the uniform. This perspective was nicely articulated by Ed: "I think cops in general treat people the same. You are not really White or Black once you're a cop—you're just a cop." For Jason, "I don't care if it's a White or Black [officer] as long as they doing a good job." Kywan believed that "Black police officers do the same thing a White police officer would," and Tommie added a negative slant: "Both of them [are] bad for real. I've seen White and Black police beat up somebody."

At the same time, Black respondents generally felt that African-American officers could relate to Black civilians in ways that were not possible for White officers. This view is supported by research that shows that Black officers demonstrate greater understanding toward residents of Black communities (Decker and Smith 1980) and are more likely to provide them with information, referrals, and assistance (Sun and Payne 2004).

## **Police Accountability**

Even though our respondents tended to discuss specific rogue or racist cops rather than generalize about the scope of police misconduct in St. Louis, they also believed that there was little accountability in the department. Several youths were convinced that police supervisors and other officers were aware of police misconduct but failed to take action. Views about the lack of accountability were partly based on what the youths had witnessed—for instance, when corrupt or violent officers continued to be seen working the streets and had not been suspended. James had "seen this police officer kick this dude's ass, but you still see him on the streets. He didn't get no months off work, suspended, nothing."

Many youths were skeptical that making a formal complaint against an officer would be worthwhile. They expressed no confidence in the police investigating other officers and doubted that citizen complaints would be taken seriously (St. Louis lacks a civilian complaint review board), particularly for

Black kids who had been involved in delinquent activity. Greg felt that there was “no point in [making complaints] because we can’t get justice for real.” And Ed had considered creating his own safeguard:

You can’t prove anything against them unless you have videotape, so there is really no point in prosecuting them unless you are rich and can afford a lawyer. . . . And everybody know the law is to protect the rich. I was thinking about getting a camera and tape recorder built into my car, so when they pull me over, I have proof of what happens.

Many American adults agree with our youth that the police are not sufficiently accountable for their behavior (Weitzer and Tuch 2006), but our data suggest that young people feel at an added disadvantage should they decide to make a formal complaint because of their age and associated disempowerment.

The youths assumed that accused officers would be defended by their colleagues: “Certain officers have a reputation for [wrongdoing, but] . . . if you were to out another cop, the rest of the officers would soon lose respect for you and it would cause general havoc in the department, which would make the captain and the chief and all them want to keep it quiet too” (Ed). Likewise, Jason observed, “If another officer handles [the complaint], it’d probably be his buddy and he’s trying to [cover] up for him.” This blue code of silence is a well-documented feature of the police subculture, and a recent Police Foundation survey of 121 police departments found that fully two-thirds of the officers interviewed agreed that officers who report another officer’s misconduct would be given the cold shoulder by other officers (Weisburd and Greenspan 2000).

## **Conclusion**

The importance of race and age has been well documented in research on citizens’ attitudes toward the police. Furthermore, a small but growing body of literature emphasizes the importance of neighborhood context in predicting individuals’ perceptions of and experiences with the police. Compared to middle-class communities, neighborhoods characterized by high levels of economic disadvantage, social disorganization, and street crime typically have high levels of police involvement and hence, greater opportunities for conflicts between residents and officers. Our study builds on the ecological literature with qualitative evidence regarding the experiences and attitudes

of youths who reside in three disadvantaged neighborhoods that differ by racial composition.

The findings suggest that, holding neighborhood socioeconomic context constant, race makes a difference in how youth are treated by police and in their perceptions of officers. On one hand, the vast majority of our study participants, both Blacks and Whites, complained about routinely being subjected to what they considered unjustified police stops and physically intrusive searches. On the other hand, such unwelcome police encounters occurred less frequently for Whites. In addition, Black respondents expressed hopelessness regarding the situation because they felt that officers would never see them as anything other than symbolic assailants, even when they were engaged in entirely lawful activity. White youths, by contrast, reported that they risked being stopped by police while (1) associating with Black males, (2) visiting or traveling through racially mixed or majority-Black neighborhoods, or (3) dressed in hip-hop clothing. Whites who reported being stopped by police in majority-Black and racially mixed communities said that officers initially expressed concern for their safety, but if observed repeatedly in such areas, officers were more likely to view them with suspicion. Similar racial differences are documented in a British study, which found that White youth held a mixed view of the police (both positive and negative) whereas Black youth regarded the police as "bullies in uniform." Compared to Whites, young Blacks had "virtually *no* conception of the police as guardians" (Waddington and Braddock 1991, 42).

Mayfield youths described having little direct contact with officers while in their own (White) neighborhood and were more likely than other study participants to believe that most police stops were proper. They also expressed a desire for more contact between Mayfield residents and the officers patrolling their streets. This was in stark contrast to views expressed by the vast majority of Hazelcrest and Barksdale youths who were angered by frequent and seemingly arbitrary police stops. In fact, several of these young men said that they wished officers would generally stay out of their neighborhoods unless called upon.

In addition to being frustrated by frequent pedestrian and vehicle stops, young Black men took particular exception to the way officers spoke to them during these encounters. Respondents described repeated instances of being verbally abused by officers, and they believed officers used antagonistic language to provoke them to respond in kind to justify an assault or arrest. While both Black and White youths objected to officers' uncivil language, they agreed that the vilest remarks (racial slurs, profanity) were reserved for Black males. Such verbal abuse has important consequences at

both the symbolic and behavioral levels: It weakens police authority in the eyes of the youths and reduces their willingness to comply with police directives.

Allegations of physical abuse were prominent features of young men's experiences, and several considered it a routine aspect of neighborhood life. Respondents described acts of officers shoving, punching, kicking, and using mace against the youths. Another more indirect technique of victimization was to transport individuals to unfamiliar neighborhoods and abandon them there, a practice the youths considered not only an inconvenience but also potentially life threatening. The young people also described a wide range of corrupt police practices that they had witnessed. Of particular concern was the planting of drugs or weapons on innocent persons. Respondents knew that these practices placed them at risk of being convicted of crimes they did not commit, and they were well aware of the reasons officers planted evidence on people—they were free cases when officers lacked evidence to justify a lawful arrest.

One intriguing finding is that youth drew distinctions among officers rather than generalizing—at least on the corruption question. They thought that corruption occurred frequently but was not necessarily widespread—engaged in by only a handful of crooked cops. Indeed, in each of the three neighborhoods, respondents consistently identified the same rogue officers by name. Young men reported feeling especially powerless when they encountered bad cops and tried their best to avoid them. Respondents also expressed frustration that supervisors did nothing to discipline the “rotten apples.”

Racially biased policing is yet another concern among young inner-city males. Whereas a substantial body of literature has examined the issue of racial profiling in vehicle and pedestrian stops (e.g., Harris 2002), biased policing also can be explored by comparing police responsiveness and the delivery of police services in different kinds of neighborhoods (Weitzer 2000). The majority of our respondents, regardless of race, believed that St. Louis neighborhoods were policed differently: Residents of White neighborhoods were thought to receive better police services and enjoyed faster response times than their counterparts living in racially mixed or majority-Black communities.

While there was considerable agreement that police practices varied by neighborhood, the explanations for these differences also varied between residents of the three communities. Our White Mayfield residents said that police responded to calls for service according to their views of each neighborhood's crime and dangerousness. Residents of Barksdale and Hazelcrest were more likely to attribute differences in policing to racist stereotypes

about Blacks. Recall one young man's observation that policing in Hazelcrest became more aggressive as the number of Black residents increased. Finally, the vast majority of respondents agreed that officers' race was unimportant and emphasized that regardless of their racial identities, cops were essentially blue. An important exception was those Black youths who believed that African-American officers were more likely to demonstrate compassion and concern for their well-being.

While a full discussion of policy implications is beyond the scope of the article, our findings suggest that certain reforms in police practice might help to improve youths' (and adults') opinions of the police officers who patrol their neighborhoods. Inasmuch as our sample of youths complain about unwarranted stops and abusive treatment during stops, this can be ameliorated if officers clearly explain the reasons for the stop, behave politely and respectfully, and refrain from using gratuitous or excessive force (Tyler and Huo 2002). Abiding by these norms may help to reduce the number of occasions in which citizens believe that officers lack proper grounds for making a stop and are instead engaged in sheer harassment of youth on the streets, and such practices also increase citizens' willingness to cooperate with officers' commands (Skogan and Hartnett 1997, 217; Wiley and Hudik 1974). Furthermore, our findings point to the need for greater accountability, which might be advanced by the establishment of a complaint review board accessible to citizens. Residents of cities that lack civilian review boards overwhelmingly support the creation of such panels (Weitzer and Tuch 2006), and our respondents expressed a similar view (Weitzer and Brunson, forthcoming). Such efforts may help to improve citizen confidence in the police, especially in disadvantaged communities comparable to those studied here.

There are some limitations to the present study. First, the modest sample size does not permit conclusive generalizations to the larger population. Second, we purposively sampled youths at risk of contact with the criminal justice system because we were particularly interested in their relations with the police. Their experiences and views are not intended to reflect those of youth who are not at risk of delinquency or contact with the police. Third, the data are limited to citizens' accounts of encounters and do not include officers' accounts or independent observations of encounters. As the literature shows, citizens may misinterpret police actions, and some act in a belligerent or provocative manner toward officers, which may result in abusive police actions toward troublesome individuals. In other words, the data do not allow us to weigh the veracity of our respondents' reported experiences. Having said that, our focus on reported experiences and on observations of others' encounters



with officers lends a degree of concreteness to the data that is typically absent in purely attitudinal studies where respondents are asked to express opinions or make assessments about issues that are remote from experiential knowledge (e.g., how often police are perceived as using excessive force). Finally, a study such as this, based on three neighborhoods with modest numbers of respondents, cannot conclusively determine whether individual race or neighborhood conditions are more important influences on citizens' experiences and attitudes. However, our findings are consistent with some other literature on police-citizen relations, which finds that race continues to be significant after controlling for neighborhood socioeconomic conditions. This literature was based on studies of adults, and we extend it to youth.

Our in-depth approach adds a deeper level of understanding to the ways in which race may help to shape young people's experiences and perceptions of the police. Both Black and White youth reported having adverse experiences with the police, yet Blacks appear to be treated poorly no matter where they live. In other words, for Black youth, race appears to be a "master status" that trumps ecological context. For White youth, by contrast, circumstances and locale seem to matter greatly in how they are treated by the police. That is, Whites who spent time in Black or racially mixed neighborhoods were tainted by the suspicion police usually reserved for Black youth and were treated more harshly if they were seen associating with Blacks—an example of guilt by association. The literature has paid almost no attention to the experiences of White youth, and our examination of Whites in both a lower class, White neighborhood and in non-White areas can be regarded as an important contribution to the literature. Future research will benefit from additional attempts to separate the influence of race from place. Such an approach will allow us to obtain a better understanding of citizens' experiences with and attitudes toward the police.

Moreover, it is clear that our respondents' convictions that they and their peers had been mistreated in their contacts with officers had important consequences for subsequent interactions (amplifying the tension level), efforts to avoid all future contact with officers, and for larger opinions of the police among inner-city youth. In other words, reported experiences had implications for subsequent behavior and attitudes. And despite the above-mentioned limitations, our findings are largely consistent with those of studies of adult citizens, with the proviso that the youths' reported experiences with police officers appear to be both more frequent and more conflictual than is the case for their adult counterparts. As indicated in the introduction, age is a consistent predictor of experiences with the police, with younger people holding more negative orientations than older cohorts.

## Notes

1. Pseudonyms are used throughout the article for the neighborhoods, our respondents, and for the streets they occasionally name. To ensure anonymity, young men's addresses were not solicited; instead, they were asked to provide the names of two cross streets near to where they lived. It is common in research on sensitive topics such as policing to conceal the identities of respondents' neighborhoods to minimize the risk of police retaliation against residents (e.g., Brunson 2007; Carr, Napolitano, and Keating 2007; Weitzer 1995, 1999, 2000).

2. The distribution of respondents by neighborhood was Barksdale (N = 16), Hazelcrest (N = 17), and Mayfield (N = 12).

3. The interview team was composed of four graduate students, two African-American and two White, who primarily interviewed same-race respondents. The Black interviewers were raised in Barksdale and one of the White researchers had previously lived in Mayfield.

4. *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989).

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**Rod K. Brunson** is an assistant professor in the Center for the Study of Crime, Delinquency, and Corrections at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. His research examines youths' experiences in neighborhood contexts, with a specific focus on the interactions of race, class, and gender and their relationship to criminal justice practices. His articles appear in the *British Journal of Criminology*, *Criminology*, *Criminology & Public Policy*, *Gender & Society*, *Justice Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Crime and Justice*.

**Ronald Weitzer** is a professor of sociology at George Washington University. He has conducted research on police-minority relations in the United States, Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Israel, and his most recent book, coauthored with Steven Tuch, is *Race and Policing in America: Conflict and Reform* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).