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Edited by Howard Giles, Edward R. Maguire, and Shawn L. Hill

# **The Rowman & Littlefield Handbook of Policing, Communication, and Society**

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**Edited by HOWARD GILES,  
EDWARD R. MAGUIRE, and SHAWN L. HILL**

Foreword by  
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ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD  
*Lanham • Boulder • New York • London*

Published by Rowman & Littlefield  
An imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.  
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706  
www.rowman.com

6 Tinworth Street, London SE11 5AL, United Kingdom

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Giles, Howard, 1946— editor.

Title: The Handbook of policing, communication, and society : an interdisciplinary approach / edited by Howard Giles, Edward R. Maguire, and Shawn Hill.

Description: Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield, 2021. | Series: The Rowman & Littlefield handbook series | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary:

"The Rowman & Littlefield Handbook of Policing, Communication, and Society brings together well-regarded academics and experienced practitioners to explore how communication intersects with policing in areas such as cop-culture, race and ethnicity, terrorism and hate crimes, social media, police reform, crowd violence, and many more" — Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020053039 (print) | LCCN 2020053040 (ebook) | ISBN 9781538132890 (cloth) | ISBN 9781538132890 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Police. | Police ethics. | Police-community relations. | Criminal justice, Administration of.

Classification: LCC HV7921 .H34 2021 (print) | LCC HV7921 (ebook) | DDC 363.2/3—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020053039>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020053040>

∞™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

*We dedicate this book to Jane, Betty, and Alexis,  
for their love, support, and patience*

## CHAPTER 5

# Race, Policing, and Communication

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## Old Problems, Twenty-First-Century Struggles

Travis Dixon, Marisa A. Smith, and Kristopher R. Weeks

Over the last few years, concerns regarding racial inequity during police interactions have remained at the forefront of political and policy discussions. Media coverage, political debates, videos disseminated via social media, and public protests highlight apparent police mistreatment of minorities (see the introduction and the conclusion to this book). Public outcry following officer-involved shootings, such as the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown, or the more recent deaths of Breonna Taylor (Oppel 2020) and George Floyd (Hill et al. 2020), sparks debate about fatal officer encounters (see chapter 16 and the this book's conclusion). Spurred by social media, viral recordings of traffic and pedestrian stops by police regularly instigate dialogue about police-community relations. We argue that interpersonal interactions and mediated vicarious experiences with police officers shape people's trust of law enforcement (see chapter 8). A lack of trust between citizens and law enforcement can erode the ability of officers to reduce crime in partnership with the community (Barker et al. 2008). Communication scholarship elucidates key aspects of interpersonal and mediated encounters that can create trust or mistrust between police and citizens. In this chapter, we discuss theories and behaviors highlighted by communication scholars that explain the racial divide in perceptions of the police, manifesting in a lack of trust by communities of color.



## ROUTINE TRAFFIC STOPS, COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION, AND PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE BIAS

There are two kinds of experiences that the public likely have with the police—direct and vicarious. The most common direct experience would be the common traffic stop (Barker et al. 2008; Dixon, Schell, Giles, and Drogos 2008). Two theories stand out when we consider these direct experiences: communication accommodation theory (CAT) and social identity theory (SIT).

CAT provides a wide-ranging framework designed to predict and explain the adjustments interactants (e.g., officer and citizen) make to create, maintain, or decrease social distance (Giles 2016). Social distance does not refer to the physical distancing related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, social distance in this context refers to a person's immediate (and often unconscious) communicative adjustment to be more similar or dissimilar toward another person (Dragovic, Gasiorek, and Giles 2016). It proposes that communication can be influenced by the immediate situation and sociohistorical context in which it is imbedded. Sociohistorical context includes the history of relations between police and community members (Giles, Willemyns, Gallois, and Anderson 2007; see also this book's conclusion). For example, disproportionate investigatory stops (Epp, Maynard-Moody, and Haider-Markel 2017), especially prevalent in African American communities during the Reagan era "War on Drugs" (Alexander 2010), provide sociohistorical context for greatly deflated levels of trust during routine traffic stops (see chapter 16). SIT further elucidates that our personal identities become linked with our perception of our own group in relationship to other groups (see chapters 1, 6, and 22). Therefore, interactants (e.g., White officer, Black citizen) often act as members of their respective groups rather than as individuals. This leads them to preference ingroup members (e.g., fellow White people, including officers) rather than outgroup members (e.g., dissimilar Black people). Some of those ingroup preferences lead interactants to communicate their kinship or closer social distance as predicted by CAT. Thus, ingroup members reflect more kindness, consideration, and similar language style to reflect a type of social "closeness."

CAT says that people use communication to demonstrate their attitudes toward one another—an indicator of the social distance between them. It highlights the process of convergence, a strategy whereby one adapts their communicative behaviors (e.g., verbal and nonverbal patterns) to become more similar to their interactant's behavior. Convergence represents attempts to decrease social distance (e.g., between officers and interactants) and spur cooperation, while divergence represents an attempt to reestablish social boundaries (Barker et al. 2008; Giles, Willemyns, Gallois, and Anderson 2007).

### CAT and the Routine Traffic Stop

CAT suggests that understanding communication between officers and the public requires looking at interactants, their motivations, and how their communicative strategy may be perceived. Therefore, it may be illustrative to consider the routine traffic stop from both the position of the officer and public interactants. Many Black people have been given the "talk." The talk remains a series of strategies passed down from African

American parents to their children to encourage the use of accommodative statements and stances when undergoing a routine traffic stop. Black children are encouraged to deploy convergent behavior designed to discourage officers from arresting, beating, or killing them (Brunson 2007). However, despite these efforts, Black people often encounter harsh treatment by the police, which may lead them to engage in divergent communication during traffic stops.

However, officers, having received less accommodative behavior from Black people, may deploy more divergent communicative behaviors during routine traffic stops with African Americans. In fact, Dixon et al. (2008) investigated each of these possibilities by content analyzing over three hundred dash cam video interactions between Black and White officers and drivers in Cincinnati. In line with SIT and CAT, they found that officers and drivers exhibited more accommodative behaviors (e.g., speaking with more respect and politeness) when officers and drivers were from the same race. However, Black drivers performed more divergent communication (e.g., less courteous and apologetic) compared to White drivers overall. Moreover, officers engaged in more divergent behavior when interacting with drivers from different races.

### Limits of Accommodation and Racial Disparity

The more divergent communication exhibited by Black drivers might be linked to the fact that they do not receive the same treatment once detained by police, and this may influence their accommodative behaviors. For example, Dixon et al. (2008) found that Black drivers were subject to more extensive policing than White drivers. This included stops that lasted for a longer duration for Black than White drivers; more officers present during the traffic stop for Black versus White drivers; and a higher likelihood that a Black rather than White occupant was searched during stops. Moreover, these scholars found that Black drivers became more belligerent the longer they were detained. Ultimately, these kinds of personal adverse encounters with police officers can drive a decreased trust in the police (e.g., Lai and Zhao 2010) and increase the belief that police perform illegitimate actions (e.g., Gau and Brunson 2012). This also illustrates the limits of convergence. Black drivers may have difficulty remaining accommodative when White officers engage in divergence and extensively police them. At the same time, White officers encountering less accommodative behavior from Black drivers might view the harsher actions of fellow officers toward Black drivers as justified behavior. We should note that such interactions are interdependent with divergence from either officer or member of the public more likely to engender even more divergence over time (Dixon et al. 2008). All of this may perpetuate a lack of trust between officers (particularly White officers) and African Americans.

For an illustration of the deterioration of this trust, surveys have highlighted a disconnect between public and police perceptions of fatal officer-involved shootings of African American citizens. A Pew Research Center study surveyed 7,917 police officers from 54 police agencies, as well as 4,500 public respondents. According to the survey, 67 percent of police officers view fatal police encounters with African Americans as isolated incidents, as opposed to a sign of a broader problem. The public, however, reports that these incidents are indicative of larger issues. Sixty-eight percent of police officers



report that protests against law enforcement are primarily motivated by anti-police bias, while only 10 percent of officers believe these protests occur out of a genuine desire for officer accountability (Morin, Parker, Stepler, and Mercer 2017). Furthermore, the public increasingly views policing policies, like the New York City Police Department's stop-and-frisk program, as the cause of racially inequitable citizen stops (Chang and Poston 2019). We should note here that some of these officer opinions and their comfort level with over-policing Black people might be driven by implicit bias. We explore these processes more below and then extend them to mediated contexts.

## COGNITIVE ASSOCIATION, IMPLICIT BIAS, RACE, AND POLICING

An obvious disconnect can be seen in the paragraph above. Police believe that bad behavior by law enforcement occurs rarely, while the public sees this as more regular and systematic. This makes sense from the officer's perspective because policing is supposed to be a service occupation. This disconnect can be partially explained through implicit and explicit biases developed through media consumption (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, and Davies 2004).

According to Spencer, Charbonneau, and Glaser (2016), implicit biases operate outside of conscious awareness but, nonetheless, shape our behaviors. These biases derive from cognitive associations or stereotypes that link specific groups with certain behaviors or traits (e.g., Black people are criminals or Black people are violent). Such implicit biases influence judgments that lead to biased policing through a process of misattribution and disambiguation. Implicit bias and priming have also been used by communication scholars to understand how people process mediated and interpersonal messages. Our minds rely on various cognitive associations that lead to fast judgments about various social categories (e.g., Blacks are most likely up to no good). This is sometimes called heuristic processing (Dixon 2020). Our cultural context (including media, which is discussed below), socialization, and intergroup experiences (e.g., a White person who grew up in an overtly racist family) influence the accessibility of these cognitive links.

Heuristic processing and implicit bias explain why African American off-duty officers remain much more likely to be killed by fellow officers compared to White off-duty officers (Charbonneau, Spencer, and Glaser 2017). Moreover, uncertainty exacerbates the influence of racial bias during officer decision making. Therefore, certain driver behaviors during traffic stops (e.g., reaching for a wallet sometimes looks like reaching for a gun) can contribute to disproportionate violence against Black drivers (Glaser, Spencer, and Charbonneau 2014). Finally, it should be noted that besides the obvious death and injury that result from bias, racial profiling itself often leads to negative consequences. Hackney and Glaser (2013) found that profiling of Black confederates in a laboratory study encouraged more cheating among White participants. This again shows how this heuristic processing can lead to poor outcomes regarding policing. This study has real-world implications as reporting indicates that White people who are stopped and searched by the police tend to have contraband more often than Black people who are searched (Chang and Poston 2019).

Psychologists, criminologists, and communication scholars have for decades studied the mechanism and outcomes associated with the implicit bias illustrated in the studies above. Many of them point to cultural information and social interaction that form implicit cognitive linkages between social groups and stereotypes. Mediated messages in the form of television or news media form cultural information that facilitates implicit bias (see chapter 10). Furthermore, mediated messages contribute to explicit endorsements of racial stereotypes associated with African Americans (e.g., African Americans are culpable; Dixon 2006, 2008) or other groups of color (e.g., Figueroa-Caballero and Mastro 2018). Therefore, information that Black and White non-officers and officers receive via the media might facilitate vicarious intergroup interactions that deepen mistrust. We turn to the role of mediated messages in furthering mistrust and perpetuating stereotypes below.

## MEDIA CONTENT, EFFECTS, AND POLICE-PUBLIC MISTRUST

Media might also be a source of vicarious experiences by officers and citizens that encourages negative intergroup dynamics and promotes stereotyping (see chapter 15). Media reinforce messages about groups that shape attitudes and behaviors, particularly regarding race and the police (Dixon and Azocar 2007). For example, traditional entertainment media consistently portrays officers as successful at clearing cases, yet as also hypermasculine and overly aggressive (Dowler and Zawilski 2007; Oliver 1994; Scharrer 2001). Research has found that media consumption of these distorted images increases the belief that police engage in misconduct (see chapter 15). However, at the same time, they tend to be depicted as extremely proficient at solving crimes. Moreover, news media consistently overrepresent officers as being White and heroic (Dixon 2017a; Dixon, Azocar, and Casas 2003; Dixon and Linz 2000). This leads news consumers to assume that unidentified officers are White and to think more positively about these officers as a result (Dixon 2007).

The depiction of African American people remains stark in comparison to White officers. As we have noted elsewhere, research has found that African Americans have been overrepresented as criminal suspects in news programming compared to official crime reports (Dixon and Linz 2000). In entertainment programming, particularly in gaming, Blacks tend to consistently be depicted as aggressive and resistant to pain (Dixon, Weeks, and Smith 2019). Moreover, the news overrepresents Black families as poor and criminal (Dixon 2017b). These mediated depictions shape the conceptions of Black people among media consumers. Scholars have found that news consumers exposed to these stereotypes support the death penalty for Black suspects and believe Black criminals to be incorrigible (Dixon 2008).

There are three potential implications of these effects for our current discussion. First, officers, especially White officers, who consume traditional entertainment and news media, will develop strong cognitive associations between African American people and criminality. This consumption would then lead to greater implicit bias when the police interact with Black people and hence reduce trust between Black persons and



White officers. Second, Black people will be more suspicious of officers because of their media portrayal as hypermasculine rulebreakers. Third, citizens, especially White citizens, will be slower to embrace police reform and quicker to support punitive stances against people of color (further contributing to systemic discrimination in the criminal justice system; see Dixon and Azocar 2007). These conclusions can be buttressed by a number of theoretical perspectives that we mention below.

### Cultivation and Traditional Media Effects

As we note above, implicit bias, cognitive accessibility, and priming help explain the communication dynamics and behaviors in the interactions between officers and members of the public, particularly when they do not share the same racial background. Communication scholars have utilized these same theories to explain the effects of stereotypical media consumption. In addition, they have also developed a framework, known as media cultivation, that incorporates the theoretical notions of accessibility and implicit bias (Dixon 2020). Cultivation implies that our view of the real world starts to look like the media world the more we consume said media content. In other words, *cultivation* refers to the long-term shaping of social reality from repeated prior media exposure.

Therefore, a White officer who encounters an individual cognitively related to a previously viewed media stereotype (e.g., Black poor person) might make a quick (and possibly inaccurate) judgment about them based on repeated exposure to this stereotypical depiction over time (e.g., they must be a criminal). This suggests that heavy traditional news and entertainment media might reinforce the negative conception of Black people in the mind of officers. Cultivation has a number of underlying constructs. One of them is resonance. Resonance refers to when a mediated encounter matches an interpersonal encounter, making previous mediated encounters more powerful in shaping perceived reality (Busselle and Van den Bulck 2020). For example, if I have seen numerous Black criminals in the movies and have just been robbed by a Black criminal, I am much more likely to embrace the mediated “reality” of Black criminality. Resonance has implications for when Blacks face mistreatment and verbal aggression at the hands of police. For them, the prior media depictions of over-aggression match the divergent communication behaviors of officers they may encounter during stops, making a lack of trust much more likely.

### EMERGING MEDIA, POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS, AND THE SOCIALLY MEDIATED STEREOTYPING MODEL

However, we increasingly receive our news via social media and other online technologies (Dixon 2017c) rather than analog television or newspapers (see chapters 10 and 21). These emerging technologies allow us to curate our own news and to follow “sources” that tend to reinforce our group identity as predicted by SIT. Therefore, officers might consume news media that upholds their own group identity and disparages other groups (e.g., Black people who may be assumed to be criminals or provocateurs).

Similarly, Black digital media consumers might encounter “news” that includes the sharing of videos and other content that shows police abuse (Anderson and Hitlin 2016; Bigman, Smith, Williamson, Planey, and McNeil Smith 2019). These behaviors can be explained by the socially mediated stereotyping model (SMSM; Dixon, 2017c). The SMSM contends that most digital media consumers remain susceptible to unconscious bias reinforcement through algorithms and selection preferences. This bias strengthens when digital consumers seek stereotype confirmation (e.g., officers are abusive or Black people are criminals).

SMSM may partly explain why 75 percent of officers report that interactions between police and African Americans have become tenser after recent high-profile incidents that have likely been shared over social media (Morin et al. 2017). Moreover, African Americans and Latinos who fear their group identity will cause them to be racially stereotyped report lower trust in the police (Kahn, Lee, Renauer, Henning, and Stewart 2016). These people of color have vicariously experienced the mistreatment of African Americans by officers through social media and may have also directly experienced resonance from the divergent communication behaviors of officers who have detained them. They may be experiencing the self-reinforcing principles described in SMSM.

### Traffic and Pedestrian Stops: Racialized Treatment in Tone and Searches

We should note that there remains ample evidence that African Americans often receive poor service from law enforcement. These apparent racial disparities in policing remain the most significant limitation to convergent communication strategies designed to encourage cooperation and trust. We highlight a few examples here and then place summaries in table 6.1. Traffic stops, in particular, substantially influence drivers’ trust in law enforcement (Barker et al. 2008). Research suggests that racially disproportionate traffic stops and differential experiences *during* traffic stops indicate racial disparities (Tillyer and Engel 2013). African Americans are consistently subjected to more intensive policing experiences during routine traffic stops, such as being detained for a longer period of time, as well as having passengers and their vehicles searched (Dixon et al. 2008; Poston and Chang 2019).

African American and Latino pedestrians are also disproportionately targeted for *frisks*, that is, the search of an individual through a pat down of their outer garments for weapons or drugs (Legewie 2016). For example, Gelman, Fagan, and Kiss (2007) examined the New York City Police Department’s “Stop and Frisk” policy to determine whether there was any racial bias in undertaking this effort at curbing crime. They found that even after controlling for a number of factors, including arrest rate and neighborhood factors, that African Americans and Latinos were more frequently stopped than Whites. Similarly, Ridgeway (2007) analyzed NYPD pedestrian stop data and found that Black suspects were slightly more likely to have been frisked than White suspects. In fact, a great deal of research highlights problematic racial disparities connected to pedestrian, passenger, and vehicle searches. Pre-textual stops are not conducted to enforce traffic or pedestrian regulations but, instead, allow officers to temporarily detain pedestrians and drivers viewed as reasonably suspicious. While

TABLE 5.1. Racial Disparities

| Race   | Source                                                   | % of Population | % of Stops | Use of Force | % of Searches | Likelihood of Being Searched  | % Contraband Found | Likelihood of Deadly Force                     |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Black  | Legewie 2016—peer reviewed                               | 25              | 54         | 22           | —             | —                             | —                  | —                                              |
| White  | Legewie 2016—peer reviewed                               | 45              | 10         | 16           | —             | —                             | —                  | —                                              |
| Latino | Legewie 2016—peer reviewed                               | 28              | 32         | 24           | —             | —                             | —                  | —                                              |
| Black  | Epp, Maynard-Moody, and Haider-Markel 2017—peer reviewed | —               | —          | —            | —             | 5 times as likely as Whites   | —                  | —                                              |
| Black  | Ryan (2015)—peer reviewed                                | —               | —          | —            | —             | 2.5 times as likely as Whites | —                  | —                                              |
| Black  | Chang and Poston (2019)—periodical                       | 31              | 65         | —            | —             | —                             | —                  | —                                              |
| Black  | Poston and Chang (2019)—periodical                       | 9               | 27         | —            | 24            | —                             | 17                 | —                                              |
| Latino | Poston and Chang (2019)—periodical                       | —               | —          | —            | 16            | —                             | 16                 | —                                              |
| White  | Poston and Chang (2019)—periodical                       | —               | —          | —            | 6             | —                             | 20                 | —                                              |
| Black  | Johnson et al. (2019)—peer reviewed                      | —               | —          | —            | —             | —                             | —                  | 6.67 times more likely to be Black than white  |
| Latino | Johnson et al. (2019)—peer reviewed                      | —               | —          | —            | —             | —                             | —                  | 3.33 times more likely to be Latino than White |

police departments across the United States utilize investigatory stops to prevent crime, investigatory stops disproportionately target African Americans (Epp et al. 2017). Once stopped, African American drivers tend to be subject to more searches of their person and vehicles (Ryan 2015).

An analysis in Los Angeles found similar disparities in the proportion of African Americans involved in police stops. The *Los Angeles Times* examined stops conducted by the Los Angeles Police Department's specialized metropolitan division from 2015 through 2018 (Chang and Poston 2019). The data demonstrates that African American drivers are stopped at rates double their representation in the Los Angeles population (Poston and Chang 2019). Even though laws prohibit investigatory searches on the basis of race, African Americans are searched at rates higher than Whites. When considering the race of the officer, Rojek, Rosenfeld, and Decker (2012) found that searches during stops involving a White officer and African American driver (8.22 percent) were more common than searches of African American drivers by African American officers (3.89 percent). The racial composition of the neighborhood also influenced the rate of searches experienced by White and African American drivers. In communities with a low percentage of African American residents, searches occurred most often when they involved White officers and African American drivers. However, when the community was predominantly African American, searches of White drivers by White officers were most common. The authors suggest that these diverging rates of stops within communities of differing African American populations potentially represents "out-of-place" policing. African Americans in predominantly White neighborhoods may be met with suspicion and, therefore, have the police called on them by White residents. In addition, officers might stop these drivers because their presence violates the officers' expectations and, subsequently, they must be "up to no good" (Rojek et al. 2012).

The disparate application of searches during traffic stops is not justified by the amount of contraband produced by these searches. Research demonstrates that officers find weapons or drugs through searches in a greater percentage after stopping White drivers, even though African American drivers are stopped at a disproportionately higher rate than White drivers (Poston and Chang 2019).

### Police Use of Force

Not only are African Americans subjected to a disproportionate amount of stops and searches, they also may encounter greater use of force (Kramer and Remster 2018). In New York City, African Americans and Latinos are not only stopped at proportions greater than their representations in the populations, they also experience a higher rate of physical force by police officers than White people (Legewie 2016). Kramer and Remster (2018) found that Black suspects are particularly more likely to experience potential lethal force when police uncover criminal activity, and this disparity is greatest for Black youth compared to White youth. Similarly, Willits and Makin (2017) found that officer body-worn-camera footage revealed less time before deploying force against African American suspects compared to White suspects.

In addition, Cesario, Johnson, and Terrill (2019) looked for potential racial disparities in police shootings by comparing the amount of African American and White



Americans killed by police based on the category of their criminal activity (i.e., murder, violent crime, weapons violations). When using violent crime rates as a benchmark, these researchers found no evidence of racial disparities in officer-involved shootings, including shooting of unarmed citizens and shootings due to misidentified objects. However, Johnson, Tress, Burkel, Taylor, and Cesario (2019) did find that African Americans are disproportionately involved in officer-involved shootings compared to Whites.

While those citing these works would conclude that racial disparities in officer-involved shootings are nonexistent, the analytical methods used by the researchers pose concerns. Skeptics posit that researchers must determine whether African Americans are over- or underrepresented in officer-involved shootings relative to their encounters with police (Knox and Mummolo 2020) or relative to their representation in the population (Menifield, Shin, and Strother 2019).

Nix, Campbell, Byers, and Alpert (2017) used this approach when examining 990 fatal officer-involved shootings in 2015. Specifically, the researchers examined the representation of unarmed and aggressive African Americans and other racial groups among those fatally shot by police. When examining the racial makeup of suspects attacking the police officer(s) or other people killed by police, African Americans and other racial/ethnic groups were less likely to have been an aggressor than White Americans. Additionally, among unarmed persons killed by police during this same period, African Americans outnumbered Whites.

## THE COMMUNICATION AND INTERGROUP CONSEQUENCES OF RACIAL DISPARITIES ON TRUST

Thus far, we have described a significant amount of disparity that would lead to communication divergence rather than convergence during both pedestrian and vehicle stops by the police. Such negative interactions might be facilitated by a combination of implicit bias, stereotyping, and media consumption and, therefore, lead to distrust of the police. Such distrust would then lead to less cooperation and involvement in community-oriented policing (Barker et al. 2008; see chapter 10). For example, a survey of 756 residents in the Houston metropolitan area found that African Americans report more negative attitudes and less trust in the Houston Police Department than White residents (Lai and Zhao 2010). The researchers also examined relationships between personal experience and perceptions of the police. They found that satisfaction with the police's work in the residents' neighborhood was significantly related to attitudes toward and trust in the Houston Police Department. Residents who reported lower satisfaction with police work in their neighborhood, including interaction with citizens and crime prevention efforts, reported lower levels of attitudes and trust (Lai and Zhao 2010).

Police behavior during traffic stops also impacts public perception. Police departments often use searches during traffic stops as a crime prevention mechanism. However, when motorists receive requests from officers to search their vehicles, drivers' report decreased perceptions of the stop's legitimacy (Gau and Brunson 2012). Racial

identification also impacts perceptions of stop legitimacy with African Americans reporting the greatest level of stop illegitimacy. Given that African Americans are disproportionately subjected to vehicular searches during traffic stops (Epp et al. 2017), these relationships help explain African American perceptions of the police. Specifically, these authors found that vehicle searches during traffic stops damage trust in police, more so than the officer's language (e.g., level of respect).

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter discussed how interpersonal interactions and media content may influence relationships between the police and African Americans. We have offered communication accommodation, social identity theory, implicit bias/cognitive accessibility, SMSM, and cultivation to explain the possible opportunities and pitfalls to trust between Black people and police officers (particularly White officers). We discussed the role of CAT and SIT in defining how communication messages during police-public interactions can either increase or decrease social distance, leading to either more or less trust. However, we also discussed how processes associated with implicit bias/cognitive accessibility, cultivation, and SMSM reinforce stereotyping that leads to racially biased policing. We then detailed some of these disparities as seen in stops, searches, and use of force. Furthermore, we reviewed the negative outcomes these disparities pose for the public's trust in the police, especially those from Black and Latino communities. This review assists our understanding of fragmented opinions about policing held by the public and officers, but it can also aid in answering an integral question. How can police departments remedy the negative physical, cognitive, and attitudinal effects of policing procedures during encounters with African American and Latino populations?

Research demonstrates that merely increasing the amount of African American officers does not change institutional regulation and practices (Nicholson-Crotty, Nicholson-Crotty, and Fernandez 2017). Instead, we believe that police departments should first acknowledge the factors underlying racial differences in policing. Police departments must recognize and alter their institutional cultures and incentives, such as their reliance on disproportionate pedestrian and traffic stops. Institutional practices, such as the utilization of investigatory stops for crime prevention, open the door for racial disparities in the application of these procedures (Rojek et al. 2012). Although intended for positive outcomes, drivers may find such stops illegitimate (Gau and Brunson 2012).

Overreliance on investigatory stops can decrease trust in policing institutions and depress attitudes toward police officers (Epp et al. 2017; Gau and Brunson 2012). Consequently, the assessment of practices adopted by police departments and the recognition of any inadvertent consequences these practices present is integral for the equitable treatment of Americans during police interactions. We would argue that both departments and officers can begin to fix the wounds of mistrust by focusing on the nature of the routine traffic stop (Dixon et al. 2008). Two issues should be addressed: the extent to which the officer in question provides less accommodative and positive communicative interaction with African American and Latino drivers; and the extent to which these stops involve additional scrutiny (duration, searches) that may not be warranted



by the circumstances (see chapter 16). In addition, there needs to be a recognition that these adjustments in training and intervention are more likely to be successful if they incorporate the understanding that biased policing occurs in the absence of explicitly "racist" thoughts. Instead, they often occur because of well-documented, pernicious stereotypes that operate largely outside of conscious awareness and control (Spencer et al. 2016). One strategy being taught in some policing academies that needs to continue is the notion of mindfulness. Mindfulness encourages moving judgments from a below conscious to conscious level that greatly diminishes the influence of stereotypes. It is the process of making distinctions (Barker et al. 2008). Such distinctions separating people of color from perceived inherent criminality needs to be facilitated so that service and cooperation with these communities can thrive.

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## CHAPTER 6

# Intergroup Biases

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## Policing and Gender

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The purpose of this chapter is to discuss how the intergroup dynamics of women in policing in the United States affect the values and practices of law enforcement agencies and the interactions between officers and the public. According to the social identity approach (SIA), social identities are developed and made visible through communication, including language (vocabulary, domain-specific jargon, and labels) and nonverbal cues (uniforms, badges, and hair; Dragojevic and Giles 2014; Reicher, Spears, and Haslam 2010). Important consequences of the SIA process include the depersonalization of one's self and of others, the formation of stereotypes, and intergroup bias, which is the propensity to systematically evaluate representatives of one's own membership group (the ingroup) more positively than representatives of a non-membership group (the outgroup; Hewstone, Rubin, and Willis 2002). Although the SIA framework is often used to explain why dominant groups discriminate, it can also be used to identify resistance by marginalized groups and highlight possibilities for change (see this book's conclusion).

In this chapter, we focus on four specific areas regarding intergroup dynamics and women in policing. First, we outline important conceptual and measurement issues. This includes an overview of the status of women in policing in the United States and a presentation of relevant concepts about police culture. Second, we describe prominent theories within the SIA framework with an eye toward understanding the fundamentals of intergroup dynamics and explaining why women remain underrepresented and marginalized in policing. Third, we discuss how intergroup dynamics affect police-public relations in the United States. In particular, we describe how intergroup dynamics may affect organizational structures and institutional policies, as well as officer decision making when facing potential use of force situations. Finally, the chapter