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### **The Effects of Aggressive Policing Tactics on Urban Communities' Political Efficacy**

Due to increased media attention upon prominent issues such as police brutality, racial profiling, and unprovoked police killings of unarmed civilians, we have witnessed a steady rise in the number of cross-disciplinary studies that ambitiously aim to explain these tragedies. A specific subset of the literature on policing in the United States concerns the police's treatment of urban (predominantly non-white) communities. Much has been said about the racial biases inherent in American law enforcement. Programs such as the New York Police Department's (NYPD) Stop-and-Frisk and similar iterations across the nation have gained notoriety as racial profiling in action. Less, however, has been said about the *effects* of these sorts of policing tactics on the targeted individuals and communities. In this paper, I will review the literature on the effects of aggressive policing tactics on urban communities' political efficacy. I divide the literature into three sections: (i) the influence of early life interactions on attitudes toward the police, (ii) the effects of accumulated experiences on attitudes toward the police, and (iii) the effects of aggressive policing tactics on political efficacy. Throughout, I will offer my insight as to what the field is currently lacking, as well as ideas for future research.

First, it is important to clarify what constitutes as aggressive policing tactics. Aggressive policing tactics can range from unduly detaining a certain class of citizens (eg. racially discriminatory policing policies, such as the aforementioned NYPD's Stop-and-Frisk) to officers' use of excessive force in police-civilian encounters, the latter of which results in severe injury—or even death—of the civilian. Others instances of aggressive policing tactics include, but are not limited to (i) the restriction of blacks' mobility (Bass 2001a), (ii) increased levels of detainment

and community surveillance (see Fagan and Davies 2000; Hurst et al. 2000; Weitzer 1999), (iii) the rise in police officers' use of undue force (Weitzer 1999), (iv) increased instances of police misconduct (Kane 2002), and (v) decreased response times to crises and fewer police services (Klinger 1997). Soss and Weaver (2017, 571) deem the current rise in aggressive policing tactics a "pivot toward violations of order." In several respects, the contemporary literature on policing in the United States has been dominated by discussions of how police officers are socialized (Cohen 2017; Soss and Weaver 2017), whether the chain of hierarchy actually encourages officers on the beat to resort to aggression with suspect civilians (Cohen 2017), and if technological advancements (such as body-worn cameras) can properly address these concerns (Lum et al. 2019). A subset of this rich literature specifically focuses upon the normative impacts and political ramifications of aggressive policing tactics on urban (usually non-white) communities. In the next section, I will present the literature that discusses the influence of early life interactions on one's attitudes toward the police.

### **The Influence of Early Life Interactions on Attitudes Toward the Police**

How do early experiences with the police influence youths' attitudes toward them? Hurst and Frank (2000) contend that researchers have dedicated minimal attention to youths' attitudes toward the police. They point to a handful of studies from the mid- to late-twentieth century (see Griffiths and Winfree 1982; Rusinko, Johnson, and Hornung 1978; Winfree and Griffiths 1977) that focused upon youths' attitudes toward the police (and, in some of the studies, other criminal justice agencies). The results of these studies were, at best, inconclusive; while Winfree and Griffiths (1977) found that race's effect on youths' attitudes toward the police was negligible, Rusinko, Johnson, and Hornung (1978) concluded that black youths were significantly more critical of the police than their white counterparts. Across several studies, sex was not found to

have a significant effect on one's attitudes toward the police. The studies have varied in size, with some focusing upon one city (Sullivan et al. 1987) while others aggregated youths' attitudes across several cities (Taylor et al. 2001).

An interesting finding supported across the studies, however, is that the more contact youths have with the police, the more negative their attitudes toward the police are (see Rusinko, Johnson, and Hornung 1978; Winfree and Griffiths 1977). Crucially, Griffiths and Winfree (1982, 138) offered a vital caveat, noting that “[t]hose juveniles who reported negative contacts with the police were negative in their views of law enforcement, while the converse was true for youths with positive experiences with the police.” Leiber, Nalla, and Farnworth (1998) supported Griffith's and Winfree's conclusion, reporting that the *nature* of youths' interactions with the police is more important than the *quantity* of said interactions. Notably, black youths reported lower levels of respect for the police when their interactions with officers involved being questioned at the station. Overall, a well-established verdict in the literature is that young people possess more critical attitudes toward the police than older people (see Boggs and Galliher 1975; Scaglione and Condon 1980) because young people are significantly more likely to experience hostile interactions with police officers (see Erez 1984; Scaglione and Condon 1980).

Through their study, Hurst and Frank aimed to build upon this relatively scant and understudied literature, more thoroughly examining youths' attitudes toward the police. In line with the aforementioned works, they found that young people are significantly less favorable of the police than their adult counterparts. Indeed, as opposed to adult respondents, the youths whom Hurst and Frank surveyed reported low levels of trust and satisfaction in the police. What might explain youths' unfavorable opinions of the police? Generally, young people are more familiar with the police than other criminal justice officials, as police are present in every community.

Consequently, youths' interactions with police can influence the former's views on the criminal justice system. Thus, these early encounters are crucial for young people's political socialization. Previous studies had found that positive relationships between the police and their community members increased the community members' willingness to help the police in their investigations (see Goldstein 1987; Stipak 1979). Based on these consistent and well-supported findings, Hurst and Frank contended that it only makes sense to apply the same logic to *youths'* relationships with the police. Accordingly, they claim that young people's early experiences with the police should be monumental in forming their views on the criminal justice system.

Hurst's and Frank's work is of critical importance to the field. While many of the earlier studies had also concluded that young people possess more critical attitudes toward the police than older people, Hurst and Frank went a step further by suggesting that these early life encounters with the police are of substantial importance to youths' political socialization. To impart the sheer significance of their study—both normatively and empirically—Hurst and Frank (2000, 199) noted that “attitudes formed early in life are likely to persist over time.” Relate this to studies about how one's identification as either a Democrat or Republican, once meaningfully established, tends to remain remarkably stable throughout one's lifetime. If the memories of negative experiences with the police at such a formative age are as persistent as one's political affiliation, the former can, potentially, wield a chilling effect on one's desire to become a politically efficacious citizen.

Taylor et al. (2001) built upon Hurst's and Frank's trailblazing research, further analyzing youths' attitudes toward the police. While most studies concerning youths' attitudes toward the police merely observed the differences between white and black youths, a few notable works emerged in the later part of the twentieth century that included Hispanic youths. Hadar and Snortum (1975), for instance, found that Hispanic youths resembled black youths in that both

groups reported lower approval ratings for the police than white youths, and Sullivan et al. (1987) concluded that Cubans shared blacks' predominantly negative views of the police, while whites perceived the police in the most positive light. In their study, Taylor et al. expanded upon this framework of inclusion, also examining Asian and Native American youths' attitudes toward the police. Unsurprisingly, as reflected in past studies, they found that there are, indeed, distinct racial differences among youths regarding attitudes toward the police, with whites and Asians reporting the highest levels of favorability toward the police and blacks reporting the lowest. Interestingly, Hispanics and Native Americans fell in the middle, reporting relatively indifferent levels of favorability toward the police. Contrary to previous studies, which had not reported a significant effect for gender (Winfrey and Griffiths 1977), Taylor et al. found that girls express more favorability toward the police than boys. Concluding along similar lines to Hurst and Frank, Taylor et al. argued that these racial and gender differences in perceptions of the police are democratically troubling. Young black men, for instance, do not have the same experience with the police as young white women.

Of course, there are several reasons why this reality should concern us. If police are disproportionately targeting certain groups of citizens based on ascriptive characteristics such as race or sex, then a true schism emerges in society wherein those whose experiences with the police are primarily positive report higher levels of trust in government than those whose experiences with the police are primarily negative. Through their aggressive policing tactics, then, police are, in essence, disenfranchising—or, at the very least, demobilizing—a significant portion of the citizenry. Police are meant to serve as protectors of their communities. Yet, if youths' interactions with police officers are of such a hostile nature that the former develop a lack of trust in not just the police, but government, in general, this can harm the legitimacy of our democracy. Truly, the

literature needs to analyze more closely the political ramifications of such negative interactions with the police. If an entire generation can become so deeply disaffected with the criminal justice system through their interactions with the police alone, then we must understand how to reverse such alienation.

Furthermore, the literature must contend more seriously with issues of intersectionality. Taylor et al. began to engage in intersectionality, looking at race and sex, but we need to understand more about the role of class, as well. How do these factors combine and affect one's attitudes toward the police? Which of these identities (race, sex, or class) is the most powerful indicator of one's attitudes toward the police? While it has been found that young, impoverished, black men experience the highest rates of incarceration (Pettit and Western 2004; Western 2006), more research needs to be conducted on how, specifically, these factors translate into levels of confidence and trust in the police—and, in a broader sense, the state. The literature, I argue, is not yet equipped to answer effectively these concerns. In the next section, I will present the literature that demonstrates how accumulated experiences can affect attitudes toward the police.

### **The Effects of Accumulated Experiences on Attitudes Toward the Police**

For decades, scholars have studied how experiences with the police affect not only citizens' views of the *police* as an institution, but the state, in general. Feagin (1991, 115) theorized that, in part, the “cumulative impact of racial discrimination” explains blacks' unfavorable perceptions of the police. In Feagin's estimation, these negative, accumulated interactions with the police become a part of the collective experiences of all blacks. Indeed, it is not only blacks' *personal* experiences with the police that influence them; oftentimes, by looking around their communities and witnessing the sheer prevalence of racial discrimination in policing, blacks internalize their community members' struggles as their own (Weitzer 2002). In a later work, Feagin and Sikes

(1994, 16) expanded upon this idea of collective experiences, finding that “experiences with serious discrimination are stored not only in individual memories but also in family stories and group recollections.” Through the power of group recollections and collective experiences, individual experiences are thus translated into community ones.

Expectedly, one of the most empirically supported findings is that blacks report far higher levels of distrust toward the police than their white counterparts (see Barlow and Barlow 2002; Weitzer 1999, 2000, and 2002; Weitzer and Tuch 2002). In tandem with this conclusion, many studies have found that prevalent, negative police encounters lead people to view officers less favorably than those who do not experience such adverse interactions (see Decker 1981; Huebner et al. 2004). Weitzer and Tuch (2002) argued that race, coupled with negative experiences with the police, are two of the greatest indicators of one’s attitudes toward the police. As Hurst et al. (2000) found, young, urban black men are the demographic most frequently detained by the police. Unsurprisingly, these excessive stops—which are, in large part, due to the racially discriminatory nature of policing—decrease young black men’s confidence in the police. Expanding upon this framework of blacks’ disillusionment with the police, Rosenbaum et al. (2005) found that the effects of vicarious experiences on community members’ views of the police are more prevalent in black communities, as blacks are particularly inclined to share their negative police experiences with their friends and families. These stories, in turn, have a direct impact on blacks’ perceptions of the police, resulting in higher levels of distrust.

With these studies in mind, Brunson (2007) sought to examine how accumulated experiences influence young, urban black men’s perceptions of the police. Two-thirds of the young men he surveyed claimed that the police are difficult to talk to, half reported that the police were impolite, and slightly less than half revealed that police officers frequently “harass and mistreat

people in the neighborhood” (Brunson 2007, 81). Moreover, the young men sharply criticized the police for what they perceived to be ineffective crime prevention and response. Such unfavorable attitudes toward the police translate into outright disaffection, as these young men grow to accept that the police do not care about the security of their community members (Brunson 2007, 83). In extreme instances, negative experiences with the police—whether those experiences assume the form of unwarranted stops or overuse of force—do not just affect black citizens’ attitudes toward the *police*. Instead, these experiences carry ramifications for how blacks view the *entire criminal justice system*. Blacks who perceive the criminal justice system as unresponsive to their needs are less likely “to testify as witnesses in criminal proceedings and/or when serving as jurors,” or convict a black defendant (Brunson 2007, 93). Furthermore, blacks who become disenchanted with the criminal justice system are more likely to try to solve disputes on their own, as they no longer trust the police to provide protection. Negative experiences with the police can thus make blacks feel like lesser citizens, and they do not feel as civically or politically efficacious as their white counterparts.

Brunson’s study goes a long way toward explaining the various ways in which negative, accumulated experiences with the police can impact young black men’s perceptions of the police. Brunson bolstered his argument through the use of in-depth, detailed interviews, painting a deeply distressing picture of young, urban black men’s troubled relationship with the police. A limit of Brunson’s study, of course, is that he focused upon a small group of young black men in St. Louis, Missouri. Despite the limited scope of his inquiries, his results are comparable with those conducted in other urban areas and contribute to the ever-growing field on how accumulated experiences with the police influence blacks’ perceptions of them. Toward the end, Brunson offered some policy recommendations, reiterating his belief that the police need to work



consciously to rebuild trust in these communities, but he does not here fully expand upon the consequences of urban blacks' decreased levels of political efficacy.

Recently, Braga, Brunson, and Drakulich (2019) conducted a survey of the current state of the field regarding the effects of accumulated experiences on urban communities' attitudes toward the police. Interestingly, while black communities have the aforementioned tradition of sharing their experiences with the police with their families and friends, this same phenomenon does not exist in white communities (Brunson and Weitzer 2011). In essence, whites do not feel as compelled as blacks to warn younger generations about the dangers of walking the street late at night, acting "suspiciously," or talking back to a police officer. Clearly, a disconnect exists between the police and non-white communities: a disconnect that detrimentally impacts the citizens of these communities and results in diminished trust and confidence in the police. Braga, Brunson, and Drakulich (2019, 541) note that "most individuals, regardless of race and socioeconomic status, are not antipolice." Therefore, it is not intrinsic that blacks should distrust the police more than whites. Instead, blacks' disproportionately negative experiences with the police must be able to explain this stunning—and disturbing—disparity in citizens' perceptions of the police. Braga, Brunson, and Drakulich concluded by offering a cautiously optimistic view of the future of policing, suggesting that an emphasis on community policing may go a long way toward rebuilding the lost trust between black urban communities and the police. Furthermore, they foresee the full implementation of body-worn cameras increasing the police's transparency, which, theoretically, could result in increased trust in the police. These fractured relationships cannot, and will not, be healed overnight, but the police must actively choose to pursue more community-based policing in order to start the process of resurrecting their communities' confidence in them as providers of security.

Tragically, a paradox exists in the contemporary United States, where “impoverished communities of color feel simultaneously over- and underpoliced” (Braga, Brunson, and Drakulich 2019, 549). While community-based policing and technological advancements such as body-worn cameras can, potentially, increase urban (predominantly non-white) communities’ trust in the police, I argue that the problem is more systemic. Nationally, we need to re-examine how we train our police officers. It is not enough to install body-worn cameras on every officer’s vest, or cameras upon every police car’s dashboard. We need to change the way police officers are told to behave in the field. Incidents of police brutality and racial profiling are not relegated to one region of the country, or one city, demonstrating just how pervasive the problems are. More incentive must be placed upon police forces to investigate how officers are trained. Police officers are trained to respond to perceived suspect aggression with aggression, but instead, they should be instructed in de-escalation tactics. Then, and only then, will community members feel safer in their interactions with police officers. In the next section, I will present the literature that demonstrates how aggressive policing tactics affect political efficacy.

### **The Effects of Aggressive Policing Tactics on Political Efficacy**

The previous two subsets of the literature laid the groundwork for aggressive policing tactics, outlining how early life interactions and accumulated experiences with the police serve to alienate certain citizens from the criminal justice system. Overall, though, the studies lack a causal mechanism that explains the civil and political consequences of these aggressive policing tactics. How do youths’ higher levels of distrust toward the police affect their future political behaviors? And, perhaps more urgently, how does a plethora of negative experiences with the police affect urban community members’ desire to be politically efficacious citizens?

As aforementioned, non-white communities are more likely to be the target of aggressive

policing tactics than predominantly white ones (see Fagan and Davies 2000; Leitzel 2001; Tyler and Waslack 2004; Weitzer 2000; Weitzer and Tuch 1999). Previous studies had demonstrated that the demographic group most affected by aggressive policing tactics is young, urban black men (see Brunson and Miller 2006a, 2006b; Hurst et al. 2000). Expectedly, aggressive policing tactics impact community-police relations, with civilians who view officers as aggressors expressing greater doubt in the police's regard for their rights and overall safety (Carr, Napolitano, and Keating 2007). Officers' overuse of force can, and does, dramatically decrease a community's perception of the police's legitimacy (Braga et al. 2014; Brunson and Miller 2006a, 2006b). These diminished perceptions of police legitimacy, in turn, decrease officers' effectiveness in the field (Tyler 2004), and the productivity of police-community relations is essentially non-existent. In the most extreme cases, if citizens perceive the police as a democratically unfair and unjust institution that is indifferent to their needs, these citizens may engage in acts of civil disobedience, ranging from small-scale riots to outright domestic terrorism (Krueger and Malechkova 2003).

Prior to Lerman and Weaver (2014), the field did not endeavor to explore fully the political ramifications of aggressive policing tactics. Krueger and Malechkova (2003) hinted at the political impacts by discussing civil disobedience, but their analysis lacked breadth. Instances of civil disobedience are rarer than, say, decisions to abstain from the political system. Inarguably, the effects of aggressive policing tactics on communities' political efficacy are more pervasive than acts of civil disobedience, and thus require more research. Indeed, because political scientists had, for far too long, ignored the effects that aggressive policing tactics may have on urban communities' sense of political efficacy, the field, as a whole, lacked meaningful analysis on the democratic consequences of aggressive policing tactics.

However, Lerman and Weaver (2014) changed this by framing aggressive policing tactics

in a decidedly political light. They argued that the field has already hinted at the political ramifications of aggressive policing tactics; for instance, prior studies had found that adverse encounters with the police weigh more heavily upon citizens than positive ones (Tyler and Fagan 2012), and residents in neighborhoods with high levels of police-civilian contact are more likely to engage in “systematic evasion” of the police (Weitzer and Brunson 2009, 251). Past research had also suggested that citizens learn about the intricacies of government operations through their personal interactions with said agencies (Soss 2005). As such, negative interactions with government agencies are more likely to have a chilling effect on citizens’ broader perceptions of the state. In extreme cases, such alienated citizens may become less likely to reach out to their local government, instead choosing “politics of invisibility” (Cohen 2010, 195).

Operating within this framework, Lerman and Weaver (2014) set out to determine the potential civic effects of aggressive policing tactics on communities in New York City. Their findings suggest that the most crucial aspect of urban community policing is not the *quantity* of police stops or police-civilian contact, but the *quality*. Accordingly, Lerman and Weaver echoed the conclusions of Griffiths and Winfree (1982) and Leiber, Nalla, and Farnworth (1998), who had argued that communities that experience high amounts of police-civilian contact are not necessarily adversely impacted by these interactions. Optimistically, Lerman and Weaver (2014, 217) found that “the prevalence of police activity may be associated with higher levels of local engagement.” In these instances, citizens may feel more closely connected to the police force and trust officers to protect their communities. A high visibility of police officers, therefore, may actually encourage citizens to feel safer in their communities. However, officers’ overuse of force has a chilling effect on community members’ sense of political efficacy, thus decreasing the likelihood of the community members reaching out to their local government when they are in

need of assistance. Hence, aggressive policing tactics directly impact citizens' engagement with not only the police, but their local government (Lerman and Weaver 2014). The consequences of aggressive policing tactics could, on a large scale, be democratically catastrophic, with lower voter turnout from affected communities, higher rates of political alienation, and decreased levels of trust in government. Lerman and Weaver thus persuasively demonstrate why concerns regarding aggressive policing tactics are inherently political.

Lerman and Weaver (2014) expanded upon these critical findings in their seminal book *Arresting Citizenship: The Democratic Consequences of American Crime Control*. Criminal justice institutions (such as the police) have affected the political socialization of a significant portion of the American populace, and direct interactions with the police influence how citizens think not only about the democratic state, but their place within it. Due to the racially motivated nature of aggressive policing tactics, an alarmingly large number of Americans—whom Lerman and Weaver deem “custodial citizens”—are now questioning whether they are, in fact, full-fledged citizens. This “diminished belief in [the] equality of citizenship,” for its part, translates into decreased levels of political trust, efficacy, and participation (Lerman and Weaver 2014, 16-17). Worryingly, custodial citizenship does not only pertain to an exclusion from certain privileges, but to “the active construction of a different citizenship” (Lerman and Weaver 2014, 28). Thus, through aggressive policing tactics, the police forge this concept of “custodial citizenship” and socialize said category's members into perceiving the state as antithetical to their well-being. Those whom the police have classified as custodial citizens have, due to their diminished levels of trust and faith in the state, effectively “withdrawn from participation in the political life of the nation” (Lerman and Weaver 2014, 231). Disillusionment with the system, then, translates into outright apathy, with citizens actively and consciously opting out of all sorts of civic activities,

from participation in social groups to voting. Hence, while aggressive policing tactics can encourage citizens to engage in acts of civil disobedience, they can also demobilize and, in the most extreme cases, disenfranchise citizens.

Troublingly, those who experience direct interactions with the carceral state differ greatly from those who do not on a wide array of positions, from social issues such as same-sex marriage and church attendance to more substantive issues such as their economic well-being and the role of government in providing equal opportunities for all. Custodial citizens, for their part, express higher levels of anxiety over their economic futures and job prospects than the rest of the American polity (Lerman and Weaver 2014, 233). These stark disparities illustrate that custodial citizens do not view the state in the same way as the broader American populace—and, more alarmingly, that they do not perceive themselves as being equipped to improve their current condition as lesser citizens. Aggressive policing tactics feed into this sense of abject hopelessness, convincing custodial citizens that they are unequal members of society who are undeserving of the same rights and privileges that other Americans enjoy.

By focusing upon communities in Charlottesville, Trenton, and New Orleans, Lerman's and Weaver's work expands upon the pre-established literature on aggressive policing tactics in highly populated urban areas such as Philadelphia (Carr, Napolitano, and Keating 2007), St. Louis (Brunson 2007), Cincinnati (Hurst and Frank 2000), and New York City (Lerman and Weaver 2014). In urban communities across the nation, citizens (from, notably, predominantly non-white communities) are forced to contend with the effects of aggressive policing tactics, and many of these effects are unquestioningly political (eg. demobilization of potential voters, diminished trust in local government, and decreased faith in the political system). Political scientists, for their part, need to emulate Lerman and Weaver and start considering policing to be a distinctly political topic.

Evidently, the ramifications of aggressive policing tactics on urban communities' levels of political efficacy are staggering—and democratically disconcerting. More work must be done to discover just how rampant these police abuses are—and how we can mitigate their effects and restore communities' trust in the government.

## **Conclusion**

In this review, I highlighted seminal studies that examine the effects of aggressive policing tactics on urban communities' political efficacy. Though extensive, the review is by no means exhaustive. As shown, early life interactions with the police have a significant influence on one's attitudes toward the police. Youths are most familiar with the police—as well as the age demographic most frequently detained by them. As such, contact with the police is exceptionally salient for younger people. Negative experiences severely diminish youths' trust and confidence in police officers. The literature on the effects of accumulated experiences on one's attitudes toward the police builds upon this theme, illustrating that persistent, hostile interactions with the police negatively affect attitudes toward not only the police, but the state, in general. And finally, aggressive policing tactics exert political effects, ranging from acts of civil disobedience to detachment from the system. In sum, aggressive policing tactics have enduring influences on citizens' levels of political efficacy, including, but not limited to: (i) decreased faith and confidence in not only the police, but the state, (ii) diminished desire to participate in the political process, and (iii) outright disengagement from the system.

While policing has traditionally been a topic covered most extensively by sociologists and criminologists, Lerman and Weaver have demonstrated that policing is inherently political, as well. Together, the disciplines can more methodically study the effects of aggressive policing tactics. Currently, the field lacks meaningful policy recommendations. Though we have seen that

aggressive policing tactics are problematic for a variety of reasons, there is no clear consensus on how to best address these issues. Though I argue that the problem is more systemic and internal to the police's operations, I do not foresee significant overhauls to officers' training in the coming years. I am, however, optimistic about the potential of surveillance technologies such as body-worn cameras and car dashboard cameras. These technologies, on their own, are not enough to remedy the solemn issues of antagonistic police-community relations, diminished trust in the police, and custodial citizenship. They are, nevertheless, a start, and one that police agencies across the nation have seemed to, more or less, embrace (Lum et al. 2019).

Clearly, seeing how political scientists have only consequentially forayed into the field in the last few years, there is much we still need to uncover about the political consequences of aggressive policing tactics. Presently, the literature on policing has a distinctly urban focus. Future studies should examine more rural communities to determine whether aggressive policing tactics also occur in smaller communities and, more crucially, whether the ramifications for these tactics are just as democratically troubling as they are in urban communities. Moreover, more work must be done on intersectionality. How do age, race, sex, class, and location (i.e. urban or rural) interact? Much of the work has focused on racial disparities in policing, as well as increased police presence in predominantly poor, non-white neighborhoods. We know that young, urban black men are the demographic group most targeted by the police. But the field is still unclear on how, exactly, these sociodemographic factors relate to each other. Why is the experience of young, urban black men so different from that of other young urbanites? Furthermore, studies need to follow in Taylor et al.'s (2001) footsteps and analyze the attitudes of other racial groups, such as Hispanics and Asians. Lastly, are groups of different sexual orientations or gender identities targeted more by the police than others? Parsing these differences would strengthen the empirical findings of the field and



grant us greater leverage in discussing the effects of aggressive policing tactics—as well as the groups most besieged by these tactics.

Regrettably, due to the reality of contemporary policing in the United States, the problem of aggressive policing tactics is not one that will vanish in the near future. Consequently, we, as social scientists, need to dedicate more resources to understanding the causes and effects of aggressive policing tactics. Because of the sheer prevalence of the police—as well as their unparalleled ability to coerce communities—we need to more significantly examine how officers are trained. For, if the issue is, indeed, systemic—as I argue—then we must be prepared to answer uncomfortable questions about how to restructure the police.

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