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# Perception of Police in Public Housing Communities

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# PERCEPTION OF POLICE IN PUBLIC HOUSING COMMUNITIES

by

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## ABSTRACT

Research on the relationship between police and citizens consistently finds that attitudes toward police (ATP) are least positive among black citizens in areas of concentrated disadvantage. While much of the research in this area focuses specifically on ATP among young black males in low-income communities because they have the most contact with police, there has been relatively little research that has included older and/or female residents. Additionally, research has yet to examine ATP in racial and economic enclaves that may have different social and environmental characteristics than the surrounding community. This study utilizes in-depth interviews with 60 residents of two public housing communities in Columbia, South Carolina to examine ATP and, once formed, how ATP is further shaped and maintained in these communities. The findings are consistent with the procedural justice model in that the police-citizen interaction process is an important factor in shaping citizens' ATP and perceptions of police legitimacy. However, unlike the procedural justice model of police-citizen interaction, residents' global perceptions of policing played a significant role in their interactions with individual officers. Residents also distinguished between two different types of police legitimacy. The broader definition relates to whether police are perceived as a legitimate law enforcement entity, while the more narrow definition of legitimacy relates to whether police are perceived as a viable means of dealing with

problems in the community. Residents' age, whether they were involved in criminal activity, and relationship with others in the community were also found to influence the ATP development process. These findings suggest that community context and differences among residents are important factors regarding how ATP is developed and should be considered by law enforcement officers when interacting with the public.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In a democratic society, police serve to maintain public order. Goldstein (1977, p.35) noted that this general objective also incorporates a number of functions, such as protecting citizens' constitutional rights, conflict resolution, identifying potential problems, and creating and maintaining a sense of security in the community. So important are these functions in a democratic society that police have been granted the authority to deny the freedom, through use of force if necessary, of those who threaten the continuation of order. However, police cannot rely on threat of force alone to accomplish their objectives. They must also have the support and cooperation of the public to adequately and efficiently perform their duties (Hall, 1953; Tyler, 1990). Although public support and cooperation are generally considered to be prevalent, Tyler (2004) argues that they cannot be taken for granted. This is because it is not possible for police to be present in every situation in which social order is threatened, nor is it practical for police to use force in every encounter with the public. Consequently the public must willingly comply with the law voluntarily and, at minimum, acquiesce to specific police requests. In the absence of such support, police cannot adequately maintain public order.

While the above represents the ideal function of the police-public relationship in a democratic society, it may not represent the reality of policing in

the United States. Instead, policing has undergone several changes since the early nineteenth century, many of which were in direct response to problems between the police and the public. When examining the history of policing in the United States these changes are reflected in three distinct eras. The political era was the earliest and spanned from 1840 into the 1920s. This was followed by the reform era from the 1920s into 1970s and the community problem solving era from the 1970s to current (Kelling & Moore, 1988).

Unlike Goldstein's (1977) depiction of police in which their primary functions are to ensure and preserve public order, early political era police functioned as agents for political factions. Resembling casual labor more than a respected profession, pre-twentieth century police officers received no formal training, did not wear uniforms, and worked extremely long hours with little supervision (Walker, 1977). Moreover, police earned little respect from the public and often resorted to violence in order to control citizens. This type of "curbside justice" was prevalent at the time and particularly so in police interactions with black citizens (Walker, 1977).

Many political era police officers viewed policing as nothing more than stable employment (Walker, 1984). Officers would often avoid policing activities and used their authority for personal profit. They also spent much of their time attempting to maintain their status and authority, a difficult task given the reluctance of many citizens to acknowledge them as a legitimate legal authority. If and when police did decide to engage in legitimate police work, they did so through the occasional and arbitrary arrest of a citizen committing a minor



offense (Walker, 1984). Police departments began to formalize in the United States in the late 1800s. Departments often recruited and assigned officers to the community or neighborhood they were from and granted wide discretionary power in the enforcement of laws with little regulation or oversight (Miller, 1977). Focusing on the New York City Police Department during this time period, Miller (1977) noted that although police had wide discretionary power, their primary function was to control what upper-class citizens thought of as “the dangerous class.” The dangerous class, according to Miller (1977), was made up of unruly people who were a threat to public order and the status enjoyed by upper-class citizens. Thus, this segment of society viewed dealing with public order offences such as public drunkenness and vagrancy as the primary role of police. As Walker (1984, p.87) noted, “We do not find in this picture any conscious purpose of fighting crime or serving neighborhood needs.” Instead, the police became a political tool, viewed as useful by those with power and illegitimate by those without. Citing these issues, reformers associated with progressive movement in the United States called for comprehensive change in policing and helped usher in the police reform era (Kelling & Moore, 1988).

The reform era was characterized by the move toward a professionalization of policing. Rather than being a tool for local politicians and viewing politics as the basis for police legitimacy, early reformers envisioned policing as a professional and independent institution free from political control (Kelling & Moore, 1988). Taking a top down approach, early reformers focused on an organized and centralized command structure. They also cut ties with local

political leaders and empowered police administrators in an effort to achieve efficiency and political autonomy (Walker, 1977). During the same time period two technological innovations also served to rapidly advance the professional model in policing. Motor vehicles and two-way radios became widely available and were utilized by the police to provide more efficient service. While both of these tools were lauded for improving police response time and allowing fewer officers to patrol a larger area, they also decreased the need for police to interact with the general public on a regular basis (Walker, 1984). With law as the basis for their legitimacy rather than political backing, police began to focus on crime control and catching criminals (Kelling & Moore, 1988). As a result of their decreased need to interact with citizens, detachment from public officials, and crime fighting focus, departments became more militaristic and less personal. This filtered down to their relationship with citizens as well, changing the police-public relationship from contentious to somewhat detached (Goldstein, 1977; Walker, 1977).

A number of commissions charged with assessing the state of policing in the United States were also influenced reform. Most notable was the Wickersham Commission enacted by President Hoover in 1929. The Wickersham commission is often associated with findings that led to the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment (prohibition on alcohol) but it also focused on related law enforcement practices. Findings indicated the widespread use of violence and coercive practices among police officers and fueled further call for reform through improvements to police training (Records of the Wickersham Commission on

Law Observance and Enforcement, 1997). In the decades to follow police training academies were established at universities and community colleges across the country, and in 1959 the first state agency to regulate police training and recruitment standards was established<sup>1</sup> (Bopp & Shultz, 1972).

Despite the changes in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century toward professionalization, tension continued to exist between the police and the public. Most notably with African American communities, as exhibited by the civil disturbances in the 1960s and 1970s. Consequently, the objectives and nature of policing shifted once again and the community era began. Unlike the professional era, this era is characterized by decentralization of police departments. Police departments became more responsive to citizen concerns and implemented proactive policing strategies to deter crime. Individual officers were also granted the flexibility to resolve conflict and order issues in the community without using a strict law enforcement approach (Kelling & Moore, 1988). Mastrofski and Willis (2010) argue that there are also negative aspects of decentralization. Specifically, they claim that decentralization has caused innovative policing techniques to progress and spread among departments at an extremely slow pace. Overall, the community era may be more reflective of Goldstein's (1977) description of police in a democratic society than the political and reform eras, but it has not completely eliminated the longstanding tension between police and minority citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1959 the State of California created the Peace Officer Standards and Training (P.O.S.T.) Commission to set recruitment and training standards for police officers.

## Minorities and the Police

Though there are many examples of tension between the police and minority communities, the relationship between the police and African American communities is unique given the experience of the latter in the United States and particularly with police. Laws in U.S. history have supported slavery, segregation, and discrimination against African Americans and can be traced back to the founding of the country. Slave patrols may be the earliest example of a policing entity for maintaining the differential status of African Americans (Williams & Murphy, 1990). While slave patrols did not function as modern police departments do, they were government sanctioned law enforcement entities that dealt exclusively with African Americans. Even after the abolition of slavery, the “black codes” in some states prevented black men from such things as holding political office, voting, and serving on juries. Additionally, “pig laws” in some states made previously minor offenses such as theft of a farm animal or tool subject to felony prosecution, and made it illegal to be unemployed<sup>2</sup> (Adamson, 1983). Just as the slave patrols enforced the conditions of slavery, early police departments enforced the black codes and pig laws. It may indeed be that this early interaction between law enforcement and African Americans helped determine the course of their future relationship (Williams & Murphy, 1990).

During the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century African Americans from southern states began to move to the urban areas of northern states. Known as “the great migration,” this population shift lasted until the early 1970s (Wilkerson, 2011). In

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<sup>2</sup> *These post-Civil War laws related directly to the behavior of newly freed slaves to prevent them from bringing livestock they raised or tools they created with them after gaining their freedom.*

the early stages of this process black communities developed in the urban centers. Although black communities grew in terms of population, Patterson (1973) argued that the lack of a shared cultural foundation, similar to that of immigrant groups, prevented true social cohesion in these communities. At the same time, external forces were shaping the perception of black communities. White residents did not live in these communities but intentionally engaged in vice activities such as gambling and prostitution in black communities in order to avoid the attention of their peers. While this may have afforded the white citizens the privacy they desired, it also contributed to the stigmatization of black communities as dangerous and criminal places (Muhammad, 2011). It also served to reinforce the arguments of Jim Crow (segregation law) supporters and perpetuated the need for police to enforce those laws.

During the same period (1920s – 1930s), the first large scale aggregation of crime statistics was also taking place in the United States. Politicization of these statistics led to a focus on crime in urban, predominately African American areas without the ability to disaggregate the data into the race of individual offenders. This further stigmatized blacks as criminals and problems in urban areas. Muhammad (2011, p. 272) cites this period as “crucial to the making of urban America.” In other words, the idea of black criminality in urban areas, despite its historical inaccuracy, helped define what is “urban” and the roles of people in urban areas. Police treated urban blacks accordingly and tension between the two continued. Stigmatized as criminals, having no political power or equal protection under the law, the treatment of black citizens by police was often

discriminatory and inhumane. Indeed little changed in the relationship between the police and urban blacks during the police reform era (Williams & Murphy, 1990).

The continued tension between black citizens and the police led to violence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Walker, 1977). From 1900 to 1935 there were several race-based riots, with the larger and more violent ones during that time span occurring in New York City, Saint Louis, Washington, D.C., Knoxville, Omaha, and Chicago. Perhaps the worst of these riots was in Chicago where, as with the other riots, police played a central role in the escalation of tension. The precursor to the Chicago riot was a young black male being stoned to death and drowned by a group of whites for crossing into a swimming area for whites at a public beach. Citizens were enraged after incident yet police refused to make arrests. When the riots ensued police resorted to brutal and discriminatory tactics to quell the rioters.

With the exception of the Harlem riot in 1935, violence between police and minorities became less frequent in the 1930s (Walker, 1977). One of the major reasons for this may have been the Great Depression, which temporarily changed how citizens viewed police and shifted public concern to the economy. Because of the financial hardship endured by most citizens policing became a sought-after occupation. Once viewed as paltry wages, officers' pay became desirable to the average blue-collar worker, especially when considered in addition to the security of a government employment (Walker, 1977). For almost two decades the relationship between police and minority citizens enjoyed this

less volatile existence and was not a high priority with the public. In latter part of the 1940s, however, the relationship between police and minority citizens would become increasingly volatile, prompting another move to reform policing (Walker, 1977).

Increased volatility between police and minority citizens during the 1940s through the 1960s may not have been entirely the result of an increase in discriminatory behavior by police. Marx (1970) argued that discrimination was already an established tradition by that point, and that the increased volatility was more likely due to the rising expectations of black citizens. The desegregation of schools is a fitting example. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) established the separate but equal doctrine, which held that segregation was legal as long as equal facilities were available. Despite evidence that facilities for black citizens were typically not of equal quality to those for white citizens the *Plessy* decision stood for 58 years. In the early 1950s the status quo established by *Plessy* was challenged successfully in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which declared that separate educational facilities could not offer equal educational opportunities for minority citizens. Black citizens also challenged the status quo relating to employment, housing, political representation, and other social concerns. Moreover, they actively and vocally addressed their concerns through sit-ins, demonstrations, and protests. The police response to this behavior varied from one department to another but was often confrontational and at times inflammatory. When examining the police response, Goldstein (1977) suggested that at the time even the larger police departments tended to lack the

understanding, commitment, and sensitivity needed to effectively deal with racial tension.

As a result, tensions continued to escalate and led to violence. In 1964 a group primarily composed of black citizens protested the shooting of a black teenager by a white police officer in Harlem. The NYPD responded by advancing on the group of protesters in full riot gear. The subsequent confrontation escalated into a full scale riot that resulted in hundreds of injuries and the destruction of public property and businesses. One year later a riot broke out in Watts, California after a police officer forcefully arrested a black citizen in front of a crowd of onlookers. The resulting injuries, deaths, and destruction of property eventually led to the National Guard being deployed to Watts. Similar unrest was experienced in Newark and Detroit in 1967. Public housing residents in Newark witnessed the police physically assault a cab driver they had arrested for a traffic infraction. Angered by the incident, residents gathered and a riot ensued, leading to a violent encounter with Newark police (Groves & Rossi, 1970). Detroit experienced even more violence pursuant to a botched police raid of a suspected illegal drinking establishment that turned out to be a party for two returning veterans returning from Vietnam (Waddington, 1992). While these incidents are not the only riots and civil unrest experienced during the 1960s, they were the most destructive in terms of loss of life and destruction of property. They also reflect the extent of the disconnect between police and minority citizens.

Following his election in 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson recognized the need to better understand the criminal justice system in the United States. In 1965,



President Johnson ordered a thorough review of the criminal justice system via the 1967 President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. Of the commission's major recommendations, higher education and structured training programs were cited as critical needs for police officers. The commission also recommended more structure in police organization and operations through updated policies (The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society, 1967). Subsequent to the report, the Omnibus Crime Control Act was created which established funding for the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA). In turn, the LEAA provided grants to law enforcement agencies to help educate their officers and fund projects meant to improve relationships with the community.

Shortly after the Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice released their report President Johnson formed the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to focus specifically on the riots in Newark and Detroit (Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968). Led by Otto Kerner, then Governor of Illinois, the commission sought to identify what happened, why it happened, and what could be done to prevent it from happening again. Related findings helped identify the nature and extent of the problem. First, and consistent with the Johnson Commission finding that rioters tended to represent a broad cross-section of the black community, there was no organized plan by minority citizens to riot. Instead, the Advisory Commission found that most of the violence was the culmination of escalating social tension rather than an isolated response to a specific event. A variety of social variables

(12 total) were found related to community tension and the police were identified as playing a significant role in the escalation of tension. Specifically, police practices, ineffective political and grievance mechanisms, and the discriminatory administration of justice contributed to frustration among minority citizens.

Second, most of the disorder was against symbols of white society and authority. In other words, violence was typically directed at government and private property rather than white citizens. Some black citizens also viewed police as a symbol of white status, power, and discrimination, and this view was reinforced when police were called in to quell the rioters (Hahn, 1970). Blauner (1969) offered a different perspective, contending that these events were not an attempt to attain or change the status of whites, but rather an attempt by black citizens to establish some level of control over their own social position. Finally, the commission found that these problems were being exacerbated by the rapid growth of the black population in urban areas and exodus of the white population and high paying jobs to suburban areas. In their summary of the situation, the commission reported that the country was becoming one of two unequal societies, one black and one white (Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968). Additionally, the report noted that whites were largely ignorant of the consequences this bifurcation had on black citizens. In the words of the Advisory Commission (p.1): “What white Americans have never fully understood but what the Negro can never fully forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.”

To remedy the identified problems the Advisory Commission made several recommendations designed to improve the relationship between police and minority citizens at the community level. Improved communication, government transparency, and citizen participation were the major themes in the Advisory Commission's proposals. While the Advisory Commission did not recommend specific programs to accomplish these goals, they did outline a basic strategy. Their recommendations included the formulation of neighborhood task forces, developing community sub-stations for government agencies, improving the grievance-response systems, and citizen input in policy development. Additionally, the Advisory committee recommended increasing the number of minority police officers and taking a mentorship role with juveniles. Further, the committee noted that accomplishing these objectives would require innovative approaches and financial assistance from the federal government (Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968).

In the decades since the Advisory Commission published their recommendations innovative approaches to policing minority communities have indeed emerged. Community-oriented and problem-oriented policing programs in particular have become prevalent since they began in the late 1970s. Community-oriented policing emphasizes police-community partnerships to help improve neighborhood conditions and reduce crime. Citizens are also instrumental in defining the most important issues in their community and helping to prioritize the police response (Reisig, 2010). Although problem-oriented policing is also a departure from the rigid style of policing emphasized in the

professional model, it is a more structured approach than community oriented policing. Utilizing the SARA (Scan, Analyze, Respond, Assess) model, problem-oriented policing allows police to adapt their approach to the community rather than implementing a “one size fits all” approach to policing. While community and problem-oriented policing utilize different methods, they are compatible and often used simultaneously in one community (Reisig, 2010).

The success of both programs is also dependent on police officers developing new skills for dealing with the public. Unlike the more detached approach that is necessary in the professional model, community oriented policing requires officers to develop interpersonal skills. Consequently, additional training such as diversity training, mediation and conflict resolution, and foreign language proficiency has been increasingly utilized by police agencies (Reisig, 2010). Police forces have also become more racially diverse in an effort to improve communication with citizens and related provision of these services. In fact, African Americans now make up 12% of local law enforcement officers, compared to 3.6% in 1960 and 6.4% in 1970 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010, Kuykendall & Burns, 1980).

Yet, despite these significant investments in improving the relationship between police and minority citizens, tension continues to exist. Black citizens in Florida interviewed for the Florida Supreme Court Racial and Ethnic Bias Study (1992, p.634) claimed that bias was rampant in the criminal justice system and went so far as to describe the relationship between the police and minority residents in their state as “warfare.” Perhaps the best specific example of the

continued tension between the police and blacks is found in the 1992 riot in Los Angeles. The riot occurred following the acquittal of four LAPD officers of charges related to use of excessive force against Rodney King, an unarmed black man, whose vehicle was stopped after a high-speed chase. Related property damage was estimated at \$1 billion, in addition to 2000 injured people and 60 fatalities (Davis, 1993).

More recently, the arrest of Professor Henry Louis Gates has raised the issue of how black citizens are treated by police (Ogletree, 2010). Gates, a black man and Harvard professor, was arrested in 2009 after an encounter with Cambridge Police at his home. A neighborhood resident notified police of a possible break-in at Gates' home. Police responded to the call and found Gates inside of his home. The ensuing interaction between Gates and the Cambridge Police, in which Gates was treated as a suspect, resulted in a national debate over whether Professor Gates would have been treated with less suspicion and more respect if he were white. Peffley and Hurwitz (2010) identify these incidents and others like them as the means by which the tension between black citizens and the criminal justice system from the pre-civil rights movement is perpetuated today.

Regarding the cause of these encounters, racial profiling has been the subject of increased attention among the police, the public, and social scientists in recent years (Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). In the context of policing, racial profiling is defined as the differential use of race and/or ethnicity instead of behavior as the primary factor in an officer's decision making process when choosing to

interact with a citizen (Ramirez, McDevitt, & Farrell, 2000). For example, Harris (1997, 1999) described the “driving while black” phenomena in which police are particularly suspicious of black motorists and stop them for a minor traffic offense as a pretext to look for more serious offenses (e.g., possession of drugs, weapons). Although findings regarding the actual extent of racial profiling vary, black citizens are more likely to believe that it occurs. In a nationwide study, Weitzer and Tuch (2002) found that 40% of blacks believed they had been stopped by police in the past based on their race alone, while only 5% of whites shared this belief. Reitzel & Piquero (2006) found similar results when examining perceptions among New York City residents. Specifically, non-white residents were more likely than white residents to feel that racial profiling was widespread and that they had personally been profiled by police. With fewer examples of overt racism than in decades past but the continued tension between police and black citizens, it may be that racial profiling is the most recent manifestation of this historical conflict. Regardless of its prevalence, the perception of widespread racial profiling is akin to the perception of police as symbols of white status, power, and discrimination that fueled the riots of the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Race and Attitudes Toward Police**

Jacob (1971, p.69) defined justice as “the congruence between expectations about key officials in the justice system and perceptions of their actual behavior.” Injustice then, he claimed, is “incongruence, or a gap between expectations and perceptions.” Notice Jacob made no mention of actual behavior in his definitions. Actual behavior may have some influence but in the end it is the

person's *interpretation* of behavior, their perception, that defines the situation. So there is a highly subjective component to public perception that must be understood. This is important in the context of attitudes toward police (henceforth ATP) because, as Bittner (1970) noted, despite attempts to change the institution of policing, police cannot completely escape their past. It is logical then, given their history with police, that African American citizens would have less positive ATP than other citizens.

Research on race and ATP has tended to focus primarily on community context and type of interaction with police, but there is also a growing body of literature that focuses on race and broader perception of law enforcement. In general, blacks tend to perceive greater levels of injustice when police interact with citizens in a variety of contexts (Brown & Benedict, 2002), and to perceive the criminal justice system as a whole in a less positive way than whites (Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005). These findings regarding race and ATP also remain true regardless of the population size of the community (Reisig & Parks, 2000). However, differences in black citizens' ATP have been found between higher-class and lower-class<sup>3</sup> black citizens (Weitzer & Tuch, 1999). Age and type of contact also appear to overlap with race regarding their influence on ATP. In particular black males under 18 years old have been consistently found to have less positive ATP than older citizens in the same geographic area and direct contact with police has a larger impact on ATP than vicarious contact among blacks in general (Brunson & Miller, 2006b; Hurst & Frank, 2000). Overall, the

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<sup>3</sup> *The dominate characteristic of lower-class citizens is that they earn less income than most other citizens.*

collection of research has been able to identify several important factors related to ATP, however, it has also lacked a solid theoretical framework until the emergence of research on procedural justice and policing.

**Procedural Justice.** Procedural justice is a process based model that explains how value judgments by citizens are based on the motivation and behavior of police. Through the procedural justice model, Tyler (2003) argued that the perception of police as a legitimate means of law enforcement is central to the police-citizen interaction process, and can lead to compliance through acceptance of immediate and long-term decisions made by police officers. Legitimacy, in this sense, is a quality that police possess when citizens feel obligated to defer voluntarily. The quality of decisions the officer makes, being treated with respect, and believing that the police are acting sincerely have all been found to be critical in determining police legitimacy and the overall police-citizen interaction process (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2005; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Given the history between African-Americans and the police, understanding the nature of procedural justice and police legitimacy with this population should be a specific concern.

To date, ATP research with a procedural justice element has primarily relied on quantitative survey data collected from urban populations. This line of research has tended to focus on process based factors in police-citizen interaction and their relationship with ATP and satisfaction with police services. For example, Tyler (1990) found that the basic elements of procedural justice, and respect in particular, were acknowledged as being important by citizens of



Chicago regardless of race. However, Tyler and Huo (2002) conducted phone surveys with 2,000 residents of Los Angeles and Oakland and found that black citizens were more likely than white citizens to believe they were targets of police disrespect. Using a national level sample, Weitzer & Tuch (2005) also found that minorities believed this behavior was widespread. However, minorities in New York, Los Angeles, and Oakland were less likely to feel targeted if they were treated with kindness and respect when interacting with police (Tyler & Wakslak, 2004). Where the quantitative research tends to focus broadly on identifying and evaluating procedural justice factors, the qualitative research in this area is less developed and tends to focus on police-citizen interaction at the community level.

Tyler (2001b) claimed that procedural justice issues (e.g., trust, fairness) are more important than actual police performance regarding perception of police. Carr, Napolitano, and Keatings' (2007) research, which utilized 147 interviews of juveniles living in 3 Philadelphia neighborhoods with high crime rates, supported Tyler's (2001b) contention. Carr et al. (2007) found that minorities with less positive ATP tended to describe a feeling of frustration related to being targeted by police. Additionally, the juveniles described interactions with police as being impersonal and cold. Gau and Brunson's (2009, p.265) interviews of 45 adolescent males in St. Louis provided further insight in this area. St. Louis youth described additional frustration with being targeted as troublemakers and a general sentiment that "doing nothing wrong" should have been enough to keep them from being stopped by police. On the other hand, Birzer (2008, p.204) interviewed 28 African-American residents of a midwestern

city and found that when an officer showed sensitivity and empathy (s)he was described as being “more human” to the respondents.

Although the breadth of ATP research is quite large there are two major areas that require further examination. First, ATP literature does not contain a thorough examination of racial or ethnic enclaves within lower-class, predominately minority communities. Instead, data may be drawn from large areas that may be defined as communities but have several neighborhoods or micro-communities within their boundaries. Although communities may share basic characteristics, different parts of the community may be patrolled by different police officers, be subjected to different styles of policing, and have different environmental variables that affect how ATP is developed.

Second, ATP literature tends to focus on young black males because they have the most frequent contact with police. Yet, the absence of research that focuses all community members leaves a significant gap in our knowledge of ATP. It is important to recognize the distinction between the involuntary police contact often experienced by young black males and voluntary contact experienced by other members of the community. Unlike involuntary contact in which residents are subjected to police services, voluntary contact is often the result of a request for police services. In other words, a greater understanding of ATP among community members who are most likely to report crime to the police is also needed.

Finally, ATP research needs a theoretical foundation to guide future studies in this area. Although some ATP research has incorporated procedural

justice concepts, it has not been developed using the full procedural justice model. This will both provide a proper theoretical framework for ATP research and provide new social settings to test the procedural justice model. A lack of qualitative research is also evident in this area. Additional qualitative research will allow for a more in-depth examination of ATP using the procedural justice model by allowing residents to provide context and meaning to their responses. This, in turn, may allow local law enforcement and policy makers to more effectively tailor their policing style to neighborhoods and communities.

### **Present Study**

The present study addresses gaps in the literature through in-depth interviews of residents in two low-income public housing communities in Columbia, South Carolina. Public housing communities in Columbia, South Carolina are specific racial and economic enclaves within the larger communities they are situated. Females are also a significant portion of the population in these housing communities. They comprise 95 percent of the primary leaseholders in the two public housing communities included in this research and possess valuable knowledge related to ATP in these communities. The purpose of this study is to conduct an in-depth analysis of attitudes toward police in two public housing communities maintained by the Columbia Housing Authority which will be referred to as “Dorner Homes” and “Brookside Court.” Qualitative methodology will be utilized to identify themes related to the ATP process through in-depth interviews.

In addition to the reasons outlined above, understanding procedural justice and related attitudes toward police in racial and economic enclaves of lower-class communities is important for several reasons. First, there is evidence that less positive is associated with a reduced likelihood of requesting police services. The ability to call upon law enforcement is one of the fundamental aspects of the social contract between citizens and the government (Black, 1973) and if citizens do not feel that police are capable of protecting them, they tend to lose confidence in the broader legal system (Dean, 1980). Second, if citizens in a particular neighborhood are unwilling to call upon police because of less positive ATP, then the police cannot be expected to effectively combat crime in that neighborhood. The importance of this point cannot be understated, especially when considering that lower-class minority communities often have high crime rates (Morenoff, Sampson, & Raudenbush, 2001). Additionally, females in these communities are most likely to contact police as a result of violent victimization (Truman & Planty, 2012) so improving ATP in this population is critical to ensuring the mobilization of law. Finally, the historical relationship between minorities and police is marred by discrimination, conflict, and distrust which may cause an increased sensitivity to police behavior among minorities (Bittner, 1970). Understanding how ATP is shaped and maintained among lower-class minorities could help inform programs meant to improve ATP and the overall relationship between police and the communities they serve.

Chapter Two of this proposal contains a review of the current state of the literature relating to ATP. It begins by addressing the ideal function of police in a

democratic society and then proceeds to a discussion about the relationship between police and minority citizens. Next, Chapter Two discusses the empirical literature on ATP, with a particular focus on minorities. A discussion of potential explanations for how ATP is developed, including procedural justice and legitimacy, will conclude the chapter. Chapter Three discusses the data and methods used to answer the research questions for this study. It includes detailed information regarding where the research will be situated, the research subjects, data collection, analytic strategy, and limitations of the study. Chapters Four and Five present the themes identified through a qualitative analysis of the interview data. Finally, Chapter Six discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings and provides suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter advances the discussion contained in the introduction by focusing on the evidence and theoretical frameworks related to differential treatment of African-Americans as well as ATP among African-Americans. Specific attention is given to the distribution of police forces in relation to the racial makeup of communities, related police-citizen interaction, and the utility of the procedural justice model in related analyses. This chapter will also expand the discussion of tension between police and citizens by examining research on police behavior in relation to citizens' race and ATP at both the individual and community level. As discussed in the previous chapter, these issues are also tied to the concept of police legitimacy. Before concluding, this chapter will discuss police legitimacy through the procedural justice model and how this can be used as a framework for ATP research, particularly in areas of concentrated disadvantage.

#### **Policing and Race**

With the history of police and minority citizens in mind, Bittner's (1970) description of the role of police in modern society is particularly insightful. According to Bittner (1970), the ability to use force is what separates police from the public. He further claims that the rarity of use of force incidents does not

matter because police are associated with force regardless of its frequency. In and of itself this may not seem profound, but within the broader historical context of the relationship between the police and public the ability to use force may have serious implications. To frame his argument Bittner (1970) put forth three primary claims.

First, he claims that police work is a tainted occupation. That is, historically police have represented tyrannical forces and the public cannot simply forget this despite efforts by the police to improve relations. This is especially so with populations that were disproportionately subjected to this behavior or discrimination. Still, the public knows police are needed so in effect police have become a necessary evil. Bittner (1970) claimed this was analogous to the police being the dragon *and* the dragon slayer. Second, Bittner (1970) claimed that police are not only tainted but actively offensive to someone in almost every encounter with the public. Unlike doctors and social workers, Bittner (1970) contended, police usually oppose some human interest when dealing with the public. For example, settling a dispute between two people often results in a favorable outcome for one person and an unfavorable outcome for the other person, and preventing a drug deal may help the addict but it prevents the dealer from earning money. Consequently, even when the officer's behavior is lawful and or well-meaning someone is likely to be offended by the officer's actions. Naturally then, areas with greater frequency of police intervention are likely to produce more people who are offended by their actions. Areas characterized by disadvantage, especially in urban areas, often have high crime rates which

necessitate police attention and intervention (Krivo & Peterson, 1996; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Wilson, 1987). This relates to Bittner's (1970) third contention, that the ecological distribution of police officers is disproportionate to the population of various communities and neighborhoods.

According to Bittner (1970) the ecological distribution of police officers reflects not only the distribution of crime in a given community, but also a number of social prejudices as well. So some individuals receive increased attention from the police based on social class membership rather than strictly based on their behavior. Bittner (1970) cited ethnic and racial minorities, people living in poor urban areas, and young people as receiving the most attention from police. Research has supported Bittner's claim, indicating that disproportionate arrest rates have been a byproduct of this increased police attention. For example, research by Engel et al. (2012) found that drug arrests corresponded with crime rate and differential police deployment patterns in Seattle, Washington. Tomaskovic-Devey et al. (2004) also suggest that the disproportionate distribution of police in minority neighborhoods may be a mechanism for explaining the "driving while black" phenomena. In other words, police focus their efforts on high crime areas that typically have large minority populations and their efforts result in a disproportionate number of minorities being stopped.

While Bittner's (1970) critique is useful for understanding the police-citizen interaction at the community level, Black's (1976, 1980) work helps explain police-citizen interaction at the individual level. Black (1976) theorized that distribution of law (e.g., stop, search, arrest, conviction, sentencing severity) can



be explained by the social position of the individuals involved in a given event. Specifically, those with higher social rank are more likely to utilize the law, and distribution of law is skewed disproportionately toward those with lower social rank. Black referred to this as the downward distribution of law and claimed that the relationship becomes stronger as the distance between social rank increases. To determine a person's social position Black measured differences in previous application of law related to wealth, culture, organization, and normative status.

It should also be noted that Black considered racial differences and included them as indicators of culture. Regarding the distribution of law, Black claimed that black citizens are less likely to have material wealth, are a social and culturally stigmatized, and generally have less social status compared to white citizens. Thus, Black's theory of law suggests that white citizens are more likely to utilize the law, particularly when dealing with black citizens, and that the distribution of law is disproportionately skewed toward black citizens (downward distribution). Black (1976) extended his theory to the police-citizen interaction process as well, claiming that police officers in general have a higher social rank than citizens but that the race of the officer and the race of the citizen both play a part in the interaction.

Just as white citizens tend to have a higher social rank than black citizens, Black's theory suggests white police officers have a higher social rank than black police officers. This leads to a different likelihood of the distribution of law in each of four possible interaction scenarios (Black, 1989). The scenario where

distribution of law is most likely is the one in which a white officer interacts with a black citizen. Distribution of law is less likely in an interaction between white officer and a white citizen, even less so with a black officer and a black citizen, and least likely with a black officer and a white citizen (see also Rojek et al. 2012). Black (1980) further detailed the interaction process at the individual level by including situational factors that can influence the distribution of law. In addition to social rank, he claimed that relational distance between parties and deference shown to the officer were important and may also influence interaction outcomes in low-income minority communities. The section to follow explores these issues in further detail through a review of related empirical research.

### **Research on Police Behavior and Race**

**Interaction level.** Despite the move toward professionalism in the early-twentieth century and federal intervention during the civil rights movement, problems between police and black citizens continue to exist. Black's (1976) theory of law attempts to explain how the downward distribution of law is determined by the social rank (including race) of police-citizens interaction participants. Specifically, the theory suggests that black citizens tend to have lower status than whites and will be more likely than white citizens to be stopped, searched, and arrested when controlling for race of the officer. Subsequently there has been some empirical debate over whether or not objective factors such as race are indeed significant in the police-citizen interaction process.

Considering the empirical research on the effect of race in police-citizen encounters in its totality, Skogan and Frydl (2004) note there are mixed findings

and contend that race is only part of a complex process. In their National Research Council report, Skogan and Frydl (2004) claimed that while some studies have found that race is a factor in a police-citizen interaction, others have found no impact or mixed results. Skogan and Frydl (2004) contend that this diverse set of findings is likely do differences in time period and location in which the studies were conducted and the need to account for interaction effects such as the presence of offenders or victims in a given encounter. In other words, race is a variable that must be considered in the broader context of the interaction. They further contend that future research in this area should account for the organization (type of department), environment in which police-citizen interactions transpire, and history of police decisions and behavior in the area.

In response to claims of uncertainty related to race and police-citizen encounters, Kochel, Wilson, and Mastrofski (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 40 research reports (quantitative research only) based on 27 data sets that ranged from 1966 - 2004. Focusing specifically on likelihood of arrest, the results indicated that blacks were significantly more likely to be arrested than whites regardless of time period, location, data collection method, and publication type. Additionally, when controlling for interaction variables such as suspect demeanor, presence of witness, strength of evidence, victim to arrest, suspect prior record, and the suspect being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, black citizens were still more likely to be arrested than white citizens (Kochel et al., 2011). In fact, more variation was found within each race than between them regarding likelihood of arrest. Echoing Skogan and Frydl (2004), Kochel et al.

(2011) claim that this may be due to differences in the neighborhood in which the data was collected and that future research should account for neighborhood context.

Other research in this area supports the influence of race on police-citizen interactions as well. In New York City, Fagan & Davies (2000) found that black citizens were stopped at an overall rate that was 58.7% higher than for non-Hispanic white citizens. There is also evidence that police are more suspicious of minorities than of whites after a stop is initiated. Through observations and officer interviews related to traffic stops, Alpert et al. (2005) found that minority status was influential in police-citizen interactions in Savannah, Georgia. Specifically, blacks engaging in innocuous behavior were more likely to be viewed suspiciously than whites engaging in similar behavior. In effect, minority status acted as a primer for the interaction to follow, which may help explain findings related to likelihood of arrest as well.

Recently, Rojek, Rosenfeld, and Decker (2012) analyzed Black's theory of law through data collected on traffic stops in St. Louis, Missouri. Their results indicated that black motorists were more likely to be searched after being stopped, however, this was only true in predominately white communities. In predominately black and racially mixed communities, white officers were more likely to search motorists than black officers but white motorists were most likely to be searched. Research by Novak and Chamlin (2012) examining stops in Kansas City produced similar results. Although these results only partially support Black's theory, Rojek et al. (2012) argue that the theory is still promising

and that the racial composition of a community is likely also a factor in police search patterns. Overall, the interaction level research on police behavior and race appears support the importance of race in the interaction process and Black's theory of law has proved to be a promising theoretical perspective in this area.

**Community level.** Bittner's (1970) description of the ecological distribution of the police helps explain the relationship between police and minority citizens in different communities. Recall that Bittner described police as disproportionately active in lower-class communities populated by minorities. At the same time, Bittner claimed the police are actively offensive to someone in almost any encounter with the public and that they represent a despotic authority. Chambliss (1994) claimed police are still able to operate at will in minority neighborhoods because citizens in those communities have little to no political power or means of formally defending themselves.

Research findings suggest that neighborhood context is a factor in police-citizen interaction. Heterogeneous and high crime areas have been linked to more frequent citizen stops (Smith, 1986), and more frequent police use-of-force incidents in disadvantaged neighborhoods and neighborhoods with high homicide rates (Terrill and Reisig, 2003). It appears that both neighborhood level distribution of police is uneven and that police behave differently based on neighborhood context. Importantly, this body of research has continued to refine the definition of community beyond geography and race. For example, Close and Mason's (2007) defined the racial makeup of communities in their research using

county-level data. Rojek et al. (2012) examined police districts in St. Louis and observed the racial and social difference between districts. Novak and Chamlin (2012) focused 70 police beats in Kansas City police beats to account for local variation social conditions and police behavior.

Klinger (p. 229, 1997) noted the importance of defining community claiming that “any attempt to understand police behavior in the context of neighborhoods or any other sub district spatial unit must account for the nature of the patrol district in which they are situated.” Continuing to refine the definition of community and accounting for neighborhood social characteristics beyond geographic boundaries will help advance research in this area. Race has been central to this process.

**Racial threat.** Racial threat, and to a lesser extent benign neglect, are other macro-level explanations for disparate treatment of black citizens by police that have received attention in the empirical literature. While Black’s (1976) theory of law considers race as part of a larger construct (status) in its explanation of police-citizen interaction, racial threat shifts the focus to race as the primary explanation for greater punishment of black citizens. Hawkins (1987) also claimed a shift in focus was necessary because economic-based explanations for disparate treatment could not fully explain the disproportionate representation of blacks in the criminal justice system compared to other demographics that are overrepresented in the low-class (e.g., Hispanics, Native Americans). Instead the influence of race itself, regardless of economic class, must also impact punishment decisions.

Blalock (1967) described racial threat as the perception of a majority group that a growing minority population will weaken or subvert their social status. This ultimately leads to conflict between the majority population and the minority population that is the perceived threat. According to Blalock (1967) the primary sources of threat are economic and political in nature. Economic threats tend to relate to an increase in competition for employment, while political threat relates to the increase in political power that often accompanies growth in a particular population. Early racial threat research examined the relationship between the racial makeup of a community and the police force size or resources in large metropolitan areas. Jacobs' (1979) analysis of U.S. cities with a population of 250,000 or more revealed that racially diverse cities had more law enforcement personnel. In addition to racial makeup (percent black) of each city, Jackson and Carroll (1981) examined the relationship between involvement in civil rights activities and frequency of riots in 90 U.S. cities with a population of 50,000 or more. Larger percentages of black residents and greater involvement in civil rights activities were both predictors of increased police capital expenditure. Jackson (1986) expanded on this research by hypothesizing that the relationship between capital expenditure on policing and minority group size differs based on the population size of the city. Jackson's findings (1986) confirmed this hypothesis, indicating that larger cities (more than 50,000 residents) with higher percentages of black residents tend to devote more resources to policing. There was no significant effect or no effect in smaller (25,000 – 50,000 residents) cities.

Chamlin (1989) contended that a large minority population alone does not necessarily lead to threat. Instead, threat is perceived most when a minority population is experiencing active growth. Liska (1992) added that racial threat also stems from the belief that blacks are criminals, and that those who believe black citizens engage in criminal behavior often are likely to support stricter social control measures in areas with a large or expanding black population. Besides basic prejudice, Chiricos (1996) claimed that media depictions of blacks tend to associate drugs and violent crime with low-income minority communities. In turn, a type of “ghetto pathology” is created and threatens to infect traditionally white communities, especially those in which the black population is increasing.<sup>4</sup> Eitle, Stewart, and Stolzenberg’s (2002) examination of National Incident Based Reporting System data collected in South Carolina supported this contention. They found that high levels of black-on-white crime compared to black-on-black crime elicited a greater criminal justice response than political or economic threats. Similar to Chiricos (2006), Eitle et al. (2002) reasoned that race and whites’ fear of the “black criminal” played a significant role in this relationship. However, Stultz and Baumer’s (2007) findings using national-level data suggested there may be a limitation to the relationship between the size of the black population, whites’ fear of crime, and the size of police force in a given area. Specifically, that as the size of the black population increased past 25 percent of the overall population, influence of fear of crime on police force size decreased.

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<sup>4</sup> *It should be noted that blacks are currently not the largest minority group in the United States nor do they have the fastest growing population, rather these are characteristics of the Hispanic population.*



Response to threat is an important part of the racial threat hypothesis and is addressed in the racial threat literature. Tonry (1995) claimed that the formal response to racial threat can be seen in the punitive criminal justice policies of the 1980s. This, Tonry (1995) claimed, was exemplified by the United States Government's "war" on drugs which resulted in the tactical targeting of minority neighborhoods and disproportionate incarceration of blacks. While Tonry's contention broadly implicates the U.S. Government crime control policy as responses to racial threat, Jackson (1986) took a more precise approach when defining the response to racial threat. Jackson (1986) did not deny the significance of government policy and other proposed social control responses to racial threat, but contended that responses tend to vary based on certain contextual factors including city size, temporal proximity to city strife, and religion. As with Jackson's (1986) findings, city size was particularly important in Jackson's (1989) findings, with threat being increasingly salient as the city size increased and most prevalent in cities with a population of 50,000 or more. Holmes (2000) found similar results with cities of 150,000 or more residents and suggested that urban conditions may amplify perceptions of minority threat.

Overall, the racial threat perspective predicts greater commitment of police resources in areas where the minority population is larger (and or growing) than areas where the minority population is smaller (and or stagnant). Racial threat also predicts higher arrest rates for minority citizens in the former (Liska & Chamlin, 1984). It suggests that large or growing minority populations lead to an increased fear of crime which leads to increased pressure on police to control

crime, and controlling crime is then expressed in the form of arrests. There is another perspective that shares the basic foundation of racial threat but predicts a different response by police. Instead of an increase in arrests, the benign neglect hypothesis suggests arrests will actually decrease in areas with a large minority population.

**Benign neglect** . The benign neglect hypothesis focuses on explaining the police-citizen relationship in predominately minority communities. Liska and Chamlin (1984) claim that benign neglect occurs when the rate of intraracial crime exceeds the rate of interracial crime (against white citizens), as is often the case in minority communities. This reduces the pressure on police to control crime because black citizens are viewed as a subordinate social group, which results in a lower arrest rate for minority citizens. Contrary to the racial threat research, Liska, Lawrence, and Benson (1981) found an inverse relationship between the size of a police force and the amount of racial segregation in large U.S. cities. Liska and Chamlin (1984) took this a step further by examining the racial populations and arrest rates of 76 U.S. cities with a population of 100,000 or more. Their findings supported the benign neglect hypothesis, indicating that as the percentage of nonwhite citizens increased the arrest rate for nonwhites decreased.

More recent work by Parker and Maggard (2005) examined also examined large U.S. cities from 1980 - 1990<sup>5</sup>. Although they were testing a hypothesis based on racial threat, Parker and Maggard's findings were indicative of benign

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<sup>5</sup> Parker & Maggard (2005) examined data from 168 U.S. cities with a population of 100,000 or more.

neglect. Rather than increasing, as racial threat would suggest, rise in the population of blacks had a negative effect on black drug arrests. Additionally, areas of concentrated disadvantage and large minority populations within cities had a significant negative effect on black drug arrests.

Parker and Maggard's (2005) research is informative not only because it finds evidence of benign neglect hypothesis, but also because it represents a shift in the focus of this area of research. Their findings related to areas of disadvantage populated by minorities suggest that the relationship between police and minority citizens is effected by factors that are present at the community or neighborhood level. Kane (2003) noted that there is a critical need to examine different contexts within a particular urban area as opposed to generalizations across urban areas. He further claims that community expectations should be measured and that research must "move beyond examinations of quantitative outcomes to the analysis of qualitative processes."

**Public perceptions on the relevance of race.** Research on public perception consistently finds that citizens tend to believe race is a factor in police-citizen interactions. Two national level public opinion polls conducted by Gallup in 1999 and Penn, Schoen, and Berland in 2000 found that a majority of Americans felt that racial profiling by police was widespread and a problem regardless of race or political orientation (Gallahger et al., 2001). Studies focusing on residents of urban areas have also found that residents tend to believe that racial profiling is wide spread, especially among minorities who are also more likely to believe they have been personally subjected to racial profiling

(Reitzel & Piquero, 2006; Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2005; Tyler & Wakslak, 2004; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002).

Tuch & Weitzer's (1997) findings are informative regarding the importance of how citizens perceive treatment by police. In relation to race, they found when aggressive policing tactics were perceived to cross the line (i.e., street justice) minorities were more likely to develop feelings of animosity toward police than whites and have those feelings longer than whites. This is important because animosity is often associated with defiance and lack of deference, which have been found to lead to more punitive behavior by police (Cao & Huang, 2000; Lanza-Kaduce & Greenleaf, 2000, Piliavin and Briar, 1964). This does not necessarily suggest there is a conscious and pervasive effort by law enforcement to treat lower-income and minority citizens differently than other members of society as the racial threat hypothesis would assert. It is possible that aggressive enforcement tactics are justified by police as a means to enforce the law and preserve order and that police officials view them as the best way to service the community.

But do citizens perceive the provision of services similarly? Carlson and Sutton (1981) found dissimilarity in perception when studying community evaluations of police performance. In fact, they found that citizens and police were only likely to agree on the definition of poor police service. This matters because what police consider professional behavior has been construed by minority citizens as intrusive, aggressive, or abusive behavior (Block, 1970; Brunson & Miller, 2006b; Hadar & Snortam, 1975). Feagin's (1991) analysis of

interviews conducted with middle-class, urban black citizens suggested that perception of differential treatment was not exclusive to lower-class black citizens' perceptions of an aggressive or abusive police force. The citizens interviewed for the study indicated that white police officers were a source of danger to black citizens in general. Perceptions of differential treatment in specific situations have been found as well. Henderson et al. (1997) surveyed 240 residents of an urban area and found that blacks more likely to perceive differential treatment regarding likelihood of being stopped by police, being given a speeding ticket, and being arrested. These perceptions were strongest among lower-income black residents and remained true when accounting for prior experience with the criminal justice system, prior criminal activity, and neighborhood conditions.

Regarding differential treatment by white and black police officers, Weitzer (2000) also found that lower-income residents were most likely to perceive differential treatment. However, it is worth noting that Weitzer's (2000) conceptualization of income was not entirely separate from neighborhood conditions. Through interviews with residents of three neighborhoods in Washington, D.C., Weitzer found that black residents (especially those in the lower-income neighborhood) were more likely to perceive white officers as being more abusive, brusque, and guarded than black officers. Moreover, black residents were more likely to perceive black officers as being easier to talk to, more understanding, and more willing to get to know people than white officers. Stewart et al. (2009) also identified specific situations in which neighborhood

context is most salient. In particular, black adolescents felt discriminated against most frequently by police in majority white neighborhoods that have a growing black population.

Again, there is little evidence to suggest a conscious effort on the part of law enforcement to discriminate against minority citizens. Still, the perceptions of minority residents should not be overlooked. An alternative perspective may be that racist behavior by police is driven by an unconscious thought process rather than conscious bias. Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn (1993) suggest how this racist behavior is expressed could be rooted in one of several different ethnic attitudes. For example, rather than the biological-based believe that minority citizens are incapable of assimilating with white culture, a person may believe that minorities are free to behave how they want, within certain limitations. Both are racist perspectives but they may lead to different methods of social interaction (or social control). Quillian's (2008) survey of related research found that without being aware of it happening, ethnic attitudes based on past experiences can also influence a person's current thought process. Smith and Alpert (2007) argue that police are subject to this process as well and may believe they are acting in a just manner when their behavior decisions are actually related to a preexisting bias.

Overall, citizens tend to feel that race is a factor when police engage citizens. Minorities are particularly aware of this issue and often perceive racial profiling and differential treatment as widespread. Whether or not they believe these are attributed to a conscious or unconscious bias among police is less

clear. There is evidence that this perception of police behavior among minorities has also caused problems with their willingness to request police services, which is especially troubling considering their likelihood of victimization.

### **Race and Likelihood of Utilizing Police Services**

Black citizens, particularly younger and urban blacks, have been found to have an increased likelihood of being the victim of a burglary (Cohen & Cantor, 1981). They are also more likely to be victimized in general over their lifetime (Koppel, 1987). Additionally, results from the National Crime Victimization Survey suggest that blacks are more likely than white or Hispanic citizens to be victimized by violent crime, including rape, sexual assault, aggravated assault, and robbery (Truman & Planty, 2012).

Research clearly indicates that many black citizens perceive that they receive differential treatment by police, that differential treatment is perceived to carry out in a variety of ways, and that it can be related to the race of the officer. At the same time, blacks are victimized at higher rates than other races. Despite their increased need for police services, studies analyzing the awareness and willingness of community members to request these services show a disconnect between police and black citizens. In general, research has found a resistance to utilize police as a means of problem solving in low-income, predominately minority communities. Black (1973) provided perspective on why requesting police services or “mobilization of law” is an important function in American society.

“Mobilization of law is the process by which a legal system acquires its cases. The day-by-day entry of cases into any legal system cannot be taken for granted. Cases of alleged illegality and disputes do not move automatically to legal agencies for disposition or settlement. Without mobilization of the law, a legal control system lies out of touch with the human problems it is designed to oversee. Mobilization is the link between the law and the people served or controlled by the law.” (p. 126)

One of the earliest examples of how mobilization of law can be weakened is found in Gourley’s (1954) examination of police-public relations in Los Angeles. Gourley (1954) found that the public was largely uninformed regarding the competency level of their police officers and the circumstances they dealt with on a regular basis and that women were particularly unlikely to possess this information. A community that does not understand what problems police are capable of addressing and how to utilize police services could be another symptom of a dysfunctional relationship between the police and the public and reduce the chances of citizens requesting police services (McIntyre, 1967). This is demonstrated by Hill, Hawkins, Raposo, and Carr’s (1995) finding that minority women living in high-violence areas did not consider police a viable means of addressing problems. In addition to race and gender, Avakme, Fyfe, and McCoy (1999) found that wealth, and education level were all instrumental in determining the likelihood of requesting police services. Using recent NCVS data, Xie and Lauritsen (2012) also found that in communities where the economic divide between blacks and whites was the greatest and blacks and whites were more residentially segregated, reporting crime to the police was less likely when the victim was black and the offender was white.



There has also been some indication that minority citizens are generally confused over the role of police in their community (O'Brien, 1978) and that minorities living in high-violence areas do not include police services in the repertoire of coping strategies (Hill, Hawkins, Raposo, & Carr, 1995). These issues are especially problematic considering that the majority of patrol officers' policing activities are initiated either through direct public contact or through department dispatchers who relay calls for assistance (Rubenstein, 1973). Another important factor in community resistance to report crime and request police services appears to be related to the general social acceptability of calling police. Rosenfeld, Jacobs, and Wright (2003) found that contacting police, or "snitching," in urban minority communities was particularly taboo. Because Rosenfeld et al.'s (2003) findings were derived from interviews with criminals, whether or not the practice of snitching was similarly frowned upon by the community at large was not clear. It may be that potential repercussions of snitching would have been enough to keep others community members from engaging in the behavior regardless of its overall acceptability. Other studies on likelihood of calling the police tend to focus on specific offenses, such as domestic violence (Felson, Messner, & Hoskin, 1999; Felson & Paré, 2005), or in the broader context of post victimization decision-making (Goldberg & Ruback, 1992).

In summary, research has found that minority citizens are more likely to not understand what services their police provide and are generally confused about the role of police in their community. Furthermore, police and minority

citizens often perceive each other's behavior differently. While police may justify their behavior as an appropriate method for dealing with crime, citizens may view the same behavior as either inadequate or overly punitive. It should come as no surprise then that low-income black citizens are also reluctant to request police services. These issues underscore the complicated nature of perception and the importance of understanding how perceptions are formed, especially in low-income, predominately black communities. Even if perception cannot be changed, police officers could benefit from understanding how their behavior is perceived by the citizen(s) during an interaction. To date, a growing body of research has focused on perception and attitudes toward police. The section to follow will discuss research on both race and attitudes toward police at the individual and the community level.

### **Race and Attitudes Toward Police**

It is clear that individual, community, and law enforcement characteristics all play a role in the relationship between police and citizens. ATP research has tended to focus on these areas (Gallagher et al., 2001, Hagan & Albonetti, 1982) and generally finds that young, minority citizens, in lower-class urban neighborhoods have the least positive perception of police. Although how law enforcement style affects ATP is less clear, frequency and type of contact appear to be important factors. Given the high rates of victimization of low-income minorities and history of problems between residents of low-income minority communities and police, gaining a better understanding of how perception is formed within them is critically important.

**Individual factors.** Research in this area tends to analyze ATP in terms of either global perceptions of police or specific perceptions of police based on individual encounters (Brandl et al., 2004). Operationalization of global perceptions typically involves general assessments of police using scaled answer options. For example, Brandl et al. (2004, p.124) asked interview participants to rate how satisfied they were with police in general by indicating whether they were very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied. Specific perceptions of police tend to relate to process-oriented standards or situation outcomes (Gallagher et al., 2001). They have also been utilized more in assessments of individual factors, such as race, in relation to ATP. Studies utilizing process-oriented standards are far more prevalent in this literature and have assessed ATP in a variety of ways. For example, Johnson & Kuns (2009) asked citizens to assess police use of force in their community and Brunson & Miller (2006b) asked interview participants to describe what happened during their interactions with police. Studies examining situation outcomes also utilize specific situations to assess ATP. Stephens and Sinden's (2000) examination of an officer's decision to arrest in relation to ATP among domestic violence victims exemplifies this approach.

Regarding individual factors, age and race are most consistent characteristics that predict global and specific ATP. In particular, blacks and younger people have the most negative or least positive ATP of any demographic group (Brown & Benedict, 2002). The term "least positive" is particularly important because regardless of demographic characteristics and

geographic location research has consistently found that overall attitudes toward the police are positive (Albrecht & Green, 1977; Benson, 1981; Brown & Benedict, 2002; Cao, Frank, & Cullen, 1996; Davis, 1990; Payne & Gainey, 2007; Peek, 1978).

Positive ATP has even been found in groups that may not be traditionally associated with favorable perceptions of police. For example, overall positive ATP has been found among perpetrators of crime (Folger & Tyer, 1980). Homant, Kennedy, and Flemming (1984) had similar findings but noted that victims of crime in urban areas had less favorable opinions of police because they believed police should do a better job following up on calls for service, and show more urgency to address crime problems. Stephens and Sinden (2000) found a similar pattern among domestic violence victims. Overall ATP was positive, but it was more positive among domestic violence victims who felt the police were acting on their behalf and when an arrest was made. This is especially important considering that research suggests females in low-income minority neighborhoods experience a higher frequency of dealing with violence than other residents (Wolfer, 2000). Regarding perpetrators of crime, Myrstol and Hawk-Tourtlot (2011) found that ATP was most positive among arrestees who felt they were treated with respect and benevolence. It is only when focusing on a few specific subpopulations that less positive ATP is the norm (e.g., young black males, low-income, high crime area).

Although youth in general believe that police are biased against minority groups, after viewing scenarios depicting police-citizen interaction, black youths

were more likely to perceive bias behavior by police than white youths (Sivasubamaniam & Goodman-Delahunty, 2008). Younger blacks have also been found to have less positive ATP than older blacks (Sullivan et al., 1987). Specifically, older blacks are more likely to perceive police as acting respectfully and fairly than younger blacks. Partially explaining this difference, Brunson & Miller (2006b) contend that young, male minority residents in low-income communities tend to feel like symbolic assailants and are routinely stopped for no other reason than perceived guilt. That is, they have come to embody what the police define as criminal. There is considerably less research on the source of less positive ATP among young black females. What research does exist focuses on young (under 18 years old) black females only and tends to identify unwarranted sexual advances from police as a major source of their less positive ATP (Brunson & Miller, 2006a; Cobbina, Miller, & Brunson, 2008). Compared to predominantly white community members, black community members appear to have a heightened sensitivity to police use of force as well (Johnson & Kuhns, 2009). Interestingly, residents with a stronger sense of ethnic identity and who are more willing to explore their ethnic identity tend to believe police engage in these practices more often (Lee, Steinberg, & Piquero, 2010; Lee & Piquero, 2011). Given their tumultuous past with police, perhaps this is because they are more aware of race in the larger social context. Social psychological research can help explain further as findings in this area suggest that as group identity (e.g., race) becomes more salient, members of that group tend to view members

of other groups more critically (Crocker and Luhtanen, 1990; Crocker and Major, 1989).

It is clear that citizen characteristics can affect ATP. It also appears that policing style during interactions with black citizens, and whether that interaction was personal or experienced vicariously, effect ATP as well. National level surveys have indicated that overall, federal, state and local departments are viewed positively by citizens despite different operational styles (Hindelang, 1974). Brandl, Frank, and Worden (1994) suggested this is because perception can be compartmentalized and that global attitudes are separate from specific assessments. In effect, citizens may have positive views of policing or authority in general but dislike how police operate in their community. Alternatively, citizens may have positive interaction with a police officer and not have favorable attitudes toward the legal system in general (Albrecht & Green, 1977; Clark & Wenniger, 1964; Warren, 2010). While this may be true in select cases it is unlikely that perception is compartmentalized to the point that general perception has no influence on perception in more specific circumstances. An alternative perspective, which finds more support in the literature, is that general opinions are part of a complex process that informs a person's perspective in specific situations (Worrall, 1999; Brandl, Frank, Wooldridg, & Watkins, 1997).

Evidence of this can be found when considering the role of a citizen's race in global and specific ATP. Hurwitz & Peffley (2005) found a significant divide in white and black citizens' global perception of the fairness of the criminal justice system. Their global perspectives also informed their specific interpretation of

police interactions, albeit in different ways. Black citizens who held a global perspective of an unfair criminal justice system tended to view police interaction with black citizens with a greater degree of suspicion (of the officer) than other blacks and nearly all whites. Hurwitz and Peffley (2005) offered the following explanation:

Because so much of one's general sense of whether the [criminal justice system] is fair is experientially determined, these encounters (whether experienced personally or vicariously) contribute heavily in creating in much of the African-American community a profound understanding that the criminal justice system is inherently biased against them. And we know that these beliefs - far more prevalent among blacks - encourage suspicious interpretation of police encounters with black civilians. And finally, these interpretations 'loop back' to reinforce and intensify one's initial generalized judgment that the [criminal justice system] is inherently unfair, in much the same way that stereotypes (or other fundamental beliefs) bias perceptions and thus maintain or reinforce themselves. (p.781)

If Hurwitz and Peffley's (2005) contention is correct then understanding how police-citizen contact, be it personal or vicarious, affects ATP is all the more important. The loop back effect they refer to is essentially a form of expectation confirmation theory in which expectations coupled with similar perception of behavior work to strengthen future expectations. While expectation confirmation theory (ECT) is relatively new to criminal justice and criminological research, it is well established in a variety of other disciplines (e.g., education, information systems, marketing, psychology, sociology) and has a solid base of empirical support (Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005). With ECT in mind, a review of the literature on police behavior and related perceptions among minority citizens is essential. Durose and Langan (2005) found that most minorities felt police acted appropriately during interactions. However, their study was limited to interactions

during vehicle stops and there was no indication of setting or context (e.g., stopped in minority neighborhood). In a more general sense, Brown and Coulter (1983) and Birzer (2008) found that African-Americans were likely to rate police as “good” when they acted professionally and directly but in a non-threatening manner. Unfortunately, little attention is paid to defining the behavior that minority citizens consider threatening versus the behavior they consider nonthreatening. This is not a criticism of Birzer’s work (defining threatening behavior was not the focus of the paper) so much as it is a critique of ATP research in general. That is to say, much of the research on ATP has focused on whether ATP is positive or negative in relation to one or two other contextual factors such as race or community size, rather than the nuances associated with it. This limitation may potentially be the result of ATP research typically using quantitative data gained through surveys that will not capture such subtleties.

The difference between direct and vicarious contact is also a relevant consideration. As noted above, Hurwitz and Peffley (2005) mention that encounters that are experienced personally or vicariously are important regarding minorities perceptions of bias in the criminal justice system. ATP research related to direct contact with police indicates that negative direct contact with police is associated with negative overall ATP (Chapman, 1956; Walker, 1972; Lobitz, 1973). Regarding the influence of direct contact between police and black citizens specifically, Weitzer and Tuch’s (2004b) findings illustrate the importance of race. Through survey data collected from residents of urban communities they found that blacks were more likely than whites to claim they had a negative



encounter with police, and that the encounter was significantly more likely to influence their overall ATP. Indeed, direct contact appears to be a powerful predictor of ATP and often remains so even when accounting for citizens' age, race, gender, and income (Gau, 2010; Murty et al., 1990; Lasley, 1994; Scaglione & Condon, 1980). Vicarious contact with police has been subjected to less scrutiny in the literature and there is some indication that vicarious experiences are not as impactful as direct experiences on ATP (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). However, vicarious experiences are a factor and research suggests they are substantially more frequent than direct experiences (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2009; Hurst & Frank, 2000). How the prevalence of vicarious experiences impacts different communities and effects ATP is not yet fully understood. More research is clearly needed to examine the possible cumulative effect of vicarious experiences on ATP in different communities.

Another proposed explanation for the difference that has been the subject of increasing attention in contemporary ATP literature is the role of the media in public perception of police. Wortley, Hagan, and Macmillan (1997) suggested that narrative is important when considering the media's depiction police-public interaction. That is, how the media depicts the behavior of the citizen and the officer influences what media consumers think about the interaction. Wortley et al. (1997) examined how this played out in Toronto, Canada after a high profile crime in which three minorities shot and killed one of the patrons, a white woman, of an upscale café during a robbery. The narrative expressed by the media was one in which the perpetrators were vicious thugs, the patrons acted heroically,

and the police waged an unrelenting crusade for justice. Related findings indicated that feelings of injustice associated with police were actually moderated among highly educated blacks. On the other hand, less educated blacks continued to express higher levels of perceived injustice. Wortley et al. (1997) claimed this may be the result of higher educated blacks being active and informed media consumers versus less educated blacks who are less likely to consider the various narratives related to a news event. More recently, Callanan & Rosenberg's (2011) survey of 4,245 California residents indicated that viewing crime-based reality programs (e.g., COPS) predicted more positive ATP among white males only and non-reality based programs did not affect ATP in any group. Positive depictions of police did not correlate with positive ATP among black citizens regardless of the type of media (news or entertainment) through which the behavior is depicted.

Regarding media depictions of negative police behavior, there is some indication that media reports specifically about police violence, and especially extreme cases of violence such as the Rodney King incident, have a negative effect on black citizens' ATP (Warren, 2011; Weitzer, 2002). In turn, black citizens have also become less cooperative with police (Weitzer, 2002) and less likely to report criminal behavior to police (Avdija & Gievers, 2010). So it appears that media accounts of police behavior can have an asymmetrical effect on citizens' perceptions of police. Among less educated black citizens in particular, positive media depictions have little effect on perception while negative depictions have a decidedly negative effect how they perceive police. If this is

accurate it suggests a segment of the population that has frequent interaction with police is also insulated from one potential way of improving ATP. One less way of improving ATP makes identifying what can improve ATP all the more important. The current body of research on ATP does not adequately address this, especially with regard to areas defined by concentrated disadvantage.

A natural extension of how ATP relates to race, social status, direct or vicarious contact with police and media exposure is how ATP influences citizens' perceptions of future contact with police. Use of force incidents, a hot button issue in policing, are a particularly appropriate example. If one accepts Bittner's (1970) contention that the ability to use force is what differentiates police from the public, than it may also be reasonable to assume that how force is expressed helps define the nature (or perception) of the difference. For example, research indicates that experiencing a police use of force incident, either in person or vicariously, will reduce a citizen's approval of future use of force incidents (Cullen et al., 1996; Jefferis, Kaminski, & Holmes, 1997). Further, when comparing white community members to black community members, blacks appear to have a heightened sensitivity to police use of force (Johnson & Kuhns, 2009). This accords with Tuch & Weitzer's (1997) research mentioned above, which found that minorities were more likely to develop feelings of animosity toward police when subjected to overly aggressive policing tactics. In addition, minorities with a stronger sense of ethnic identity and who are more willing to explore their ethnic identity believe police engage in these practices more often (Lee, Steinberg, & Piquero, 2010; Lee & Piquero, 2011). Ultimately perception related to use of

force is important because it may lead to reduced support for police in general and potentially less effective law enforcement (Kaminski & Jefferis, 1998; Stuntz, 1998).

One proposed method of dealing with less positive ATP related to use of force, and contact with police in general, focuses on the racial makeup of police that service predominately minority communities. Specifically, police departments would assign minority officers to predominantly minority neighborhoods with the expectation that minority citizens would relate to minority officers better than white officers (United States National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968). This type of racial cooptation is not a new concept in policing. During the 1960s some urban police departments used cooptation as a method of dealing with racial tension between their officers and minority citizens (Rafky, 1975). Alex (1969) claimed cooptation was also a part of a larger legitimization process used by police departments in which the hiring of black officers served to pacify the black community, while harnessing attempting to harness their growing political power. This process, also known as representative bureaucracy, suggests that minority representation among elected and nonelected officials has an empowering effect on minority citizens and positively effects their attitudes and behaviors (Banducci, Donovan, & Karp, 2004).

Although on its surface cooptation may appear to be an astute (if not sly) political maneuver, there is reason to question whether or not it is completely effective. Minorities may respond to police based on their occupation and not

their race, a phenomenon Weitzer (p. 314, 2000b) referred to as the “blue cop principal.” If this is so, cooptation of citizens in predominately minority communities may be more effective than cooptation in police departments. Coleman (1957) described the process in basic terms, contending that all communities tend to have three groups of people. There is a small portion that favors the organization (e.g., police), a small group that opposes the organization, and a large group that is neutral until problems arise (e.g., abuse of force, discrimination). When problems arise the opposition group capitalizes on the neutral group and large-scale opposition to the organization ensues. To prevent this, Coleman (1957) contended that the organization must co-opt citizens in the opposition group in order to introduce their own ideas for resolving problems, thus preventing the spread of opposition. Community level approaches such as Coleman’s (1957) method of cooptation demonstrate the importance of understanding of how ATP works at the community level as well as the individual level.

**Community factors.** Separating the effect of individual level factors (personal characteristics) and community level factors on ATP is a difficult process (Apple & O’Brien, 1983; Murty, Roebuck, & Smith, 1990). For instance, social conditions within communities have been found to affect citizens’ willingness to request police services and overall relationship with police. This may be because residents tend to focus on tangible issues of immediate importance rather than broader, more abstract concepts such how the community fits with other social institutions, or weighing the intent of particular

institution against the results of its actions (Nelson, Eisenberg, & Carroll, 1982). For example, Kusow, Wilson, and Martin (1997) found that people in high-crime areas who had suffered some form of victimization in the past tended to have less positive ATP regardless of other factors. Additionally, residents' evaluations of the safety and overall condition of their neighborhoods (Priest & Carter, 1999) or crime flow in their neighborhood (Skogan, 2009) have had a significant effect on evaluations of local police. There has even been evidence of differential ATP in children. Derbyshire (1968) asked third grade students in three school districts, stratified by ethnicity and social class, to draw a scene depicting a police officer interacting with a citizen in their neighborhood. A systematic review of the drawings revealed that African-American and Mexican-American children in low-income school districts drew officers behaving more aggressively and negatively than upper-class Caucasian children who tended to draw police behaving in a neutral or positive manner.

Some scholars claimed these findings should be expected and that as research models have become more complex and incorporate concepts such as concentrated disadvantage, the influence of individual characteristics (e.g., race) will become less direct (Schafer, Huebner, & Bynum, 2003; Schuck, Rosenbaum, & Hawkins, 2008). Others contend that we tend to overestimate crime and disorder, and that the overestimation conceals the influence of economic conditions, neighborhood stability, and especially race (Harcourt, 1998). Indeed, early examples of research focusing on race and ATP tended to focus on basic race-ATP relationships (Klyman and Kruckenberg, 1974; Peek, 1981; Skogan,

1978; Zeitz, 1965) or more broadly on race and the larger attitude complex (Albrecht & Green, 1977; Block, 1970; Peek, 1978). Basic research models found race to be the most salient factor in predicting citizens' ATP. In fact, race remained a factor regarding ATP when controlling for a variety of other variables (Cao, Fank, and Cullen, 1996; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004).

Consistent findings also relate to areas characterized by concentrated disadvantage rather than race alone. Concentrated disadvantage typically refers to areas populated by low-income, minority, non-traditional (single parent) households (Reisig & Parks, 2004). Reisig and Giacomazzi (1998) found residents of neighborhoods characterized by concentrated disadvantage in small towns had less favorable ATP than residents of higher-income and predominantly white neighborhoods in small towns. Sampson and Bartusch (1998) studied 343 Chicago neighborhoods and found that dissatisfaction with police positively correlated with concentrated disadvantage in urban areas as well. Reisig and Parks (2000) found similar results when analyzing national level data that included residents of small, medium, and large towns and cities. Still, consistent with the general body of ATP research, ATP is generally positive among residents in areas of concentrated disadvantage, though less positive than residents of other areas (Payne & Gainey, 2007).

Considering that areas of concentrated disadvantage are typically populated by minorities (Hipp, 2010), have low collective efficacy (Morenoff, Sampson, & Raudenbush, 2001), and high incidents of social harm related to crime (Stuntz, 1998), it is logical that that ties to social institutions (e.g., police)

can be strained or broken in these communities. Indeed, minorities that perceive their quality of life as being low or dislike their neighborhood have been found to be more distrustful of police (Jesilow, Meyer, & Nemazzi, 1995; Sharpe & Johnson, 2009). There is also evidence that suggests factors associated with concentrated disadvantage such as high crime rates, poor attitude about living environment, and aggressive policing are related to less positive ATP (York & Davis, 1990; Parker, Onyekwuluje, & Murty, 1995; Parker et al., 1995; Weitzer, 1999). Weitzer's (1999) work is particularly insightful in this regard. Through interviews with residents of three Washington, D.C. neighborhoods they found that neighborhoods populated by low-income black residents were more likely to report having experienced police abuse and aggression. Weitzer (1999) referred to this as a halo effect. In other words, there was a clear distinction between ATP in white and middle-class neighborhoods and the lower-class minority neighborhoods they bordered.

When referring to the halo effect and whites, Weitzer (p. 843, 1999) claimed that it "reduces their chances of being viewed with suspicion and subjected to abuse both inside and outside their neighborhoods." As a result black citizens may have to establish credibility, or prove themselves unworthy of suspicion, while white citizens do not. Weitzer and Brunson (2009) claim this could have far reaching implications in that black youths have to be socialized how to act around police. This could serve an opportunity for adults to communicate their own negative experiences with police as a method of reinforcing the socialization process.



It also appears that whites and blacks justify the halo effect in different ways. That is, whites tend to view differential treatment as justified while blacks tend to view it as discriminatory (Weitzer, 2000a). Weitzer and Tuch's (2004b) examination of ATP in several large cities supports this contention. They found that a majority of blacks perceived police as engaged in profiling and bias behavior against minorities more than whites, and that this type of behavior was widespread.

Given that ATP is generally less positive in predominately minority communities, researchers have also focused on ATP differences across and within these communities. Although predominately minority communities tend to harbor more negative feelings toward police (Hahn, 1971), they may differ from one community to the next. Some communities have expressed anger at aggressive enforcement tactics, while others desire a stronger police presence. When studying attitudes about police in different ethnic communities in Miami, Sullivan, Dunham, and Alpert (1987) found that attitudes were not completely standard across or within communities and varied across residents' age and race. Weitzer and Tuch (1999) found ATP was consistent within communities but found variation across communities. Specifically, lower-income black communities had less positive ATP than higher-income black communities. What is less clear is *why* differences occur within communities and *how* differences across communities (e.g., economic status) relate to differences in ATP. A possible explanation was offered by Sharpe and Johnson (2009), who contended that the historical context of the community (or city) and issues of race

may help explain current differences in ATP across predominantly minority communities. This is consistent with Bittner's (1970) contention that minority communities with a longer and/or more sordid history of race-based issues with law enforcement will likely harbor more animosity toward law enforcement to begin with. Yet this still does not account for differences in ATP within minority communities.

To summarize, research indicates that individual and community level factors play a part in forming ATP. Early research tended to identify race as the primary determinate of ATP. Specifically, blacks have negative or less positive ATP than members of other racial groups. As ATP research progressed, it has become apparent that formulation of ATP is a more complex process and highly dependent on context. Race remains a significant factor, but findings suggest being young and or residing in an area of concentrated disadvantage are major factors as well. When also considering research on the role of law enforcement in development of citizens' perceptions, a complicated picture of ATP emerges. It appears citizens differentiate between global ATP and ATP related to contact with specific officers. Moreover, findings indicate that current *and* future influence on ATP can be differentiated by type of contact (direct or vicarious). To address this in minority communities, some police departments have employed a system of racial cooptation in which power is shared with the community in the form of decision making ability and/or additional minority officers. Whether or not this is an appropriate or effective method of addressing ATP is still the subject of debate.

Collectively the literature relating to the police-citizen relationship provides the basis for understanding ATP. There remains, however, the question of how ATP is formed in specific contexts, especially those in which it is typically the most negative. Knowing that individual factors such as race and community context predict negative (or less positive) ATP is not enough. Developing an understanding of the process that informs ATP and how it works is the critical next step in ATP research. To date, this area of research is limited and future research on ATP process requires theoretical guidance. An expanded discussion of legitimacy and procedural justice will demonstrate how this can be accomplished.

### **Legitimacy and Procedural Justice**

At some point early in most people's lives they begin a process of legal socialization through which their perspectives on law, legal authority, and legal institutions are formed (Piquero et al., 2005). Research has suggested that personal contact with police officers can impact the socialization process and, in turn, the perceived legitimacy of legal authorities and institutions. Fagan and Tyler (2005) studied 216 adolescents between the ages of 10 and 16-years-old and found that perceptions of police legitimacy changed over time from age 10 to 14, and stabilized by 16-years-old. They also found that, among the adolescents who had interacted with police, how the interaction proceeded was an important factor in the socializing process. Early interactions with police may be even more important considering Piquero et al.'s (2005) finding that legal cynicism and perceptions of legitimacy remain stable through at least 18 years of age.

Collectively the findings do not indicate that perceptions cannot change, but instead that police-citizen interactions matter and may have long-lasting effects. The procedural justice model helps to explain how this socialization process is carried out and its implications on citizen behavior regarding the law and legal authorities.

Thibaut & Walker's (1975) research on procedural justice provided a foundation for contemporary research in this area. By comparing people's views on the adversarial style American legal system versus the inquisitorial European system, Thibaut & Walker found people preferred the American system because they felt control was more equitably distributed between all parties involved. Thibaut & Walker (1975) interpreted this to mean that if people believe the process is fair they will be able to achieve more favorable outcomes.

Lind and Tyler (1988) and Tyler (1990) shifted the focus of procedural justice in their research to a normative approach. Rather than people being concerned with procedure because of its relevance to favorable outcomes, Tyler (1990) suggested that people find importance in procedural elements that do not influence outcomes, such as honesty, fairness, and respect. Mears (2013, p.1866) refers to these values as "rightful policing," or what people expect of police behavior rather than whether or not it is lawful or an effective crime fighting method. Applying these principals to policing (i.e., "process based policing"), Tyler (2003) described how police legitimacy is achieved through this process. Procedure is central to the model and leads to value judgments by citizens on the motivation and behavior of the officer (see Figure 1). Judgments then serve as

the basis for level of cooperation, acceptance of immediate and long-term decisions, and overall police legitimacy.

Ultimately, according to Tyler (2003) the outcomes of procedural justice are both compliance with the law and acceptance of decisions made by authority figures. The procedural elements that begin the process are the citizen's perceptions of the quality of the officer's decision and the quality of the treatment received from the officer. Quality decisions are perceived as ones that are neutral, objective, and consistent. Tyler (2003) noted that profiling is non-natural by definition and will have a negative impact on perceptions of decision quality. Quality of treatment is achieved when an officer is polite, respectful, treats the person as an individual, and acknowledges their rights during and interaction. Positive perceptions of treatment and decisions by the officer will then inform process-based judgments, prompting a citizen to feel that an officer is exercising judgment fairly (procedural justice) and for the right reasons (motive-based trust). Importantly, this can all lead to a citizen viewing police as a legitimate law enforcement authority, whose decisions should be accepted and followed voluntarily. Legitimacy is a key component of this model because it prompts citizens to cooperate because they have an obligation to do so, rather than simply being convinced or coerced to do so.

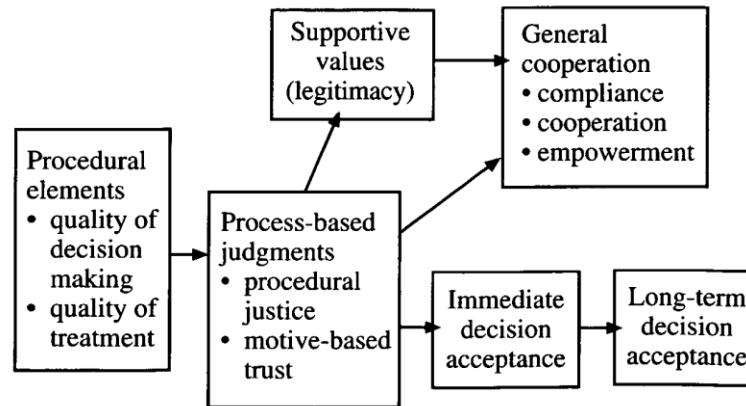


Figure 2.1: Tyler's model of procedural justice<sup>6</sup>

Tyler's explanation of procedural justice is ideal for ATP research because it provides a framework for understanding how ATP is developed (through procedure and process-based judgments) and the related implications (level of cooperation and immediate and long-term decision acceptance). In this model, the presence or absence of supportive values is equivalent to positive or less positive ATP. The model also reflects what Herbert (2006) referred to as "generative" police-citizen relationship in which police and citizens share responsibility for achieving a mutually agreeable outcome. Regarding the elements of procedural justice, both survey-based and ethnographic research are represented in the literature.

**Survey-based research.** Fagan & Davies (2000, p.498) noted that, "The incentives for people to engage with legal actors in social regulation and the co-production of security may lie in their evaluations of their treatment by the police." Procedural justice theories explain ATP development through their evaluations of their treatment by the police. Research that has utilized the procedural justice

<sup>6</sup> Diagram copied from Tyler (2003, p.284)

framework to analyze police-citizen interaction has found citizens were more likely to give deference to police when interacting if they felt officers were operating based on sincere or benevolent motives. Survey-based research is prevalent in this area and tends to use either national level data or data collected in large urban areas to assess elements of procedural justice.

Sunshine and Tyler (2003) connected perception of fairness to more global attitudes toward police, which research suggests are a factor in ATP (Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005; Worrall, 1999; Brandl, Frank, Wooldridg, & Watkins, 1997). Perceived fairness is completely subjective, yet it is a critical component to contemporary procedural justice models. Expectancy disconfirmation has been linked to perceived fairness and is an extension of the subjective aspects of procedural justice (Reisig & Chandek, 2001; Tyler, 2000). Reisig and Chandek (2001) surveyed 500 urban residents and found that as citizens perceive police performance as being less congruent with their expectations, they will be less inclined to acquiesce to police requests and be less satisfied with police in general. An explanation for this contrast in police service delivery and the expectations of minority community members can be found in the concept of distributive injustice. This occurs when a person in the community gets less justice or fairness than he or she feels is deserved in a particular situation. Based on data collected from 945 Philadelphia males, Erez (1984) found this concept was particularly applicable to minority communities because they developed different sense of justice through continued victimization and civil rights violations. As a result they expect to be protected by police and treated

with understanding and sympathy, but wind up experiencing neither. When considered with Hurwitz and Peffley's "loop back" effect there appears to be a strong case for the importance of police fairness, which is also the basis for citizens' judgments about police legitimacy.

Tyler's (1990) analysis of 1,575 surveys conducted with residents of Chicago connected perceptions of police fairness to perceived legitimacy, finding that residents who described police as polite and impartial also tended to consider police as legitimate authority figures. Although this suggests that legitimacy is a currency that can be accrued through positive police behavior (e.g., quality of treatment, quality of decisions), there is also reason to believe that perceived legitimacy can erode based on negative police behavior.

Kaminski's (1998) survey of 500 Cincinnati residents demonstrates this point. Kaminski (1998) found that residents who viewed violent arrests on television had a reduction in their perception of police legitimacy. This was especially true for non-white citizens.

Recent international research has also tended to find a relationship between legitimacy and procedural justice. Hinds & Murphy (2007) examined the relationship between police decisions and behavior on perception of legitimacy in Australia. Their findings suggested that citizens who perceived that an officer behaved in a procedurally just manner tended to view the officer as a legitimate means of authority, which ultimately led to greater satisfaction with the officer's services. Also using survey data collected in Australia, Mazerolle et al. (2013) found that individual encounters with police effected global perceptions of police



legitimacy as well. Still, research findings on the relationship between procedural justice and legitimacy are not unanimous, as evidenced by Tankebe's (2013) findings in Ghana. Tankebe (2013) found that citizens' feelings of obligation to obey a legal authority were not always normatively based. Instead, they were based on a variety of normative issues and rational choices related to police lawfulness, procedural fairness, distributive fairness, and assessments of police effectiveness. Kochel (2013) examined the likelihood of reporting criminal victimization among residents of Trinidad and Tobago but found that assessments of police effectiveness were not a factor in residents' perceptions of police legitimacy. Kochel's results were published in the same issue of *Criminology* as Tankebe (2013). The degree to which the differences in these findings are culturally based is not clear, but they do demonstrate the complex nature of police legitimacy.

Contextual factors at the individual level such as race and age have received significantly less empirical attention in this area. However, recent studies by Lee (2010) and Lee and Piquero (2010) have identified ethnic identity as a factor in perception of police legitimacy. Specifically, young black juvenile offenders with stronger senses of ethnic identity were more likely to report positive beliefs about police legitimacy than those with weaker senses of ethnic identity. Lee and Piquero (2010) suggest that this may be because juveniles with stronger senses of ethnic identity also have a level of maturity that allows them to understand that the police are necessary for maintaining order in society.<sup>7</sup> This

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<sup>7</sup> *This discussion of ethnic identity relates to police legitimacy, which is a different issue than the discussion of ethnic identity and perceptions of police misconduct on page 39.*

has important implications in the procedural justice model. If neighborhood characteristics and personal factors effect perceptions of police legitimacy then they will also affect whether citizens' cooperate with police and their willingness to accept short and long-term decisions made by police.

Tyler (2003) contended that citizen behavior while interacting with police was subject to their assessment of being treated fairly and professionally. Regarding ATP, Tyler's (2003) contention is consistent with the Birzer's (2008) findings discussed in the previous section and more recently with research conducted by Myrstol and Hawk-Tourtlot (2011). Myrstol et al. (2011) surveyed 139 people who were arrested and booked into the Washington County, Arkansas jail over a two week period. Their findings indicated that arrestees were most satisfied with an officer's decision if they believed the officer was acting in a kind or caring manner. However, positive behavior by police may not have the same impact on perceptions of legitimacy as negative experiences. Recall the brief discussion of the asymmetrical nature of ATP in reaction to media accounts of police behavior. Findings indicated that less educated blacks were least likely to respond favorably to positives narratives of police in the media (Wortley et al., 1997). Asymmetry has also been found in attitudes toward the legal system (e.g., courts, corrections) and ATP. For example, Dean (1980) found that positive contacts with police led to more positive ATP and negative contacts to more less positive ATP, but that the effect of negative contacts was much stronger. Skogan (p. 100, 2006) referred to this as the "asymmetrical effect" of police-citizen interaction. Survey-based research has confirmed this among residents

of urban areas (Skogan, 2006; Dean, 1980) and even in countries other than the United States (Bradford, Jackson, & Stanko, 2009), but has not examined procedural justice and the asymmetry effect in specific community contexts in depth. Instead, ethnographic methods have been utilized to examine these issues in relation to specific community contexts and citizen characteristics.

**Ethnographic research.** A growing body of research relying on ethnographic methods exists in the ATP related policing literature. Although qualitative research of this sort is not as generalizable as survey research, it is often ideal for studying context based processes such as the ones related to procedural justice and police legitimacy. In-depth interviews are particularly effective in this regard and are the most common type of qualitative data collection in ATP related policing literature. Unlike the use of quantitative data collection techniques alone, in-depth interviews can help reveal the full range of experiences people have with the police and provide detailed insight into their various experiences (Gau & Brunson, 2010). To date, there are few examples of ethnographic research on the police-citizen relationship that address procedural justice and fewer still that incorporate procedural aspects of police-citizen interactions in the research design. Rather, ethnographic approaches were rooted in an alternative theoretical basis and then began to discuss elements of procedural justice in related findings. Only recently has qualitative research in this area started using the procedural justice model as a theoretical basis for inquiry.

Early ethnographic work on police-citizen interaction and related ATP was guided by race and class based versions of conflict theory (Weitzer, 1999; 2000a; 2000b). Focusing on these issues at the neighborhood level, Weitzer's (1999) interviews of 169 residents in three Washington, D.C. neighborhoods, differentiated by class and race (middle-class predominately black, middle-class predominately white, lower-class predominately black) revealed a type of halo effect (discussed earlier) in which lower-class black residents were more likely to report being subjected to police abuse and aggression than residents of middle-class neighborhoods. Weitzer's (1999) work produced these basic findings, but it also exemplifies how ethnographic research can help increase the depth of understanding related to police-citizen interaction and ATP. When asked why police stops are often seen as unjustified, one resident claimed that "A lot of times it's not a drug thing, just a bunch of teenagers getting together and talking (p. 829)." Another resident provided his perspective on why police use abusive language when dealing with some people in the community. He claimed that "they ain't gonna hear you... Homeless people, prostitutes, drug dealers, criminals... Sometimes nice language is just completely misunderstood" (p. 836). When examined in their totality comments such as these can provide context and meaning to quantitative data.

Using the same dataset, Weitzer (2000a, 2000b) found that although police behavior was perceived differently in different neighborhoods, there was not a substantial difference in behavior based on the race of the officer. One black resident exemplified this point, claiming that black officers "treat you just as

bad, and they say, 'My brother.' How can you be a brother when you just slammed my head up against that car..." (2000a, p.318). Regarding this issue of race, and why black and white officers were perceived to discriminate against black residents, another resident claimed "Stereotyping – you see a young black male, he's a criminal" (2000b, p. 138). This ethnographic work may not have addressed procedural justice, but concepts of fairness and impartial behavior are clearly an important part of their findings. Procedural justice played a more significant role in later ethnographic work as researchers identified the importance of procedure in their findings.

Birzer (2008) interviewed 32 African-American residents of a Midwestern city and found that when an officer showed empathy and fairness the resident had more positive feelings about the encounter. Police legitimacy was a central theme in Brunson and Weitzer's (2009) analysis of interviews conducted with young males from disadvantaged neighborhoods in St. Louis, Missouri. Police legitimacy tended to be undermined most by derogatory behavior of police officers. As one resident explained, "Police like to curse at people for no apparent reason" and "they shout bitches, hoes, niggers" (2009, p.871). These findings were never associated with procedural justice by Birzer (2008) or Brunson and Weitzer (2009), but they represent a shift in the ethnographic research from needing to infer that findings were related to procedural justice to researchers using procedural justice terminology.

Taking this one step further, Brunson and Miller (2006b) connected the language of procedural justice directly to the model. Through their interviews of

40 African-American young men in St. Louis, Missouri, they found that factors related to process played an important role in perception of fair treatment. In Brunson and Miller's (2006b, p.636) words these findings illustrate "that it is not only *who* is policed, but *how* they are policed that matters in establishing the credibility of police officers in minority communities." In fact, Tyler (2001b) claimed that *how* people are policed may be more important than actual police performance. Carr, Napolitano, and Keatings' (2007) research, which utilized 147 interviews of juveniles living in 3 Philadelphia neighborhoods with high crime rates, also supported Tyler's (2001b) contention. Carr et al. (2007) found that minorities with less positive ATP tended to describe a feeling of frustration related to being targeted by police. Additionally, the juveniles described interaction with police as being impersonal and cold. This was more than a mere lack of procedural justice according to Carr et al. (2007, p.447), it was the presence of "procedural injustice."

Gau and Brunson's (2010 p.265) interviews of 45 adolescent males in St. Louis was based on the procedural justice model and provided further insight in this area. St. Louis youth described frustration with being targeted as troublemakers and a general sentiment that "doing nothing wrong" should have been enough to keep them from being stopped by police. Instead, police were described as treating juveniles unfairly and, at times, in a discriminatory fashion. One resident described police as assuming he was guilty and a threat, and claimed an officer told him "I'm not arresting you [but] can I put you in handcuffs though and run your name?" Juveniles perceived this treatment as unfair and not

how other people are treated. Another juvenile's comment illustrates this point, he claimed, "We look thuggish, so [the police] treat us like thugs .... But if you grew up in a perfect neighborhood, the [police] treat you like you're a human being."

In sum, the early development of procedural justice was conducted using survey-based methods. This method of research identified the importance of the elements procedural justice identified by Tyler and others, and that procedural justice plays a significant role in the perception of police legitimacy. Survey-based research also revealed that perception of procedural justice is context specific and helped identify the characteristics of communities and citizens that perceive the least amount of procedural justice. This was achieved primarily through the analysis of national level data or data collected in large urban areas. As this line of research progressed it shifted toward the use of ethnographic methods and qualitative data, collected primarily through in-depth interviews. This method of research helped to further our understanding of procedural justice, particularly in low-income minority communities, by helping to explain not just *that* context matters but *why* context matters.

As the characteristics of a community change so do citizens' perception of police behavior. Ethnographic studies are well suited analyzing contextual issues such as these because they tend to utilize smaller samples drawn from specific communities, and allowed residents to explain in their own words how police behavior in their community is interpreted as procedurally just or unjust. At this level of analysis researchers are also able to explore how specific methods

of policing effect procedural justice and police legitimacy in specific neighborhoods. This is particularly beneficial considering the variation in policing methods, as noted above, from one community to the next.

When combined with findings from previous ethnographic research on police-citizen interaction and related ATP, several factors emerge. Race and class appear to be the most salient, with black citizens from low-income areas perceiving the lack of procedural justice, or presence of procedural injustice, most frequently. These citizens described procedural justice issues stemming initially from indiscriminate stops by police and then progressing to disrespectful treatment during the interaction, regardless of whether or not the citizen had done anything to warrant the stop (Brunson & Miller, 2006b). Gender has also been an issue regarding police-citizen interaction, with females more likely to describe problems related to sexual advances (Cobbina, Miller, & Brunson, 2008). However, research in this area has not focused on the police-female citizen interaction through the procedural justice model. Age has been examined even less than gender. There are examples of qualitative research in this area that have included citizens of all ages (Weitzer, 1999; 2000a; 2000b), but this was likely a byproduct of focusing on variation in neighborhood income level and race rather than to examine age specifically. Recent research utilizing the procedural justice model has begun to examine age by focusing on younger individuals because they tend to have the most frequent interaction with police (Brunson & Miller, 2006b; Gau & Brunson, 2010), but citizens older than 19 have not received the same attention.



With the development of the procedural justice model, and using it to guide qualitative research on police-citizen interaction and related ATP, comes the need to test this model in a variety of contexts. The foundational research in this area has indicated that citizens' race, age, and gender all effect perceptions of police. Still, current research tends to focus on one race, age group or gender at a time. Qualitative procedural justice related research in particular has focused on young black males in low-income communities. Research on the influence, if any, of family, friends, and community member is also absent from the literature. More research is needed to determine how variations in race, age, and gender, and the influence of others can effect perception in low-income communities. For instance, it may be that older residents perceive police behavior differently than younger residents or that family members influence each other's perceptions. Additionally, Brunson and Miller (2006b) have called for more research on whether or not police-citizen interaction can have a cumulative effect on citizens' perceptions. Brunson (2007) examined this issue among young black males and found that the accumulation of both direct and indirect negative experiences with police effect perception. Again though, variation in race, age, and gender were not examined in relation to these issues, nor were they examined through the procedural justice model.

### **Legitimacy and Concentrated Disadvantage**

Identifying the proper community context in which to examine variation in race, age, and gender is another important factor in this line of research.

Examinations of culture and violence in urban minority communities have found

that community context influences cognitive processes (Reisig and Parks, 2004; Sampson, 1997; Sampson and Bartusch, 1998). Specifically, black citizens living in areas of concentrated disadvantage were less likely than citizens in better neighborhoods to view police as a legitimate means of dealing with crime in their community. Research has also found that minorities that perceive their quality of life as being low or dislike their neighborhood have been found to be more distrustful of police (Jesilow, Meyer, & Nemazzi, 1995; Sharpe & Johnson, 2009). Kochel's (2012) research in Trinidad and Tobago also suggests a link between community context and cognitive processes. Kochel (2012) found that citizens who perceived high levels of police service quality also reported high levels of collective efficacy. Conversely, those who reported poor police service quality also reported lower levels of collective efficacy.

Procedural justice related research tends to focus on these communities because they typically have higher crime rates and a larger and more aggressive police presence than other communities (Terril & Reisig, 2003). Thus, the number of police-citizen interactions in a given day is greater than in communities with lower crime rates and less aggressive police. This is important considering the evidence connecting policing style, ATP, and perceived police legitimacy (Hawdon, 2008; Tuch & Weitzer, 2007). These findings are used to justify data collection for much of the recent qualitative work as well. Even qualitative studies that incorporate data from middle and or upper-class neighborhoods do so for comparison with lower-class neighborhoods (Weitzer, 1999; 2000a; 2000b).

Perhaps the best example of research related to police legitimacy and concentrated disadvantage was conducted by Brunson & Weitzer (2009). Through their examination of young males in three different neighborhoods stratified by race, their research helped to identify the intersection of race, concentrated disadvantage, and police. All participants in their study were from areas of concentrated disadvantage and either a majority black, majority white, or racially mixed neighborhood. Brunson and Weitzer's (2009) results indicated that young males in the majority black neighborhood were more likely to report problems with police, negative personal interaction with police, aggressive policing tactics, and harassment by police. Gau et al. (2012) also found that procedural justice was an important factor in police legitimacy in areas of concentrated disadvantage and argued that macro-level factors such as neighborhood conditions should be incorporated into the procedural justice model.

If police legitimacy is weakest communities characterized by concentrated disadvantage and majority black population, then identifying neighborhoods and communities with these characteristics is essential for future research. Public housing communities have a history of being built in poor majority black neighborhoods and housing the most disadvantaged minorities (Wilson, 1990). They have also been identified as places where the onset of criminal activity begins at an earlier age, is more violent, more frequent, and lasts longer in a resident's life than residents of other communities (Fabio et al., 2011).

## **The Present Study**

Through Bittner's (1970) framework it is apparent that the role of police and how it shapes the relationship with citizens has evolved, particularly with lower-class minority citizens who have a historically dysfunctional relationship with police. Thus far, it appears that low-income, minority communities are uncertain about what role police play in their community, what services they have to offer, and are generally reluctant to request police services. Research findings also indicate that attitudes toward police are less positive among young black males in urban areas and that law enforcement style, citizen expectations regarding police behavior, and direct versus vicarious contact with police are factors in this process. Further, blacks citizens are most likely to be suspicious of police before interacting with them and more sensitive to perceived injustice during and after an interaction. This is problematic because there is also evidence that aggressive policing tactics are not uncommon in lower-class minority neighborhoods and that questioning the motivation behind aggressive tactics may be viewed as an affront or challenge to the officer.

According to Tyler (2001b), how people are policed may be more important than actual police performance regarding citizens' attitudes toward police. The procedural justice model describes this process, stating that when police treat citizens fairly, respectfully, and make process based decisions citizens will perceive them as a legitimate means of authority and be more likely to cooperate and accept their decisions. Early research examining the procedural justice model was largely survey-based and helped identify juvenile residents of

low-income minority communities as the population most likely to perceive police behavior as procedurally unjust. Qualitative research expanded on this by identifying what type of police behavior is perceived as unjust and how it tends to play out with young black males in areas of concentrated disadvantage.

Is procedural justice an important factor when police interact with adult residents of low-income minority communities? Examining whether the procedural justice model is applicable to older residents and female residents of these communities could be equally, if not more, valuable. Juvenile black males are often the most visible members of these communities because they have the highest rate of interaction with police and are the focus of much research. However, adults also live and work in these communities. They too interact with police and they too possess valuable information regarding how police are perceived in the community. Adult residents also suffer high rates of criminal victimization and require police services, yet they are relatively unlikely to do so compared to citizens of other races.

If the procedural justice model is applicable to older residents as well it could instruct police how interact with *all* citizens in low-income minority communities in a way that engenders acceptance, compliance, and perceptions of legitimacy. In turn, citizens may be more willing to report criminal activity and request police services when needed. Although secondary, it is also noteworthy that if procedurally just policing does matter, its implementation is cost effective. Training can be integrated into academy curriculum and/or offered to sworn officers. After training, there is no cost associated with procedurally just policing

and it has the potential to save considerable resources through greater cooperation between community members and police in crime control efforts.

This study will examine attitudes toward police in public housing communities using data obtained through in-depth interviews with residents. The study will be guided by the procedural justice model and account for variation in race, age, and gender by including a representative cross-section of housing residents. This method will give residents the opportunity to explain in their own words how their perceptions are formed and identify how direct contact and vicarious experiences such as media accounts of police behavior and/or influence from others that may affect their perception of police.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DATA AND METHODS

This chapter describes the research methodology used for this study and is divided into three primary sections. The first section provides background information including the purpose of this study and the necessary arrangements needed to carry it out. Details on the subjects included in this research and the data collection procedure are included in the second section. Finally, the third section outlines the analytic strategy for this study.

#### Background

The purpose of this dissertation is to answer the following two primary research questions:

1. What process informs attitudes toward police among public housing residents in Columbia, South Carolina?
2. Once formed, how are attitudes toward police among public housing residents in Columbia, South Carolina further shaped and maintained?

To date the research on ATP in primarily low-income minority neighborhoods is limited and in need of further exploration in several areas. First, this area of the literature needs further attention regarding ATP as a process. Certainly isolated incidents of police-citizen interaction are important, but the influence of accumulated experiences via direct and vicarious police interaction, the media, and fellow citizens has received relatively little attention. Additionally,

what role does context play? There is a lack of research in low-income enclaves such as public housing communities. The focus instead has been primarily on low-income, young black males. Indeed this population has been found to have the least positive ATP, but they are only one segment of their respective communities. There are also older residents, especially females, who are often parents, the primary income earners in their homes, and are held responsible for the housing unit in which they reside. What role do these community stakeholders play in the ATP process and what is the ATP among this population? After all, it is the stakeholders that have the most to lose from criminal activity and thus are likely to require and request police services. If mobilization of law is truly as important as Black (1973) contends, understanding ATP among community stakeholders is critically important. Ultimately a broader understanding of ATP can help inform programs meant to improve the relationship between police and citizens, and may also help the provision of police services and crime control efforts.

**Research setting.** The research for this dissertation will take place in two public housing communities located in Columbia, South Carolina. Columbia is located in the central part of South Carolina and situated approximately 90 miles south of Charlotte, North Carolina and 200 miles west of Atlanta, Georgia. With a 129,272 residents, Columbia has the largest population of any city in South Carolina (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In terms of race, 52 percent of residents are white and 42 percent are black. The next largest minority population is Hispanics, which make up only 4 percent of the population. Compared to state



(South Carolina) and national percentages, Columbia has a much higher percentage of black citizens. Regarding income, Columbia residents have a lower median household income than state and national median income levels<sup>8</sup> (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Public housing in Columbia is managed by the Columbia Housing Authority (CHA). CHA maintains 23 separate locations in which public housing is provided. This research will be conducted in two of these locations, Dorner Homes and Brookside Court.<sup>9</sup> These locations were selected because they have identical admission requirements for residents, yet they are situated in two different parts of the city in terms of geography and surrounding community characteristics. With respect to admission requirements, income is the most relevant to this research. Dorner Homes and Brookside Court both have the lowest income threshold for admitted residents. In other words, the median income level for residents of these two housing communities is the lowest among CHA properties (Columbia Housing Authority, 2012).

Another important similarity between Dorner Homes and Brookside Court is that they are serviced by the same police agencies. Columbia Police Department (CPD) provides the daily police patrol and are the primary responders to emergency calls. Dorner Homes is serviced by CPD South Region officers and Brookside Court is serviced by CPD North Region officers (Columbia Police Department, 2012). Both communities are also serviced by the Richland County Sheriff's Department (RCSD) which handles civil process, and occasional

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<sup>8</sup> Median income: United States = \$51,914; South Carolina = \$43,939; Columbia, SC = \$38,272

<sup>9</sup> The names "Dorner Homes" and "Brookside Court" are both pseudonyms.

search warrants and patrol activities. Additionally, RCPD drug and gang suppression units are occasionally active in these housing communities. CHA maintains a police unit as well, which operates out of a CHA housing community located between Dorner Homes and Brookside Court.<sup>10</sup>

There are other notable differences between Dorner Homes and Brookside Court. The most obvious difference is in their physical appearance and design. Dorner Homes was built in 1941 and is comprised of 280 apartment units in 30 two-story brick buildings with few features aside from the front steps and windows. Brookside Court was built in 1970 and has 200 apartment units, also in 30 two-story buildings, but has a very different appearance (Columbia Housing Authority, 2012). Instead of the featureless brick design, Brookside Court buildings have a more contemporary look with a contoured façade made of brick and steel siding. Another difference between the two communities is the surrounding neighborhoods. Although both are located within the city limits, Dorner Homes is located in an urban environment while the area around Brookside Court has more suburban characteristics. For example, Dorner Homes is bordered by a large hospital to the north, closely built houses and apartments to the south and east, and businesses to the west. It is also within 1 mile of the business and entertainment center of the city. On the other hand, Brookside Court is bordered by a large wooded area to the south, east, and west, and a park to the north. Past the wooded areas are lower-middle class houses and apartments in mature neighborhoods.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Columbia Housing Authority Police office is located approximately 0.75 miles from Dorner Homes and 2.0 miles from Brookside Court.*

**Interview participants.** All of the interviews for this research were conducted with individuals whose primary residence is in either Dorner Homes or Brookside Court. It is important to note that while a resident may claim to be a resident Dorner Homes or Brookside Court it does not mean they are a *legal* resident. To be a legal resident of a CHA community a person must be the primary lease holder or included on the lease as a co-resident. Primary lease holders are responsible for upholding the terms of the lease and the behavior of co-residents. In both Dorner Homes and Brookside Court 98 percent of the primary lease holders are black and 95 percent are women. This does not mean these communities are devoid of adult males. Rather, it is an indication of who the stakeholders are in the community.

Not all citizens who apply for housing are selected and there is often a waiting list for residency. A variety of objective and subjective criteria are used by the CHA selection committee to determine whether an application is selected. Objective factors primarily relate to income,<sup>11</sup> criminal history, history of substance abuse, and credit problems (previously violated a CHA rental agreement). Subjective factors can be seen in the following selection from the CHA Admissions and Continued Housing Policy (2011):

Applicant families will be evaluated to determine whether, based on their recent behavior, such behavior could reasonably be expected to result in noncompliance with the public housing lease. The Columbia Housing Authority will look at past conduct as an indicator of future conduct. Emphasis will be placed on whether a family's admission could reasonably be expected to have a detrimental effect on the development environment, other tenants, Columbia Housing Authority employees, or other people

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<sup>11</sup> Total household income cannot exceed 80% of the median income for the area. The median household income for Columbia, SC is \$38,272, therefore the maximum household income per CHA rental unit is \$30,617.60.

residing in the immediate vicinity of the property. Otherwise eligible families will be denied admission if they fail to meet the suitability criteria. (p. 18)

Despite the vetting process by the CHA, pilot interviews with Dorner Homes and Brookside Court residents indicated that housing units are commonly occupied by the primary lease holder and other individuals who are not included on the lease. To avoid selection bias, anyone whose primary residence is Dorner Homes or Brookside Court, regardless of whether or not they are on the lease, was eligible for an interview. In fact, inclusion of unofficial residents may lend a valuable perspective to this study.

## **Data Collection**

**Access and selection.** Previous research experience in Dorner Homes and Brookside Court allowed the researcher access to the subjects for this study. The researcher has established rapport with a resident of Dorner Homes who identified five other residents that were willing to participate in the study. Each of the five residents then identified other residents who they believed would be willing to participate in the study and introduced the researcher to the potential interviewee either in person or indirectly prior to the interview request. This technique of snowball sampling that included introductions allowed the researcher to identify new interview participants without having to completely reestablish credibility prior to each interview. Although not all of the residents were able to identify another person in the community for an interview, the number of potential interviewees identified was sufficient to continue sampling until a cross-section of the community was obtained. Residents' race, age, sex,

prior experience(s) with police were the initial focus, but other issues that became relevant during the course of the research, such as location of residence within the community, were also considered when recruiting new subjects for the study. Unfortunately the researcher did not have a resident contact in Brookside Court. However, the researcher had an established rapport with the housing manager from a previous study in that community. Initial access to subjects from Brookside Court proceeded through the housing manager who recruited subjects to participate in the study. In addition to the subjects recruited by the housing manager, subjects were obtained by the researcher through the same recruitment process practiced in Dorner Homes. Recruitment concluded after 60 subjects (30 from each of the two communities) were interviewed. Although current ATP research has tended to utilize fewer participants (see Brunson & Weitzer, 2009; Gau & Brunson, 2009; Birzer, 2008; Brunson & Miller, 2006), utilizing 30 participants from each housing community should allow for comparison.<sup>12</sup> Overall, the sample demographics were similar in both communities with females and residents under the age of 40 making up the majority of interviewees in both Dorner Homes and Brookside Court (see Table 3.1).

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<sup>12</sup> Number of subjects utilized: Brunson & Weitzer (2009) = 45; Gau & Brunson (2009) = 45; Birzer (2008) = 40; Brunson & Miller (2006) = 40

Table 3.1: Interview Participants

	Brookside Court		Dorner Homes		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Interviewees	30		30		60	
Female	21	70%	23	77%	44	73%
Male	9	30%	7	23%	16	27%
Age						
18-19	5	17%	2	7%	7	12%
20-29	9	30%	7	23%	16	27%
30-39	6	20%	9	30%	15	25%
40-49	4	13%	5	17%	9	15%
50-59	2	7%	5	17%	7	12%
60-69	4	13%	2	7%	6	10%

**Data & data recording.** The goal of qualitative research as being able to capture the real words of interviewees by eliciting thick description of objects, people, and events (Patton, 2002; Geertz, 1973). In other words, the interviewee must provide context and meaning to their words and it is the interviewer's responsibility to ensure that happens. This research will utilize qualitative data obtained through 60 semi-structured interviews with residents of Dorner Homes and Brookside Court. All interviews were scheduled and conducted by this researcher and took place within the subject's respective community. Pilot interviews indicated that interviewees tend to prefer being interviewed in their apartment or in one of the private meeting rooms located in the Dorner Homes and Brookside Court administrative offices (located on site). Both locations ensure privacy and allow interviewees to speak freely about their experiences.

Approval was granted from the Armstrong Atlantic State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the interviews associated with this

study. As required by the IRB, interview subjects were provided with an informed consent document containing information about the voluntary nature of their participation, confidentiality and anonymity issues relating to the information they provide, associated risks, and necessary contact information for further question or concerns. It was the preference of this researcher to audio record all interviews. Seale and Silverman (1997, p.380) argue that, “recordings and transcripts [compared to field notes] can offer a highly reliable record to which researchers can return as they develop new hypotheses.” They also reduce the chances of the subject being misinterpreted through less detailed field notes. Subjects were also advised that any audio record of the interview would be kept in a secure location, destroyed after transcription, and that a number would be associated with the transcription instead of their name. Additionally, interviewees were advised that the information they provided was anonymous and that a pseudonym would be used for their name and any reference made to another person during the interview transcription.

All residents recruited for the study agreed to have their interview recorded prior to beginning their interview session. After permission was granted the audio recording device was activated and the subject was informed that recording would terminate at any point upon their request. The length of each interview varied from approximately 20 minutes to 1 hour and interview sessions were allowed to continue as long as new information emerged. To become familiar with the data all interviews were transcribed by this researcher.

**The interview guide.** The interview guide was developed by this researcher and designed to answer the two primary research questions for this study. Despite the number and organization of these questions, semi-structured interviews do not require strict adherence to the interview guide. Rather, it is a tool to help manage and direct the flow of conversation, beginning with general questions about the community before gradually progressing to questions relating to person encounters with police and ATP. Interview subjects were also allowed to articulate their stories and feelings in their own words without direction from the interviewer. For interviewees who are less articulate, the interview guide includes probing questions meant to help clarify or expand on a response.

During the interview process the researcher also took copious notes. Taking notes has several benefits that are not achievable with audio recording alone. One example is that the interviewer can develop a list of important points or themes the subject discusses. Rather than interrupting the natural flow of conversation to have the respondent elaborate, the interviewer can refer back to the list when conversation stalls or redirect the conversation when necessary (Patton, 2002). Another example of the value of interview notes is the ability to capture things that audio recording cannot. A respondent's demeanor, body language, and gestures can all be noted and used to supplement the audio recording.

Questions on the interview guide are open-ended and designed to elicit a detailed response. Not all questions listed on the interview guide were asked in every interview. Instead, several of the questions acted as probing questions and



were asked if the subject did not answer the previous question with sufficient detail. For example, the question *“When and why have you had contact with the police while living in this community?”* was not always followed by *“How did the officer talk to you?”* In many cases the subject will recounted how (s)he was spoken to by the officer during the response to the broader question regarding when and why they had contact with a police officer. The wording of questions was also altered to conform to the natural flow of the conversation.

Table 3.2: Interview Guide<sup>13</sup>

Interview Questions

- 
- When and why have you had contact with the police while living in this community?
  - How did the officer(s) talk to you?
  - How did the officer(s) treat you physically?
  - What was the outcome of that contact?
  - Describe any conversations you had with other members of the community regarding this event.
- 
- Do the police behave differently here than in other places?
  - Who do the police tend to stop in this community?
  - Do the police deal with certain people differently than others? How?
  - Do the police follow the rules or do things their own way? Explain.
  - What do you think officers think about the residents of this community?
  - Whose interests are the police serving?
  - Do the police seek input from the residents of this community?
- 
- Have the police changed for better or worse over time? How?
  - What or who has influenced your views the most?
  - Describe the first time you remember discussing the police with someone in your community.
  - Have people in this community always felt this way about the police? If not, what caused the change?
- 
- What are the problems that police have to deal with in [Dorner Homes / Brookside Court]?
  - Who in this community is most likely to view the police in a positive way?
  - Who in this community is most likely to view the police in a negative way? Why?
  - Overall, how do you think other residents [Dorner Homes / Brookside Court] feel about the police in your community?
- 
- How often do you hear others in the community talking about the police?
  - What types of incidents are generally being discussed?
  - What is the typical tone of the conversation (e.g., positive, negative)?
  - Describe how the topic of police arises in your household
  - How do conversations about police shape your views of police?
  - Who in this community are you most likely to discuss police behavior with?
  - Describe how the topic of police arises in your conversations with other residents of this community.
- 
- Is there anything else I should know about how police are perceived in this community?
- 

<sup>13</sup> The questions are grouped by content area in table 3.2 and are not depicted in the order they appear on the interview guide.

## Researcher's Role

It is important for all qualitative research to acknowledge the role of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Before continuing on to a discussion of the analytic strategy it is necessary to disclose the potential for bias related to the researcher. This researcher was formerly employed as a probation officer and thus has experience as a criminal justice professional. This should not have biased the interviewees' responses as this researcher was not employed in the South Carolina criminal justice system, so it is unlikely interviewees possessed this knowledge. Race and sex may be the most obvious source of potential bias. The interviewer is a white male and black females were the majority of interview subjects for this research. Race is an important factor in ATP and it will likely be discussed during the interview process. Davis (1997) found when interviewer race is a factor, it is typically a factor with overt questions about race but not with less direct question about race. The interview guide for this research (see Table 3.2) does not include direct questions about race. When race became a topic of discussion it did so through the natural progression of the discussion. Gender differences may have affected the interview process as well (Kane & Macaulay, 1993), but how and to what extent is less clear. To reduce the potential for bias related to race and gender differences, to the extent that is realistically possible, this researcher relied on other community members vouch for his credibility and attempted to build rapport with each subject leading up to the interview. Methodological rigor in the data analysis stage also helped minimize subsequent bias.

## Analytic Strategy

This research makes use of qualitative data through a systematic hierarchical coding scheme in which codes are grouped into categories, which are then used to develop concepts or themes, which ultimately inform theory. In other words, the process moves from specific to general and from the real to the abstract (Saldana, 2009). This process begins with the transcription of audio data to an electronic document. ATLAS.ti 6, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), is then used to organize and store data and assist with data analysis. Saldana (2009, p.3) defined coding as “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” And Strauss (1987) contended that the quality of qualitative research typically reflects the quality of the associated coding. The initial stage of analysis requires both indicative and deductive coding of the data. Inductive coding proceeds through a review of interview transcripts and assigning codes to the sections that reflect the concepts and themes identified in the literature and that are represented in the interview questions (see Table 3.2). Deductive coding identifies additional concepts and themes expressed by the interviewees that were not represented in the literature or interview questions. This is a particular strength of the deductive process and is important because it allows the data to speak to the researcher rather than the researcher imposing restrictions on the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2005). Ultimately the use of inductive and deductive coding can help paint a more accurate picture of the ATP process.

An exhaustive list of codes was developed and examined to see if they share common characteristics. Codes that share common characteristics are grouped into code categories.<sup>14</sup> For example, “avoid neighbors,” “few friends,” and “residents are ignorant,” are codes related to interviewees’ descriptions of the social environment in their housing community. In this example all three codes are grouped in a code family called “communication between residents” Code categories are examined to see if they can be clustered and are present across the data. The presence of both of these characteristics indicates an overall theme in the data. Ideally, explaining how these processes interrelate will help revise existing theory or inform a new theoretical explanation.

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<sup>14</sup> *Code categories are sometimes referred to as “code families.”*

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMUNITY**

This chapter focuses on how residents of Dorner Homes and Brookside Court perceive their respective communities through two themes that emerged during the interview process. The first theme relates to the community setting and the fact that crime and criminal behavior are a persistent part of life in Dorner and Brookside. Gangs were cited as a problem in both communities but residents did not always agree on the extent of the gang activity in their communities. Residents of both communities also felt that much of the criminal activity in their communities was initiated by non-residents who think the public housing community is an easy place to make money illegally (a “quick hustle”). Guests of residents and non-resident males living with resident females illegally were cited as the source of problems in both communities as well. Noting the frequency of these issues, residents described becoming numb or apathetic to their occurrence.

The second theme presented in this chapter focuses on the absence of a sense of community in Dorner Homes and Brookside Court and how this limits communication among residents about the police in their communities. Residents often referred to other residents as ignorant and claimed they tried to avoid other people in the community whenever possible. Negative perceptions also extended to children in the community, many of whom were described as being

out of control due to incompetent parents. Only older and elderly residents were consistently described as being respected by other residents, including those engaging in criminal activity. This has created a situation where dialogue between residents about the police and why police are in the community is limited to brief acknowledgment of their presence and little more.

These findings are important because they provide insight on daily life in Dorner Homes and Brookside Court and help explain social interaction in both communities. They also provide context for the residents' perceptions of police and the nature of police-citizen interactions in these communities, which are presented in Chapter Five.

### **Crime is Part of Daily Life**

Residents of both housing communities claimed that criminal behavior is a regular occurrence in their community. Shootings and drug dealing were mentioned frequently by residents and they tended to associate this behavior with gang activity. Residents, especially those living in Dorner Homes, also believed that people who did not live in their housing community were responsible for a large portion of the criminal activity. Finally, citing the volume of criminal activity and apparent inability to stop it, some residents claimed to have ceased trying to fight crime in their communities.

Shootings were a primary concern among residents but they also felt that fighting and drug dealing were common. Yvonne (49) claimed it is normal to “be

sittin' in the yard and see somebody sellin' drugs in front of you.”<sup>15</sup> Carole (40) mentioned that a young male got shot recently in Dorner Homes. She claimed that “the boy he had got shot in his right side... from his abdomen all the way down” and that the shooting was “gang related.” Although the frequency of shooting, fighting, and drug dealing was widely agreed upon by residents of both communities, there was less agreement on who was responsible for these acts.

Like Carole, some residents in both Dorner and Brookside associated criminal behavior in their community with gang activity. Calvin (30), a resident of Dorner Homes, said, “There is a lot of gang violence. It’s a nice neighborhood, but it can get crazy at times.” Janette (42) thought that gangs were involved in a variety of criminal activity in Dorner Homes. When asked what type of criminal activity gangs were associated with in the community Janette responded, “you name it, it’s goin’ on. The gangs is involved in it.” Cleo (58) provided a specific example of how gang violence tends to start in her neighborhood: “Yes, these gangs that sits out here, that come behind [our building] and sits on the trash compactor. They gather out there and be dealin’ drugs or sellin’, ya know. Then they get to arguin’ and fighting.” This, as Yvonne (49) described, can also result in the victimization of residents who were not involved. Yvonne stated:

“We had an incident where a lady across the street was sittin’... I was at work that day though and I got a call at work. She was sittin’ out there in that yard waitin’ on a ride to go to work or somethin’, and some gangs started comin’ out here in the afternoon and arguin’ about drugs or something’ and she messed around and got shot in the leg in broad daylight. So things like that do come about and do happen, but not as often.”

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<sup>15</sup> The age of the resident is indicated in parentheses immediately following his or her name.



Lottie (28) claimed that some of the younger females in the community were also involved in gang activity and claimed they are sometimes aggressive toward other females. Lottie provided a recent example in which a girl assaulted a female gang member who had been bullying her. She claimed that the bullying victim “stabbed the [female gang member] in the head... she went to jail. But this girl had been bullying this girl the whole time. The girl was like a part of the little Blood gang out here.” Nisha (33) agreed that gang activity, and the Bloods specifically, are a part of daily life in her housing community. She explained:

“Gangs are real bad out here. The red color stuff. I've seen [police] drive by and people are like *fuck the police!* They have big bottles of liquor... Little boys now, I'm talkin' about little boys, like 14, 15 sayin' fuck the police. Some of them have been through it and they know they're only gonna get like 30 days down there in [juvenile detention] and nothing's gonna happen. The older people ride by in their nice cars and pay them little change to go out there and shoot at somethin' or commit little crimes. I sit here and I see this. I sit here with my window cracked and I'm listenin' and lookin'. It's scary. It's sad, it's so sad.”

Lisa (30) agreed and noted how gang activity was the reason why she rarely spent free time in the housing community:

“You know, and there's been gang activity out here – a lot of that. And that be one of the reasons why I was kinda nervous about moving out here. Because during the summer time it's more present as far as the gangs and the drugs and stuff like that, 'cause you hear the shootings and stuff. So I'm like we go... I take my kids to the park and stuff like that. We go somewhere else.”

Other residents in both communities acknowledge that gang activity can be a problem in their housing community, but claimed that it does not affect them on a daily basis. Lottie (28) acknowledged that her community is considered a “Blood neighborhood” but the gang problem was not as serious as people thought. She explained by saying:

“This neighborhood is considered a Blood neighborhood okay, so that gang is just supposed to be like [stretches arms out indicating a big or powerful thing]... But it's not as bad as people think it is. It's just like... They just scared because of the things that happened in the past in the neighborhood. It might have been really bad, but to me it's not that serious, it's not that bad. It's not like if I wear blue [color associated with rival gang] and go out the door they [Bloods] are gonna be like [aggressive gesture]... No, it's not even like that.”

Lottie's belief that gang activity was more prevalent in the past was also echoed by other residents. Even Yvonne, who describe drug dealing as a major problem in her community, felt that gangs were less involved than they had once been. She claimed that “we don't really have no gangs out here you know. Maybe back in the day it was a problem, but... We don't really have no problems with gangs out here.”

There also was some confusion over who in the community belonged to a gang. Cali (42) noted:

“you couldn't point out and say that's a gang member, you know. At night, you know, sometimes things do get heated at night out here and stuff. But I would put it like that because there be some out here but you couldn't tell. You wouldn't know it.”

Cleo (58) believed this was because gang colors were not always an accurate indication of gang affiliation or membership. She claimed that younger residents “run around here in these gang colors and stuff like that, some of them is in gangs and some is not. People wear they colors. They wear what they want to wear... it's like a style too.”

Gang related or not, residents tended to feel that the problems in their community are initiated by people who do not live in the community. Older residents in particular felt this way, while younger residents thought the problems

were from residents and non-residents. Linda (50) said that her housing community is “not that bad” and that “It’s just the people that come in, it’s not the residents [committing crime].” When asked why non-residents would choose to enter the housing community to engage in illegal behavior Carole (40) claimed that it is because “they know they can get a quick hustle.” While residents did not claim that non-residents entered the community intent on committing violent acts, some felt their presence was related to violence in the community. Lisa (30) explained how this can even effect residents who are not involved:

“They come over here and they can go back to where they stay and live in peace, but they leave all they drama up here. Oh yeah, they'll sit on your porch if it's dark they'll sit right there [points toward front door]. I got up one morning and found blood droplets and all that stuff and I had to clean that up because so they won't think that that's me. Yeah, so that's why I keep my lights on now.”

Dorner and Brookside residents also indicated that non-residents engaging in criminal behavior in their community were often connected to a resident in some way. Gia (35) suggested that “some of ‘em are either living with a female, or it might be their sister or family member.”<sup>16</sup> Irma (52) believed the connection to residents was less direct and claimed that, “crime is not from the residents [themselves]. It's like my company brings company with them and, you know ... They just act like this is their little stop area. They just make this area the worst of all.”

It was clear that residents believed that non-residents engaging in criminal activity are often males who stay with female residents, despite housing

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<sup>16</sup> The majority of housing units in Dorner Homes and Brookside Gardens are leased to females.

regulations that prohibit such behavior. Cleo's (58) explanation reflected the general feelings about this among older residents:

"It's them young girls we got out here. They let these young girls come in with those babies and they ain't payin' no rent. And then they have they men, those drug boys sittin' out there with them, sometimes stayin' in the house with them. Matter of fact, they just busted two houses like that."

David (51) was the only resident that discussed attempts to remove non-residents from the community. He claimed that non-resident males "ain't gonna leave quietly" and tended to resist attempts to remove them from the community.

Regardless of its origin, the frequency of criminal behavior in the community has left many residents numb to its occurrence. Monique's (27) reaction to criminal behavior also reflects the general reaction of many residents:

"Sometimes I get so sick of seeing this stuff out here. Most of the time I'll just go in the House. Or, my girlfriend will call and say *you know the police are out here*. I'll look out my window and I'll be like okay, I done seen this so many times I don't want to see it no more. And I'll stay in the house."

During her interview session, Carole (40) guided the interviewer to the living room window of her second floor apartment and pointed to seven young black males standing in a group below. She claimed that they were all drug dealers and that dealers congregated in that spot "every day, 24-7." She then expressed frustration that this behavior is just "accepted" by other residents.<sup>17</sup> Other residents indicated that they used to call police, but no longer do so because the people engaged in criminal activity would return shortly after police had left the area. Jasmine (30) claimed that "there are people in my neighborhood who no longer even call the police if a certain couple is fightin..."

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<sup>17</sup> Carole stated that she has called police about this several times but the drug dealers become aware of their presence and disburse before being confronted by the police. This will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Because you know [the police] will be back out here tomorrow for [the same thing].” Even some residents that had been proactive about calling the police and dealing with crime expressed a reluctant acceptance of the presence of criminals in their community. India’s (33) recount of a shooting outside of her apartment, in which she expressed little visible emotion, reflects this feeling:

“I was asleep at 3 o'clock in the morning and I heard gun shots. I woke up and I saw my neighbor, who was a pregnant girl at the time, walking to the trash can. She went, I think first she went to the back of the car, her boyfriend went to the back of the car to the trunk, and this was after the gun shots was fired and then I saw her walking to the trash can. She didn't have on slippers, it was 3 o'clock in the morning, she didn't have a jacket and she was like seven months pregnant. So then the police came out and whoever the guy shot, he tried to make his way across the courtyard and he died across the courtyard. So when the police came I called and I said I'm not going to talk unless you can promise this call won't be traced back to me. And then I told them what I saw. I heard the gun shots. I saw the guy go back to his trunk. I saw him come back to the house. I saw the girl leave and take the whatever, I'm assuming it was the gun that she got rid of, to the dumpster across the field, and so I told [the police] you guys are gonna come - and hurry. And so they came, and uhm, the girl still lives there with her kids and the guy who shot the dude parks next me.”<sup>18</sup>

### **No Communing in These Communities**

There is a negative perception of other residents in both communities as well. “Ignorant” behavior and the general disposition of other housing residents were cited as reasons to avoid other residents. They were also cited as reasons why many youths in both communities misbehave and/or engage in criminal activity. However, only older female residents and a select few male residents are accorded the respect necessary to effectively deal with criminal activity directly. Additionally, residents’ described discussions about police as limited to a small group of neighbors and often do not extend beyond acknowledgement of

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<sup>18</sup> India mentioned later that she heard the man who had been shot was in the process of stealing a car stereo and was caught in the act and shot by the owner.

police presence. Instead, in depth discussions are limited to parents' attempt to educate their children about the benefits of having police in the community.

Most Dorner and Brookside residents described their neighbors in negative terms, tending to cite ignorance, poor child rearing skills, and lack of respect for one another as the primary issues. References to "ignorant" neighbors took one of two general forms. First, some residents cited specific behavior of other residents that did not make sense to them or was "ignorant" behavior. For example, some residents were described as likely to move toward and watch police-citizen interactions, even when they had no personal stake in what was going on. Others were described as having loud parties, using the wrong parking spaces, and being argumentative in general. Rene(40) mentioned all three of these issues when talking about the people who lived next door to her:

"Okay we be havin' a cookout and your music is too loud, don't get mad at police, they just come do they job. 'Cause your not really supposed to disturb your neighbors. Everybody should be comfortable. I mean if you talk to everybody and they say it's okay don't get mad and want to curse at police and curse your neighbors because somebody called. It coulda been anybody in the neighborhood that knew you havin' a party. Just keep your music at a minimal. But they don't understand. Just like I had an incident this weekend. My neighbor and the neighbor like 2 or 3 doors down, they argue about parking spaces. Okay, this is my thing, there are plenty of days I come and I don't have a parking space. But I park over here or across the street or by the office. As long as your company don't spend the night... As long as when your company leave I can come park back over here in front my door I'm good. They arguin' and cursin'.... Mumblin' all the way to they car and I heard everything they said about they had to park across the street. It's okay to park across the street 'cause you never know how much company you gonna have. They just ignorant, stupid people."

Comments from other residents indicated a deeper problem. Specifically, that many of their neighbors did not simply do ignorant things from time to time, but that they were ignorant people that should be avoided altogether. Nisha's (33) noted that "This is the projects so you gonna have ignorant people that's going to act in a ignorant way." Adrienne (52) claimed she was afraid for her children because "people out here are ignorant and don't take life seriously." Rene (40) expressed similar concerns, and stated that "Some of these people, their maturity level goes at 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. They're just as ignorant as the kids."

Regarding children, residents tend to feel that many adults in the community are not effective parents and that they are responsible for the "ignorant" behavior of their children. Lavana (38) claimed that lack of supervision is the primary issue. Some parents, she claimed, do not care about their children and let them "run wild and do whatever they want." Lottie (28) claimed that drug addicted parents were also a problem. She said, "you know, I mean it's all kind of stuff like people are ignorant. It's crackheads as parents that is just prevalent in this neighborhood. Carole (40) noted that she had "seen kids this damn high [holding hand three feet above the floor]. And it was about 9 o'clock at night, but they parents was out the door." Robin (23) felt this problem can be addressed with formal means:

"You got kids who be out, be out all times of the night. Supposed to be a curfew out here. Don't see nobody enforcing the curfew. Got little Peewee walking - and he just started walking. He's down here and his mamma lives way over there. You know it's like that don't help either. It really don't."

It was also apparent that some children were seen as a source of criminal behavior. Mike (19) claimed to know a lot of kids that were involved with criminal activity and stated “you know, these kids out here is bad, people out here is bad man. So they out here tryin' to do stuff – illegal stuff.” In Cleo’s statement (included above) she mentions “drug boys.” This phrase was used frequently by residents and often preceded an expression of frustration with how to deal with “ignorant” children in the community. Lottie (28) explained:

“Because [minors] do stuff and then it’s like, now see, I can’t hit you. Then I go tell your momma and you’re out the door in five minutes. Don’t even know if she said anything to you about what you’re doing. So it’s like, well dang, do I call the police?”

How residents decide to deal with this type of behavior is often determined by the level of respect they have in the community. How respect is earned in the two housing communities was not universally agreed upon by residents. Some believe respect is a reciprocal process between residents, or as Yvonne put it:

“You give respect you get respect. If you somebody they know, if you drink, you get drunk and out here actin' like a fool and you showin' your behind pretty much all the time out here, when you try to chastise someone else they're not going to listen to you. You know, and it's pretty much you give respect you get respect.”

Older females were cited as the most respected people in both communities, while older males were perceived as earning less respect because they tend to be alcoholics and/or drug addicts. India (33) claimed “It’s almost like an unwritten rule. If an old lady tells you to do something you just do it.” This appears to apply to those engaged in illegal activity as well. India (33) explained:

“When an elderly woman in an African-American community like mine points her finger or threatens you, even for the most grimy of gangsters, they acknowledge that and say *maybe I’m going to just go sell someplace*



e/se. Maybe because in the community a lot of people are raised by their grandmothers and so they see, you know, their grandmother in this woman's eyes when she's trying to correct them from doing harm, and so they just kind of go someplace else."

Although older females were viewed as the most respected people in the community, none of the residents interviewed for this research indicated that older females are given respect freely or proactively by those engaging in criminal behavior. In other words, residents did not claim that a drug dealer would avoid selling drugs in front of an older female's apartment unit. Rather, drug dealers sell drugs in front of the unit until they are asked (or told) to leave, at which time they typically comply.

Age is also important with regard to respect between residents. Among females, elderly females are accorded the most respect and adolescent females are accorded the least. Yvonne, who is forty-nine years old, claimed that she was given more respect than younger females but not as much as elderly females. She claimed that drug dealers will move away from her apartment when she asks them to, "but they'll talk junk as they leave." Younger females, such as Larisha (24), claimed their request would be dismissed completely. Larisha explained:

"If they see an elderly person fall or that's in distress they're going to go help that elderly person. You know, they have just that much respect for them, so they have more influence. Like if an elderly lady was to come out and see a boy selling drugs or something right in front of her face then he's most likely to feel shame and say let me go over here or let me move away from here, versus someone my age goin' out there they may be like you want some?"

Both male and female residents indicated that a male of any age could not make the same request without a physical confrontation ensuing. While they could not request that criminal activity cease without negative repercussions,

males still interact with people engaged in criminal and/or gang activity. Some residents described criminal and noncriminal males as interacting without a problem as long as the noncriminal males did not interfere with other's criminal activity. Gia (35) explained how this works with her son and some gang members in the community:

"We moved here in the summer time... He just said that's not the crowd he preferred to be with. So he just stay out of their way and they stay out of his way. And the funny thing is all of them know him because he plays ball with most of them. They'll speak to him but they know he's not into none of that and they just speak and let him go about his business."

According to India (33), the only exception to this appears to be males who are "exceptional people in the community that have had the chance to overcome some serious things." When asked to elaborate India claimed that Mr. Cothran, an older male in the community, was the perfect example. She stated:

"Somebody like Mr. Cothran who speaks on behalf of all the people who live under the housing authority, of course he wouldn't be associated with drugs, but he does get a lot of respect because he can, you know... He's been down that path. So he can identify with a drug dealer and tell him *you need to get from in front of my door selling those drugs or I'm going to call the police on you.*"

**Communication between residents about police.** Consistent with their general perception about one another, residents claimed to have small social networks with their communities. Discussions about police tended to be limited to these social networks and occur infrequently. When asked if she ever talks about the police with anyone in the community Larisha (24) responded, "No, no. 'Cause we really stay to ourselves" and that "we go to class, go to work, that's it. We really don't communicate with people outside of our house." Larisha's claim that

she does not communicate with others in her community was similar to that of other residents.

While most residents did not claim complete social isolation from other housing residents, their communication networks were limited, and often consisted of 1 - 3 other residents who lived in the same building or a building within sight of their own building. In the following comment, Cleo (58) explains where the residents she associates with live in Dorner Homes. All of the complex she mentions are within sight of her apartment and the network of fellow residents that she associates with was the largest reported by any resident of Dorner or Brookside.

“I don’t associate with a lot of people around here. Let me tell you something, to be honest, this is how I am. Only body I associate with is the people in this building, ‘bout one, two, people across the street right there [points toward the complex on the other side of the service road]. One guy over in the M building, he’s an elder man, one or two people in the L building, and one people in P building. Used to be two people in this building behind me but there’s one now named Mr. Grant, he in a wheelchair. But anybody else, I don’t associate with ‘em.”

The term “neighbor” was often reserved for these specific residents, while all others tended to be referred to generally as “people” or “people who live around here.” Other than communication with “neighbors” most residents claimed they did not associate with other housing residents or, as Mary (32) put it, “I’m just one of those people that keeps to myself. I try not to get involved.” Lottie (28) claimed that she did not like to involve herself with other residents either, because other residents of Dorner Homes could not be trusted. She claimed “they just snakes out here. Real snakes out here.” Janette (42) indicated that even if you did talk to someone about police the story would probably be

inaccurate because “the story could be switched around a hundred times before you get to it.” Jamel (24) said that he often walks through Brookside Court because he does not own a car. Even though Jamel has regular opportunities to interact with other residents, he also chooses to keep to himself, claiming “I just chill with my dog and keep it movin’. I don’t cause no problems, I don’t know nobody, I just keep it movin’. I don’t speak, I just keep it movin’.” Tina (32) claimed that Brookside Court was not always a place where you tried to avoid social interaction with other residents.<sup>19</sup> She explained:

“I came out here and was like it's nice, everything is so quiet out here. I don't know why people don't want to move out here, it's so quiet. And for the first two years I was out here it was like that. It was nice to be able to walk around. It was like – I didn't have no problems walkin' around anytime of the day or nothin'. The kids was playing nice, it seemed like parents got along better. But, those first two years, the circle in the back, those building was empty. They were renovating, so the whole complex wasn't filled to capacity, so it's like I kinda had a false sense of hope when I first moved in here. 'Cause I was like ah it's so quiet, I don't know why anybody didn't want to be out here. Then when they opened up the circle in the back it was like okay. I had to get used to there being more people out here. But I stay in my apartment anyway. I used to sit out on the steps. I don't do that anymore. And it's like, you know, I don't know what happened.”

Noting their limited social networks, residents of Dorner and Brookside claimed that if police were discussed, it was usually related to teaching a child about police or because police officers were in their immediate proximity. Darren (29) thought that most children in the community were “raised not to like [police]” but most residents did not feel this way. Mothers in both communities tended to describe one of two ways they have communicated with their children about

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<sup>19</sup> Although Tina did not indicate exactly when the change occurred in Brookside Court, based on the length of her tenure in Brookside and the renovations she mentioned, she is likely referring to a time approximately 1 – 2 years prior to the date of the interview.

police, with both related to a teaching experience. The first type of discussion was meant to clarify the role police play in the community. Mary (32) described a related discussion with her son:

“My kids, they were at one time afraid of the police. That’s because every time they see them, bein’ in a bad neighborhood, [police] are pullin’ out their guns – *please get down on the floor*. So you know, that scares [my kids]. But as they grew up I would explain to them, even though you see them do bad things like that – which I consider bad because we don’t promote guns in my house – they’re actually doing it to protect us. So that person they’re tellin’ to freeze and they’re pullin’ they’re guns out did something bad. So don’t look at them doin’ something harmful to you. They’re actually trying to protect you and the community.

Monique (27) described a similar discussion that she had with her son:

“My son asked me Mom, do police always chase people with guns? So I have to explain to him sometimes... No that's when you're being bad. If you're not bad police aren't going to bother you, police are here to help you. Stuff like that. 'Cause if something happen they need to know that I can go talk to him or I can go talk to her. Or, if something's wrong with me I can go talk to her. You know, kids need to know those types of things. Because if there's a situation they're just gonna be like well he ain't gonna help me, he's just gonna ride by in his car. So you know, interact more with your neighborhood that you patrol. And the ones that mainly won't like it are the ones that sell the drugs or doin' break-ins or whatever.”

Like Mary and Monique, Kim’s (30) discussions about police were meant to help clarify the role of police in the community, but she also emphasized the need to teach her children that police are a viable option for dealing with problems. She claimed:

“If something happen they need to know that I can go talk to him or I can go talk to her. Or, if something’s wrong with me I can talk to her. You know, kids need to know these types of things. Because if there’s a situation they’re just gonna be like *well he ain’t gonna help me, he’s just gonna ride by in his car.*”

Unlike discussions with children, when police are mentioned in conversations between residents, they are not the main topic of discussion. Rather, residents

tend to focus their conversations on the incident that caused police to arrive and there is little to no discussion regarding ATP. Lora's (55) described how this can work:

You know, it all depends on the officer and it all depends on the crime that was committed. If it's like domestic violence, like the girl who stays in [Apartment #5], like when her and her boyfriend got into it, and he kept knocking on the door and she was like get away from the door. The police came one time and told him to get off the property. He was on drugs so he came back and started knocking on the door 'cause he wanted his phone. And we was sittin' out there talkin, right then she could have just give him his phone and maybe he'll just leave an go on but she tried to hold on to his cell phone and called the police back. They came and took him to jail. And we just discussed if she would have given him the phone he probably would have gone on because he had just got out of jail. And we was like if she would have just give him the phone he probably woulda went on about his business. But by she holdin' on to the phone and not givin' him the phone caused him to get locked up. Stuff like that, you know, yeah conversations like that. It all depends on the crime and how police act to that particular crime.”

Conversations about police behavior in the community that were not directly observed by the residents were described as brief and containing few details.

The following exchange between the interviewer and a Brookside Court resident demonstrates how police fit in these conversations:

Resident: If somebody got shot or something you hear about the police being here. Or just like yesterday some girl got jumped on and the police were out here.

Interviewer: When you have those conversations is it more about what happened, the person getting jumped, or...

Resident: It's more about the person getting jumped on, not more about the police.

Interviewer: So the police just showed up. And it was more just a part of the story, but not the main part?

Resident: Yeah, the police showed, the girl got jumped on, the police was there... The topic, as far as the police, what I hear if I'm

sittin' on the porch when the sun is going down, it's dark...  
*Hey did ya'll see the police?* Talk commin' from the dope  
boys. That's it.

Even though police are not discussed at length and most residents claim to associate with only a few people in their communities, most residents claimed to know when police are interacting with someone in their neighborhood. Residents often claimed that people in their community could be nosy and that they would tell everyone when police were around. Janette (42) mentioned this and referred to nosy neighbors as “flies.” She said “Oh we, got a nosy person down there on the end, Mrs. Woosley, she a fly. She stops you and tells you.” Irma (52) described herself in this way and claimed that residents she associates with will ask about police activity in the neighborhood. Still, she claimed they tend not ask in general, and only when “[the police] are on the scene and they want to know if I'm out there being nosey.”

## **Summary**

The first theme presented in this chapter focused on how residents of Dorner Homes and Brookside Court public housing communities described crime as a daily part of life. Residents claim that many of the issues are gang-related and caused by people who do not live in the housing communities. Because of the prevalence of criminal activity and perception of nothing being done about it, residents also claim to have become desensitized to its occurrence. The second theme was about communication between residents about crime. The interview data suggests communication is typically limited to a resident teaching his or her children about police, or a brief discussion with up to three friends in the

community. It appears that these small social networks in the community are a result of the perception that most other residents think and behave in an ignorant manner. The next chapter presents the remaining themes, which deal with perception of police and police-citizen interaction in Dorner Homes and Brookside Court.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE

This chapter focuses on perceptions of police among residents of Dorner Homes and Brookside Court and how interactions with police help shape those perceptions. The chapter begins by presenting themes related to individual resident's ATP and perception of other residents' attitudes respectively. Residents' personal perceptions of police varied, and were often a complex mix of positive overall perceptions coupled with negative anecdotes about specific police officers. Older residents tended to express more positive ATP and younger residents less positive ATP. Residents of both communities also thought police were more proactive in other communities and slow to react to calls for service from public housing residents. Additionally, most residents believed that others in their community had a negative perception of police. Negative perceptions were often attributed to another resident's age, with older resident's being perceived as having the most positive ATP and younger residents having the least positive ATP. Residents who participate in illegal activities were also routinely cited as having less positive ATP. Although most residents perceived other community members as having negative ATP, they claimed that other residents' opinions did not influence their own.

A second set of themes captured the interaction between police and residents. The first theme relates to how residents feel about interacting with police in their community and presented two different perspectives identified by residents. Some residents felt thought they could avoid a negative experience with police by acting nice during the interaction. Other residents felt that it is best to avoid police altogether. The second theme in this area relates to residents' perceptions of how an interaction proceeds and focuses specifically on how residents perceive the quality of treatment by an officer and the officer's decision related to the interaction. A final theme addresses the complications related to requesting police services identified by the residents of Dorner and Brookside. Several residents claimed they preferred to handle criminal behavior themselves rather than calling police but indicated different reasons for doing so.

### **Positive About Police But Not Always About Interaction**

Attitudes toward police varied among residents of Dorner and Brookside, especially related to the resident's age. Although most residents had a positive perception of police in general, younger residents were less likely to have a positive perception. Perceptions were also highly dependent on, and often limited to, the behavior of an individual officer. The few generalizations that were made tended to relate to police not being proactive enough, response time, and failure to follow-up after the initial response.

**Attitudes toward police.** Attitudes toward police tended to be more complex than basic positive or negative feelings. For instance, even residents that indicated they have a positive overall opinion of police also tended to cite

specific incidents or police behavior that they did not like. The most positive attitudes were held by older residents in both communities, who were happy to have police deal with problems in the community. Lora (55) said “From what I’ve seen, I respect them. I’ll be glad to see them comin’ if somethin’ goes wrong, let’s put it that way.” Older residents also tended to refer to specific situations in which the police had a positive influence on a family member. Irma (52) expressed her positive opinion of police through a situation where they helped her daughter:

“My daughter, she was a little trouble maker herself and we sat down and had [the police] get involved with it. They seemed to say *this is the way we’ll do it*. They gave her something positive and they stayed on her. They went to her school. They checked in on her school. So then I started to see how they were making her more comfortable and making her see the right way to go about things.”

Attitudes among younger residents were less concrete than older residents and their views were constructed through a businesslike perspective rather than personal experience. Younger residents often referred to policing as an occupation and identified making arrests and deterring crime as the primary objectives of that occupation. Jamel (24) said “police do pretty good” in his community and claimed that “they got a job to do. When they come they do what they gotta do.” Lisa’s (30) comment also represented the views of many residents when she said “I like them, I respect them. That’s what they do, they come out and protect. That’s what they supposed to do.” Interviewees relayed this information with little outward expression of emotion. Their gestures and facial expressions did not change as they conveyed the information, nor did their tone of voice. In other words, there was no indication that the residents found this type of behavior by police exceptional. Instead, these statements were likely

more indicative of a basic level of satisfaction with police job performance rather than outright praise.

Lack of enthusiasm about police among younger residents', despite their claims that police are successful at their job, appear to be because they also feel unjustly targeted by police. Lottie (28) said that younger residents in the community "might not be guilty of what police are lookin' for but [police] still think they guilty of somethin'." John (20) has an overall positive view of police but described how being symbolic assailant (Skolnick, 1966) stressed him, claiming that "[the police] stop you if you look suspicious. Like say if I'm walkin' down the street, if I'm walkin' fast they're gonna stop me because they think I'm up to somethin'." John claimed this would enter his mind anytime he was walking down the street and made him self-conscious about his behavior. Gia (35) also expressed a similar feeling and described how her teenage son wants to be a police officer but gets frustrated with how he is treated by police:

"They've stopped him and run his ID. They'll check him and they'll let him go ahead on. I guess 'cause he doesn't have anything on his record or anything like that. I guess they'll just look at him and be like, well okay. And they might question him, where he goin', where he comin' from, and stuff like that. He gets mad. He gets mad sometimes. He'll be like *I wasn't even doin' nothing! I was just walking through the neighborhood to go to the store. The police think everybody sell drugs and everybody gang bang.* I always tell him, well you in a high drug area so I guess you fall under the same category as everybody else. He says *everybody don't sell drugs or gang bang, and if I wasn't doin' anything then why should I be stopped?* I can see his views on that."

Older residents agree that police tend to target younger people in their community but voiced general approval of the practice. Carole (40) claimed most of the people stopped are young males walking through the community and that

“it is what they’re supposed to do because if you don’t live out here you don’t have any business being out here.” Her comments show approval for targeting this population and reflect the perception that much of the crime in her community is committed by nonresidents. Yvonne (49) was the only older resident to disagree with this perspective. Yvonne explained:

“The young teenagers, they could be standin’ in a group. They could be just be standin’ there talkin’. Like right over there you got a little brick wall and a tree, and a lot of teenagers and young men sit out there. If you in a group, that’s when [police will] pull up and they want to see ID’s and whatnot. Now it don’t make no sense ‘cause you’re sittin’ out there and you ain’t botherin’ nobody. Whether you stay out here or not, if you sittin’ out here and not botherin nobody it shouldn’t be no problem. You know, but [police] do that if you in a group. If they think you gang or you plottin’ for something they stop you and check your ID and ask you questions, make sure you stay out here and stuff like that.”

Although most residents had at least one negative thing to say about police they did not perceive all police in a negative way. Only 5 of the 60 public housing residents, all of whom were under 40-years-old, indicated they had a completely negative perception of police. All five claimed that a personal encounter with a police officer, in which they believed the officer behaved inappropriately, was the basis for their opinion about all police officers. The other residents did not make generalizations about all police and developed their opinions on a case by case basis. For instance, Tasha (36) noted that “when you’re approached by them individually you don’t judge them based on the entire department. No, it’s based on how they act.” Robin (23) claimed that “it’s only certain ones that come out here with an attitude.” Jamel (24) agreed and rationalized officers with negative attitudes in the following way: “I mean every now and again you’re gonna have a jackass on the force. It’s just like any job.”

Residents also tended not to generalize behavior expectations based on an officer's race. Rhonda (42) described a situation in which she was trying to give a white police officer information about a crime she witnessed. She claimed the officer was extremely rude to her and would not listen to what she was saying. However, Rhonda explained that she did not think that all white officers behaved that way. She explained:

"I wouldn't say all because some white officers that come out here are nice. We had one that would come out here and he would stop and talk to you. He would play with the siren for the children and he would go in his trunk and give little police badges out to the children. So no, it's different officers out here. Then you got some bad black officers as well. They look at you like you in the ghetto. And some white officers that'll do the same. But you got some white officers that'll take time with you, talk to you with the children. So it varies, it varies. I wouldn't even put race into it. It's just the individual officers."

While residents did not generalize based on an officer's race, they did indicate that an officer's age factored in their perception of police in general. Specifically, younger and/or new officers are viewed as being overly aggressive in trying to prove themselves and disrespectful when interacting with residents. Linda (50) claimed:

"Some of them need to go back to school and learn how to deal with the public. Be a people person. You need to be a people person. Some of them need to know how to talk to the public. Some of them don't. Some of them just little old rookies out here, out of the academy, and they try to come out here and make a name for themselves.

Loretta (58) recounted a specific incident between herself and a young officer that she said was an example of how new officers do not listen and are disrespectful.

"Well you know I'm gonna tell you somethin'. You've got some white officers you can deal with and some you cannot. Especially them young

rookies. If they young and white you can't deal with them. But them young black ones, I don't want no part of them neither. They are nasty! Lady got shot over here. I was tryin' to run 'cause I heard the shots. She was runnin' toward me. She said *Loretta, Loretta, I'm shot!* I said well come to me I'm not commin' over there. So I got back and was helpin' her. Now I'm a nurse technician. This here city police, a young woman, me and her got into it. I like to went to jail. She gonna tell me I can't do that, I can't help her 'cause I may do it wrong. Washing it away, I said let me tell you somethin', this lady bleadin' on my porch! She didn't get shot here, y'all need to go over there where she got shot. That's where you need to investigate, not over here. I brought her here! But she talked shit to me and want to put me in jail. I said well they didn't make one cell they made two, one for you and one for me.

Dorner Homes and Brookside Court residents' also thought that police behavior in public housing communities could not be generalized to other neighborhoods. They felt that police were more proactive in their crime control efforts and more respectful when interacting with citizens in other neighborhoods. Economic status, race, and crime were repeatedly cited as the reason for these behavior differences. Lavana (38) talked about how a variety of criminal acts occur on a regular basis on the street next to her apartment unit but police do little to stop them, and how they are more proactive in "nicer" neighborhoods. Lavana claimed this is because: "it's not a strong priority to them because it's Dorner Homes, it's the projects. But let it be further down Main Street in other neighborhoods, let's say white neighborhoods, and yeah they wouldn't even tolerate that." Two blocks away from Lavana's apartment on O'Shea Street there is an eight foot tall cement wall that separates the Dorner Homes area from an upper-class and predominately white neighborhood. She went on to describe how the police would react if people committing crime on O'Shea Street behaved the same way two blocks away in the upper-class neighborhood:

“Oh they’re not even gonna tolerate that! ‘Cause I think there was an incident some years back where an older person got assaulted over there. Oh [the police] was on it. News, all that stuff you know. I’m like okay, but then in the same breath, [the police] know O’Shea Street. I knew about O’Shea Street as a young child. Yeah, and I knew about O’Shea Street. You wanna get anything, you go to O’Shea Street. And I’m like this is known! [The police] know it’s right there. Why isn’t this a high priority area when [this police] know this is where all this is goin’ on?”

Similar feelings were expressed by Brookside Court residents. Cheryl (18) has lived in Dorner Homes and Brookside Court and claimed that police treat residents of both communities “all about the same” way, which she contends is not as well as residents of other neighborhoods. Other residents expressed similar feelings and included race as a reason for differential treatment. CJ (20) said that police treated public housing residents differently than people in other neighborhoods because “the housing communities are more of all blacks and [police] tend to have a lot of negativity because of that.” Gia (35) had a different perspective on why race is a factor in differential treatment by police. She claimed that black males in her community who sell drugs act differently than white males who sell drugs in predominately white communities. Gia explained:

“I just think it’s geared more toward African American males. If you was in an all Caucasian neighborhood do you think it would be the same thing? No. Obviously I don’t stay in a all-white neighborhood. White people probably hang out in the house or on the porch. They probably don’t hang out on the street like that, you know, pacing back and forth and flagging down cars and all kinds of stuff. You obviously make yourself look guilty when you’re out there doing that kind of stuff. Most white people that I’ve seen that got busted for drugs and stuff, they ain’t out publicizing it in the street.”

Monique (27) felt that race was only part of a larger reason that police treat public housing residents differently. She claimed that Brookside is “what they call low-



income. We're known as the projects. We're the people that live in the hood."

Bethany (33) thought that because of Brookside's "hood" status police "showed favoritism" by responding faster to calls for service in other communities. Police response time and the likelihood of police following-up after their initial response was one of the more prevalent themes in Dorner and Brookside.

**Police are slow to react.** Frequent presence of criminal activity is a reality for the residents of Dorner Homes and Brookside Court. Despite the lack of communication between residents regarding police, every resident interviewed for this study had an opinion on why police are in their community. Few residents cited proactive patrol efforts when asked why police are typically in the community. When proactive patrol was mentioned, it was described as a short-term response to direct requests from residents. Residents, such as Calvin (30), claimed police "just ride through" and do not stay in the community for an extended period of time. Mary (32) agreed, but claimed that "if you call and say you've seen some activity and you want them to patrol through and walk around, they'll do that."

Residents indicated that police patrol is a reactive effort related to a wide range of problems. Janette (42) described police presence as "nine times of ten a reaction to something bad happening." Reyna (24) said that typically they are called by a neighbor due to "something that's happened at their home. Something may have happened to one of their kids, or there may have been a shooting." Reyna's response reflects the feelings of residents in both housing communities that domestic disputes and violence are the primary reasons that

police are called. Violence, especially gunshots and drug dealing, were also frequently associated with gang activity in both communities. Bethany (33) elaborated by saying that “it’s for the boys bein’ out here. Younger boys, teenagers in the gangs, shootin’ and fightin’.”

Regardless of age or gender, Dorner and Brookside residents feel that police do not patrol their communities frequently enough, that they take too long to respond to calls for service, and that they often do not follow-up after their initial response. Both Dorner and Brookside homes have arterial roads bordering at least one side of the community. Residents of both communities indicated that if police are seen patrolling, they are typically driving by on the arterial road. Rene (40) claimed that police seldom patrol the interior of the neighborhood, stating that “I don’t hardly ever see police [inside the neighborhood]. I think like every hour they should ride through and monitor the area. Right here on the premises you hardly see ‘em. Residents also indicated police substations in their communities were not utilized properly.<sup>20</sup> Adrien’s (52) comments reflect this feeling. She claimed:

“I don’t even think they come daily. At least I don’t see them daily. They don’t come enough. They need to post up out here. They need to use [the substation]. I don’t ever see them there. They had something here a couple of months ago, a little workshop or something. I saw a lot of plain clothes walking around then, but other than that I don’t see them.”

Another perception is that police patrol less frequently at night. Residents expressed frustration with this and claimed that most of the criminal activity in

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<sup>20</sup> The city police department utilizes one apartment unit in each housing community as a police substation.

their communities occurs at night so they would prefer police to patrol more after dark. Carole's (40) words reflect this feeling:

“When everybody really comes out is when it gets dark. So you would think the police would come even more when it gets dark, but they don't. They come a little bit more during the day time than they do at night. So I don't know what the hell is with them.”

Some residents think police patrol less in their communities because police are scared of certain residents. Calvin (30) thinks that police are “scared to get out and walk around” because of the gangs in his community. Other residents think police fear is not limited to gang members and extends to “bad folks” in general in the community. Cleo explained:

“Now they approach us about drinkin' beer, which I don't drink. But they won't approach the people out here with the drugs and [other] stuff. They say they'll do somethin' but they ain't never do nothin'. They'll come up and frisk them down and be rollin' up on the wrong person! And the ones that doin' the stuff they don't say nothin' to 'em because I think they're scared of 'em.

In addition to feeling that police do not patrol enough, residents of Dorner and Brookside feel that police are slow to respond to calls for service, particularly relating to serious issues. Rhonda (42) stated that “When you call them around here it's like it's not really an emergency. They get here when they want to get here, sometimes, some police.” Residents feel that police are quickest to respond to “small issues” such as noise complaints or arguments between neighbors. However, police were described as taking much longer to arrive when called for more serious issues such as drug dealing or shooting.

Gun shots were mentioned frequently by residents. In fact, more than half of the residents interviewed for this study claimed they have heard gun shots in

their community on more than one occasion. Tina (32) claimed that she has called police several different nights because she heard people shooting guns in the wooded area behind her apartment. She said “I stay up and I’m lookin’ to see when they’re gonna come and sometimes I’ll fall asleep waitin’ to see when they’re gonna come around.” Yvonne (49) described a similar situation where she saw a young male firing a weapon in the air in front of her apartment. Yvonne called police and waited but she did not see them drive through the neighborhood. “And eventually,” she said, “I just went to bed.” Robin (23) mentioned that besides frustrating residents it made the police less effective, claiming that “by the time police get here the people are gone.”

After the police respond to calls for service in Dorner or Brookside residents feel that they are unlikely to follow-up with the issue. India (33) claimed that police often do not go back to residents and follow up after investigating a crime. Instead, she stated that police occasionally provide information about crime in the community and that it is “something they do in community meetings.” Another police follow-up issue related to residents providing information about ongoing criminal activity. Residents who claimed they had contacted police wanting to provide information indicated that police were not reliable about getting back to them. Nisha (33) described such an incident:

“I tried to call the Sergeant, I think his name was Alvin Bailey, and I have his personal cell number. I’ve been callin’ him all week and me and him talked on Sunday. I told him that I’d even... I don’t have a job and I have a small baby and I can’t afford to pay for daycare right now. So I would even be an informant right now. I offered for them to come to my apartment, because I see people, like my neighbors. And there’s stuff goin’ on, like really bad. I see guns, I see drugs, and I’ve got 5 kids. I’ve even left and lived with someone not from here. I lied and renewed my lease, but I

wasn't here. I was scared. After my apartment was broke in twice and after I see the stuff that goes on. My kids, I don't have 'em here because I'm scared. And I spoke with the officer, Mr. Bailey, thinking he was gonna get back with me. I called him... If they was to look at his phone I called him like 12 times yesterday to see were they still gonna come look and sit in my apartment or something. I sent my kids off all week so they could come in there and just observe. And no response. I haven't talked to them since Sunday. He told me he would call on Monday at 1:00 and he would get me signed-up as an informant and stuff. Monday at 1:00 I got no call and I've been tryin' to call him ever since then.<sup>21</sup>

Less variation existed in residents' perception of ATP among other housing residents. In fact, the perception that other housing residents have negative ATP is one of the stronger themes that emerged in the data.

### **I Might Like Police But Other Residents Don't**

Dorner and Brookside residents believed that other residents of their housing communities generally have negative ATP, and cited younger residents and/or those engaged in criminal activity in particular. When asked how they thought other people in their housing community feel about police, Dorner and Brookside residents believed that other residents, with the occasional exception of older/elderly residents, do not like police. This was the feeling among older and younger residents as well as male and female residents. Lottie's (28) personal ATP was mixed but she believed that negative ATP is widespread in her housing community. She stated that "nobody likes the police out here." Tina (33) added that it does not matter why police are in her community because "if the police do anything [the residents will think] they did a bad job." Other

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<sup>21</sup> Nisha's interview for this study was conducted on a Friday.

residents cited specific factors they think effect ATP including a resident's age, influence from other residents, and participation in illegal activity.

Older people were the only group of residents cited as likely to have positive ATP. Mike (19) thought older people liked police because they think police are "doin' a good job around here keepin' the peace and such." India (33) believed it is specifically the older women in the community that like police. She claimed there are several older women that live near her apartment and that they are "always watching and will not hesitate to call police." This contrasted with the perception of young people in the community, who residents believed were most likely to have negative ATP.

Residents reasoned that young people either felt harassed by police or that police disrupted their involvement in criminal activities. Gia (35) claimed that when police ride through her community she hears young people say "[police] are fittin' to come bother somebody." Rene (40) had similar comments about harassment comments and added:

"A lot of kids don't like 'em because they be sayin' little things. They be cursin', like *fuck the police!* They don't like them. They be cursin' at them every time they role by and stuff."

Younger residents tended to confirm the claims made by older residents about feelings of harassment by police. John (20) said that people his age did not like police because they were "messin' things up and harrassin' them." and Mike (19) added that youger people say police "be messin' everything up, or they stoppin' they fun." Rikki (19) explained further:

"Typically police are supposed to protect us but not a lot of people look at it like that. They think *okay, they're gonna take my son or child away.* Or,

they might pick on someone that's not doin' nothin' wrong. So they look at them like they're botherin' us."

Some residents added that children are influenced by what adults in the community say about police. Monique (27) explained that she hears people talk about police in front of children and feels that it "puts negative feelings into the younger generation." She also claimed that she often hears children talking negatively about police and said that "kids talk just like adults talk and they listen when adults do talk. Like... *My daddy said police punks because they did this, this, and this to me.*" Despite their perceived influence on children, adults in Dorner and Brookside claimed to have little to no influence on each other's ATP. Lavana's statement about influence from other people in the community reflected the feeling expressed by many residents. She claimed, "It's like a typical, you know, they just gossiping and I'm like *yeah*. Like that kinda attitude. Really don't make me feel any different." India agreed, and emphasized involvement in criminal activity as a significant influence on perception of police:

"There's nothing my neighbor is going to tell me about the police that's going to influence me because I know that once I stopped smoking weed and, you know, stopped underage drinking that I know how I was looking at [the police]. And I know that you're still in this lifestyle and so you have, kind of like, an invested interest."

Many residents shared India's thoughts on the relationship between criminal activity and perception of police. Jazmine's (30) comments reflected the feeling that friendship and/or family ties to someone who is involved in criminal activity can influence perceptions of police. She stated that "It's not always the way police behave. It's 'cause so and so's cousin got locked up the other day. And so it's not the cousin's fault the cousin is commitin' crime, it's the

police fault because the police put him in jail. That's the mentality." Lottie (28) used the following example:

"Let's say a guy is selling drugs to support his family. He goes to jail. Okay, of course his family is angry because they like *dang*, you know. But hey, he was sellin' drugs. These drugs are illegal, that's why he was tryin' to keep a low profile while doin' it."

India (33) expanded on this by claiming that "the people that get involved [in criminal activity] have that view, and the people that don't get involved but associate with people that have that view... They're willing to associate with them so they probably don't feel like their friends are doing anything wrong." India did not think that most younger residents were involved with criminal activity, but she claimed most younger residents knew someone who was, so the majority of negative attitudes toward police are formed "by association" with criminals. Some residents also connected this issue with males who stay in the community illegally with female residents. Gia (35) made this connection in the following way:

"They're part of the problem. You know, thos young girls up there, they are part of the problem. They're not going to tell the police *oh that's my boyfriend and he sell drugs*, or this, that, and the other. So they ain't, you know, they ain't workin' with them so how do they expect when something happen... You know, [police] is the first person they call, but when it was you that was the problem it wasn't no problem. But now that it's someone else all of a sudden it's a problem. You know, that go *both ways*."

A common claim was that involvement in criminal activity was likely the reason for younger residents that have less positive ATP. CJ (20) claimed that younger residents tend to say negative things about police because "they know they doin' wrong and they know the police can catch them, and they goin' down." This straight forward reasoning mirrored the businesslike approach to police



described by younger residents. Tasha (36) provided her opinion on how this thought process works among younger residents engaged in illegal activities. She noted that “young criminals” in the community think “*Why are the police bothering me? This person wants drugs and I’m going to give it to them. Or, This person wants to buy sex and I’m selling it to them.*” However, most residents indicated they personally disagreed with with this rationale. Jamel’s (24) example is illustrative:

“It’s just like... Say we be chillin’ at the gym and the police just pull up and park – they can do that. But my friends like *oh they just need to get they PD down there and they need to go.* And I’m like bro, they really ain’t botherin’ nobody, bro. I mean really, like if you gonna do what you gonna do at least do it to where nobody can see it – at least do that. I mean you in the open. This is a park with kids. You catch my vibe? So you really can’t be mad. If you get caught you get caught. You really can’t be mad at anyone but yourself. *Well the police did da-da-da-da-da.* No, that’s what they get paid for. That’s they’re job. They go home to a family just like you do. That just me man. When they ask me a question... Yes sir, no sir. Keep it simple, that’s all you got to do. I mean, it’s not even that hard. I swear to god it’s not.”

### **If You Don’t Have Anything Nice to Say To Police... Avoid Them**

Police-citizen interaction in the Dorner and Brookside communities was described as a routine occurrence by residents. Indeed, 46 of the 60 public housing residents interviewed for this study claimed to have witnessed the police interacting with someone in their community and/or interacted with police directly. Of the remaining 14 residents, 9 indicated that they knew someone in the community who had a direct interaction with police and had discussed that incident with them. Further examination of the data indicated that 3 of the 5 residents who reported no direct, witnessed, or vicarious interaction experience with police had lived in their community for 4 months or less.

Dorner and Brookside residents tended to express their views on how to interact with police in their community in one of two general ways. First, some residents had no problem interacting with police in their community and claimed that people should “be nice” during the interaction. India’s (33) comments reflect how residents justified the “be nice” perspective. She claimed:

“Since I stopped doing things that put myself in a position where I could be targeted [by police]... If I’m walking through my parking lot I’ll say hello to them. My husband does the same thing and I think it makes [police] recognize that there’s a difference between the way we behave compared to some people that might have something to hide. And so [police] react to us differently.”

Residents also indicated that waving at the police when they drive by is a way of being nice and demonstrating that you have nothing to hide. The idea that you do not have to be concerned about being suspicious if you are not engaging in criminal behavior was not shared by younger residents of either community. Of the residents interviewed for this study, Tasha (36-years-old, Brookside Court) and India (33-years-old, Dorner Homes) were the youngest members of their communities to express these views and only one male, David (51-years-old, Dorner Homes), completely agreed. Rikki (19) indicated that being nice is more of a façade for younger people. She claimed that “some people have negative attitudes toward police but they don’t show it. Then when [the police] leave they talk about how they don’t like them.”

The second group of residents thought police should be avoided altogether and expressed a variety of reasons why. Tina (32) said that she is afraid of police and tries to avoid them whenever possible. When asked why she is afraid, Tina claimed that she does not do anything illegal and that her fear was

not related to mistreatment by the police. Instead, it was a general fear going to jail. When she does come in close proximity of police, Tina said “I just do what I need to do and keep it movin’.” Others claimed that children in the community often avoid the police and tend to run away when police drive through the neighborhood. Why children decided to run from police was not clear in the data. Finally, some residents thought police should be avoided during or after any type of incident that may have occurred in the community. According to Jannette (42), police might think you are “being nose-y.” Nazarine (28) explained how this can happen when the police are investigating a crime in the community:

“You can’t even look. You can’t even walk in that direction. [The police] already don’t want you lookin’, but the fact they see you walkin’... Like someone can come and put their hand on the tape and they don’t want you to do none of that. I mean most people, for the most part, they know better. They kind of stay away. Like yesterday they stopped some dude that was walkin’ down the service road, and I don’t know what happened before hand, but most people just look and it’s like *okay let me not go in that direction*. But then you got the ignorant people that just be like *I don’t care*. You know?”

Despite some residents’ efforts to avoid police, the majority of Dorner and Brookside residents had interacted with police at least once while living in their public housing community. Themes related to the procedural aspects of these interactions and residents’ perceptions of police legitimacy are included in the following subsections.

### **Asymmetry in Procedural Justice**

Procedural elements of police-citizen interaction in Dorner and Brookside played an important role in their perceptions of police legitimacy and ATP. In general, residents perceived police to be a legitimate legal authority in their

communities and claimed to enter an interaction with an officer with this mindset. Their descriptions of various interactions with police indicated that rather than establishing legitimacy, procedural elements either confirmed a resident's existing perception of police legitimacy or eroded their existing perception of legitimacy. Descriptions of legitimacy confirmation tended to be limited to brief statements such as "he did his job" or "the officer did what she was supposed to do" and did little to change a resident's existing perception or likelihood of compliance. In contrast, descriptions of behavior that eroded existing perception of police legitimacy were typically conveyed with more detail and emotion, and tended to increase the likelihood of a resident verbally expressing his or her disagreement with the officer.

Procedural elements related to the quality of an officers treatment such as an officer being polite, respectful, benevolent, and treating residents as individuals as opposed to a "housing resident" were important to residents. Although less important than treatment, neutrality, objectiveness, and consistency all affected perceptions of the quality of an officer's decision. Most residents agreed that police in their communities followed procedure, and tended to identify police behavior that deviated from procedure as outside of the norm.

**Quality of treatment.** Although both quality of treatment and quality of the decision were discussed by residents, they expressed more concern about how the officer treated them. For instance, whether or not an officer spoke to a resident politely was important to Dorner and Brookside residents. Robin (23) said that some police officers have a "negative vibe" about them, and even

though they may not be yelling or cursing at you, the negativity is still “considered rude.” Other residents claimed some police officers will raise their voices, curse, and tell residents to “shut-up” instead of engaging in dialogue. Candice (21) noted that this can shape an interaction with police from the outset, claiming that “when police come at you rude to start, you respond in the same way.” This was a common claim among residents and confrontations between residents and police officers were often described as escalating in this way. Tasha (36) talked about a confrontation she had with police after she had been assaulted and robbed at gunpoint. After the police arrived, Tasha claimed:

“Well, they talked respectful. I just didn’t like the fact that I had already explained my story to two police officers and the investigator came out and repeatedly kept asking me the same story. My story wasn’t going to change because my story was truth. You know, it was the truth. I got a little frustrated with her because I thought they should’ve been out ridin’ around or at least tryin’ to find the guys that took my money and hit me with the gun. I was frustrated with her, and that led to another issue.”<sup>22</sup>

Residents described a variety of scenarios in which they thought police should have been more polite, but the ones they claimed to feel most strongly about involved children overhearing the officer’s comments. Referring to police officers being impolite or disrespectful, Bethany’s (33) noted that “it really makes it worse when it’s around the kids.” Nisha (33) described such a situation that occurred after the police arrested a man in her neighborhood:

“When they arrested the guy they called him a ‘stupid-assed nigger’ and said ‘*you stupid fucking junkie what the fuck is wrong with you?*’ There’s kids around here, little babies. I don’t talk like that around my kids!”

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<sup>22</sup> The “other issue” that Tasha referred to was that she began yelling at police and was eventually arrested for disorderly conduct.

Cheryl (18) claimed police behave this way toward people who are not involved in a situation as well. She claimed:

“When the police come out here they are really nasty. They have really nasty attitudes. Like, we could just be standing around tryin’ to be nosey, lookin at other people’s.... And they’ll be like *go home you...* They don’t never say it in a nice manner, they never have a positive attitude. I think they just always rude.”

Lottie (28) described a situation where this happened with her and also mentioned the issue of respect. Overall, being polite was an important part of the interaction process, but it was described by residents as a symptom of a larger problem – lack of respect. In Lottie’s words:

“You know, you’ve got to treat everybody with respect. If they greet [police nicely], police should greet [residents] back that way instead of thinking, *oh okay, they live in the projects so – hey Tyrone!* You know? One police officer asked me if I was going to fix him a pork chop or something. And I was like, what? Really? No!”

Perceived disrespect from police officers was typically associated with verbal communication. Although residents mentioned witnessing physical altercations between police and other residents, they tended to justify the officer’s behavior by claiming the resident provoked the officer’s response. For example, Tasha (36) claimed that she had seen police “get rough” with people in the neighborhood but only after “the person tried to get away.” Only one resident, Yvonne (49), claimed to feel disrespected by an officer’s physical behavior. She said that on one occasion police had searched her home because of her son, and that they were not respectful of her property. According to Yvonne:

“They ain’t just gonna come and... [picks up a magazine and sets it down gently], they be throwin’ stuff around. What they break they break. They be takin’ a knife and cuttin’ up stuff.”

Yvonne also mentioned that police did not find anything during the search and did not apologize for destroying her belongings in the process.

Disrespect through verbal communication was described as stemming from the officer’s overall approach to the interaction. Carole (40) explained how this can work through an encounter she had with police:

“They disrespect you, the way they talk to address you. Like a incident where my son. Him and his friend came in from playin’ basketball to get them somethin’ to drink and they was out sittin’ on the hood of the car drinkin’ they water and juices and whatnot. And somethin’ had happened earlier that day ‘cause when I got home from work I was up there layin’ down and then one of my son friends called me to come outside. He said Ma you need to come outside because we out here surrounded by police. So, my son was like 17 then, so I’m like he stays at my house so I want to know what’s goin’ on. I go out there and I’m like that’s my son and what’s goin’ on. [Police] got him all bent over the car. And one police told me to take my ass and go sit down. A little rookie, he was a rookie, you could tell he was a rookie. And that made me upset because I was like number one ya’ll question my son, he’s my son I want to know what ya’ll got him up against the car for and you tellin’ me to go sit my ass down. So by then one of the... I guess you call him the head officer, the head officer came up and I was upset and he asked me why I was upset. I was tellin’ him and he went and talked to the officer and was tellin’ him that was disrespectful and he shouldn’t have addressed me like that and stuff, but sometimes the officer do... You don’t want to talk to ‘em because some of them are nasty. You know?”

Mary (32) thinks that when police speak to her they convey not just disrespect, but also a disbelief in what she is saying. Sometimes, according to Mary, the police will also express this directly. Recalling one instance, she said an officer was asking her if she knew who committed a crime in the neighborhood. When Mary responded that she did not know, she claimed the officer responded by

saying “*Why don’t you just quit lyin’ and tell me who it is.*” Lana (31) described a similar experience and explained how it made her feel:

“Like, okay, if they’re questioning you they might catch an attitude because you don’t answer the way they want you to. I’m not the type that just yells or whatever... But I feel like if you’re asking someone something – especially if they don’t have to speak to you – you should give them the common courtesy to speak to them with respect. Don’t talk down at them. Don’t sit up there and say *well dah-dah-dah-dah*. It’s like they’ll catch a attitude and blow you off. So it’s like why you asking me since you know everything. Why do you need me, you already know everything, so why does it matter what I say as to what happened? Or, why you even talkin’ to me? And I’m like well since you know it what you askin’ me for. And since you know everything you know I didn’t have anything to do with it since you know everything. So, why are you even talking to me? And I guess a lot of the police feel that because you stay out here that you’re stupid. So, when you talk to them like you’ve got some sense it kinda throws some of them off. Then that’s when they try to throw that authority at you – and they get loud.

Residents also conveyed that police do not reserve this type of verbal disrespect for those who are suspected of wrongdoing, and claimed that police are sometimes disrespectful to people who report criminal activity. Overall, residents described this type of verbal disrespect as making them feel like police were talking down to them. Lottie said police made her feel “like the scum of the earth.” Yvonne claimed police “talk to you like you’re not even human” and Cleo mentioned that police talk “like we ain’t got no common sense. Like we know nothing.” Residents conveyed a sense of anger at this type of treatment and cited it as a reason for responding to police in a critical manner.

Repeated disrespect seemed to have a cumulative effect on residents as well. For example, Candice (21) noted that she had seen residents “go crazy on [police]” after continued disrespect. Still, despite feeling justified for their responses to disrespect from police, residents indicated that arguing with or



criticizing police would not improve the situation. Monique (27) described how she thought police-citizen interactions can improve:

“I want [police] to treat everybody fairly. If you hang on the corner your gonna speak to me that way because *ah she one of them* or whatever. Versus if you see me in the doctor’s office your gonna speak to me another way because *ah that girl is doin’ something with herself*. So it’s just... It’s just a business thing. If you respect somebody in a business, respect us too. This is where we live. This is where we have to pay. So we want a little more respect than what we get.”

None of the residents interviewed for this study indicated that acknowledgment of individual rights was an issue (positive or negative) during interaction with police. However, being viewed as an individual person by police as opposed to being categorized as a public housing resident was a specific concern for both Dorner and Brookside residents. A personal gesture by the officer such as writing down his or her cell phone number, as opposed to simply handing the resident a business card with a dispatch number, was mentioned by five different residents. Adrienne (52) recounted one such incident after the police had handcuffed neighbor’s son outside of their building:

“At the end of that there was an officer DeCruze, he talked to us and he gave [my neighbor] a card and they supposed to be a no tolerant task force that will be out here. And you know he came and talked to us and said you can reach me directly at this number. At the end of that, that happened with her son, at the end of that day or end of that situation it was nice knowing that that officer pretty much, even though the way they went about it, wasn't right, but at the end of it he was willing to talk to us and give us a card and say if there's any problem with a gang or with drugs or whatever, here's a card you can call.

Several other residents focused on what constitutes a lack of individual treatment by police officers, with the general feeling being that police think public housing residents sell drugs, are gang members, or are generally untrustworthy.

Carole (40) claimed this is because “We’re what they call low-income... We live in the hood.” In fact, most residents acknowledged that they lived in an area with more problems than other neighborhoods in the city. According to Nisha (33), “This, to me, is considered the ghetto. I don’t know if there’s worse, but this is the worst I’ve seen.” Still, many residents questioned why police did not treat everyone in the city like criminals because, as Lavana stated, “[Crime] happens everywhere, it don’t just happen here.” There was also a general sense among some residents that they could not change this stigma. Even being nice to some officers was described as a waste of time. Tina’s (32) comments reflect this feeling:

“they already have it set in their minds what it’s supposed to be like out here. So, even if it’s something that’s trying to be toward the positive, they’re really not open to it because they put everybody in the same category... I think they kind of lump everybody the same way. You know? Because it’s housing, it’s like their mindset. Like I said it’s like they already have a mindset of what’s supposed to be out here. So if you already have a negative mindset that something is this way, even if there is a lot of positive things, they’ll harp on that one negative thing. Never mind the ten positive things that may have happened or the stuff you might get right in the neighborhood. They’ll harp on that one thing. It’s crazy.”

Even more important to residents than personal gestures and being treated as an individual were the intentions of police officers. Benevolent motives, or the lack thereof, were consistently a part of resident’s descriptions of their interaction with police. Similar to other elements of interaction, residents indicated that perceptions of benevolence are formed in each interaction experience, based on the action of an individual officer, and are not generalized to all officers during or after the interaction. Yvonne explained how this can be frustrating because of uncertainty about motivation from one officer to another:

“When we call and we talk to [police] about the situation, then another officer come out here and it’s a whole different thing. He don’t feel the way you feel about the community out here. He don’t have the same compassion about the children that you have out here.”

Yvonne’s comment is also important because it reflects the expectation among older Dorner and Brookside residents that police officers consider policing more than an occupation, or as Monique put it, “not just because it’s their job, but because it’s something they like to do.” Like other concepts discussed by residents, this form of benevolence was described not in terms of how it can be achieved, but in terms of how the feeling can be eroded. For example, Candice (21) talked about an incident in which a police officer who was driving through the community ran into her cousin who was 10-years-old at the time. Candice claimed the officer got out of his car and asked if the child was alright, but then:

“He just got in his car and drove off without making sure. That was it. Then he just got in the car. I would expect them to be a little more concerned or respectful with this being a child.”

Without being prompted, another resident interviewed for this study mentioned the same situation. Calvin (30) claimed that he saw a “little kid” get hit by a police car while he was riding his bike a few days earlier. Calvin also explained how the officer reacted, claiming the officer “got out the car He really didn’t check to see if the little boy was okay. Then he got in the car and hauled tail.” This also fits with the broader description of police behavior by some residents. Specifically, that police can be slow to respond to problems and quick to leave the scene after their initial response.

India (33) was one of the few residents to explain how officers could demonstrate genuine benevolence in Brookside Court. She initially claimed that

some officers tend to “minimize” the way she feels, but contrasted this with a story about an officer she interacted with who tried to relate to what she was saying and offer help. India claimed she thought the officer was being genuine and had her best interest in mind, and that made her feel safe. Mary made similar comments, and claimed that when officers interact with residents of Brookside “they need to put a little hood and heart into it because you have to deal with hood people.” Mary clarified that she meant “hood” as a way of describing a rougher neighborhood in which weakness is not overlooked. Expressing lack of motivation, according to Mary, is an example of how police are sometimes perceived as weak during an interaction with a resident. She went on to describe an experience where police demonstrated weakness in a situation where she expected them to take the situation seriously and be proactive:

“I’m gonna give you a prime example. I just had my baby. We were in the house and heard some shooting. There was a bunch of young fellas across from my sister’s car, a group of them. And they started yellin’ out gang activity slang, and they went behind the building and hopped the fence. My sister and my brother went to the store and next thing you know – *pow, pow, pow, pow!* So automatically all of my kids was upstairs. But as a mother, you know, a bullet don’t have a name and you never know where it come from. I ran upstairs to find my kids – heard the front door open – heard the front door close. I’m upstairs in the closet. I’m in the closet on the phone dialing 911, tellin’ them someone is in my house. It took them a long time to get here, and when they got here they just took a report and left.”

The implications of this type of behavior by police extended beyond perceptions of weakness for other residents. In addition to a sign of weakness, they also found the lack of motivation offensive because it meant the officer was not taking the situation seriously. Chris (23) claimed that he gets frustrated with

officers who act like this and “doesn’t even bother” with police officers who behaved this way. The feelings presented above, particularly related to toughness, were most frequently expressed through residents’ descriptions of the difference between the Sheriff’s Deputies and city police who serve their communities.

Most Dorner and Brookside residents preferred the policing style of the County Sheriff’s Deputies (“the county”), who do not have primary patrol responsibilities in either housing community, over that of the City Police Department (“the city”). Of the 60 public housing residents interviewed, 50 claimed there was a difference between how the county deputies and the city police behaved. Specifically, their descriptions of the two departments indicated that sheriff’s deputies typically exhibit the characteristics that substantiate legitimacy and the city police officers are more likely to exhibit the characteristics that erode legitimacy.

The two departments have different roles in the community and most residents were aware of the differences. CJ (20) explained that with the county, “somebody’s getting arrested or getting an eviction notice” but that “[city] police do more regular patrolling.” Still, the perceived aggressive and straightforward nature of the sheriff’s deputies was preferred to the less formal and reactive methods utilized by city police. The only exception to this was a few of the younger residents who were interviewed. For example, Rochelle (18) claimed that “the county is stricter” but when asked about who younger residents preferred she claimed “they like the city more than the county.”

Robin's (23) reason for preferring the county police related to a concern expressed by older and younger residents. She claimed that "The city, they work on their time. The county, you can call them and they're there in less than 2.5 seconds." Perception that the county police were more proactive and willing to listen also led residents to feel that the county police were more effective at dealing with crime. Calvin's (30) commented that "It's like, if the county patrolled out here, there wouldn't be none of this foolishness out here. There wouldn't be no shootin'. They don't play."

The fact that county police were perceived as "not playing around" was a favorable descriptor for most residents. Tasha (36) noted that "if you see the county coming somebody goin' to jail for real" but that the city police are "a little more lenient." Nisha (33) thought this was because "the county is more serious than the city" and that when the county comes "it's business." John (20) thought that most residents respected this type of no-nonsense approach, and claimed that the county is "stricter about everything. You act all bad with the county, they gonna slam you." Darren (29) thought that criminals knew this as well. He stated that "somebody say there go the county, everybody gone. But if somebody say there go the city, everybody just turn and look at them [laughter]. Monique (27) explained further:

"Nobody is scared of the city... It seems like the county is harder, they're tougher. [The county] take the extra mile. [People] be like *oh there go the county*. Or, *that's just the city*. They treat the city just like they're the flashbulb police. They're not important... I mean I understand that not everybody job is what it looks. It might be hard or whatever. But, I mean, look like you're doin' your job. Don't just fly by. I mean it's okay to speed but... You know, they could be like well are you feelin' okay today? Or, did you see somethin' wrong today? Don't just ask when something happens,

like well what did you see? Nobody's gonna talk to you. I mean, on a regular day when you just ridin' around and you see someone sittin' in their yard, it's okay to get out and ask if anything's going on or if you've seen strange activity or something suspicious. Interact with the neighborhood that you work in and people will respect you more. If you just ride by then – well okay but psss [hand gesture – wave off].

Again, some of the younger residents were the only ones to disagree with this assessment. Tre's (18) comments reflect how some of the younger residents felt. Tre claimed:

“The county is too strict. They real strict about everything, even the simple stuff. They're voices are kinda deeper and they talk mean. [City police] talk all cool but they don't do as much as the county police. They don't be all strict and everything with what goes on.”

Overall, residents viewed the county as being tougher than the city, but they also described county officers as being more polite and respectful than city officers. Rhonda (42) noted that county police “are not loud with you” and that they're not cursing at you.” Lora described the difference in more detail:

“The city police are nasty, real nasty. But the county police, they're not like that. The city police, if you say anything, even a little bit, they'll say *I'll lock you up – keep on talkin'!* They are really nasty. I don't know why. [The] county will let you talk, but the city police don't want you to talk, don't want you to say nothin'.”

Adrienne's (52) comments also reflect the feeling expressed by most residents:

“The county talk way better to you than the city does. The county will try to figure out what's goin' on, while the city might have an attitude. You know, when they get out of the car they might be cussin' and doin' all this extra stuff. It's basically the way they talk to people. [The county] talk to people with respect, while the city might not. You know, I understand you like a higher authority, but we still people. So it's like respect.”

**Quality of decision.** Residents expressed less concern over the quality of a police officer's decision and were less likely to connect an officer's decision with changes in perception of legitimacy. In fact, most residents seemed to

concentrate exclusively on aspects of treatment in their descriptions of the interaction process with police. Discussion about the quality of an officer's decision typically followed prompts by the interviewer and responses were brief and to the point, similar to those about the positive aspects of police.

Perceptions of neutrality regarding an officer's decision were contingent on whether or not the officer was willing to provide information during the interaction. Officers who took the time to respond to questions and explain their answers were viewed as neutral or unbiased because they were perceived as not trying to influence the outcome of an interaction. Larisha (24) described an interaction with an officer after reporting that someone tried to break into her home. She said, "He explained everything to us. Everything, like, when my Aunt was doing the police report, he was bein' real helpful. He helped us out with any questions that we had." Other residents indicated that some police officers are reluctant to be as helpful in this type of situation because they are trying to influence the resident to not to file a formal report or complaint.

Janette (42) noted that she had to force one officer to file a formal report about a domestic dispute and provide her with a copy. According to Janette, "I wanted a report [for] disorderly conduct. So [the officers] didn't give me one, so I had them call they supervisor." Lavana (38) described a situation where she talked to an officer about a former boyfriend who she feared might try to harm her. She claimed the officer tried to calm her down but would not explain the law to her. While she understood that the officer was "supposed to calm the situation down," to Lavana, this was equivalent to protecting her former boyfriend. In



addition to not wanting to deal with paperwork, residents tended to attribute this type of behavior among police to an officer not truly listening to a resident's concerns. Yvonne said that with some officers "you try to explain to them and it's like in one ear and out the other."

Although residents were sometimes suspicious of an officer's intent, most did not consider profiling an issue. Profiling related to an officer's decision following the interaction process is different than profiling related to an officer's decision to stop a resident.<sup>23</sup> Profiling related to an officer's decision following the interaction process, according to residents, was related more to the "you live in the projects" stereotype and the belief that some officers did not care. Still, even though residents associated these sentiments with an officer's reluctance to provide information, they were not tied directly to officer's final decision. One of the most dramatic examples of this was provided by Cleo, who claimed an officer "slapped" her. When asked why the officer slapped her she said he was "talking about I'm enticing a mob or something." Cleo also indicated that she knew the officer was not allowed to slap her. Despite the officer's behavior, Cleo claimed "the incident actually turned out okay." Like Cleo, most residents believed that police officers followed a formal set of rules that guided the decision process, regardless of how they perceived the officer's attitude during the interaction.

Again, none of the residents interviewed for this study claimed that acknowledgment of individual rights was an issue during the interaction process with an officer. Furthermore, most residents believed that police followed a basic

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<sup>23</sup> *Profiling related to an officer's decision to stop relates to the "symbolic assailant" discussion in Chapter 4.*

set of rules that governed their behavior in general. Only six residents stated they thought otherwise and their reasons varied. During the interview and coding process, it did not appear that any of the six residents made a direct connection between the officer not following the rules and the officer's ultimate decision during the interaction. In other words, if an officer was perceived as not following the rules when interacting with a resident, it did not preclude the officer's decision from being accepted by the resident.

Marcus (22) mentioned that he was not certain what the rules were about how police officers talk to citizens, but that one officer "might have broken some rules with how nasty he was talking to me." Rikki (19) and Jasmine (30) each claimed they had interacted with an officer that did not follow the rules, but that the officer's behavior was not typical of police officers in general. Rikki explained that she was stopped by a police officer and harassed without cause. Jazmine appeared more visibly upset about her interaction. She explained:

"Someone had stolen one of my cars and I called the police. He came out and did the report and everything but then he asked if he could come out regularly and give me hugs or whatever. Yup, so that's the only instance that I could remember that wasn't professional."

When asked if she reported the incident, Jazmine replied:

"No I didn't. Yeah, it just didn't... I don't know. I guess what I've heard is that you can't... You can do it, but like if I were to report it, I didn't want anything to happen to me, so I just didn't report it. So I just, you know... [shrugs and looks down]."

Interactions like those described by Marcus, Rikki, and others were important but they did not reflect the experiences described by most residents.

Either way, most residents thought officers' decisions were generally consistent

over time. However, some residents cited the occasional decision made by an officer that varied from the norm. When asked to elaborate, residents tended to humanize police by suggesting that police get frustrated and make mistakes like everyone else. Jamel (24) mentioned that policing “is a job. You gotta have a job” and “there ain’t nothin’ wrong with it.” He later went on to say that he sometimes gets mad a police for stopping him, but thinks about it and decides they’re just doing their job. Jamel explained:

“That’s something I had to learn myself. *Well, Jamel, why you mad at them?* You have no reason to be mad with them. That’s they job. You know what I’m sayin’... One thing I will say about police is they are a man about they word. You treat them the way you want to be treated.

Darren (29) commented that “You know, the [officer] in the car is a real person. Everybody has problems.” Chanelle (40) claimed that policing is “a risky job and you could lose your life. So you can’t really get mad at nobody for not wantin’ to sign up for the job. I wouldn’t sign up for the job!” Janette’s thoughts reflected how some residents also justified physically aggressive behavior by police by humanizing them. She claimed that “sometimes [police] do be kinda rough when they do be throwing them down. But I guess when they have to kind of run behind them or whatever... That makes them angry when they have to run behind them.” Yvonne explained how this can work in non-physical interactions:

“I guess the officers do get riled up in certain occasions and they’ll disrespect you from that. They be stressed. I assume on the job they get stressed so if they come out here and they tryin’ to do they job and they got some people that are in they way or up in they face or talkin’ back to them, it get ‘em upset... And I guess it depends on the officer, at the end of the day how they feel when they out. You know? ‘Cause some of them it’s like they tired, they ready to get off they shift, so they’re willing to do anything... You can look at them and say well they done had a bad day.”

## Likelihood of Utilizing Police Services

In addition to procedural justice, there were other factors that affected whether or not residents viewed police as a legitimate law enforcement entity in their community. Specifically, some officers were identified as being incapable of properly dealing with criminal behavior and/or claimed that their likelihood of requesting police services was affected by fear of retaliation. Half of the residents who acknowledged the police as a legitimate law enforcement entity did not consider calling the police their primary option for dealing with all but the most serious crimes, or were reluctant to call the police altogether. Questions about police competence were typically associated with crimes such as drug dealing, prostitution, and vandalism. Anita (49) commented that she “wouldn’t bother calling [police] for those things ‘cause they ain’t gonna catch them anyway” and this reflected the feeling among many residents. Other common responses were that residents would deal with the problem themselves, that they would not call the police because they feared retaliation for doing so, and that they would prefer to call the Sheriff’s Department instead of the City Police.

As discussed in “How Residents Perceive Other Residents” section, age, gender, and respect were tied to whether or not a resident would confront drug dealers. Older residents were also more likely to claim they would attempt to personally deal with other problems in the community before calling the police. David (51) claimed this is because “people just try to work out their problems first. The only time they have to involve police is when weapons get pulled out or it gets out of hand.” Other resident’s claimed that if they could not handle the

problem themselves they would not bother calling the police. Lavana's (38)

experience reflects this:

"I went and knocked on [my neighbor's] door. I said the music and all that stuff, you know, just tone it down a bit. I understand these old paper thin walls and stuff but could you have some consideration? 'Cause they got younger kids and stuff, they don't have school aged kids. Then I don't see any point calling the police to come over and resolve it because... And I understand they got busier stuff and more important stuff to do, but I just don't think they'd care to come out here on a call like that."

Regardless of whether or not residents would call the police or deal with problems themselves, most claimed that retaliation for calling the police was something they had to consider. Joe (27) claimed that fear of retaliation is why "a lot of these people don't want to get involved." Anonymity was also an issue mentioned by residents. Irma (52) explained how this relates to fear of retaliation and the likelihood of a resident calling the police:

"My daughter called [the police] one night. A guy was being jumped in the neighborhood, and the police came straight to our door... [The officer] had started walking straight to his house, which was down near the bottom, but [the officer] still stopped here first. Then [my daughter] said she'd never do it again, even though she was trying to help the young man and she knew the young man. She even sent them directly to his house, but that was too much involvement because she was jeopardizing herself."

Even residents like Cleo, who indicated that they would call the police to deal with a problem, claimed they feared retaliation. Cleo mentioned that she has called the police on several people in the community, but said "at night sometimes I be scare to go to sleep because you don't never know what they'll do." She also claimed that even a casual discussion with police who happen to be in the community is risky. During a recent casual discussion with an officer Cleo said "I was kinda scared because I said lord they'll think I'm tellin' this man

somehin' or somehin' like that. And they may retaliate against my son or my granddaughter." Other residents echoed Cleo's concern about children or grandchildren being the targets of retaliation. Nicole's (39) example shows how serious retaliation can be:

"I'm gettin' to the point where I be scared. I don't even call police now since people busted my apartment up sayin' I called police. And these people don't care. The girl next to me, her son is in a gang. He was talkin' with a little 10-year-old girl and he said *bitch I don't care who you are, who your mommy or daddy is, I'll fuckin' kill you and you're momma and your daddy if you [call the] fuckin'[ police] on my little sister or brother.* That scared the living shit out of me. He had guns."

India discussed this issue at length and attempted to explain how the fear of retaliation worked in Dorner Homes. India claimed the saying "snitches get stitches" is used by many of the residents to convey what happens if you call police. When Brookside Court residents were asked about the saying, they confirmed its use in their community as well. In the following exchange India was attempting to clarify what is considered snitching. Her response is to a hypothetical scenario presented by the interviewer, which assumed that she was in an altercation with another person, and the interviewer called the police. India was asked whether or not that would be considered snitching and responded "If you called [it is], but if I called it's not." She was then asked if being the victim in the scenario meant that she was not a snitch for calling the police. India responded:

"Right, right, right. So I can determine whether or not I am going to go to the hospital or have the police interfere with what's going on. And it may be because that could lead to further arrests. [Police] come here, they see that [the other person's] got warrants, and now he's going to jail all because you called."

After her initial explanation, India shared a story about how snitching can be further complicated

when a family member is involved. She explained:

“My dad is a crack addict and he’s lived in my house for about 3 months. I brought him here from where my family lives because I wanted him to clean himself up. So, I brought him here and while I was with him he was fine. As soon as I left him here, I left for a few months... Came back and he was worse than before because he had associated with the people in the neighborhood and came back to, you know, being on drugs. Well, no one in my community knew me until my father came here. It was the funniest thing. Strippers, strippers would say *hi India*. Whereas before I told people in my community my name was Sandy because I wanted to associate where I knew you from. So people didn’t know my real name. But, I just say all that because one day I came home from work and my father was just buying drugs on my lawn. So, if I were to tell a drug dealer not to sell drugs it’s possible he might put poison in my father’s drugs, or if I threatened him that I would call the police, he might poison my father, or make him do something crazy for drugs to humiliate me. You know, even beyond calling the police, even beyond doing something to me physically, he might do something to my dad, so I wouldn’t do that.

## Summary

Most residents had an overall positive perception of police, but younger residents were more likely to feel like they were unfairly targeted by police. Other concerns expressed by individual residents tended to relate to police not being proactive enough in the community and/or not following-up after their initial response. Residents also tended to believe that other residents had a negative perception of police. Many residents also identified younger residents and those involved in criminal activity as having particularly negative attitudes toward police.

Regarding interactions with police, residents either try to be polite and respectful when dealing with police or to avoid them altogether. Further, perceptions of procedural justice during a police-housing resident interaction are

important. Residents tend to already believe the police are a legitimate law enforcement entity before the interaction takes place. Process-based judgments based on the quality of the officer's treatment and, to a lesser extent, the quality of the officer's decision then serve to maintain the resident's existing perception of police legitimacy or erode the existing level of legitimacy. Residents' preference for the County Sheriff's Department's tough but fair policing style helps to clarify residents' expectations for police behavior, but also complicates matters because they are not responsible for daily policing activities in either housing community. Finally, despite widespread perception of police legitimacy, some residents still prefer to handle problems in the community on their own and that fear of retaliation for calling police is a concern among many residents. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION

This study attempts to identify the process that informs and maintains attitudes toward police among public housing residents in Columbia, South Carolina. Chapters Four and Five presented themes related to the research questions that emerged in 60 semi-structured interviews conducted with residents of two public housing communities in Columbia, South Carolina. This chapter proceeds through a discussion of how the findings presented in Chapter Four and Chapter Five relate to previous research and theory identified in Chapter Two, followed by a discussion of the practical implications and limitations of the findings. Suggestions for future research are also provided before concluding.

#### Discussion of Findings

**Attitudes Toward Police.** Attitudes toward police varied among Dorner Homes and Brookside Court, particularly<sup>24</sup> related to the age of the resident. In both communities, older residents were more likely to have a positive perception of police than younger residents. Older residents were more likely to associate positive feelings in general and more likely to describe specific situations in which police were nice to them or their family. This is consistent with Sullivan et al.'s

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<sup>24</sup> *All of the interviews included in this study were conducted with black residents, so it is not possible to address differences in race.*

(1987) finding that older blacks are more likely to perceive police as respectful and fair than younger blacks. Still, more than half of the residents under the age of 30 expressed positive overall perceptions of police.

Although many older and younger residents shared a positive perception of police, when describing specific interactions with police older and younger residents tended to cite different officer characteristics as being favorable. Older residents favored officers who were personable and showed concern for the wellbeing of the residents, as exemplified in Chapter Five by Irma's comments about an officer who went out of his way to help her daughter. This is similar to Birzer's (2008) finding that officers who acted empathetic toward citizens were rated favorably by African-Americans.

Unlike Birzer's finding, younger residents in Dorner and Brookside favored officers who acted in a professional, business-like manner. It is unclear whether Birzer's (2008) respondents resided in high crime neighborhoods like the respondents for this study. That said, differences in expectations among the young black citizens Birzer interviewed and those included in this study could be related to how police commonly operate in their respective neighborhoods. Dorner Homes and Brookside Court have two of the highest crime rates in the city. It may be that when police enter Dorner and Brookside they do so with a "crime fighter" mentality, while officers in neighborhoods with lower levels of crime feel less need for formal interaction. Younger residents in Dorner and Brookside, who tend to have the most contact with police, may come to expect this type of approach by police and adjust their expectations accordingly.

This process may also help explain the difference in expectations among older and younger residents in Dorner and Brookside. Older residents, and especially elderly residents, tended to describe interaction with police as resulting from a call for service. Perhaps, as Van Maanen (1978) suggested, police have typifications for the various people they encounter in a community. If so, officers may view older residents as victims and behave in a more empathetic way toward them, whereas younger residents may be viewed with suspicion and treated in a more formal manner. In turn, residents could be conditioned to officers' behavior and expect that type of behavior during future interactions.

Even though there were differences in expectations of police, overall most residents expressed a positive perception of policing in general. That is, nearly all of the residents interviewed for this study associated the idea of policing with protection, safety, and justice. Interestingly, however, residents' global perception of police and their specific assessments of police behavior tended to be incongruent. Most residents claimed they had a positive perception of police overall but described negative experiences when discussing individual officers. Using survey data, Brandl, Frank, and Worden (1994) also found that people often have different global and specific assessments of police. Additionally, they found that global assessments have a substantial influence on specific assessments.

Brandl et al.'s second finding was not apparent with Dorner and Brookside residents, who's global assessments of police seemed somewhat insulated from their encounters with individual officers. This finding more closely resemble those

of Albrecht and Green (1977), Clark and Wenniger (1966), and Warren (2010) who found that citizens' assessments of specific encounters with police often did not affect their global assessments of police. It may be that residents' global perceptions of police are based on an ideal of what police represent. Unlike an assessment of a specific officer or department an ideal may not change as a result of a specific interaction. Instead, the interaction may be assessed based on the ideal. How this functions with residents of Dorner and Brookside will be discussed further in the Procedural Justice section of this chapter.

With respect to an officer's personal characteristics, and similar to Weitzer's (2000a) findings, residents claimed that race was not an indication of how an officer would behave. Even younger residents who had several positive and negative encounters with police did not associate how the officer handled a particular interaction with his or her race in any way. While this perception may or may not reflect actual patterns of officer behavior, it does suggest that residents of Dorner and Brookside do not perceive police-citizen interactions in the way that Black's (1976) downward distribution of law suggests<sup>25</sup>.

An officer's age, on the other hand, was an important factor related an officer's behavior according to many residents. Residents often described younger officers as being rude and verbally aggressive during encounters. This perception is supported in the literature as well. Although related to physical aggression, Brandl, Strohshine, and Frank (2001) findings show a relationship between an officer's age and likelihood of aggressive behavior. Brandl et al.

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<sup>25</sup> Downward distribution of law and related research are discussed on pages 22-23 in Chapter Two.

(2001) examined excessive use of force complaints among officers in two different police departments and found that problem officers were typically younger and more inexperienced than non-problem officers. Regarding general complaints against officers, Harris (2009) conducted a longitudinal examination of four cohorts (N =1,138) of police officers in a northeastern city and found that citizen complaint rates against officers tended to increase during an officer's first two years of service and peak during the third year. Considering that Brandl et al. (2001) and Harris (2009) did not focus on complaints among residents of a specific neighborhood or segment of the population, it appears that perceptions of age and officer behavior among residents of Dorner and Brookside are in line with those of the general public.

Despite the mix of positive global perception and negative interactions, interview participants claimed that other residents in their public housing community had decidedly negative overall perceptions of police. Younger residents were cited as most likely to have negative perceptions because they heard adults saying negative things about police, were involved in criminal activity, or knew someone involved in criminal activity. Smaller children in particular were mentioned as being influenced by hearing negative things about police.

Bittner (1970) and Sharpe and Johnson (2009) offered explanations for how negative perceptions can develop in a community when they claimed that the historical context of a community influences current residents' perception of police. This means that specific events that occurred in the community several

years or even decades in the past influence current perceptions of police. It also implies that an oral tradition or other means of communicating the history of the community must exist. While this may be so in some neighborhoods, it is unlikely that it occurs in Dorner Homes or Brookside Court for at least two reasons. First, none of the residents mentioned directly or indirectly that any such tradition existed. Second, the populations of both Dorner and Brookside are transient and most residents did not possess more than a few years worth of personal knowledge about the community. Instead of historical context influencing current perceptions, it may be how global and specific perceptions are expressed that creates consistency over time.

Many residents expressed positive global perceptions of police but only discussed negative individual experiences. It is possible that this pattern of expression is the accepted form of communication between adults and learned by younger residents. For example, Monique talked about a discussion with her child in which she attempted to explain that police were “here to help” when there is a problem. This is a global perspective on what function police serve in society and a common message relayed from parents to children in Dorner and Brookside. Yet, as some residents reported, children overhear adults talk about specific interactions with police, which tend to be negative.

Residents identified young people in the community as having particularly negative perceptions of police. Most residents reasoned that this population did not like police because they were likely to be involved in criminal activity or know someone who was involved in criminal activity. This perspective seems to fit with

the business-like approach to ATP taken by most of the younger residents interviewed for this study. Police are a hindrance to those involved in criminal activity which could cause frustration with their presence. Or, if a resident knows someone involved in criminal activity and the police arrest that person, the police may be viewed as the source of the problem.

Some adolescents and young adults in the community seemed to disagree with the assessment that they do not like police because they are involved in, or know someone who is involved in, criminal activity. Instead, they claim their perceptions are based on how they are treated by police. Specifically, younger residents felt the police view them as criminals and treat them as though they are guilty of doing something wrong. Brunson and Miller (2006a) reported similar findings based on interviews with young black males in St. Louis, Missouri. This is also consistent with what Skolnick (1966) described as a “symbolic assailant” or tendency of police associate danger to the community and criminal activity with certain traits (most notably being young, black, and male). Skolnick also claimed that certain gestures and mannerisms helped define a symbolic assailant. Jones-Brown (2007) added that the association between young black males and criminal activity is likely a conditioned reflex among police officers that leads to policing stopping young black males more frequently than other people, detaining them longer, and using force more frequently and inappropriately against them. Consistent with these findings and claims, younger residents in Dorner and Brookside claimed to be acutely aware of their own behavior when police were the community so they could avoid additional, and

often negative, attention from police. This may help explain differences in officer behavior toward older and younger residents in the two communities and related expectations from residents.

Residents' perceptions, including those of younger residents, of how their race may factor into the symbolic assailant assessment by police was not clear based on the information residents provided. Previous research in this area is also inconclusive, as findings have been mixed regarding the level of influence race has on an officer's decision to stop a civilian (Skogan & Frydl, 2004). Dorner and Brookside residents did not indicate that they perceived their race was an issue, but the fact that residents of Dorner Homes, Brookside Court, and the surrounding neighborhoods are predominately black could have made race a less salient concern. It may be, as Skogan and Frydl (2004) noted, that race should be considered in the broader context of the situation. Indeed, how residents perceived police behavior in other neighborhoods was more revealing and indicated that residents believed a more diverse set of issues than race and age effected police-citizen interaction.

Columbia has a large population of black residents overall and the population density of black residents in Dorner and Brookside is particularly high. With such a large minority population competing for jobs and political power, the racial threat hypothesis would predict a larger concentration of police resources and proactive policing efforts in the Dorner Homes and Brookside Court communities. Contrary to this perspective, residents of Dorner and Brookside did not perceive police to be more aggressive or punitive in their own neighborhoods



compared to other areas in the city. It should be noted, however, that some racial threat scholars claim that the minority population must be experiencing active growth and that the minority population in Dorner and Brookside has been stable for several years.<sup>26</sup> Also, these findings reflect the perception of residents and may not reflect the actual changes in levels of policing over time in the two communities. Still, the focus of this research is perception, and residents of Dorner Homes and Brookside Court perceive police to be more proactive crime fighters in other neighborhoods.

Many residents also felt that police shared this perception and were not as concerned with crime or community problems in Dorner and Brookside as higher income, predominately white communities. Race and economic status were not two separate issues here, but instead were parts of what residents believed was a larger definition of status that influenced police behavior. Rather than perceiving police as overly punitive, as racial threat would suggest, residents thought police were not concerned about crime in Dorner and Brookside because that is simply how people who live in the projects behave. Instead of controlling crime in Dorner and Brookside, police were perceived concentrate their efforts on keeping the “nicer” communities safe and free of criminal activity. Anderson (1999, p.321) reported a “double standard of justice” but, unlike Dorner and Brookside residents, Anderson’s interview subjects attributed the discrepancy in police behavior exclusively to the racial makeup of different neighborhoods.

These perceptions are more consistent with the benign neglect hypothesis (Liska & Chamlin, 1984). This perspective claims that pressure on police to

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<sup>26</sup> See Chamlin (1989)

control crime is reduced when the rate of intraracial crime exceeds that of interracial crime, a common condition in the largely heterogeneous populations in and around Dorner and Brookside. Further evidence of this can be found in residents' descriptions of police response times in their communities. Residents consistently claimed that police were a passive presence in the community and slow to react to calls for service. Even residents who claimed they reported gunshots said that police responded slowly or not at all, and often did not follow-up after their initial response. This also implies that residents perceive different rules or standards of behavior for police in different communities within the city, and expectations for police behavior in Dorner and Brookside cannot be universally applied to other neighborhoods. How residents' expectations were confirmed or disconfirmed when interacting with an officer was also an important issue for many residents. The procedural justice model helps explain the interaction process and provides insight on how ATP is formed.

**Procedural justice and police legitimacy.** Police legitimacy is important in Tyler's (2003) model of procedural justice because citizens tend to voluntarily cooperate and comply with an officer they perceive as a legitimate law enforcement authority. The findings reported in this dissertation also indicate there is a connection between procedural justice and police legitimacy, but suggest the model provided by Tyler (2003) does not fully account for the complexity of the procedural justice process or the role of police legitimacy therein. Tyler's model begins with the police-citizen interaction process (procedural elements and process-based judgments) which then inform a

citizen's perception of legitimacy and likelihood of compliance. Although not included in his model, Tyler (2003, p.287) noted that a preexisting perception of police legitimacy can influence a particular police-citizen encounter and that negative encounters can lead to a "spiraling effect" in which procedural justice becomes progressively more difficult to achieve. Perceived legitimacy of individual officers by Dorner and Brookside residents was indeed contingent on procedural elements, but global perceptions did not function as Tyler (2003) suggested.

Residents' global perceptions of police tended to be positive and they associated police with protection, safety, and justice. Importantly, Dorner and Brookside residents also claimed to enter an interaction with a specific officer with this perception. This means police legitimacy is tied to how citizens conceptualize police is not solely the product of the interaction process (or processes), and instead may be the product of socialization process early in life, as Gibson (1991) contended. Including police legitimacy at the beginning of the procedural justice model has important implications on the rest of the interaction process. It suggests that instead of establishing legitimacy, the interaction process may serve to only maintain or erode perceptions of legitimacy.

Regarding the quality of an officer's decision, which is one of the two procedural elements in Tyler's (2003) model, additional attention to the role of legitimacy at the beginning of the model helps clarify the police-citizen interaction process and related behavior by the citizen. Residents of Dorner and Brookside's global perceptions of police were that police meant protection,

safety, and justice. These terms imply that residents view police as true arbiters of authority, and as a result their decisions may be insulated from scrutiny during the interaction process. Indeed, residents often had little to say about the quality of an officer's decision and tended to convey general acceptance even if they did not like the officer. Even residents that thought police did not follow the rules did not connect the officer's behavior with his or her final decision. In other words, global perceptions overrode the officer's behavior when a resident assessed the quality of the officer's decision.

The only exception to residents' tendency to connect global perceptions of police to the quality of an individual officer's decision was related to officers who withheld information during the interaction process. Residents questioned officers who would not explain the process and/or refused to provide documentation after an interaction, and several residents indicated they did not accept the officer's decision by claiming they had appealed the decision to the officer's supervisor. These findings extend the procedural justice literature by helping to define the limitations of the *quality of the officer's decision* element in the procedural justice model.

In contrast to the limited influence of the perceived quality of an officer's decision, residents' perceptions of the quality of treatment they received from an officer had a substantial impact on their assessment of the officer and their likelihood of general cooperation. Consistent with the procedural justice model, residents of Dorner and Brookside cited an officer's politeness, respectful behavior, and treating the resident as an individual, as standards for assessing

quality of treatment. In fact, acknowledgement of individual rights was the only aspect of quality of treatment identified in the procedural justice model that residents did not believe was an issue.

Despite the overall importance of an officer's perceived politeness, respectful behavior, and treating the resident as an individual there was some age variation in how residents weighted each of these elements in the assessment process. Older residents tended to value most being treated as an individual and personalized interaction with police officers, while younger residents valued a respectful, businesslike approach from officers. The procedural justice model does not account for weighting differences in procedural elements and the importance of a citizen's age has not been identified in previous procedural justice research. These findings could help refine the model by making it adaptable to a citizen's age group.

Regardless of whether they wanted an officer to treat them in a personal or businesslike manner, Dorner and Brookside residents humanized individual police officers. Put another way, residents did not view police simply as representatives of the criminal justice system, but also as regular people who were capable of making mistakes. This was the basis for a variety of related perceptions and behaviors among residents. For example, residents tended to rationalize overly aggressive and even abusive physical behavior by police by claiming the officer was provoked or that the officer was having a bad day. While the procedural justice model may suggest these quality of treatment issues would prevent perceptions of police legitimacy, residents of Dorner and Brookside did

not link them to legitimacy at all. These findings were also unexpected considering the findings of Johnson and Kuhns (2009), who found that black citizens were more likely to be sensitive to police use of force, and Weitzer (1999), who found that lower-class black citizens were more likely to report police abuse and aggression.

Another common scenario, and one that is more in line with the procedural justice model, related to citizen cooperation and compliance. It was apparent that residents' tendency to humanize police was related to their general willingness to criticize or talk back to police during an interaction. Respondents reported they would often not question an officer's decision because of their global perceptions of police, but that the behavior of the officer during the interaction was not influenced by global perceptions. In other words, the image of an officer as the arbiter of justice and authority was associated with an officer's final decision, but their conduct during the preceding interaction was not above criticism. This is important because if an officer's behavior is attributed solely to the officer, and not associated with policing in general, it can further help explain the incongruence between residents' specific and global perceptions of police.

Incongruence was also found in the effect of procedurally just and unjust officer behavior on residents' perceptions of that officer. Although many residents had positive encounters with police they tended to say very little about them, and when encouraged to talk about positive interactions they did so with no expression of emotion and were extremely brief in their descriptions. On the other hand, residents tended to be more articulate and express more emotion

about negative experiences, and often did so without being prompted by the interviewer. Overall, there was an asymmetrical effect in which positive behavior by an officer satisfied residents' expectations of police behavior and did little to change their perception of the officer, but negative behavior had a substantial and negative impact on residents' perceptions of the officer.

The asymmetrical effect of police behavior on residents' perceptions of police is also supported by the findings of Skogan (2006), and seems to contradict those of Myr Stol and Hawk-Tourtelot (2011)<sup>27</sup>. However, Dorner and Brookside residents identified an exception to the asymmetrical effect that was not present in Skogan's findings. That is, residents engaged in criminal activity may not utilize the same assessment process as other residents because these residents view their criminal behavior as an occupation. Police, therefore, represent an impediment to their occupation and are perceived negatively regardless of procedure. Still, with the majority of Dorner and Brookside residents, the asymmetrical effect further illustrates a procedural justice process in which global perceptions of police legitimacy are present from the outset of police-citizen interactions, the interaction process serves to maintain or erode perceptions of legitimacy for the individual officer and influence the level of cooperation and compliance by the resident.

In sum, procedural justice model helps explain how perceptions of police are formed in Dorner Homes and Brookside Court, but the process is more complex than Tyler's (2003) version of the model suggests. In these two public

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<sup>27</sup> This assumes that at least some of the inmates in Myr Stol and Hawk-Tourtelot's (2011) study were indeed criminals and not wrongfully arrested.

housing communities, it appears that police legitimacy is tied to residents' global perceptions of police and is granted at the outset of an interaction. Legitimacy is then associated with the individual officer as long as the officer treats the resident in a procedurally just manner, which can vary based on the residents' age, or can be nullified altogether by a resident's involvement in criminal activity. Regarding the outcome of police-citizen interaction, the likelihood of a resident accepting an officer's decision seems to circumvent the procedural justice process and be linked solely to global perception, while the likelihood of cooperation and compliance with an officer does appear to be subject to procedural justice. Factors outside of the police-citizen interaction process that helped shape perceptions of police are discussed in the next section.

**Concentrated disadvantage, collective efficacy, and police legitimacy.** Dorner and Brookside residents live communities that epitomize concentrated disadvantage. They are predominately minority, have few if any economic resources, and both housing communities are located in areas with high crime rates. Research by Sampson and Bartusch (1998) and Reisig and Parks (2004) found that concentrated disadvantage correlated with dissatisfaction with police. Gau et al. (2012) later found that procedural justice was an important factor in determining perceptions of police legitimacy in areas of concentrated disadvantage, but that residential instability and low social cohesion were not factors in this process.

The findings from the present study are consistent with Gau et al.'s (2012) first finding, but unlike Gau et al., residential instability and low social cohesion



appeared to have a substantial influence on perceptions of police legitimacy in Dorner Homes and Brookside Court. One explanation for this could be how the term *legitimacy* is defined. Although Gau et al. (2012) did not define legitimacy specifically, the context in which they use the term implies a connection with police as accepted arbiters of justice. In Dorner and Brookside, the meaning of police legitimacy was twofold.

The first meaning of legitimacy was similar to Gau et al.'s (2012) use of the term and was connected to procedural justice. The second meaning related not to whether police were *accepted* arbiters of justice, but whether they were *effective* arbiters of justice. In other words, residents' perceptions of police legitimacy also related to whether or not police were considered a viable option for dealing with issues in the community. It is this definition of police legitimacy that was tied to the community issues in Dorner and Brookside. Many of the residents who accepted police as a legitimate law enforcement entity did not perceive police as a legitimate means of dealing with crime in their community. This is consistent with findings that effectiveness is a component of legitimacy and not a separate concept (Gibson, 1991; Tankebe, 2013).

Respondents' method of assessing effectiveness related to what Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997, p.918) referred to as "collective efficacy." Specifically, there was an unwillingness to call police for a variety of reasons that were exacerbated by low levels of community cohesion. One of the primary reasons residents cited for not calling the police was similar to

Anderson's (1999) findings. The following passage (Anderson, 1999, p.321) is particularly illustrative:

“Many people are afraid to report obvious drug dealing or other crimes to the police, for fear that the police might reveal their names and addresses to the criminals. It is thus better, many say, ‘to see but don’t see.’ One is better off if one can simply avoid the problem; only in a dire emergency should one involve the police.

Residents of Dorner and Brookside referred to calling the police as “snitching” and, like the inner-city residents studied by Anderson (1999), they tended to associate this behavior with being exposed as the person who called police. Once reserved for criminals who provided information to the police in exchange for leniency, the term “snitch” is used to describe anyone who provides information to the police.

Just as *criminal* snitches are disliked and preyed upon by other criminals (see Anderson, 1999; Rosenfeld, Jacobs, & Wright, 2003), so are non-criminal residents of Dorner and Brookside who snitch. Most residents thought lack of anonymity was likely to result in retaliatory behavior from the person they called about. Residents often used the phrase “snitches get stitches” as shorthand for this expectation. Fear of retaliation is an important concern, but the lack of confidence in police to keep reports anonymous is what substantiates this fear, and appears to be one of the primary reasons why residents question the viability of using police as a solution to problems in the community.

Also worth noting is that Anderson's (1999) study and the interviews for this study were conducted in different geographic locations and separated in time by two decades. To put this into perspective, several of the residents

interviewed for this study had not yet been born when Anderson's work was first published and likely have no connection to that community.<sup>28</sup> Yet, the issue with snitching is substantially similar across time and place. It may be that these values are not taught or passed on so much as they are the product of social circumstances that are endemic in low-income, predominately minority communities.

Again, if the police cannot be trusted to protect a resident's anonymity in an environment where snitching is grounds for retaliation, then they may not be a viable option for dealing with crime for most residents. The city police, who are the primary law enforcement entity in the community, were also viewed as being a passive and ineffective reaction to criminal behavior rather than a proactive police force. Lack of social cohesion may exacerbate these problems in Dorner and Brookside for two reasons. First, most residents claimed they avoided other housing residents because adults were "ignorant" or could not be trusted and children were out of control. In other words, most residents did not consider other residents as a resource for dealing with crime or community issues. Considering they did not view police as a viable option either, this leaves few options for addressing crime in these communities. Similar to Pattillo's (1998) findings in a predominately black, middle-class Chicago neighborhood, older residents in Dorner and Brookside were granted respect and could confront people engaging in criminal behavior. However, unlike the middle-class neighborhood examined by Pattillo (1998), there is little residential stability in

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<sup>28</sup> Anderson's explanation of the code of the street first appeared in 1994 in an Atlantic Monthly article (citation included in References section).

Dorner and Brookside to foster dense social networks and informal social control or connect with sources of formal control. Older females (and a few exceptional older males) alone are not an adequate informal social control in these communities.

Second, even among residents who claimed they socialized with others in the community, discussions about police were often limited to the acknowledgment of police presence. The lack of dialogue about police, their role in the community, and what should be expected of them seems to create a lack of direction in the community. Sampson (2006, p.152) outlined the implications of this when discussing the importance of collective efficacy. Sampson claimed that rational people are unlikely to personally attempt to sanction others in the community or initiate social control (e.g., calling the police) in communities where residents have little contact with one another and do not trust each other. Both of these conditions were apparent in Dorner Homes and Brookside Court.

A practical example of this was that many of the residents agreed on what type of police services they wanted (older residents tend to want more aggressive police and younger residents tend to want less aggressive police) but they did not realize that other residents shared their perspective because of lack of dialogue. Consequently, residents had misconceptions about what others in the community thought about police (they thought other residents had negative perceptions) and assumed that others did not want the police in the community. This may have further reduced the likelihood of a resident calling the police because they believed other residents would not support their decision.

Overall, the findings suggest that global perceptions of police in Dorner and Brookside are that police are a legitimate law enforcement entity, but that legitimacy can also relate to whether or not police are perceived as a viable means of dealing with crime. While instructive regarding the procedural elements of police-citizen interaction, the procedural justice model described by Tyler (2003) does not account for the full complexity of perceptions of police in Dorner Homes and Brookside Court. A resident's age and their perceptions of the community are also an integral part of the process of determining police legitimacy. The practical implications of these findings are discussed in the next section.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings reported in this dissertation suggest that police may not be able to improve their overall legitimacy in Dorner Homes and Brookside Court and can only erode it through the interaction process with citizens. While this may initially sound negative, there is also reason for optimism regarding this finding. It seems that police have a sort of built-in credibility that a conscientious officer should be able to maintain throughout most interactions. This calls attention to the legal socialization process that tends to be influenced most before the age of 18 (Fagan & Tyler, 2005; Piquero et al., 2005) and suggests that police may benefit from initiating interactions with minors in Dorner and Brookside that demonstrate both concern and the ability to effectively deal with criminal behavior. This also makes understanding the behaviors that tend to erode police credibility all the more important.

Residents often cited differences in the behavior of city and county police when explaining how police behave in their communities and which style of policing they prefer. A majority of the residents preferred the proactive, tough but fair behavior of county police over the informal and reactive behavior of the city police. This was especially so with older residents in both communities. That said, the city police may benefit from adopting a policing style similar to that of the sheriff's department. While some younger residents may not favor this approach, it would likely appeal to older residents who are the primary stakeholders in both communities. Both city and county police agencies in Columbia may also want to provide additional sensitivity training and/or supervision for young officers. Residents consistently identified younger officers as displaying the characteristics that engender negative perceptions and erode police legitimacy. Police agencies in general may also find these findings useful. As elements of procedural justice are incorporated into some police training programs and initiatives to improve the relationship between police and the public, departments may benefit from understanding the importance of community context and the role of collective efficacy in the process. Kochel (2012) and Nix et al.'s (2014) findings that link perceptions of collective efficacy to perceptions of police service quality and trust in the police respectively, also suggest the possibility that improving perceptions of service delivery could help promote collective efficacy in Dorner Homes and Brookside Court.

Administrators with the Columbia Housing Authority could also utilize these findings to help shape their own programs, especially regarding collective

efficacy. Part of the mission of the CHA is to “improve the quality of life” of low to moderate-income individuals and families in Columbia and Richland County. Many of the CHA communities are located in high crime areas so implementing programs and initiatives to help increase collective efficacy, and in turn the utilization of both formal and informal methods of social control, may help the CHA achieve their mission.

Finally, the residents of Dorner Homes and Brookside Court could benefit from these findings. Most residents interviewed for this dissertation believed that other residents in the community had negative perceptions of police. While knowing this alone may not influence their likelihood of requesting police services, it could help promote dialogue between residents about the role of police in their communities. Better still, it could help facilitate a conversation between residents, the CHA, and police about how to handle crime and police-citizen interactions in these communities.

### **Limitations**

There are some potential limitations to the findings reported in this dissertation that should be noted. The first potential limitation related to the recruitment of interview subjects in Brookside Court. As stated in Chapter Three, the initial interview subjects from Brookside were recruited by the housing manager for that community. While this did not appear to influence the residents’ responses or willingness to discuss certain issues, it is possible that the connection between an authority figure in the community and this study influenced their responses. However, any association between the housing

manager and this study was likely minimized or eliminated as new interview subjects were recruited through previous interview subjects. In the future, similar research in housing communities may benefit from identifying someone other than an authority figure to recruit interview subjects.

A second potential limitation to the findings relates to the interpretation of the data obtained for this study. Although the meaning of both quantitative and qualitative data requires interpretation from the researcher, interpreting interview data can be particularly challenging. During the interview process residents often used slang and/or phrased their statements in ways that were not familiar to me. To help clarify, and avoid substituting my own meaning for their words, I frequently asked the residents to clarify the meaning of a particular word or what they meant by a particular statement. Audio recording the interviews also helped with this process as it allowed me to review segments of interviews, several times if necessary, and assess how a resident's inflection and tone affected the meaning of their words. Personally transcribing the interviews, as opposed to utilizing a transcription service, also allowed me to become thoroughly familiar with the interview data. Although it was not possible for this study due to resource limitations, the use of multiple raters for data analysis may help reduce the influence of bias when interpreting the data.

Findings were also limited by the context in which the data was collected. It was not the goal of this study to predict perceptions of police in the future or to generalize the findings to other communities. Still, it is worth reiterating that residents' perceptions of police in Dorner Homes and Brookside Court were tied



to police behavior prior to the interviews and their perceptions of the community at the time of the interviews. With that said, changes in policing style and/or community conditions over time may alter how residents in these communities perceive police. Additionally, the findings may not be generalizable to other individuals and communities.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The findings reported in this dissertation provide insight on the perception of police among public housing residents and how their perceptions are shaped and maintained. Based on the findings, future research should focus on testing a revised version Tyler's (2003) procedural justice model, further examination of the relationship between collective efficacy and perceptions of police, and exploring whether or not perceptions of police are similar in other public housing communities.

A modified version of Tyler's (2003) procedural justice model could incorporate global perceptions of police legitimacy at the outset of an interaction, and emphasize the importance of perceived quality of treatment regarding the confirmation or erosion of legitimacy. This line of research could also examine the importance of the various elements of treatment (e.g., polite, respectful, treated as an individual) and how they are valued in relation to one another in different interaction settings and scenarios. To account for different expectations, a large variation in the age of the residents included in this research is recommended. Attempting to further identify and explain the elements of an

interaction that erode legitimacy and how they affect cooperation and compliance could also help clarify the procedural justice process.

The findings related to residential stability and community cohesion indicate they are both factors in perception of police, but other research (Gau et al., 2012) has found they do not effect perception. Further research in public housing communities could help clarify the role of residential stability and social cohesion in the process by examining data related to the average duration of residential occupancy in a community with residents' perceptions of other community members. Likelihood of calling police and the difference between legitimacy related to policing as an institution and the legitimacy of utilizing police as a means of problem solving were also related to community cohesion in Dorner and Brookside. Research that examines the difference types so police legitimacy should also help increase our understanding of both collective efficacy and procedural justice in these communities.

Finally, research on perceptions of police should be expanded to other public housing communities as well as other social, racial, and economic enclaves. Expanding this research to other public housing communities will account for social and environmental variables that are different (e.g., policing style) or were not present in Dorner and Brookside. Research in other enclaves such as mobile home parks, ethic sub-communities (e.g., Chinatown, San Francisco), or "tent cities" populated by homeless people in numerous locations around the country could also help contribute to the body of knowledge on context and perception of police, and help police better serve those communities.

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