The Context for Legal Cynicism: Urban Young Women's Experiences With Policing in Low-Income, High-Crime Neighborhoods

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Abstract

Research and public discourse on urban policing and the collateral consequences of mass incarceration often center on the experiences of young males, particularly young Black and brown men who live in low-income, high-crime neighborhoods. Consequently, less is known about how young women are policed in these contexts; and whether their experiences and dispositions toward police vary across racial and ethnic groups. Drawing on 70 in-depth interviews with low-income Black, Latina, and White young women between the ages of 14 and 24, in the City of Philadelphia, the current research explores the differences and similarities in their experiences with and perceptions of police, and the social contexts that influence those interactions. A comparative analysis reveals important nuances in young women's direct and indirect experiences with police by race and ethnicity. The findings indicate that, within disadvantaged neighborhoods, particularly among young Black and Latina women, direct and vicarious experiences with policing contribute to expressions of legal cynicism.

Keywords

youth, policing, race, neighborhoods, violence

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Introduction

Recent events in several cities within the United States have highlighted the ongoing tensions and vexed relationship between the police and many urban residents. This is especially true in disadvantaged communities where experiences with police and dispositions toward them often coalesce into legal cynicism—essentially a distrust of law and those who enforce it (Kirk & Papachristos, 2011; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998). These sentiments are especially strong among low-income African Americans living in cities (Payne, Hitchens, & Chambers, In Press; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998; Scaglion & Condon, 1980), for whom the feeling of being overpoliced and underprotected is common (Brooks, 2000). Certainly, research has shown that in contexts where crime is prevalent and policing is intense, trust between law enforcement and the community is low, and much of this has to do with the nature, quality, and frequency of police-community encounters (e.g., Carr, Napolitano, & Keating, 2007; Tyler & Huo, 2002).

Much of the research on policing in urban, predominantly African American neighborhoods focuses on the experiences of young men (for instance, Brunson, 2007; Brunson & Miller, 2006a; Clampet-Lundquist, Carr, & Kefalas, 2015; Goffman, 2015). Statistically, more so than other groups, Black males are disproportionately more likely to be targeted by police, and subjected to police use of force (Brunson, 2007; Engel & Calnon, 2004; Gau & Brunson, 2010; Jones-Brown, 2000; Maclin, 1998). Considerably less attention is paid explicitly to urban young women, especially those under the age of 18, and how they experience and understand policing in low-income, high-crime neighborhoods (for exceptions see Brunson & Miller, 2006b; Brunson & Stewart, 2006; Hurst, McDermott, & Thomas, 2005; Jones, 2009; Ramos-Zayas, 2012). Thus, we have limited information about young women's experiences with and perceptions of police, and how social constructs about gender influence the way urban young women are perceived and treated by law enforcement (Browning, Cullen, Cao, & Kopache, 1994; Fine et al., 2003).

While some research explores negative police encounters among young, low-income Black American women (e.g., African American Policy Forum [AAPF], 2015; Richie, 2012), we know little about experiences with police among similarly situated young, low-income Latina and White women (for exceptions see Galvan & Bazargan, 2012; Flores, 2016; Hurst et al., 2005; Madriz, 1997). Here, we examine the experiences of young Black, Latina, and White women who live in Philadelphia. We take an approach that acknowledges the multiple identities that we all inhabit simultaneously, and consider how the raced and gendered direct and indirect interactions with police may contribute to the legal cynicism expressed by many of the young women in our sample.

Literature

Legal Cynicism

Legal cynicism or "anomie about the law" (Sampson & Bartusch, 1998), is understood as a "cultural orientation" (Kirk & Matsuda, 2011) that perceives the criminal justice

system as unfair and ineffective (Kirk & Papachristos, 2011). Data suggest that this perception is borne out of direct and vicarious experience with police, as scholars have found that fair treatment by the police influences whether an individual views the criminal justice system as legitimate (Brunson, 2007; Hurst, Frank, &Browning, 2000; Kirk & Papachristos, 2011). For example, individuals are more likely to regard their interaction with police as fair if they assess the officer's motives as caring, and if their encounter is respectful (Tyler, 1990). These experiences can affect perceived effectiveness as well: urban youth of color have lower levels of trust in police ability to protect and serve them in time of need (Tyler, 2005).

Conceptualizing legal cynicism as a frame (Kirk & Papachristos, 2011) allows us to consider how legal cynicism shapes the "lens through which individuals observe, perceive and interpret situations" (p. 1192) with the police. Rather than a strict code of notions about the law, a frame allows for a diverse set of responses from young women[1] in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Data suggest that this frame is complex, and that trust in police "varies depending on how law and legal authorities are operating within interactive moments" (Bell, 2016, p. 338). Below we review work on how neighborhood context, race/ethnicity, and gender intersect with regard to experiences with police.

Race and Neighborhood Context: Policing in Low-Income, High-Crime Communities

Extensive research on neighborhood policing consistently finds that Blacks and Latinos have more negative experiences with and attitudes toward police than do Whites (Kirk & Papachristos, 2011; Scaglion & Condon, 1980; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). These findings extend across age, as studies show that Black youth express more negative views of law enforcement than Latino and White youth, and are more likely to experience adverse contact with police (Brunson & Weitzer, 2008; Clampet-Lundquist et al., 2015; Hurst et al., 2005; Leiber, Nalla, & Farnworth, 1998). Research also suggests that these patterns persist across social class, as professional, middle class, and poor Blacks all express higher levels of legal cynicism—that manifest through both lived experiences and attitudes—than their similarly situated Latino and White counterparts, and do not trust law enforcement to ensure their safety or to fairly uphold the law (Boyles, 2015; Feagin, 1991; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). Poor and low-income Blacks, in particular, have a long and contentious history with state-sanctioned violence and police mobilization in urban neighborhoods, which stems from slavery and racialized Jim Crow policies (Alexander, 2012; Hawkins & Thomas, 1991). But, some research indicates that neighborhood disadvantage matters more than neighborhood racial composition in determining the quality of police-citizen relations (Reisig & Parks, 2000; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998).

Qualitative research that compares residents' lived experiences with policing across racial groups in similar ecological contexts is limited, especially those that include low-income Whites and Latinos (for exceptions see Brunson & Weitzer, 2008; Carr et al., 2007; Gau & Brunson, 2010). These data are limited, in part, because even

the poorest urban White neighborhoods experience less social isolation and concentrated disadvantage in comparison to poor, urban Black and Latino neighborhoods (Chaisson, 1998; Sampson & Wilson, 1995). The current study recognizes this limitation, and seeks to explore the "ecology of race" (Brunson & Weitzer, 2008) as it relates to variations in lived experiences among disadvantaged high-crime[2] neighborhoods that differ in their racial and ethnic composition.

Philadelphia is a city that continues to struggle with high levels of violent crime, concentrated poverty, and neighborhood disadvantage across minority neighborhoods as well as within parts of some White communities. In response to violence in high-crime neighborhoods, Philadelphia law enforcement has engaged in targeted practices of stop-and-frisk, surveillance, and other aggressive tactics (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2010). As these tactics often focus on police-designated "hot spots" (Groff et al., 2015) in low-income communities, Black and brown Philadelphians are disproportionate recipients of involuntary police contact including unwarranted stops, frisks, and misconduct by police (ACLU, 2010; Goffman, 2015; Harris, 2013).

Gender, Race, and Urban Policing

Studies suggest that young women are less likely than young men to come in contact with police, and consequently hold more positive or neutral attitudes toward law enforcement (Brunson & Miller, 2006b; Carr et al., 2007; Hurst et al., 2005). Still, we have inadequate systematic research on the variety of experiences with and attitudes toward police among young women, particularly those who live in urban neighborhoods (for exceptions see Brunson & Miller, 2006b; Chesney-Lind, 2002). Studies that include gender as a variable often do so without systematic attention to young women's gendered experiences—that is, they fail to actually "do" gender, or understand gender as a performative process that shifts in the context of situated social interactions (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Low-income young women face the unique challenge of navigating urban space while managing interactions with peers, neighborhoods, and law enforcement agents (Jones, 2009; Miller, 2008). Their race/ethnicity, low-income status, and gender intersect to both exacerbate and mitigate these interactions (e.g., see Morris, 2016; Pasko & Lopez, 2016). Sexual harassment and assault, for example, often go unreported by young women, especially when these incidents are committed by police officers (Fine et al., 2003; Rand & Robinson, 2011). Such violence is gendered and affected by age vulnerability, as young women are the likely victims. It is also often classed and racialized since women of color are uniquely vulnerable to such assaults given they often lack the resources necessary to gain credibility, protection, or justice (AAPF, 2015; Miller, 2008; Ritchie, 2016).

For African Americans, research often analyzes Black men's experiences with police as representative of group status (Russell-Brown, 2004). However, scholars have not yet fully unraveled young, urban Black women's experiences with and perceptions of the police. The attention centered on Black women following the death of Sandra Bland[3] and the police assault against Dajerria Becton[4] has brought mainstream focus to experiences with racial profiling, police brutality, and lethal force for

this population (AAPF, 2015). In 2005, Hurst et al. found that Black girls expressed less negative attitudes toward police than Black boys, but expressed more negative attitudes than White, Hispanic, and Asian girls and White and Asian boys, and that these attitudinal differences may have been shaped by disparities in police treatment.

Comparable to the dearth of data on Black women, little is known about Latinas and their perceptions of police, or the factors that drive these perceptions. Similar to the literature on Black youth, findings on young Latino males are often perceived as representative of all Latino youth. Available quantitative data suggest that Latinos' attitudes toward police fall between those of Blacks and Whites, but are more closely aligned with those of Blacks (Rosenbaum, Schuck, Costello, Hawkins, & Ring, 2005). Pasko and Lopez (2016) find evidence of a "Latina penalty," wherein poor Latinas are constructed as sexually promiscuous, deviant, and violent and are subsequently treated punitively by juvenile correctional agents. Messing, Becerra, Ward-Lasher, and Androff (2015) argue that this treatment of Latinas also extends to police, and find that Latinas were less likely to report violent victimization when they perceived that police could use excessive force or treat them unfairly. Despite being high risk for victimization, Latinas were found to be far less likely than White women to report police sexual violence, especially Latina immigrants (Messing et al., 2015; Rand & Robinson, 2011). Latinas fear police, which Madriz (1997) attributes to vicarious experiences of police brutality and racial profiling through the experiences of the men in their lives, which contributes to an overall feeling that police are not to be trusted or relied upon.

Scholars often exclude young White women from discussions on policing, especially in urban and low-income neighborhoods. Research that does include young White women's experience with policing is largely quantitative (see Hurst et al., 2005; for an exception see Carr et al., 2007). In addition, studies on young White women usually focus on racial paradigms, wherein Black women are constructed as comparative opposites of White women, and other women of color are excluded (Alcoff, 2003). Literature on whiteness demonstrates how white identity is both a symbol of privilege and a buffer against adverse contact with law enforcement (Frankenberg, 1997; Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005), even among poor Whites (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2014). Chauhan, Reppucci, Burnette, and Reiner (2010) found that White girls were just as likely to engage in antisocial behavior as Black girls, but were less likely to get caught and rearrested after committing both violent and nonviolent crimes. Some existing research suggests that White females also receive more leniency than females of color in juvenile justice sentencing (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013; Miller, 1996). White femininity is afforded special privileges, as young White women's gendered behavior is perceived as normal and ideal (Pyke & Johnson, 2003). Consequently, White women's experiences (or lack thereof) with police may be due in part to preferential treatment borne out of racialized stereotypes (Visher, 1983).

By analyzing in-depth interview data from our study in Philadelphia, we provide insight into the ways in which race/ethnicity and gender intersect with experiences with police, shaping frames of legal cynicism expressed among Black, Latina, and White young women. We extend previous work by explaining the context for legal

Table 1. Direct and Vicarious Experiences with Police.

	Black Women (n = 29)	Latina Women (n = 22)	White Women (n = 19)
Arrested by police	13	6	7
Stopped by police	19	12	12
Harassed or mistreated by police	15	12	9
Experienced police use of force	3	4	1
Experienced, witnessed, or heard about police sexual misconduct	2	5	0
Witnessed police harassment or mistreatment	17	13	6
Heard about police harassment or mistreatment	3	4	8

cynicism among Black, Latina, and White young women and we do so using narratives from 70 interviews with respondents who live in high-crime neighborhoods. The comparative and in-depth examination allows us to assess similarities and differences between these groups of young women and to gauge the extent of their legal cynicism, its derivation, and how it frames the way in which respondents negotiate living in a context where crime is prevalent.

Methodology

Sample

From July 2008 to August 2010, the research team conducted interviews with 146 males and females between the ages of 14–24 in seven low-income and high-crime neighborhoods in Philadelphia. The research team used purposive and snowball sampling to recruit Black, Latino, and White youth. The team worked through community-based agencies and sought to gather 75 males and 75 females, with an equal distribution among each racial/ethnic group and those who had been arrested and those who had not. Our focus here is on the 70 females in the sample, displayed in Table 1. Using the above recruitment methods, the team ended up interviewing more African Americans than Latinas and Whites, and more of those who had never been arrested. Black females were slightly more likely to have been arrested than White and Latina females. On average, the young women were 18 years old at the time of the interviews, with ages ranging from 14 to 24 years.

Neighborhood Context

Table 2 illustrates the relationship between race/ethnicity and neighborhood context in the Philadelphia communities studied. The sample was recruited from a number of community areas that were identified using neighborhood racial demographic and crime indicators (see Table 2). All of the neighborhoods where respondents were

Table 2. Demographic and Crime Indicators for Study Neighborhoods.

	% People Below Poverty	% Individuals 25 and Over without High School Diploma	Aggravated Assault Arrests per 1,000 (2009)	Robbery Arrests per 1,000 (2009)
Fishtown	22.2	24.5	4.18	6.44
Richmond	36	36.5	7.46	8.49
Kensington	22	23.4	4.29	6.77
West Kensington	48.9	45.9	7.80	8.77
Mantua	43.1	26	11.02	5.86
Haddington	32.7	23.7	9.48	6.64
Mill Creek	41.9	26.4	11.96	9.84
City-wide	25.6	35.2	5.53	5.76

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Philadelphia Police Department, generated using the Philadelphia Neighborhood Information System, Cartographic Modeling Lab, University of Pennsylvania, http://www.cml.upenn.edu/nis).

selected experienced higher rates of crime than the city average. Philadelphia is one of the most racially segregated metropolitan cities in the United States, with Black-White segregation measured at 74 (on a scale of 0–100), and Hispanic-White segregation at 59 at the time of the study (Logan & Stults, 2012). Thus, it was not difficult to target specific racial/ethnic groups by neighborhood to generate the sample.

The Black sample was recruited mainly from the Mantua, Haddington, and Mill Creek neighborhoods in West Philadelphia. Blacks in Philadelphia are 2.7 times more likely than Whites to be exposed to poverty (Logan, 2011, p. 7). Census data indicate that Mantua and Mill Creek have the highest rates of poverty in the sample (see Table 2). Rates of aggravated assaults are also the highest in the three neighborhoods (see Table 2). The Latina sample was recruited from West Kensington in North Philadelphia. Latinos comprise the largest racial/ethnic group in West Kensington, of which Puerto Ricans comprise the largest share with smaller numbers of Dominicans and Central Americans. In West Kensington, almost half of residents live below the poverty line. The White sample was recruited in the Fishtown, Richmond, and Kensington neighborhoods in North Philadelphia. Fishtown and Kensington are home to historic working-class Irish Catholic communities. Richmond or "Port Richmond" is predominately inhabited by Polish immigrants and Polish Americans. Although poverty rates in Fishtown and Kensington are the lowest in the sample, over a third of Richmond residents live below the poverty line (see Table 2). However, urban Whites experience less exposure to the most severe effects of concentrated disadvantage than poor Blacks and Latinos (Chaisson, 1998; Sampson & Wilson, 1995).

Data Collection and Analysis

For the study, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews in respondents' homes, at playgrounds, and at social service agencies. All interviewees completed a

demographic questionnaire, contact sheet, and consent form. Each in-depth interview included sections on (1) neighborhood conditions; (2) crime and social control; (3) safety and violence; (4) police; (5) family and romantic relationships; (6) school; (7) employment; and (8) peers. Interviews were open-ended and lasted 45–90 min. Respondents were paid $35 for the interview, and all chose pseudonyms and were granted confidentiality.

Interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed. Using Atlas.Ti, a team of trained coders conducted primary, deductive coding based on interview guide constructs. Coders achieved an overall interrater reliability of 88.0%. For this paper, we used the code "police" to explore youths' experiences with and attitudes toward police. We analyzed participants' responses on policing in and around their neighborhoods, based on responses to open-ended questions on police such as; "How do you feel about talking to the police?" and "What do you think of the police? What have been your experiences with them?"

We collated all references to police or policing and organized the responses by racial group. From these data, we inductively generated 44 subcodes such as "trust" (expressions of personal trust in police) or "slow to respond" (police do not respond when called quickly or in adequate time to stop crime). These subcodes were then organized into four categories: (a) positive sentiments/perceptions toward police; (b) negative sentiments/perceptions toward police; (c) positive interactions with police; and (d) negative interactions with police. Interactions with police were then separated into direct and vicarious experiences. Direct experiences include the quality of interactions between the women and police, along with perceptions of treatment during these interactions. Vicarious experiences include indirect encounters with police, such as observing and hearing about incidents between other civilians and police. The quality of police–citizen interactions is gauged by how participants perceive the respectfulness, civility, fairness, and consideration of officers and "the manner in which authority is exercised" (Tyler & Fagan, 2008, p. 238). We explored common and divergent trends and themes for each racial group to systematically analyze the variations in young women's experiences with and perceptions of police. We then analyzed negative sentiments and interactions with police to probe for expressions of legal cynicism as it relates to perceptions of police effectiveness, treatment, and trust. Finally, we inductively explore how gender, race/ethnicity, and neighborhood can shape legal cynicism for young women given their accounts of and attitudes toward law enforcement.

Findings

Our research found significant variation in the quality of interactions between police and Black, White, and Latina young women, along with the amount of indirect or vicarious experiences with police among the women. We also found variation in the amount of leniency or punitiveness (including use of force) experienced during police encounters, with Black respondents providing the most negative reports. Participants from each group reported more negative stop experiences in the

presence of Black males. Black young women reported the most negative police encounters whether alone or with others. By contrast, White respondents reported receiving more lenient treatment during police encounters and were more likely to report having connections within the police department. Both resulted in them not being arrested, even when they were engaged in illegal conduct. Latina respondents reported more incidents of gender-based police harassment. Vicarious police experiences also varied across racial/ethnic groups. Black and Latina respondents were more likely to witness negative police–citizen encounters, while White respondents were more likely to only hear about negative encounters through secondary sources. Findings suggest that these differential experiences with law enforcement considerably influence young women's perceptions of police effectiveness and shape legal cynicism across racial/ethnic groups.

"You Lucky Your Girlfriend Was Here": Variation in Police Stops

Police stopped the young women in our sample at similar rates across the three racial/ethnic groups. Roughly 66% of Black females (19 out of 29), 63% of White females (12 out of 19), and 55% of Latinas (12 out of 22) reported being stopped by Philadelphia police while in and around their neighborhoods (see Table 1). Although most stops did not result in arrest, there were differences across the groups in the quality of interactions with police as well as the reasons they were stopped. Several participants described police stops in terms of both racial and gendered discrimination.

For all racial/ethnic groups, the presence of Black and/or Latino men intensified negative interactions between the police and the young women. Of those stopped by police, a quarter of both White and Latina respondents, and 16% of Black respondents reported being stopped by police while in the company of Black and/or Latino young men. This finding is similar to those in other qualitative studies that suggest that regardless of race, youth are more likely to be stopped and potentially harassed by police while in the presence of young Black men (Brunson & Miller, 2006b; Brunson & Weitzer, 2008; Clampet-Lundquist et al., 2015). However, what is missing from these studies is how young White women describe being treated by police while around Black men.

The White women in our sample felt that they were targeted and treated harshly by police because of their perceived interracial relationship with Black men. When asked about being stopped by police while walking with her Black male friends, 19-year-old Laura asserted, "It's race stuff [. . .] I'm one little white girl so . . . they're all like big football player guys [. . .] and sometimes I think that maybe it's because the White cops see us together that they think that we are together, and they don't like other races with other races, so they come and say stuff to pick on us. . . ." Laura also described being called a "fucking White nigger whore" by an officer while she stood near young Black men on a street corner. In both encounters, Laura inferred that police were overtly racist against men of color and used this racism as a reason to "pick on" or harass her.

Similarly, Julia, an 18-year-old White female, describes an encounter with police involving her Black boyfriend. She detailed being pulled over and harassed by police, and how her boyfriend narrowly escaped being roughed up by officers:

> Like me and my boyfriend was about to get locked up and if I wasn't there, they woulda beat my boyfriend up, like seriously beat him up. Because, just because, he's Black, they didn't like him. So it was like, probably like, there was one female girl that came over and like four White police officers and like I, I'm just looking at them like . . . they were like, "You lucky your girlfriend was here."

In this situation, Julia not only acknowledges the overt racism of officers toward her boyfriend, but she also speculates that her whiteness and gender altered the situation. These negative encounters can be understood in terms of the "White paranoia" of police officers (Butler, 1993) whose fear and disdain toward interracial relationships are steeped in racial stereotypes about Black male criminality and sexuality (Russell-Brown, 2009).

However, while being seen with Black men increased negative police interactions for young White women, adverse attention decreased when these young women were alone or with non-Black friends and family members. A quarter (5 out of 19) White respondents describe being completely ignored by police. Nina, a 17-year-old White female, reasons,

> I guess 'cause I don't really look like I would do anything. Like I'm just really little, I look a lot younger than I am, so I'm never really, ever . . . bothered by the cops. Like I'll be out, like, late at night, like I walk to Wawa [a convenience store] or something and I . . . don't get stopped.

Nina's treatment is particularly noteworthy when juxtaposed with young Black women's experiences with police. Of those stopped, young Black women (14 out of 19) were more likely to be stopped while alone on the street than both White (4 out of 12) and Latina young women (4 out of 12). Barbie is a 21-year-old Black female who has been stopped primarily while walking alone through a predominately White college campus area. When asked if she is ever bothered by the police, she agreed, "Yeah. When I'm by myself. The cops just bother people." Barbie added, "But I'm twenty-one, they actually stopped me, asked me for I.D. and they thought that I belonged in school [. . .] and I told them I was out of school. Then they tried to tell me I wasn't out of school."

When asked more about her encounter with police, Barbie contended that police " . . . wanted to know . . . basically they figured, I was there to do some type of trouble or something . . . you know, I never been stopped inside my actual neighborhood." For Black women, appearing to be alone or "out of place" (Bass, 2001) in public and predominately White spaces can prove dangerous, as her Black identity can make her susceptible to negative interactions with police (Novak & Chamlin, 2012). Consistent with existing research (see Stewart, Baumer, Brunson, & Simons, 2009) the young

Black women we interviewed reported being perceived as suspicious or "up to no good" by police when they are alone, as well as while in the presence of their Black brothers, boyfriends, cousins, and friends. Young White women reported being perceived with similar suspicion only while in the company of Black men.

Police Leniency

The pattern of mostly negative treatment for young Black women in interactions with police contrasts with that of young White women, even when these respondents were engaged in illegal behavior. Almost half of White respondents recounted stories of being ignored or left alone by police while innocent, but also reported escaping arrest or citation while engaged in criminal conduct. Several young White women disclosed that they were given warnings by officers when caught stealing, using drugs, breaking curfew, or drinking while underage. Julia, an 18-year-old young White woman, confessed that some officers "let you get away with certain things but they're like, 'Alright, I'mma give you this warning. Next time you do it, you're gonna get locked up or you're—something's gonna happen.'" Sixteen-year-old Michelle, who is also White, remembered drinking in a house full of minors when cops entered and collected names:

> [The police] came in and they were like, "Man I thought this was a rave party." [respondent laughs] . . . . They took everybody's name down and at the point in time, my friend's [White] mom was getting us the beer or whatever, and she walked into the house with two cases of beer in her hand [laughs]. And uh, and [the police] took down all of our names and they asked [my friend's mom] what she was doing . . . and she's like, "Oh this is my beer." And [the police] were like, "Yeah? Two different kinds of beers?" [respondent laughs] . . . and then [the police] said none of us were leaving until our parents came and got us . . . and um, [the police] didn't do nothing to the mom. No.

Likewise, when 15-year-old Lauren, who is White, was caught drinking at a friend's birthday party, she admitted, "We didn't get arrested or written up, they just let us go. . . . Never. I always got off the hook someway, somehow." Young White women who received such leniency described police encounters in a matter-of-fact way, wherein officers appear compassionate, forgiving, and even amused during these interactions. Police leniency of this ilk was never mentioned by the Black and Latina women in our sample.

White respondents (8 out of 19) were also able to avoid serious trouble with the law when they had some form of personal or familial relations to the police department. Twenty-year-old Ariel reported that she is often stopped and questioned by White police officers while with her friends, but she always manages to escape trouble because her stepmom is a Philadelphia police officer. She explained:

> [. . .] knowing somebody gets you out of trouble. Like no matter what kind of trouble you are in, knowing somebody will get you out of it [. . .] I've seen cops come and like

my friends have been smoking weed and stuff like that; [and the cops] just either break it in half or they tell you to put it out on the ground. I mean you don't get in trouble for it [. . .] if you have a cop in your family you're off the hook, you know? So I'm sure if somebody else tells [my stepmom] that they have a cop in their family, she lets them go too. 'Cause she expects that we get let go.

Comparably, when Daniele, a 21-year-old White female, was arrested for truancy, she acknowledged that:

"this one cop from my neighborhood [. . .] he got me out [of jail] 'cause he went and came to the district. I was there and he told them to let me out and he took me home . . . he was just a cop from my neighborhood. He knew my dad and stuff so. . . . "

Both Ariel and Daniele described situations where they were able to draw on extended networks within the Philadelphia Police Department to escape prosecution. Race and social networks are influential in creating and maintaining privilege, and "knowing somebody [to] get you out of [trouble]" has material benefits and advantages for young people. This finding is particularly salient given the fact that the Philadelphia Police Department is majority White (57%) in a city where almost half of the population is Black, and Blacks are eight times more likely than Whites to be incarcerated in the state (Burnley & Kerkstra, 2015; Nellis, 2016).

Punitive Chauvinism

Experiences with sexual harassment and gender-based mistreatment emerged as an important distinction between White and non-White respondents. Our findings are consistent with existing literature that suggests that low-income women of color are especially vulnerable to involuntary sexual contact from both strangers and male police in their communities (AAPF, 2015; Cobbina, Miller, & Brunson, 2008; Miller, 2008). We call these gendered encounters examples of *punitive chauvinism* wherein male police officers use coercive power to hassle, threaten, and manipulate young women who lack the power to protect themselves (Kraska & Kappeler, 1995; Novich, 2015). We use this term in efforts to capture how young women describe the audacious and at times, aggressive, behavior of officers that we believe is steeped in gendered attitudes of superiority toward women.

Our analysis revealed that Latina and Black young women's attitudes of mistrust are tied to direct and vicarious experiences with punitive chauvinism. The White females we interviewed did not describe experiencing such misconduct. Though outside the scope of our interview questions, seven female respondents (five Latina and two Black) volunteered that they had experienced, witnessed or heard about situations where officers stare down, flirt with, and bribe young women—even when they are underage (see Table 1). Kiona, a 19-year-old young Black woman, put it plainly: "[police] . . . they like a lot of girls too [. . .] they really stop and try to talk to [flirt with or make sexual advances towards] females nowadays." Michelle, a

Black 15-year-old, said that police stopped her 13-year-old friend outside of a 7-Eleven store:

> . . . she walked past and [the officers] told her to "come back." And [the officers] was talking to her . . . like why is you talking to a little behind girl? [. . .] "Where you going? Oh you look nice." . . . Like trying to flirt with her. [She's] thirteen [. . .] I call the cops perverts, cause they be beeping [honking the car horn] at us.

Although the race of the officers was not mentioned, Black and Latina women we interviewed describe being harassed or propositioned by officers as they go about their daily routines. In some cases, advances by police officers turned into threats. Marcia, a 17-year-old Latina, was outside after curfew when an officer intimidated her friend into giving him her phone number or he would "take [them] all down to the district." This form of punitive chauvinism is demonstrative of the vulnerability these women face.

Young women's experiences with sexual harassment crystallized into attitudes of mistrust of the police, as officers who are charged with protecting them from victimization victimize them instead. Melanie, a 17-year-old Latina, explained:

> I don't trust them. I mean, I just don't trust them 'cause I'll be walking down the street and I'll have a bunch of cops just staring at me trying to talk to me, and it's just like how can I trust them if they're trying to talk to me? Like I'm suppose to go to [the police] when I feel scared or something, but I don't know what will happen if I do go to them and [the police] say, "Oh, you know, she's pretty, let me get with her [make a sexual advance]." You know, it's just, I don't know.

Young Black and Latina women's fear and uneasiness around sexual victimization adds a layer of complexity to their lived experiences with policing, and drives negative sentiments toward officers as agents of social control.

"I feel like they pull their guns out for anything": Police Aggression and Use of Force

Direct Experiences

Only eight young women in our sample had direct experience with police aggression and use of force (see Table 1). This finding coincides with prior research suggesting that young women are less likely to encounter physical force from police officers than are young men, especially young men of color (Fine et al., 2003). Of those stopped, Black (5 out of 19) and Latina (3 out of 12) respondents were more likely than White respondents (1 out of 12) to describe incidents involving police aggression and misconduct. Latina respondents explain that they were stopped, frisked, and harassed while with their male family members or friends. Kelsey, a 17-year-old Latina, recounted that police burst into a party and frisked her and her male friends. When asked to describe how police treated her during this incident, Kelsey

replied, "I would say [the police] were . . . they were like really rude, aggressive, like when they . . . searched us like they were like not gentle at all." Alexis, a 22-year-old Latina, denied provoking an officer to cock his weapon while standing outside with her male cousin, though she stood on a street known for drug trafficking. She related, "[The officer] got out with a gun and he literally cocked his gun and he had it like on his hip pointing to the floor though. But he still like the fact that he cocked it and had it down like that's uncalled for . . . . " Though the officer did not appear to draw his weapon, Alexis described his actions as aggressive and excessive given that she and her cousins were unarmed.

Young Black women we interviewed also experienced police aggression. Samantha, a 14-year-old Black female, said police drew guns on her and her friends while coming out of a Chinese food store near a drug corner. She said that police were "staking out the corner" and mistakenly deduced that she and her friends were selling drugs because they frequented that store everyday. Similarly, Trish, a 20-year Black female, said police drew a gun on and arrested her during a neighborhood fight: " . . . the officer kept telling me, 'Move! Move! And I didn't move, and he pulled his gun out on me." Trish claimed that she wasn't involved in the actual fight, but only tried to usher a pregnant resident out of harm's way when the fight intensified. She said when she attended court after she was arrested, the officer lied and "kept telling them he didn't pull his gun out on me, [that] it was a taser gun, he [said he] *grabbed* [emphasis] it, [but] he never pulled it out, [or] put it in my face." Seventeen-year-old Diamond was on her way to the movies with cousins when an officer maced her during a flash mob, which is a large, organized public gathering wherein youth show up to quickly perform a random act (e.g., dancing, vandalism, or fighting) before dispersing. When she and her cousins tried to approach the officers to complain about the mace, Diamond reported that one officer yelled, "I don't f-ing care get the f [out of] my face you black b[itch]."

Significantly, only one White woman in the entire sample reported experiencing police use of force or aggression. Michelle, a 16-year-old, said that a female officer tightly handcuffed her before throwing her in the back of a squad car. When asked if the cop's treatment changed her opinions about police in general, Michelle laughed and said, "No, 'cause some cops ain't . . . ignorant like that and [. . .] so maybe she was havin' a bad day or something. I don't know. Like, I still feel like they are people that protect us and keep us away from danger. . . . "

Vicarious Experiences

Most young women we interviewed claim to have witnessed or heard about incidents of police misconduct or use of force in and around their neighborhoods. These indirect encounters or "vicarious" experiences occur where people "learn about the police through the experiences of others" (Rosenbaum et al., 2005, p. 346). Studies show that vicarious experience with police has a pronounced negative effect on Blacks, given their accumulated experiences with racially biased policing and discrimination (Brunson, 2007; Feagin & Sikes, 1994). In our study, most women across racial/ethnic

groups reported witnessing or hearing about negative police encounters. But we also find subtle differences in the nature of such contact by race, particularly whether young women were more likely to witness or only hear about negative police interactions. Similar to quantitative findings from Rosenbaum et al. (2005), differences in the "sources of information" or how young women learned about negative policing, shaped how they made sense of their vicarious experiences and ultimately their expressions of legal cynicism. Latina and Black respondents were more likely to actually witness police aggression toward their family members, friends, or neighbors—while White respondents were more likely to describe hearing about negative incidents or to provide other third-hand information through word of mouth or news about police misconduct.

Findings from Table 1 indicate that over half of Black women (17 out of 29) and Latina women (13 out of 22) witnessed police harassment or mistreatment, in comparison to about a third of White women (6 out of 19). Several young women witnessed what Clampet-Lundquist et al. (2015) describe as an "ever-present mosquito cloud of police officers" (p. 275) that stop, frisk, and harass their Black and Latino peers and family members. The general sentiment after witnessing such contact is that police stops appeared unwarranted and unpleasant. Twenty-year-old Llaya, a Black female, said that police gather in her neighborhood "just to have something to do" and to "pick with you just to pick with you." Young Black and Latina women described incidents with young male family members or friends in terms indicative of racial profiling and harassment. As reported, the incidents persisted with male family and friends whether or not they had been previously arrested.

Jessica, a 22-year-old Latina explained that her brother has warrants, and police "arrested him and threw him against the car, and broke his lip and his face was bruised. . . ." Yesenia, a 21-year-old Latina shared that her brother has never been arrested, but that police "stop him for nothing and check his car or grip him up, follow him, just 'cause the way he looks, 'cause of his appearance." These findings complement patterns found by Clampet-Lundquist et al. (2015) about the young men from the larger sample, wherein Black and Latino male respondents are stopped, frisked, and profiled whether they were involved in illegal activities, have ever been arrested, or were simply walking home from school.

With one exception, the White women in the sample did not report witnessing or hearing about police using excessive force against their family members. The one, Julia, recalled an incident of police misconduct toward her brother. When asked if she trusted the police, 18-year-old Julia reasoned,

> In some ways but at the same time, I'm second guessing [the police] nowadays because for the whole point [. . .] they have planted something on my brother inside of a car . . . 'cause they knew he was on drugs, 'cause they seen him all the time, they just [wanted] to get him off the streets, so they planted something in the car when they came and picked him up. [. . .] so like, I'm second guessing them now. Even though I wanna be a cop just so I can prove to everybody like not all cops are bad.

Black and Latina women were more likely to witness negative incidents between police and members of their local community than White women. Many of these incidents took place on street corners, on public transportation, in parks, or in front of someone's home. Several young women said that they witnessed young men and women of color being stopped, harassed, or abused by police officers, many of whom they knew informally as neighbors or local residents. Sixteen-year-old Sarah, a Black female, explained:

> . . . it be innocent people out here and [the police will] do stuff to them but they don't do stuff to the bad guys. Like it was this [Black] lady just walking down the street, [the White officer] had frisked her and everything. She didn't have anything on her [illegal substance or contraband] and so that's when [the officer] slammed her on the car and just started hitting her with the baton . . . I don't know, [the officer] just said "Don't come around here no more," whatever . . . I seen [the lady] before, she used to live down the street but I don't know why he did that, the cop, and he called her, you know, the N-word.

Girl, a 15-year-old Latina, added a similar experience:

> . . . like I been on SEPTA [public transportation] and I've seen like three big husky White cops, bald-head like real husky like lookin' like them wrestlers and everything around this one little Black girl that's like real little like 14, 15 years old. Real small, skinny, like she can't even take one of [the officers] down by herself, so it's like why do all three of ya'll need to be surrounding her and everything? . . . And so it was like yeah, all for her spitting her gum out. . . .

These experiences of police misconduct helped form attitudes of mistrust toward police among Black and Latina young women, as they reported viewing the officers' actions as inappropriate and racially discriminatory.

Rather than actually witnessing incidents, more young White women (8 out of 19) described hearing about negative incidents or provided other third-hand information about negative police interactions than do Latina (4 out of 22) and Black (3 out of 29) women (see Table 1). White respondents' perception of officers is largely based on what others have told them rather than what they have personally experienced or seen (8 out of 19). For example, when asked about her experiences with policing in her neighborhoods, 15-year-old Lauren, who is White, explained:

> . . . like you usually hear. . . . "Oh, the cops took too long to get here," like sometimes you'll read newspapers and it'll [be] like, "by the time the cops got there—the ambulance or whatever got there—[and police] were too late."

Our findings show that White respondents often hear about negative police activity in the neighborhood from other sources, such as by word of mouth and media. This pattern is noteworthy given that young White women in our sample live in heavily policed neighborhoods where crime is prevalent. Vicarious experiences through both witnessing and hearing about misconduct are important in the creation of attitudes of

mistrust, but the sources of this information matter in how these women develop their overall sentiments toward the police. Our findings suggest that hearing about rather than witnessing adverse policing might create a level of disconnectedness that mitigates against the development of negative sentiments.

Police Effectiveness and Legal Cynicism

Our data show that legal cynicism is connected to perceived effectiveness of police as well as treatment by the police. Overall, Black women (15 out of 29) and Latina women (10 out of 22) were more likely to mention police ineffectiveness than White women (5 out of 19) when asked about their interactions with law enforcement. Individuals can assess effectiveness on a community level—how well do the police keep drug dealers off the corner or bullets from flying—and on a personal level—how will the police respond if I am victimized? Existing research indicates that police are less likely to protect victims of crime in urban neighborhoods, as some perceive these residents as lacking capital and "undeserving" of protection efforts (Klinger, 1997; Thacher, 2011). Young women's direct and vicarious experiences with negative policing in the current study coalesced into feelings that police are unfair, illegitimate, and not to be trusted. These feelings were most pronounced among Black and Latina respondents, and White respondents to a lesser extent. These women expressed frustration about police officers' unwillingness to protect them from men they encounter on the street, and an inability to effectively address crime they experienced or witnessed. Young women who discussed victimization reported that officers (a) would not arrive on time to the scene of the crime, (b) would not believe their accounts of what occurred, or (c) would not do anything to bring about justice.

For example, when a male stranger followed 19-year Kiona, a Black female, she said that an officer contended, "what do you want me to do to him? [. . .] For all I know, you could be a young person messing with a man like he was just minding his business." Similarly, 18-year-old Searra was sexually and physically assaulted near her neighborhood. When she went to the police station to explain what happened, she said that police "were just like really rude like just saying whatever they wanted . . . [the police] thought I was making it up." As a consequence of this experience, Searra said that she does not trust police and vows that she would not call them, even if she needed help. Fifteen-year-old Stevie Lynn, a White female, was also followed by a male stranger, and added, "I mean I wouldn't even call the cops really because they—I would be afraid they wouldn't get there on time."

Although Black, Latina, and White respondents perceive the threat of gender-based violence by the men in and around their neighborhoods, Black and Latina females reported more incidents of actual victimization. Both actual and perceived threats of violence contributed to overall attitudes of mistrust, as young women report that they cannot rely on officers to protect them from victimization.

Relative to White respondents, Black and Latina respondents were more likely to voice mistrust for police, to describe personal and indirect disrespectful treatment and unjust displays of power. Their comments include seeing the police as ineffectiveness:

"they just write a report and leave", and simultaneously abusive. Barbie recounts what happens with her family members: "cops arrest them and take everything out they pocket, leave them in parks and stuff and just like ride off." Similar occurrences are not reported by her White counterparts.

Conclusion

Research on urban policing is often inattentive to young women's lived experiences with law enforcement. Instead, research places young Black men at the forefront of the conversation about the police and young people in urban America. In this paper, we redirect this focus and examine young women's accounts of their interactions with the police in low-income and high-crime neighborhoods in Philadelphia. The race and ethnicity of the young women interviewed influenced the nature and quality of both direct and vicarious interactions. Although police stopped Black, Latina, and White young women at similar rates, the quality of the interaction was less aggressive with White females. The young White women interviewed were far less likely to report police physical aggression, sexual harassment, or being stopped on the street while alone. They were also more likely to report escaping punishment and less likely to be perceived as suspicious by police. Only Latina and Black young women described experiencing police sexual harassment, and also gender-based victimization in and around their neighborhoods. Moreover, Black and Latina young women were more likely to report witnessing negative encounters with police that involved their friends or family than were White females.

Our analysis reveals that race/ethnicity and gender shaped the encounters between our sample of low-income youth and police. Relative to their White counterparts, Black and Latina young women experienced a higher frequency of negative encounters (both direct and vicarious), more instances of what we call punitive chauvinism, and a lack of law enforcement response when they were under threat (see Table 1). We conclude that these experiences and the social meaning attached to them have shaped the frame of legal cynicism leading Black and Latina young women to express higher levels of distrust and less confidence in the effectiveness and good intentions of law enforcement than do White respondents.

There are limitations to the current work as with any study of this nature. Though we interviewed in several neighborhoods and sought to recruit respondents from a diverse number of networks, the sample is not representative. However, given the consistency of our findings with other research in these contexts, we are confident that we have captured and expanded upon many of the complexities that surround young women's experience of policing in disadvantaged and high-crime communities. Future research should seek to validate our findings on the variability of direct and vicarious police experiences, across race and gender; and, their influence on legal cynicism toward law enforcement and broader legal constructs.

There is room for optimism because despite their expressions of cynicism, when some of our respondents were victimized, they sought assistance from the police, which is an indicator that while diminished—their belief in the power and authority of

the police was not completely absent. Our findings indicate that through more respectful, less aggressive, legally appropriate, discerning and caring behavior, law enforcement may be able to reduce legal cynicism among Blacks and Latinas; and, build or rebuild their legitimacy in socially disadvantaged communities and among potential victims who need their services the most.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. We use the term "young women" to connote both teenagers and young adults. This term is frequently used in criminological literature (e.g., see Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013; Cobbina et al., 2008; Jones, 2009).
2. While we acknowledge that the ecological conditions of disadvantaged urban Whites are not of the same magnitude as those of Blacks and Latinos, we have focused on contexts where there is a significant degree of White poverty, in that each White neighborhood we focus on has at least a 20% poverty rate. Similarly, the White neighborhoods have serious crime rates that are significantly higher than the city average.
3. Sandra Bland was a 28-year-old Black woman who was found hanged in her jail cell in Waller County, Texas in 2015, three days after being arrested during a traffic stop where she was physically abused by a White male officer.
4. Dajerria Becton is a 15-year-old young Black woman who was violently arrested and assaulted by a White male officer in McKinney, Texas during a teen pool party in a predominately White neighborhood.

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