

Debunking the Myth of Officer Friendly

How African American Males Experience Community Policing

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The results of a survey of 125 high school African American males regarding attitudes toward and contacts with the police are presented. Findings suggest that personal interaction with the police is not the sole or primary determinate of juvenile attitudes. Attitude formation is a complex process involving both direct and indirect police contact. A majority of the males report experiencing the police as a repressive rather than facilitative agent in their own lives and in the lives of their friends and relatives. Although positive encounters with the police are not sufficient to overcome negative attitudes, improved attitudes and respect for the police can be engendered by increased opportunities for the two groups to encounter each other in service rather than enforcement situations.

In 1958 Norman Rockwell prepared a print, "The Runaway," as the cover for the September 20 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*. The photo depicts a broad-shouldered police officer in full uniform seated next to a small boy at a lunch counter. A red bandanna tied to a stick on the floor behind the stool, where the boy is seated, apparently holds his possessions. The boy, dressed in a pair of blue jeans and a tee shirt, is looking up at the officer. His face is calm and attentive although the policeman towers over him. The face

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of the trooper is as calm and earnest as that of the boy. The lunch counter attendant stands watching the pair, his face fixed in a slightly crooked smile.

"The Runaway" is the quintessential image of *officer friendly*. In it, the trooper, the boy, and the onlooker do not appear to be fearful of or overly concerned about the police presence. In *The Runaway* all characters are White. The photo even comes with a reinforcing story. During the setup of the restaurant scene, the live model for the police officer, an actual Massachusetts state trooper, allowed the live model for the boy to sit inside the police cruiser and showed him how to work the lights and siren. The boy is noted as having exclaimed, "That was the most fun of all."

The author has often wondered how the scene might be different if the youthful perpetrator was Black. It is not difficult to imagine that instead of being seated comfortably next to the trooper, the youngster might be standing, facing the wall, hands and arms outstretched in preparation for a "pat-down," the boy's youthfulness irrelevant to the encounter. Or perhaps the boy would be bent over the hood or trunk of the police cruiser during this frisk. And the contents of his bandanna might be scattered on the floor or emptied onto the counter as a result of being checked.

On the magazine cover, Rockwell mutes the presence of the holstered firearm by making it almost invisible against the tallness of the trooper's black boots. However, in a scene with a youthful Black perpetrator, the gun's presence would be highlighted by the trooper's hand resting cautiously against it. There is much historical and contemporary evidence to suggest that this altered projection of Rockwell's image is not merely the workings of a pessimistic mind. In 1958 America, a Black person, child or adult, was prohibited by law from sitting at the type of lunch counter depicted in the Rockwell image. Rather than being present to ensure the youth's safe return home, the trooper would have been summoned to carry out his arrest (Kennedy, 1997; Mann, 1993). What at first blush appears as individual pessimism is, in fact, the stark sociolegal reality of the time (Owens, 1977).

Another Rockwell painting, "The Problem We All Live With," vividly represents what has been for Blacks, the paradox of policing in America. In the 1964 picture, a small Black girl is being escorted by U.S. marshals to integrate an all-White school. The faces of the marshals cannot be seen, but the viewer can tell by their hands that the four men are White. The apparent deliberate omission of the marshals' faces has the consequence of not conjuring up the image of officer friendly. Although the police role is facilitative for the little girl, evidence that their role is viewed as repressive by the unpictured Whites is represented by a red tomato, the juices of which splatter the wall adjacent to the girl.

The current research was undertaken to examine how African American adolescent males experience the police in a contemporary context. Even in

the absence of serious delinquency involvement, the young men were expected to have frequent repressive police encounters, including arrests and investigative detentions. Contrary to the implications emanating from theoretical (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Cohen, 1955; Miller, 1958) and empirical models (Hagedorn, 1994; Leiber & Jamieson, 1995; Leiber, Nalla, & Farnworth, 1998; Sampson & Wilson, 1995), such repressive contacts were not expected to be limited to lower-class and delinquent youth.¹ Given the oppressive role that policing has historically played in the lives of African Americans, Black males were expected to express views indicative of negative perceptions of and attitudes toward police. It was hypothesized that middle-class rather than lower-class African American males are more negative toward the police (Davis, 1974; Hagan & Albonetti, 198). The variables used to measure and evaluate African American male views of police are the following: (a) police experience, direct and indirect contact; (b) attitudes toward police (defined as respect, perceptions of fairness and equity, punitiveness, and attachment); and (c) willingness to cooperate with the police.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between the police and the community consists of physical and emotional components. Individuals may have direct contact with the police through their own personal encounters, or may observe or hear about the physical contact of others with the police, and thereby form an opinion (Browning, Cullen, Cao, Kopache, & Stevenson, 1994; Rusinko, Johnson, & Hornung, 1978). Although the causal ordering of citizen contact and opinions about the police is not clear (Leiber et al., 1998), it is accepted that opinions about the police are associated with both direct and indirect contacts. It has been suggested that sociocultural factors alone may lead to positive or negative global attitudes toward the police (Brandl, Frank, Worden, & Bynum, 1994; Leiber et al., 1998). Finckenaer (1970) notes that in the absence of direct experience upon which to make a judgment, an individual "generally assumes the attitude or opinion of those individuals or social groups who constitute his reference group" (p. 14; see also Preiss & Ehrlich, 1966). Age, race, class, gender, place of residence (locations with predominantly nonWhite populations), and delinquency status (Kusow, Wilson, & Martin, 1997; Murty, Roebuck, & Smith, 1990; Winfree & Griffith, 1977) are among the socio-cultural factors that may influence both contact and attitudes.

First, to address the issue of race, despite efforts at community-oriented policing, an innovation to improve police-citizen relations (Peak & Glensor, 1996), the issues surrounding race and police encounters have not changed much over the past 30 years. There is disagreement in the policing literature as to whether the primary goal of community policing is to improve police-

community relations, improve crime fighting, or both simultaneously. In fact, policing methods that focus on controlling rather than serving the community have led to disturbing atrocities. The beating of Rodney King by police in Los Angeles, the sodomy of Abner Louima and the shooting of Amadou Diallo by police in New York City, along with the killing of Johnny Gammage by police in Pittsburgh have served to fuel and rekindle racial tensions between members of the Black population and the police (Lasley, 1994). While there is empirical evidence that the public holds favorable attitudes toward the police (Leiber et al., 1998; Murty et al., 1990; President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, 1967; Radelet, 1986); there is little doubt that such incidents contribute to racial difference in the degree of satisfaction and confidence that citizens feel toward the police (Jesilow, Meyer, & Namazzi, 1995; Lasley, 1994; Webb & Marshall, 1995). In the 1970s, only one fifth of Blacks polled thought that local police officers applied the law equally. A majority (between 62% and 73%) believed that cops were against Blacks, that local law enforcement agents were dishonest, and that police officers were more concerned with injuring African Americans than in preventing criminal acts (Feagin & Hahn, 1973). Although community policing initiatives were widely adopted during the 1980s (Peak & Glensor, 1996), a 1989 Gallup Poll revealed that 50% of the Blacks interviewed believed that most police officers view all Blacks as suspects and are likely to arrest the wrong person. In a similar survey, 25% of the Black men polled reported that they had been harassed while driving through predominantly White neighborhoods (Bessent & Tayler, 1991).

With reference to age, Leiber et al. (1998, p. 152) observe that citizens' attitudes toward the police have been surveyed extensively in the past few decades; many of these surveys have focused on analyzing the public opinions of adults. The authors suggest that "juveniles' attitudes . . . may be more important for law enforcement because juveniles make up a disproportionately large segment of the population subject to police contacts and arrests." In assessing the sufficiency of existing theoretical and empirical analyses of juvenile attitudes toward police, Leiber et al. (1998) make three observations. First, they note that research has gone beyond mere statistical description presented via the analysis of opinion polls to attempts at estimating the effects of police-juvenile encounters on subsequent evaluations of police performance (Griffiths & Winfree, 1982). Second, theoretical explanations and empirical tests have attempted to estimate the long-term effects of early contacts with police on juvenile relationships with agencies of social control, generally, and on their long-term attitudes and behaviors (Keane, Gillis, & Hagan, 1989; Rusinko et al., 1978). However, Leiber et al. (1998) criticize these studies for the implied assumption that personal interaction with the

police is the sole or primary determinate of juvenile attitudes toward the police.

In the literature on attitudes toward the police and police contact, results vary. Some of this literature suggests that lower-class and delinquent youth are most likely to report negative attitudes toward the police because of their own criminal behavior and consequent police contact. Statistics showing the overrepresentation of African American males among youth adjudicated for delinquent acts and youth raised in poor households would, therefore, suggest a high rate of police contact and an increased likelihood of harboring negative attitudes. Involvement with the court system (Finckenauer, 1995; Morash, 1978) and allegiance to values of delinquent subcultures (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Cohen, 1955; Leiber et al., 1998; Miller, 1958) have also been associated with negative attitudes toward the police. However, Rusinko et al. (1978) suggest that such formulations may be too simplistic in that they fail to take into account possible variations in the nature, quality, and quantity of contacts. In a survey of 1,200 ninth-grade students, Rusinko et al. found that positive interaction with the police in a supportive or helping relationship served to neutralize antipolice attitudes even among highly delinquent youth. By contrast, they also found extensive law enforcement encounters, such as arrests and crime investigation, to be associated with less positive attitudes toward police, particularly among participants who reported minimal involvement in delinquency. Although overall, increased positive contacts with police were associated with positive youth attitudes, the association appeared less strong among Black youth.

Others studies of race, class, crime, and attitudes toward the police suggest that among African Americans, the middle class and those who are not criminally involved are more likely to demonstrate negative attitudes toward the law and legal agents (Davis, 1974; Hagan & Albonetti, 1982). As a better educated group, the middle class might be better able to recognize illegal or questionable police practices when used against them during police encounters. Consequently, they may be more likely than their lower-class counterparts to develop negative attitudes toward the police (Jones-Brown, 1997). For the law abiding of any class level, negative attitudes toward the police may flow from resentment for having been falsely accused or suspected (Browning et al., 1994).

Studies of youthful attitudes toward the police demonstrate that the development and effects of such attitudes may be quite complex. Whereas the nature (direct or indirect), quality (positive or negative), and extent (frequency and duration) of police contact are all factors that influence attitudes toward the police, the existence and influence of those factors appear to be conditioned by several sociocultural variables. On the importance of measuring, understanding, and changing juvenile attitudes toward the police,

Rusinko et al. (1978) note that the attitudes of juveniles toward police are "highly significant. . . since efforts to prevent and control crime committed by youth demand their cooperation" (p. 54). They conclude that increased positive contact with police can improve youth attitudes, with the potential residual effect of serving as a "first step in solving such critical police problems as community cooperation in the control of crime" (p. 65). Research published during the 1960s and 1970s similarly conclude that positive attitudes toward the police are strongly related to cooperation with the police (Holman, 1967; Kenny & Pursuit, 1965; Robison, 1963), and that the adolescent years are crucial in the development of attitudes which may persist into adulthood (Bouma, 1969; Kobetz, 1971; Portune, 1971).

Societal reaction theories (Leiber et al., 1998; Lemert, 1951; Paternoster & Iovanni, 1989) focus on the effects police encounters have on youth attitudes toward self and society. They postulate that in a spiraling pattern of deviance and official responses to deviance, levels of juvenile hostility and resentment increase, culminating in secondary deviance and increased deviant behavior (Leiber et al., 1998, p. 152). This analysis does not address consequences for youth self-concept and attitudes toward police and other legal figures when their lived experiences (Browning et al., 1994) include multiple false accusations of crime. Nor does it address the effects of encounters in which the police inaccurately suspect that the youth or someone he knows or observes is involved in deviant behavior. Because community policing efforts imply increased contact between the police and members of the community (Kelling, 1994; Peak & Glensor, 1996), it is important to examine these contacts. The data analyzed and reported here are police contacts and attitudes toward the police among youth who reside in an area where the police were reportedly using community-oriented policing and problem-solving techniques as the predominant mode of operation.

METHOD

Site and Instruments

Data was collected between fall 1993 and fall 1994. Participants were recruited from three high schools, a boys and girls club, a summer basketball league, and a housing authority summer work program. Printed flyers were used at each site to advertise the study. There were also verbal reminders issued by the site staff and the researcher. The study was advertised as open to males age 16 or 17. If they were within 3 months of the target ages, 15- and 18-year-old boys were interviewed as well.

The research sites were located in five towns within a suburban county in central New Jersey. Each town had at least one section with typical urban setting characteristics (i.e., high population density, poor housing stock, high crime, youth gang activity, drug trafficking, and a sizable portion of residents receiving public assistance). Collectively, the five towns provided a major portion of the juvenile petitions forwarded to the county prosecutor's office in the year preceding the study. This fact suggests that there would be an appreciable level of police contact reported by the research participants. Interviews were conducted at six sites under conditions of confidentiality. Individual questionnaire responses were identified by code numbers only and participant names could not be matched to the code numbers.

A total of 125 African American males participated in the study. Each participant was required to submit a signed parental consent form to participate in the study. Any number of unknown factors may have affected participants' willingness to ask for parental permission and/or parents' willingness to consent. The possibility of self-selection bias could not be controlled for, although at four of the sites, age eligible participants were identified through computer-generated lists. This reduced the potential for selection bias on the part of the staff. The resulting sample consisted of males ages 15 to 18 in grades 8 through 12. Approximately 90% of the sample was 16 or 17 years of age and nearly 95% were in grades 9 through 12. Although systematic bias that produces invalid results cannot be ruled out, the consistence of the current results with existing literature argues against systematic bias.

Given previous research establishing a relationship between attitudes toward the police and delinquency; attitudes toward the police and race; attitudes toward the police and race, social class, and police contact, the modified Internalization of Legal Values Inventory (ILVI) (Finckenauer, 1995) was designed to gather information in each of these relevant areas. A majority of the items on the ILVI were adopted from other research instruments with established reliability and validity (Hess & Tapp, 1969; Law-Related Education Project, 1983; Rafkey & Sealey, 1975; Tapp & Levine, 1974). The items include open-ended and closed-end questions. Twenty-one items on the ILVI pertain directly to the police. The modification² consists of eleven items constituting a police experience section (see appendix) that were adopted from Finkenauer's (1970) police satisfaction survey. The instrument contains 14 demographic items and 29 items measuring self-reported delinquency.

The ILVI was administered verbally to each participant. Each interview took place on site in a closed setting with only the researcher and participant present. Interviews lasted 45 minutes to an hour, and each person completing the interview was paid a \$10 participation fee. During interviews, extensive handwritten notes were taken as participants described their police encounters to the interviewer. Encounter is used to denote direct contact via being

stopped. The term *police experience* encompasses direct and indirect contacts and impressions, whether favorable or unfavorable and whether for assistance or law enforcement purposes. The descriptive information required interpretation on the part of the interviewer. Every attempt was made to keep the interpretations to a minimum and to keep them consistent from case to case. Because the police experience section is designed to elicit as full a picture of individual experiences as possible, interviewer notes were later reviewed to determine if patterns or themes emerged. Information from these notes is included here along with the quantitative results in an effort to present a full picture of the police experience data.

Variables

The demographic variables are age, grade in school, socioeconomic status (SES), family living arrangement, town of residence, and work status (see Table 1). SES is measured with the Rating Scale of Parental Occupations (Finckenauer, 1995). The scale provides a numerical SES code for different types of occupations. Participants' SES codes were derived from the highest score of either mother's or father's occupation. If the participant was not living with a parent then the SES code was derived from other head of household occupation. These codes were used to create the variable SES level. SES level is measured as middle SES and low SES. If a parent or guardian was unemployed or receiving supplemental income, the source of that income was inquired about.

Delinquency status was ascertained from the question, "How frequently during the last 12 months have you . . . ?" The question was followed by a series of behaviors that varied in seriousness from status offenses to felonies, to which participants gave one of the following responses: never, 1 or 2 times, 3 or 4 times, or 5 or more times. The range of values for these responses was 0 to 87. Questions were asked twice in slightly different formats to check for accuracy of the responses. This check revealed 96% consistency in the two sets of responses. A delinquency index score was calculated for each participant. Participants were also asked to report any involvement with the juvenile court.

The police experience section of the instrument contained multiple measures of police contact. The evidence to date was that both frequency and type of contact with police were significant factors affecting attitudes. Participants were questioned about frequency of contact, type of contact, and their perception of the various contacts as positive or negative. Direct contact with the police was assessed through the question, "Have you ever been stopped by the police while you were on foot or in a car?" This question is distinct from other questions, the response to which may involve indirect police con-

tact. To determine whether a direct police encounter was favorable or unfavorable, the responses to the following two questions were considered: (a) "On the whole, did the police officer(s) act as you think s/he-they should have acted?" and (b) "Was there anything that you did not like about the way s/he-they acted?" The first question gave respondents an opportunity to provide a general self-evaluation of their contact with the police. The second question allowed them to be more precise. The participant could have responded yes, no, or don't know to the first question. A yes response was coded as a favorable encounter and a no response was coded as an unfavorable encounter. If a participant responded in the affirmative to the second question, he was asked to describe what it was that he did not like about the encounter. In measures of direct and indirect contacts, arrests were coded as unfavorable encounters unless an arrest was what the participant desired in a particular instance, such as when the police responded to a call and arrested the live-in boyfriend who was beating the mother. A measure of direct positive police contact was derived from responses to the question, "Have the police ever helped you in any way?" A measure of indirect positive police contact was derived from responses to the question, "Have the police ever helped any of your friends or relatives?" To gauge the frequency of direct and indirect contact, participants were asked to report all other contacts with the police. The number of contacts with the police was coded as less than five or five or more contacts. Each contact was given a favorable or unfavorable score.

Five attitudes toward the police were identified: cooperation, respect, equity and fairness, punitiveness/police power, and attachment/guilt. Responses to the following questions were used to measure attitudes:

- Cooperation: "If your friends got into trouble with the police, would you be willing to lie to protect them?"
- Respect: "I have a lot of respect for the police in my town."
- Equity and Fairness: (a) "The police always have a good reason when they stop somebody;" (b) "Police try to give all young people an even break."
- Punitiveness/Police Power: "Can police officers punish you if you do something wrong?"
- Attachment/Guilt: "If you broke [disobeyed] a police officer's orders and no one knew, would you feel bad?"

Items two through five were measured with a 5-point Likert-type scale. For the respect and the equity and fairness items, the scale ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. For the punitiveness/police power and attachment/guilt items, the scale ranged from *never* to *always*. A lower number on each of these four items represented a more negative response and a

higher number represented a more positive response. Responses yes, no, or don't know were used for the cooperation item. These responses reflected what might be considered a socially negative response, a socially positive response, and an ambivalent response, respectively.

Analysis

All verbal responses were converted to numerical values and statistical analysis was performed using the Statistics Package for the Social Services (SPSS). In addition, during interviews, extensive handwritten notes were taken by the researcher as participants described their police encounters. The term *encounter* is used to denote direct contact via being stopped. The term police experience encompasses any or all of the measures in the section: direct and indirect contacts and impressions, whether favorable or unfavorable, and whether for assistance or law enforcement purposes (not discounting the fact that law enforcement efforts may be facilitative). The descriptive information required interpretation on the part of the researcher. Every attempt was made to keep such interpretations to a minimum and to keep them consistent from case to case. Because the Police Experience section was designed to elicit as full a picture of individual experiences as possible, the notes were later reviewed to determine if patterns or themes emerged. Information from these notes is included here along with the quantitative results in an effort to present a full picture of the police experience data.

FINDINGS

Table 1 shows characteristics of the participants. Approximately 42% of the participants resided with a mother only, roughly 25% resided with both parents, and 13% resided with one parent and a live-in companion. The remainder lived alone, with foster parents, or other relatives. The sample was almost evenly split between middle and low family SES, with 27.2% of the respondents themselves reporting having a part-time job. The mean delinquency index score for the group was 12.50. Consequently, few of the participants had involvement with the juvenile court.

Direct Contact Police Experience

Although there was low delinquency and a small percentage of juvenile court involvement, all participants reported contact with the police. Table 2 shows that 52% reported five or more contacts. These contacts were both direct and indirect. The majority of participants ($n = 114$) reported being stopped by the police at least once. Most of these stops occurred in the com-

TABLE 1
Characteristics of Study Group (N = 125)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Current grade		
8	4	3.2
9	16	12.8
10	38	30.4
11	45	36.0
12	18	14.4
Missing	4	3.2
School type		
Public	123	98.4
Private	0	0
Other	2	1.6
Employment		
Yes	34	27.2
No	75	60.0
Missing	16	12.8
Family SES level		
Middle	60	49.6
Low	61	50.4
Other income source		
AFDC	19	15.2
Unemployment	2	1.6
SSI/DISAB	24	19.2
Child support	14	11.2
Other	5	4.0
NA	60	48.0
Missing	1	0.8
Living arrangement		
Mother	52	41.6
Both parents	29	23.2
Other (alone, aunt, grandparent, older sibling, uncle, godparent)	20	16.0
Parent and live-in	17	13.6
Father	3	2.4
Both grandparents	2	1.6
Foster parents	2	1.6
Delinquency index		
Range	0-49	
<i>M</i>	12.5	
<i>Mdn</i>	9.0	
<i>SD</i>	9.97	
Age		
Range	15-18	
<i>M</i>	15.5	
<i>SD</i>	0.5	

NOTE: SES = socioeconomic status; AFDC= aid to families with dependent children; SSI = supplemental security income.

TABLE 2
Direct and Indirect Police Experience (N = 125)

	n	Percentage
Direct experience		
Stopped by police		
No	11	8.8
Yes	114	91.2
When stopped		
More than 1 year	12	9.6
Last 12 months	101	80.8
Missing	1	0.8
Who with		
Alone	18	14.4
Relatives	14	11.2
Friends	71	56.8
Both	11	8.8
First time stopped		
Favorable	51	40.8
Unfavorable	61	48.8
Don't know	13	10.4
Number of contacts		
4 or less	60	48.0
5 or more	65	52.0
Second time stopped		
None	3	2.4
Favorable	62	49.6
Unfavorable	47	37.6
Don't know	13	10.4
Indirect experience		
Impression from friend		
None	89	71.2
Favorable	1	0.8
Unfavorable	33	26.4
Impression from relative		
None	63	50.4
Favorable	3	2.4
Unfavorable	58	46.4
Direct police help		
No	70	56.0
Yes	50	40.0
Indirect police help		
No	76	60.8
Yes	44	35.2

NOTE: Some totals reflect missing data.

TABLE 3
Reasons for Unfavorable Police Contact (N = 125)

<i>Reason</i>	<i>First Stop</i>	<i>Second Stop</i>
No dislike	40	52
Officer attitude	22	16
Race	16	12
Physical treatment	20	24
Other	16	9
Not applicable	11	12

pany of friends (56.8%) during the 12 months preceding the interview (80%). Many of the stops were unfavorable encounters (48.8%). Of the 98% who reported a second direct contact, the encounter was evaluated as favorable by 49.6% and unfavorable by 37.6% of the participants. As shown in Table 3, definite themes emerged from responses to the question, "Was there any thing that you did not like about the way s/he-they acted?" Forty-six percent of the participants did not like the police attitude, felt the stops were race related, and were physically handled during a stop. Another 13% cited no apparent reason for the stop, stop based on mere (unfounded) suspicion, and being treated like a criminal during the stop.

Of those who were stopped and found the encounter unfavorable, more than one third disliked the encounter because the police attitude was rude, racist, nasty, or snotty. Another third disliked the physical treatment that included handcuffing, extensive searching, pushing, grabbing, and punching. One fourth of participants cited racial motivation, expressing this sentiment as, "They stopped us because we were Black;" "They stopped us because we were Black in a White neighborhood;" "They stopped us because we were a group of Black kids together;" "They stopped us because we were in a car, so it must be stolen;" "They stopped us because we were Black in a 'drug neighborhood' so we must have been selling drugs;" "They stopped us because we were Black, we looked suspicious."³ When asked specifically if they had ever received any direct help from the police, 55.6% of the participants could not report receiving direct assistance.

Indirect Contact Police Experience

The indirect police encounters occurred at parties, fights, or other group functions, with the police arriving to disperse the crowd. Respondents reported having been present at gatherings in which the police indiscriminately sprayed mace to get the crowd to disperse. Indirect encounters also included observing a friend, relative, or neighbor being questioned, searched,

TABLE 4
Attitude Toward Police (N = 125)

<i>Attitude</i>	<i>M Score</i>
Respect for police	3.15
Good reason to stop	2.06
Police give even break	2.64
Power to punish	3.86
Guilt/attachment	2.25

NOTE: Scores range from 1 (*strongly disagree or never*) to 5 (*strongly agree or always*).

or arrested by the police. In response to questions about indirect impressions of the police, 27.2% of the participants formed impressions based on the experiences of friends. Of the 34 participants who responded that their friends had contact with the police that made an impression on them, only one had a favorable impression of the contact. Unfavorable indirect contacts were described as a friend being arrested, beaten up, unjustly arrested, or otherwise treated in a negative manner. Similar descriptions applied to the unfavorable experiences of relatives. Other reported negative impressions included police not solving a case or treating a reported offense as not important enough to investigate. The most frequently reported indirect impressions of the police involved relatives. Just more than 46% were aware of a situation between a relative and the police that made an unfavorable impression. The unfavorable impressions involved arrest or investigation of parents, siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles. Only 3 participants reported a police/relative encounter that made a favorable impression. More than 60% of participants could not recall the police having assisted any of their friends or relatives.

Attitudes Toward Police (ATP)

Table 4 reports attitudes toward police. More than 80% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "Police always have a good reason when they stop somebody." This statement received the most negative responses among all the ATP measures. On a 5-point scale, with 1 being *strongly disagree* and 5 being *strongly agree*, the mean score on this item was 2.06. The next item that received a large negative response was, "Police try to give all young people an even break." Roughly 60% of the participants did not agree with the statement. The mean score for the group on this item was 2.64. Although this figure represented a substantial number of negative responses, it was a 20% improvement over the police stop question. Those who responded negatively to the police stop question but positively to

the even break question, attributed the inconsistency to personal experience or knowledge of a friend being given a break by the police. There were no statistically significant differences on the equity and fairness items attributed to SES.

Responses to "I have a lot of respect for the police in my town" were inconsistent with responses to the first two questions. Half the respondents (50.5%) agreed, 36% disagreed, and 13.6% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. The mean score on the item was 3.15. Given the responses to the police experience items, it was surprising how many participants agreed with the "respect" statement. A subsequent focus group discussion revealed two things about this question. The phrase "in my town" was important because many of the negative police experiences involved state police or police from another town. Participants whose responses were undecided or neutral said that although their overall image of the police was not necessarily favorable, "some" police are "okay," particularly those with whom they were personally acquainted. These acquaintances tend to be with police in their own town. However, of the participants who disagreed with the respect statement, 7.2% did so strongly. Middle SES respondents were significantly more likely to disagree with the statement, "I have a lot of respect for the police in my town." Given the sample size, this result must be accepted with caution. The difference between the two groups was statistically significant at the .05 level (chi square = 6.944; $df = 2$; $p = .03105$).

Despite the fact that half of the participants have respect for police officers, the overall responses indicated that the participants view the police as punitive and have little social attachment to them. A mean score of 3.86 was reported for the question, "Can police officers punish you if you do something wrong?" On a 5-point scale, with 1 = *never* and 5 = *always*, participants exhibited a relatively strong belief in the power of police to punish. Contrast this to responses to the question, "If you broke [disobeyed] a police officer's orders and no one knew, would you feel bad?" The responses revealed that, in the absence of external forces monitoring their behavior, participants felt little obligation to obey police orders. The mean score for this item was 2.25. Obviously, the police are perceived substantially more as punishers than guilt producers.

Willingness to cooperate was measured by the question, "If your friends got into trouble with the police, would you be willing to lie to protect them?" The question elicited 38.4% willing respondents, 42.4% unwilling participants, and 19.2% who did not know. In an effort to separate out the influence of the police from the influence of peers, the responses were compared to responses from a generic lying question, "Is it OK to lie if it keeps your friends out of trouble?" A slightly smaller percentage of respondents (36%) agreed that it is okay to lie generally. Substantially more participants reported

disagreement with the general lie proposition (58.4% vs. 42.4%). Fewer participants were indecisive about willingness to lie to protect their friends (5.6% vs. 19.2%). It appears, therefore, that the person to whom the lie would be told (i.e., police vs. other) does affect the willingness of participants to lie, with the police more likely to be the recipients of the lie.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A majority of the African American males in the sample reported experiencing the police as a repressive rather than a facilitative agent through direct encounters and through the encounters of friends and relatives. The repressive nature of the police role is particularly evident in the circumstances under which direct police encounters occurred. These stops were primarily drug interdiction efforts involving tactical narcotic teams, known to the Black males as “the jump out boys.” Stops to enforce curfew ordinances and stops for being in the wrong neighborhood (being Black in a neighborhood that is predominantly White) were also frequent. Although curfews and “drug sweeps” are intended to reduce youth crime and drug trafficking, the aggressive and indiscriminate use of these tactics with young African American males created or reinforced uncooperative attitudes. This finding challenges community policing efforts that are based on the assumption that “the effectiveness of current police strategies in controlling crime can be improved if the police increase the quantity and quality of citizen contacts and collaboration” (Kusow et al., 1997; McElroy, Casgrove, & Sadd, 1993, pp. 655-656; Moore, Trojanowicz, & Kelling, 1988).

By merely increasing the police presence for the purpose of carrying out draconian repressive approaches to the crime problem, community policing becomes its own problem. In the study reported here, African American males strongly believe that race plays a role in police-citizen encounters. One respondent commented, “we, minorities bring this on ourselves.” This comment raises several questions. First, to what extent do Black males run the risk of developing negative legal self-images? Second, to what extent might such negative self-images affect the future behavior of African American males? The findings suggest that repressive police encounters may reinforce negative attitudes toward the police—attitudes learned through a process of socialization (Brandl et al., 1994). Contrary to the findings of Leiber et al. (1998), high school youth in this study did not report high levels of delinquency, nor did they report antisocial or delinquent values. Thus, negative attitudes toward and contacts with the police for these African American adolescent males do not appear to be limited to those involved in delinquency. Furthermore, negative attitudes and experiences do not appear to be limited by class/SES or family structure.

Consistent with the findings of Rusinko et al. (1978),⁴ positive encounters between police and African American adolescent males were not sufficient to overcome overall negative attitudes; however, the opportunity to know and encounter police in facilitative or unofficial roles appeared to temper the negative attitudes of the young men. For a substantial number of Black males, police experience is associated with lack of respect for and disbelief in the equity and fairness of the police. The participants showed substantial recognition of the police power to punish but expressed little guilt for disobeying police orders if no one knew. These attitudes reflect a level of externalization and detachment from the police as agents of social control. In combination with other factors, these attitudes may have implications for future delinquency (Hirschi, 1969, p. 201). Although a rather crude measure of cooperation was used (willingness to lie to police to protect a friend), the fact that almost 40% of the participants would be willing to do so suggests that their experiences, attitudes, and socialization may be influencing this variable.

Given the small sample size and the location, claims of generalizability cannot be made. However, the parallel between these findings and others in the literature is worth noting. Unlike other studies that have used scaled measures of police attitudes, here individual measures were used because each was viewed as having its own substantive meaning. The legitimacy of this approach seems borne out by the subtle differences in results produced from the responses to separate items. They add yet another layer of complexity to the formulation and perpetuation of attitudes toward the police. They confirm that there are two avenues to attitude formation: direct and indirect. For African American males, it appears that there are also two dimensions to the attitudes themselves—one in which the symbolic police officer is almost never friendly, and one in which the individual officer may not be friendly often enough.

APPENDIX

Section Nine: Experience with Police

INTERVIEWER: Next I'd like you to tell me about an experience of yours involving the police.

1. Have you ever been stopped by the police (while you were on foot or in a car)?
Yes No
2. Were you alone or with friends or relatives?
3. When did this happen?
4. Please describe the circumstances under which you were stopped?
5. On the whole, did the police officer(s) act as you think (s/he-they) should have acted?
Yes No Don't Know

6. Was there anything that you did not like about the way (s/he-they) acted?
7. Have you had any other contacts with the police that you can remember?
(PROBE)
8. In those situations, on the whole, did the police officer(s) act as you think (s/he-they) should have acted?
Yes No Don't Know
(IMPORTANT: Interviewer, if multiple situations are described, please have participant differentiate between each).
9. Was there anything that you did not like about the way (s/he-they) acted?
10. Have any of your friends or relatives had any experiences with the police that made an impression on you? (Describe)
11. Have the police ever helped you in any way? Have they helped friends or relatives?

Code#: _____

NOTES

1. Virtually all youth report having engaged in some conduct that would be considered a crime (misdemeanor or otherwise) if engaged in by an adult. The term *delinquent youth* as it is used here means persons younger than age 18 who, alone or acting in concert with others, have committed acts of serious delinquency such as homicide, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, and theft in excess of \$50 (including auto theft) and/or who have committed less serious criminal offenses in a pattern that might be considered chronic (e.g., three or more times).

2. An earlier version of the instrument was pretested on a sample of 20 participants, and changes were made to clarify questions that the participants had difficulty understanding.

3. When more than one reason was given for finding the encounter unfavorable, the researcher chose the one that appeared first on the code sheet unless race was mentioned among them. If race was mentioned among the reasons for finding the encounter unfavorable, it was coded because race was a focal point of the research.

4. Rusinko et al. (1978) found that those who had supportive or helpful encounters with the police had more positive attitudes toward the police than those who only had encounters involving arrests or criminal investigations.

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