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GENDER, RACE, AND URBAN POLICING
The Experience of African American Youths

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Proactive policing strategies produce a range of harms to African Americans in poor urban communities. We know little, however, about how aggressive policing is experienced across gender by adolescents in these neighborhoods. The authors argue that important insights can be gained by examining the perspectives of African American youths and draw from in-depth interviews with youths in St. Louis, Missouri, to investigate how gender shapes interactions with the police. The comparative analysis reveals important gendered facets of African American adolescents' experiences with and expectations of law enforcement. Young men described being treated routinely as suspects regardless of their involvement in delinquency and also reported police violence. Young women typically described being stopped for curfew violations but also expressed concerns about police sexual misconduct. This study highlights the differential harms of urban policing for African American young women and men and highlights the need for systematic attention to the intersections of race and gender in research on criminal justice practices.

Keywords: *policing; African Americans; gender discrimination; racial discrimination*

Law enforcement strategies in poor urban communities produce a range of harms to African American residents. This includes disproportionate experiences with surveillance and stops, disrespectful treatment, excessive force, police deviance, and fewer police protections (Fagan and Davies 2000; Mastrofski, Reisig, and McCluskey 2002; Smith and Holmes 2003). Attempts to explain these

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patterns examine how young Black men come to symbolize the stereotypical offender (Skolnick 1994) and have drawn from minority group threat theories (Smith and Holmes 2003) and social ecological models (Anderson 1990; Kane 2002; Klinger 1997). However, few studies have considered how gender intersects with race and neighborhood context in determining how police behaviors are experienced. It is taken for granted that young minority *men* are the primary targets of negative police experiences.

Feminist scholars suggest that young Black women are far from immune from negative experiences with the justice system. Girls are more likely than boys to experience juvenile justice interventions for relatively minor offenses (MacDonald and Chesney-Lind 2001), and African American women and girls receive more punitive treatment than their white counterparts (Bush-Baskette 1998; Miller 1999; Visher 1983). Moreover, research suggests that Black women crime victims are less likely than white women to receive police assistance (Robinson and Chandek 2000).

While feminist research has illuminated how formal aspects of the justice system adversely affect Black women and girls, we know less about their experiences with the police, including discretionary police activities in their neighborhoods. Officers' ability to use discretion is a low-visibility but defining feature of policing, and the process through which many racially biased practices emerge (Bass 2001). In general, criminological investigations of minority citizens' experiences with the police have focused on adults rather than adolescents, and this work is based largely on survey research or official data on citizen complaints. Few studies have drawn from in-depth interviews, which allow a deeper understanding of the context of events and their meanings for the individuals involved (Phillips and Bowling 2003).

We analyze in-depth interviews with African American youths in a poor urban community to investigate how gender shapes their interactions with and perceptions of the police. We compare young women's and young men's accounts of their personal experiences with the police, their understanding of neighborhood policing, and their knowledge of police misconduct in their communities. Our comparative analysis allows us to examine how gender intersects with race and place in shaping youths' expectations of law enforcement and the nature of police/youth interactions.

GENDER, RACE, AND URBAN POLICING

Police actions in poor urban communities are different from those in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. Areas characterized by concentrated poverty and minority racial segregation are subject to aggressive policing strategies, including drug and gang suppression efforts, higher levels of police misconduct, and underresponsive policing (Bass 2001; Kane 2002; Klinger 1997). Aggressive policing

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disproportionately targets African Americans (Bass 2001). Even when such strategies result in temporary crime reductions, they undermine relations between police and minority communities and expose large numbers of law-abiding citizens to unwelcome police contacts.

A consistent finding in policing research is that legal cynicism is more prevalent among African Americans than whites. Distrust of the police is correlated with both concentrated neighborhood disadvantage (Sampson and Bartusch 1998) and personal experiences with negative and involuntary police contacts (Weitzer and Tuch 2002). Although "juveniles make up a disproportionately large segment of the population subject to police contacts and arrests" (Leiber, Nalla, and Farnworth 1998, 152), most research on race and policing has focused on adults. The few studies to examine adolescents suggest they have less favorable attitudes toward the police than adults; African American youths experience more police contacts than white youths; and they also have greater distrust of the police than their white counterparts (Hurst, Frank, and Browning 2000; Leiber, Nalla, and Farnworth 1998).

Feminist scholarship demonstrates that race, class, and gender inequalities cannot be understood in isolation to one another. They are intersecting structural positions that result in variations in the nature and effects of inequality (Collins 1990). However, gender often is ignored in research on race and policing. Some research includes samples of men and women but fails to attend to gender (Hurst, Frank, and Browning 2000; but see Fine et al. 2003), while other research simply narrows the focus to young men (Anderson 1990; Leiber, Nalla, and Farnworth 1998). Likewise, the theoretical models used to explain discriminatory patterns of policing and their relationship to citizens' perspectives on the police display a presumption of gender neutrality or an uncritical focus on men.

Nonetheless, we can glean some knowledge from previous research. There is strong evidence that African American women and girls receive more punitive treatment within the justice system than their white counterparts. For example, the contemporary "war on drugs" has led to unprecedented levels of incarceration among Black women (Bush-Baskette 1998). Research on the adjudication of delinquent girls suggests that African Americans are disproportionately placed in detention, while whites are more likely to be tracked into treatment-oriented programs (Bartollas 1993; Miller 1999). It stands to reason that similar processes may be at work within policing.

Visher's (1983) groundbreaking study was the first to demonstrate how gender and race intersect to shape police/citizen interactions. It was long assumed that the police treat women in a "chivalrous" manner, providing preferential treatment in arrest decisions. Visher (1983, 5) challenged this assumption, suggesting instead that "chivalry exists . . . for those women who display appropriate gender behaviors and characteristics." Drawing from data on police/citizen encounters, she found that older, white, and deferential women received more leniency than

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other women. Younger women received harsher treatment, and African American women were significantly more likely to be arrested than white women or men. In fact, they faced arrest at rates comparable to those of African American men.

Patterns of arrest decision making provide evidence of differential policing but do not directly speak to other discretionary police practices. Stops and searches, disrespect, and the use of force do not consistently coincide with arrest. While research has documented that such actions disproportionately target citizens in poor minority communities (Fagan and Davies 2000; Mastrofski, Reisig, and McCluskey 2002), we know little about how gender shapes these police behaviors.

Several studies report within-race gender differences in the likelihood of exposure to involuntary police contact. Weitzer and Tuch (2002) found that 73 percent of the Black men in their sample reported experiences with racial profiling compared to 38 percent of Black women. The few studies with adolescent samples report race and gender differences separately. Friedman et al. (2004) found that 73 percent of young men and 45 percent of young women had been stopped by the police and that African American youths were more likely than other racial groups to report physical abuse during police contacts. Gender is also statistically significant in studies of police harassment (Browning et al. 1994) and violence (Worden 1996). Such research confirms that young Black men typify the "symbolic assailant" in the eyes of the police.

An additional consideration is the problem of underpolicing, including the failure to respond promptly to calls for service, investigate crimes, and be responsive to crime victims. Klinger (1997) argues that the police are less responsive in poor urban neighborhoods because they believe that certain crimes are normative in these communities and they view victims in such contexts as deserving. In this vein, one area that has received attention is differential police response to domestic violence calls. Robinson and Chandek (2000), for example, found that domestic violence incidents with Black victims were less likely to result in arrest than incidents with white victims. Such research undermines the claim that chivalry guides police behaviors toward African American women. Moreover, it suggests that police responses to African American men are mediated by the differential treatment of African American women victims and by gendered understandings of private and public space with aggressive policing emphasizing the latter.

Finally, the problem of police sexual misconduct has received limited research attention. In their survey of adolescents, Fine and her colleagues (2003) report that two-fifths of young women complained of sexual harassment by police officers, including 51 percent of whites and 38 percent of Blacks. Kraska and Kappeler (1995) suggest that young women who are poor, racial minority, and otherwise marginalized are most vulnerable to sexually abusive practices.

Although few studies have specifically compared how African American young women and men experience discretionary police practices, the research reviewed here suggests this is an important area of inquiry. While young Black men experience higher rates of involuntary police contact and police violence,

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young Black women are far from immune from harmful encounters with the police. Our goal in this investigation is to examine how gender influences youths' experiences with the police in their neighborhoods and to consider these issues from the perspectives of minority youths themselves.

METHOD

This investigation is based on survey and in-depth interviews with 75 African American youths living in St. Louis, Missouri. The sample includes 35 young women and 40 young men. They range in age from 12 to 19, with a mean age of approximately 16 for both genders. Interviewing began in spring 1999 and was completed in the spring of 2000. Interviews were voluntary and typically lasted about one and a half hours. Youths were paid $20 for their participation and promised strict confidentiality. Pseudonyms are used throughout for research participants and the streets they occasionally reference.

Youths were recruited into the project with the cooperation of several organizations working with "at-risk" and delinquent youths, including a local community agency and two alternative public high schools. Approximately equal numbers of young men and women were drawn from each location. The community agency was a neighborhood drop-in center for adolescents in north St. Louis. The second author volunteered at the center the summer prior to data collection. The two alternative schools served youths expelled from St. Louis public schools for a variety of infractions. The counselor at each school identified youths for study participation when they were known to reside in disadvantaged neighborhoods in the city. Interviews were conducted in a private office or empty classroom at each of the research sites.

We narrow our focus to urban Black adolescents because they are the group for whom involuntary police contacts are most frequent and salient (Hurst, Frank, and Browning 2000). Sampling was purposive in nature. Our inclusion of young women and young men permits us to examine how gender shapes youths' experiences with and perceptions of the police. In addition, we sought to compare youths involved in serious delinquency—whom we would reasonably expect to have more involuntary police contact—with those who were not.

In all, 16 of the 40 young men and 15 of the 35 young women reported participating in serious delinquency in the past six months. Serious delinquency included the following self-report items: stealing more than $50, stealing a motor vehicle, attacking someone with a weapon or with the intent to seriously hurt them, committing a robbery, and selling marijuana, crack-cocaine, or other drugs. On the other hand, all of the youths reported having engaged in minor forms of delinquency, including skipping classes, being loud or rowdy in public, avoiding paying for things, stealing $5 or less, lying about their age to get into someplace or buy something, or running away. Research suggests that girls are more likely than boys to face

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juvenile justice interventions for such minor offenses (MacDonald and Chesney-Lind 2001). Thus, our sample captured variations in delinquent involvement.

Data collection began with the survey, and youths were then asked to participate in an audiotaped in-depth interview, typically completed the same day. Surveys provided baseline information about youths' participation in delinquency, perceptions of the police in their neighborhoods, personal experiences with police harassment and mistreatment, and knowledge of incidents involving others in their communities. Survey responses were used as a reference point during the in-depth interviews.

Our goal was to collect data that could provide a relatively holistic assessment of youths' experiences with the police and their perceptions of policing in their communities. The in-depth interviews were semistructured with open-ended questions that allowed for considerable probing. Youths were reminded of their survey responses about experiences with the police and were asked to provide detailed descriptions of the circumstances surrounding these events, their consequences, and the youths' interpretation of what happened and why. They also were asked their perceptions of policing in their neighborhoods, and they were encouraged to discuss problematic police incidents they had witnessed or heard about.

Although neither author conducted the interviews, the study design and interviewer training facilitated the development of rapport. The survey began with relatively innocuous questions (demographics, family, school) and slowly made the transition to questions about delinquency, policing, and other sensitive topics. Completing the survey first allowed the interviewers to establish familiarity with participants before moving to the in-depth interview and provided the opportunity to set a relaxed and nonjudgmental tone. This facilitated more open discussion when issues were revisited during the in-depth interviews.

In addition, social distances that include differences in relative power can result in suspicion and affect disclosure (Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995). To address this, we matched interviewers and interviewees on social characteristics to the extent possible. The majority of interviews (61 of 75) were conducted by an interviewer of the same gender. In addition, three of the four interviewers on the project were African American, and they completed 47 of the 75 interviews. They included a male college professor, a female Ph.D. student from the same community as the research participants, and a female M.A. student with experience working in social service agencies. The fourth interviewer was a white male Ph.D. student from Holland.

Where social distances were present, we used these to help "elicit explanations that are known to someone with insider status" (Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995, 32). For instance, the white interviewer routinely made note of his outsider status (which was evident by his Dutch accent), stating that he was "not from around here" and asking youths to help him understand how things work in America. Such an approach can be beneficial, particularly when interviewing those for whom social and economic marginalization has routinely meant they are denied the opportunity to have their perspectives taken seriously (Phillips and Bowling 2003).

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The interviews completed by the African American professor and African American Ph.D. student yielded the consistently richest results. This is likely a function of their shared racial identity with participants and their having more research experience than the other two interviewers. They completed 39 of the 75 interviews. Comparisons across the four interviewers' data, however, did not reveal inconsistencies in the kinds of information youths provided; instead, there was more variation in the level of detail in the 36 interviews completed by the African American M.A. student and European Ph.D. student.

Reliability was strengthened through triangulated data collection techniques, by asking questions at multiple points across two interviews, and obtaining detailed accounts during the in-depth interviews. To achieve internal validity in our analysis, we used techniques drawn from grounded theory methods, including the search for and explication of deviant cases (Strauss 1987). We took care to ensure that the concepts developed and illustrations provided typified the most common patterns in youths' accounts. In addition, we make note of exceptions to these patterns where appropriate. We first analyzed data and identified thematic patterns independently. Once this was completed, we compared notes and worked together to refine our conceptual schema. The first author, an African American man who grew up in St. Louis, was a police officer in respondents' neighborhoods for seven years before becoming an academic. The second author is a white woman with expertise in the study of gender. Thus, we brought complementary insights to the analysis process. Although not statistically generalizable, our study raises important issues about the impact of gender on the policing of urban African American youths.

STUDY SETTING

St. Louis is a highly distressed U.S. city with large concentrations of extreme poverty that result in social isolation, limited resources, and high crime rates. Table 1 compares youths' neighborhoods, St. Louis city and county. Study participants were drawn from neighborhoods characterized by racial segregation and high rates of poverty, unemployment, and female-headed families.

Youths provided a stark account of how these statistics translate into lived experience. Asked to describe her neighborhood, Cleshay explained,

> [It's] terrible. Every man for theyself. Ghetto, in the sense of raggedy, people uncool to people, just outside, street light never come on, police don't come in after four o'clock. . . . Heavy drug dealing. They loud, they don't care about, you know, the old people in the neighborhood or nuttin'.

Likewise, Maurice explained,

> [There's] a lot of gangs, lot of drugs, dirt. Dirty, like the streets are polluted. A lot of abandoned houses, lot of burned up houses. 'Cause of the drugs and the gangs I guess. . . . Vandalism. They get into a lot of fights. Bring property value down, you

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TABLE 1: Select Neighborhood Characteristics (in Percentages)

	Youths' Neighborhoods	*St. Louis City*	*St. Louis County*
African American	82.6	51.2	18.9
Poverty	33.8	24.6	6.9
Unemployment	18.0	11.3	4.6
Female-Headed Families with Children	43.1	28.8	10.7

SOURCE: U.S. Census (2000; see http://www.census.gov/).

> know, people don't take care of they houses. And you know, don't nobody really wanna live there.

Many youths said their neighborhoods were physically run-down, and most described drug dealing, street gangs, and associated violence as commonplace. Moreover, youths saw their own neighborhoods as typical of the surrounding community. Asked how her neighborhood compared to others nearby, Tisha surmised, "It's not different at all. They all do the same thing." Raymond noted, "In every neighborhood there's drug activity and gang activity." And Tami explained, "It's mostly every neighborhood got drug dealers in they neighborhood. Or people that be shootin' and stuff."

These descriptions are consistent with scholarly research, which demonstrates that poor African American neighborhoods tend to be ecologically clustered and lacking in institutional resources necessary to insulate them from crime (Krivo and Peterson 1996). In fact, even when youths described their immediate blocks as relatively problem free (which they attributed to having primarily older adults or young children present), they nonetheless described gangs, drugs, and violence nearby.

These are precisely the ecological contexts associated with aggressive policing, police deviance, and underpolicing. Policing strategies in respondents' neighborhoods relied heavily on proactive encounters to address problems such as drugs and gangs. This involved frequent pedestrian and vehicle stops by patrol officers, detectives, and members of specialized units. To examine these issues further, we now turn to youths' narrative accounts of their experiences with the police, focusing on similarities and differences across gender.

FINDINGS

The survey reports offer evidence of the gendered nature of policing in urban Black neighborhoods. Table 2 shows that most youths knew someone who had been harassed by the police, including 37 young men and 33 young women.

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TABLE 2: Perceptions of Neighborhood Policing

	*Young Men (*n *= 40)*	*Young Women (*n *= 35)*
Harassed or mistreated by the police	33	16
Knows someone who has been harassed or mistreated by the police	37	30
"The police are often easy to talk to"	5	5
"The police are almost never easy to talk to"	26	19
"The police are often polite to people in the neighborhood"	4	2
"The police often harass or mistreat people in the neighborhood"	19	18

However, young men more often reported being mistreated themselves. In all, 33 young men, versus 16 young women, described experiencing police harassment. In addition, young men reported harassment regardless of their participation in delinquency, while more of the young women we interviewed reported harassment when they were involved in delinquency. Specifically, 19 of the 24 young men who did not engage in serious delinquency nonetheless said they had been harassed by the police, compared to 6 of 20 young women. The majority of young men (14 of 16) and young women (10 of 15) who reported participation in serious delinquency also noted experiences with police harassment.

Youths' responses to survey items about how the police behave in their neighborhoods were consistent across gender. As Table 2 shows, similar numbers of young men and women described the police as impolite and difficult to talk to, and about half said the police often harass and mistreat people in their neighborhoods. In fact, only about one in five youths said this almost never occurs. These survey findings corroborate youths' in-depth interview accounts of their treatment by the police, the extent and nature of police harassment in their neighborhoods, and their beliefs about how gender shapes police/youth interactions.

Youths described frequent pedestrian and vehicle stops as the primary policing strategy in their neighborhoods. Their accounts of police harassment emphasized how the police behaved during such stops. Cherise explained, "I don't like police 'cause they mean. They don't know how to talk to people right, they disrespectful. They treat people like they ain't nothing, and especially Black people. They act like Black people are worthless." However, many youth suggested that severe police behaviors were typically reserved for young men. Destiny remarked, "It's little stuff they be sayin' to us [girls], but like with the dudes, they'll try to lock them up and try to take them to jail." Tommie noted,

> The police will mess with the males quicker than the females. If it's a group of girls standing across the street and it's a group of dudes standing across the street, [the police] fina [getting ready to] shine they lights on the dudes and they ain't fina mess with the girls.

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Tommie also suggested that the police were somewhat less aggressive when young men were stopped in the company of women: "You alright if you with your momma, your girlfriend, then that's a different story, [with] your kids or something. . . . They'll still bother you, but they won't look at you like that. [Their behavior] wouldn't be different [but] they'd hesitate." Wayne believed that the police posed one of the primary dangers for young men in his neighborhood: "I would say males are in more danger [than females] 'cause you gotta deal with police. All police ain't good police. You ain't even gotta be doing nothing. If they think you doing something, they get out [of their cars. If] they can't catch you, next time they see you, they put something on you." Nonetheless, young women were not immune from negative encounters. Janelle clarified, "The police harass the guys a little bit more than the girls, but there's always certain females that they'll pick to harass." Next we examine these patterns in detail.

Young Men and the Police

Young men's discussions focused on their frequent involuntary contact with the police. They believed that the police besieged their neighborhoods because officers believed that many of the people living there, particularly young Black men, were criminals. Ricky described how hanging out on the street attracted police attention, regardless of whether anyone was involved in crime:

> Two blocks up from me it's like a lil' heroin area. The police is *real* hot on this area now. . . . One day I was walkin' from over there and the police . . . seen me standing out over there. I mean, they know I don't sell dope, they know I go to school every day. . . . Everybody don't got to be doing the same thing. This what I tried to explain to them: "Just 'cause I'm out here don't mean I sell dope, man. I mean, every time you check me [I'm clean]." I mean I don't even carry money no more. . . . How am I sellin' dope and I don't never have no money in my pocket? Check my shoes, make me take my socks off. Man it's cold outside. "Pull your pants down." . . . All types of stuff, man, and it's freezin' outside. Make you lay on the ground. To me, that's police brutality.

Such searches were also described as physically intrusive, with numerous complaints about the police "trying to put they hands all in your mouth."

Young men believed the police sought to limit their use of public space by designating neighborhood locations as crime hot spots. Shaun noted, "They a trip, we be sitting on the front [porch] or something, they'll pull up just 'cause we sitting there. Or we be chillin' in front of the store, [they] get out checking everybody." Terence observed,

> On certain days, [police] might do a sweep through the neighborhood. They'll come in like, three or four cars deep, two paddy wagons, and they'll just roll down every block that they think mainly sellin' drugs or whatever. And anybody outside, if they think you got something, they gon' check you. Just everybody that happen to be on the block. If you look like you got something or look like you fina do something—so they say—then they just come up to you, tell you to assume the position or whatever. Put your hands on the hood, check you . . . talk bad to you for a lil' minute and then tell you to go on about your business.

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Young men believed officers failed to consider that designated crime hot spots might also be places where law-abiding youths gather. Because pedestrian stops seemed arbitrary, they questioned whether the police were really concerned with addressing neighborhood crime or were merely interested in harassing them. Darnell commented, “Police over there by me, they stop you just to mess with you for real. . . . Sometimes they’ll pull up and be like, ‘get that damn crack out your mouth boy!’ and keep going.”

While they understood that certain contexts might subject them to increased suspicion, young men nonetheless found it prejudicial. They believed officers viewed them as criminals because they were young Black men living in poor neighborhoods. Jamal commented, “[Police] feel that if you have fancy clothes or you have a lot [of] money, you selling drugs. They can’t see a Black male these days having a good job. They always want to pull you over or search you.”

Young men were especially frustrated when stops occurred in situations they believed warranted no suspicion. Several described being stopped on their way to school. Eugene explained,

> I was going to school one time and a cop just swerved, pulled up on me. I’m like, “Whoa, what’s up?” He said I fit a description of some dude that robbed a store. So I’m like, “Robbed a store where?” He’s like, “Way on the southside.” I am like, “I’m on the northside so that don’t got nothin’ to do with me.” And then they . . . put my hands on the car, you know, frisked me, asked me did I have any weapons or narcotics. I was like, “No.” He said, “Where you going?” I’m like, “I’m going to school” and stuff, you know. And then people across the street lookin’. They like, “Dang, why they stop you?” I’m like, “I don’t know.”

An additional frustration was officers’ refusal to acknowledge young men’s innocence, even when no evidence was found. Instead, they were described as expressing that young men merely “got lucky this time.”

Finally, young men were critical of officers’ routine use of antagonistic language, derogatory remarks, and racial epithets. Cooper commented, “They need to change the way they talk to people. . . . They show us no respect . . . [call us] niggers and all that.” Ricky concurred: “They’ll talk bad, call you all types of punks and sissies, and say you don’t wanna be nothing and you ain’t gon’ be nothing.” Tony described whistling to a friend when a passing officer “told me, ‘Shut up whistling, you Black monkey!’” Thus, young men’s complaints about police harassment were not just about routinely being stopped and treated as suspects but were tied to their sense that officers refused to treat them with dignity and respect.

Young Women and the Police

Young women’s descriptions of police harassment differed from young men’s. Their most common complaint, particularly when alone or in the company of other girls, was being stopped for curfew violations. Katie explained:

> On weekends we can be out ’til twelve, but long as you sittin’ on your front or close by your house. But if you like outside our gate or in the street or something the

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> police, they be like, . . . If we ride past again then we're gonna lock you all up . . . or whatever. . . . We just sittin' outside the house there, I don't know why they always messin' with us.

Kristy observed, "Police be harassing you constantly. I mean, if they not trying to get you for truancy, [they] trying to get you for curfew." She described a recent encounter:

> It was like eleven o'clock at night. I was getting off the Lake Street bus. I walked down the street, police put their high beams on me, they was like, 'Where you going?' And I'm like, 'Man, I'm going home, leave me alone.' They was like, 'Don't talk to us like that, we the police, we deserve respect, we here to protect y'all.' [I'm] like, 'Man, y'all ain't doin nuttin' but bothering me.

Once Kristy challenged the officers, the situation escalated:

> They was like, 'I heard you fit a description, assume the position.' Like hands on the wall, hands behind your head. I'm like, 'I ain't doin' nuttin'.' They like, 'You must want us to put your little black ass in jail.' . . . [I was like], 'Just let me go home, that's all I'm trying to do, I got school in the morning.' . . . They was like, 'Well fuck her, we got better things to do.' So they let me go. I walked home mad as a dog.

After Kristy challenged the police, they treated her as a criminal suspect. Up until that point, however, they appeared to be concerned that she was out past curfew. This differed from young men's accounts: They described being treated as suspects from the onset of their encounters with the police. In addition, whereas young men described being stopped throughout the day, young women described being stopped mostly at night. That they were stopped for curfew violations confirms research suggesting that the police intervene on girls for minor or status offenses. Despite the police's initially telling Kristy that they were "there to protect y'all," young women believed such stops had little to do with genuine concern about their well-being.

LaSondra, who had been sexually assaulted in her neighborhood, illustrates the tension for young women between concern over how the police treat people and the desire for protection from neighborhood dangers:

> [The police] just pull people over for no reason at all. Sometimes they just check people, see if they got some drugs. It could be the innocent person on the block they just pull 'em over and just start checking 'em. . . . It's messed up. They'll yell at 'em too for no reason you know. . . . Sometimes the police, they just sit on the block and they just watch the block and stuff. . . . But over there you have to watch. Especially when you walking or something 'cause you never know who might be behind you.

Although the police came to the hospital after LaSondra's sexual assault, she felt they were not responsive. Asked why, she explained, "Police don't do nothing. Some of 'em just give up. They could care less."

In the survey, only four girls (vs. nine boys) described the police as responding quickly to calls for service. Several girls described calling the police when a

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woman was victimized but reported they did not come. Jamellah saw a woman robbed and beaten near her home and brought the victim in her house to call the police: "[They] ain't never come. . . . We waited like 30 minutes and they ain't never show. So I waited at the bus stop with her . . . and she caught the bus home." Rennesha's parents called the police after a neighboring child asked for help because her stepfather was beating her mother. Rennesha explained, "The lil' girl looked so sorry. But the police never did come."

Complaints about police responsiveness emerged primarily in interviews with young women and centered on incidents of violence against women. This may be because such events are more likely to result in calls for service; thus, negative outcomes are more apparent. Or it may be that the police are less responsive to such calls because they do not fit neatly into the urban crime-fighting mission (Robinson and Chandek 2000). Either way, the young women who were interviewed expected the police to come to the aid of crime victims, particularly women. Their frustration with the police in their neighborhoods stemmed both from negative interactions and from the lack of responsiveness toward crime victims. Jamelle surmised, "I feel the police are there to protect and serve you, not to harass you for no reason."

Young women reported being treated as suspects in two contexts: when they were in the company of young men and when they were involved in offending. Most often, they described being stopped while passengers in vehicles driven by young Black men. In the company of young men, girls became suspects as well. Youths believed that vehicle stops occurred under the guise of enforcing traffic laws, but their true purpose was to search for weapons and drugs. Felicia's example is illustrative:

> We was coming from the riverfront and we went to Taco Bell to get something to eat, and [the police] had followed us . . . and they pulled us over. . . . [The officer] was like, "Do you have any warrants? . . . Is there any illegal substances or any drugs in the car?" and we was like, "No, not that we know of." He was like, "Well, can everybody step out of the car?" So we asked him, why did we need to step out the car? He said, "Don't worry about it, just get out of the car." . . . There was two male police officers. They searched everybody, even us girls.

When the search failed to produce contraband, Felicia said the officer issued a series of tickets for minor infractions, including not wearing their seatbelts, having windows that were "too tinted," and playing the radio too loud. Felicia noted, "Everything came out clear—[the driver's] insurance, his registration, his license, no warrants—so [the officer] got mad. He got to going off, he got to writing up tickets, just writing 'em up." She continued:

> I felt they was wrong. In one sense they was wrong 'cause they searched us and we women. They should've called a female officer to search us if they felt that we needed to be searched. I felt there wasn't no need for everybody to get out of the car. Wasn't no need for him slamming they heads into the car. Wasn't no need for all that. The boy gave you everything you asked for. He didn't talk back, he didn't get loud, he wasn't disrespectful. You got mad 'cause all his stuff was legit so you feel like if you can't get him on nothing in his car then you can write tickets on whatever come into your mind and that's what he did. . . . [Even for] not using his blinker to pull over when he flagged 'im.

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Felicia believed the officer behaved inappropriately and also was troubled that men had conducted body searches of the young women. Yvonne reported a similar concern. Asked to get off the street by an officer, Yvonne said she moved slowly and the officer became

> real rude to me, they put handcuffs on me, put me in the car, talking about they should take me out to the county so this white lady can whup my ass or whatever. Because men police ain't allowed to search women,[1] so they be like, 'We gonna take you out there and she gonna beat your ass.'

Yvonne's comment about the "white lady" was the only explicit reference made about a female officer. Given that just 11 percent of police officers are women, and they are often excluded from work in narcotics and gang units (Harrington and Lonsway 2004), this is not surprising. However, it does explain why young women were particularly concerned about how male officers dealt with cross-gender physical contact. By and large, youths also did not distinguish between how white and Black officers treated them, although they found Black officers' mistreatment especially egregious (Brunson and Miller forthcoming).

Janelle was the only young woman to report being stopped and searched by the police when in the exclusive company of girls. Like young men, she was told to "'put your hands on the car,' you know, 'take off your shoes, take off your socks,' and all I'm trying to do is walk to the store to get a soda." Janelle had been arrested numerous times and said this was "probably" why the police targeted her: "[If] they've had to deal with you before, next time they see you they are gonna mess with you . . . especially if they don't like you, they're gonna keep on trying to find something to lock you up on."

Destiny said her negative police encounters occurred when she was selling crack:

> They know that we sell drugs and stuff, so they try to talk about us and do us wrong. Take us down. But they never did take me down. They used to take everybody else down, because I mean I used to talk my way up out of it. . . . The white police like, 'These niggers always doin' something.' Even the Black ones'll say that . . . and be tryin' to beat on 'em and stuff.

Although the surveys indicated that most of the young women stopped by the police were involved in serious delinquency, Destiny and Janelle provided the only accounts that connected police behaviors to their delinquency. Perhaps delinquent girls spend more time on the streets than other girls, and this presence accounts for their greater likelihood of being stopped. However, their descriptions suggest that they tend to be stopped for minor offenses like curfew and truancy rather than for their participation in crime.

Destiny's and Janelle's descriptions parallel those provided by young men. Although atypical for girls, such incidents were routine for young men, regardless of their criminal activities. For boys, simply being in public spaces was sufficient to warrant suspicion. In addition, through shifts in pronoun usage, Destiny distinguished between her treatment and that received by the young men: The police talked poorly to "us," but beat on and arrested "them." This also resonates

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with Felicia's complaints: She was upset about being searched by male officers but described the officers slamming the young men's heads into the car.

Police Violence

In addition to harassment, 21 young men and 14 young women reported knowledge of or experience with more serious forms of police misconduct. Most incidents involved police violence toward family or friends.[2] In addition, 10 young men and 3 young women recounted personal experiences with police violence. The level of violence that boys reported was more severe. On the other hand, several girls noted concerns about police sexual violence.

Many young men regarded police violence as an expected consequence of being young Black men in their neighborhoods. Ricky noted, "I been thrown on the ground, I been kicked [laughs], I been choked, man I could go on forever." Tyrell concurred: "I know people getting beat up by the police all the time." Travis described an undercover officer's choking him in an attempt to recover drugs:

> They thought I had some dope in my mouth. So this one cop grabbed me and just started squeezing [my throat]. I was coughing and spitting up stuff and I'm like, 'What you all doing this for?' and they kept on like, 'Don't swallow it son.' I'm like 'Swallow? I ain't got no dope!' I opened up my mouth after they let go. I was showing them and everything. I mean that's they job to make sure dope isn't on the street but I mean I don't think it is their job to literally squeeze someone's Adam's apple.

Several young men described police violence when they were engaged in crime and said the police used violence to obtain evidence. Frank described being beaten after he and another suspect refused to tell the police where their accomplices in an auto theft were hiding:

> [The police] was like, 'Where the rest of 'em at?' I'm like, 'Where the rest of who at?' They like, 'Oh you wanna play?' . . . He drives out to the dark, stops and pow, pow, pow, pow, got to hittin' hard, he hittin' us with a stick, hurting us. [I'm like,] 'Dang, I don't know where anybody at.' He like, 'You lying.' Pow, hit me again in my face."

Frank described a serious physical assault that occurred because the police believed he was protecting his co-offenders and hindering their apprehension. In contrast, young women's personal experiences with police violence involved rough handling. Kenisha described being thrown to the ground before being arrested for a curfew violation. Cherise said an officer became physical after she was uncooperative:

> We was on the [gas station] lot and our bus stop is right by there so we were playing and stuff. . . . Police came, and I'm the type of person that's like, 'Look, if you ain't gonna hold me then I ain't got time to talk.' . . . They ripped my coat off of me, they threw me on the car and did all kinds of stuff for no reason. They bent my arm all the way back. And I was only 14 years old, and they did this for no reason.

Cherise believed the officers became rough with her not because she was a suspect but because she was not sufficiently deferential.

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While officers' encounters with young men often began with aggressive physical contact (being pushed against walls or the ground, having pockets rifled through or mouths probed), such incidents were at the extreme end of girls' contacts with the police. Shauntell provided the only account of witnessing a young woman beaten by the police with the severity often reported about young men:

> My cousin, she a tomboy and she was sittin' on my grandma['s] front [porch] one night. . . . [The police] pulls up, tell her to put her hands up. . . . They take her, throw her into the wall. They check her, found nothin' on her, throw her on the ground and just start kicking her. Put a gun up and put it in her mouth. Tell her if she tell anybody, they'll blow her Black brains out. Or they'll take her away and rape her and she won't be found.

Shauntell believed her cousin was targeted both because she had a history of delinquency and because she had been sitting with a group of boys just prior to the police's stopping her. The assault she described was severe and also included an explicitly gendered component, with the threat that they would sexually assault and kill her if she reported it.

Shauntell's account of her cousin's beating was an outlier. However, the threat of police sexual violence was noted by several other girls. Asked how to make her neighborhood safer, Felicia mentioned carrying a weapon, noting, "you even have the police out here raping people nowadays, so you can't count on them for protection." Nykeshia said her friend had been raped by the police:

> It was like three o'clock [a.m.] and the police was rollin' past. . . . Curfew had passed so they was gon' lock her up and take her to juvenile. But they didn't. Instead . . . they just drove out [to an isolated spot]. . . . She [told me], 'They held me down and did what they had to do, told me if I tell, they'll get me and lock me up for real.' And so she didn't tell nobody but me.

Later in the interview, Nykeshia described calling the police to report a man who had sexually threatened her. Nykeshia's friend was present when the officer arrived, and it was the man who raped her. Nykeshia described her friend's "backing back" into the house upon seeing the officer and said he took no action against the man who had threatened her. She was angry about the officer's failure to intervene, and her reaction was further tainted by her friend's traumatic reaction to seeing the officer who had victimized her. These stories, though atypical, suggest that girls' distrust of the police also includes a gendered component tied to concerns about the threat of sexual assault by male officers.

More commonly, youths described incidents of police violence against young men, which they had witnessed or heard about. These events fostered anger toward the police. Frank recounted an incident in which

> my friend had got harassed by the police in front of his big brother and his little sister": "I wasn't there, but they said—make it bad—it was two Black cops who did it. They had grabbed him, threw the dude on the car, they maced him. He couldn't see nuttin'. Got to punching him, slamming his head against the car. Dude's brother like, 'Ya'll leave my little brother alone!' Little sister like, 'Call momma! call momma!

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> call momma!' Got to slamming his head against the thing, boom, boom, boom. They had took the handcuffs off and scurried off. Man, that's wrong. How they gonna do it front of they little sister?

Frank's anger about this incident was multifaceted: Not only did the officers use excessive force, but they did so in front of his younger sister, whom he believed should have been shielded from such violence. Moreover, he found it especially egregious that the beating was committed by African American officers.

Several girls described attempts to intervene when officers mistreated family or friends. Nicole saw two officers "grab [my cousin], take him all back there . . . in the alley," and "was like, ''Scuse me, what y'all doin'?' And they was like, 'Mind yo' business lil' girl.' I said, 'I'm not little,' I was like, 'You messin' with family, you need to get yo' hands off him 'fore I call in y'all [car] number.'" Jamellah was taken into custody when she pressed officers for answers regarding injuries her brother sustained:

> My brother girlfriend . . . was crying and said, "The police beatin' up on your brother!" So I'm like, "Take me up there, take me up there!" 'Cause I wanna stop it, it's my brother. So I get there, my brother getting in the ambulance holdin' his head and blood gushin' down. I'm like, "What's wrong? What y'all do to my brother? Why his head bleedin'?" And they like, "Mind yo' business, go on the corner." I'm like, "That's my brother and I wanna know what's happenin', why is he bleedin'? What y'all do to him?" And they like, "I don't hafta tell you nothing, if you don't leave, I'ma lock you up" . . . [and] they put me in the police vehicle.

The officers refused to provide Jamellah any information concerning her brother's injuries, and when she continued to demand to know what happened, she was arrested rather than treated as a rightfully concerned relative. Youths said neighborhood residents watch closely when male relatives are detained by the police. However, only young women described intervening directly. Perhaps girls have greater confidence in challenging officers. Since they are not the typical targets of police violence, they have less fear that the police will turn their aggression toward them.

In fact, as earlier examples illustrate, more of the young women than young men in our sample said that they challenged officers when they were stopped. While young men disapproved of police behaviors, they typically described complying with officers, because, as Cooper explained, officers "sometimes try to rough you up [if you're uncooperative]." In fact, research shows that the highest rates of police compliance are found in encounters between white officers and Black men (Mastrofski, Snipes, and Supina 1996). Our research suggests this is because police interactions with young men are seen to pose danger (Anderson 1990).

DISCUSSION

Research on race and policing is often inattentive to gender and rarely considers the perspectives of minority citizens. Feminist scholars insist, however, that

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minority standpoints are a vital aspect of sociological knowledge building and that discriminatory practices can best be understood by examining the cross-cutting nature of gender and racial inequalities (Collins 1990). With these insights in mind, we described urban African American youths' accounts of their interactions with the police, comparing young women's and young men's experiences with and perceptions of policing in their neighborhoods. Our research offers compelling evidence that the aggressive policing strategies used in urban poor neighborhoods pose harms to their adolescent residents and that these harms are shaped by gender.

In keeping with previous research, we found that young men were the disproportionate recipients of aggressive policing tactics such as stops and searches. Youths characterized such incidents as harassment because of their intrusive and antagonistic nature. While both young men and young women said such incidents were routine in their neighborhoods, they also distinguished them as gendered. They believed young Black men were burdened by a presumption of guilt that served as justification for aggressive police behavior.

Young men emphasized their frustration with the unilateral suspicion against them. They described being stopped on a regular basis and treated as suspects. They said officers routinely used disrespectful language, engaged in physically intrusive actions such as strip searches and cavity probes, and assumed young men merely "got lucky" rather than were innocent when no evidence of criminal wrongdoing was discovered. There was an important temporal dimension as well: Young men described being harassed at all hours, including in the mornings as they walked to school. Most of the young men who were interviewed recounted incidents of police harassment, including those who were not involved in serious delinquency. Proactive policing in urban communities targets activities—street-level drug sales and gang participation—that disproportionately involve adolescents. While this contextualizes police stops and searches, it is insufficient for explaining why so many young men are treated uniformly as suspects, even when their behavior belies this interpretation (Bass 2001).

Previous research has explained such patterns by drawing on minority group threat theories and social ecological models. Our research suggests that gender plays a significant role as well. It is not simply their status as minority youths living in poor urban communities that exposes young men to aggressive policing strategies but also that they are young African American *men* (Quillian and Pager 2001). The controlling image of young Black men as "symbolic assailants," whereby they are defined and responded to as criminals, is deeply entrenched in American culture but also deeply gendered. The young men in our sample illustrate that these messages are powerfully conveyed in adolescence. In fact, research demonstrates that such responses to African American boys begin in early childhood and has reverberating consequences (Ferguson 2001).

This is not to say young women were immune from negative police encounters. Gender shaped the kinds of treatment they experienced as well. Previous research

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suggests that young women are more likely than young men to face juvenile justice interventions for relatively minor offenses (MacDonald and Chesney-Lind 2001) and that African American girls face more punitive interventions than white girls (Miller 1999). We know that the police are more likely to arrest younger African American women than white women (Visher 1983) but little research has examined other discretionary aspects of policing for young women.

Girls' accounts most closely paralleled those of boys when they were in young men's company and thus tainted by the suspicion applied to young men. In addition, girls who reported participating in serious delinquency described being stopped by the police. Ironically, though, they were typically stopped for curfew or truancy violations rather than for their involvement in criminal offenses. There were also notable temporal differences across gender. Young women often described being stopped at night. Young men, however, were treated as "out of place" in public spaces, regardless of the time of day. The presence of young Black men in neighborhoods seemed to symbolize criminal wrongdoing (Quillian and Pager 2001), while definitions of femininity deny young women access to public spaces after dark (Garber and Turner 1995).

In addition, many young women expressed specific concern about the lack of police responsiveness to crime victims in their communities. They displayed deep pessimism about police efforts to protect community members—especially women—from crime. Direct knowledge of both police inaction and sexual misconduct by the police served to heighten their distrust further. On the other hand, we did not receive systematic reports from young women of police sexual misconduct. It may be that officers who engage in such behaviors are more reticent to sexually mistreat adolescent girls precisely because they are underage and the penalties for such action could be much more severe. Certainly there is other evidence that police sexual misconduct can be a widespread problem (Kraska and Kappeler 1995) and is reported by adult women in urban criminal networks (Maher 1997).

These are important gendered facets of policing in poor minority communities. Victim assistance is not a highly valued part of the policing mission (Harrington and Lonsway 2004), and this is exacerbated by community context. Research demonstrates that officers are less likely to view residents of poor neighborhoods as deserving police protection (Klinger 1997), and this is exacerbated for African American women (Robinson and Chandek 2000). We found that young women, more than young men, believed the police should "protect and serve" the community. Our findings suggest that whereas the intersection of gender, race, and place results in the construction of young Black men as symbolic assailants, it also results in young Black women's being denied the adequate police services they desire.

Finally, youths' experiences with police violence were deeply gendered as well. With few exceptions, young men faced more severe violence at the hands of the police, and youths were deeply troubled by the frequency of such incidents in

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their neighborhoods. Perhaps as a consequence, young women often challenged officers who they believed were conducting themselves improperly. Our findings suggest that young women may do so more than men because they believe such challenges will not be met with physical aggression. In fact, Mastrofski, Snipes, and Supina (1996, 276) argue that women may be "more likely to resist compliance . . . in anticipation of greater police tolerance."

African American youths provide vital knowledge about how they experience policing in their neighborhoods and its effects on police/community relations. In addition, they reveal police practices as deeply gendered. Our study contributes to research on race, gender, and policing by offering further evidence of the differential harms experienced by African American girls and boys within the juvenile justice system—in this case, with a focus on events beyond the scope of formal intervention. Future research on discriminatory policing will benefit from more systematic attention to the intersections of race, place, and gender.

NOTES

1. Although some young women believed male officers were not permitted to search them, departmental guidelines allow men to conduct protective pat downs of women.

2. Six young men described other forms of police misconduct, including planting evidence, dropping them off in rival gang territories, and confiscating money without filing a report (Brunson and Miller forthcoming).

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