

WE NEVER CALL THE COPS AND HERE IS  
WHY: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF  
LEGAL CYNICISM IN THREE  
PHILADELPHIA NEIGHBORHOODS\*

PATRICK J. CARR

Department of Sociology  
Rutgers University

LAURA NAPOLITANO

Department of Sociology  
University of Pennsylvania

JESSICA KEATING

Department of Sociology  
Saint Joseph's University

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*This article presents data from the completed first wave of a multiwave comparative study of crime, danger, and informal social control that focuses on youth living in three high-crime neighborhoods in Philadelphia, PA (N = 147). The study is a purposive sample of delinquent and nondelinquent young men and women in one predominantly African-American, one predominantly Latino, and one predominantly white neighborhood, and researchers have completed in-depth interviews and self-reports with each subject. This article focuses on the narratives that youth living in high-crime neighborhoods build around their contact*

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*with police and the strategies the young people propose for crime reduction in their communities. The data illustrate that most youth in each neighborhood are negatively disposed toward police and that this is grounded in the lived experience of negative encounters with law enforcement. However, when youth expounded on what they thought would reduce crime, they overwhelmingly chose increased and tougher law enforcement. We analyze these findings to determine whether support exists for a subcultural approach or a cultural attenuation/procedural justice argument, and we explore the implications of our findings for community-based crime control.*

What do young people who live in high-crime neighborhoods think about the police? What kinds of encounters and interactions with police do they describe, and what can this tell us about the prospects for trust and belief in the rule of law? Do encounters that youth have with police lead to legal cynicism, and, if so, what are the “cognitive landscapes” (Sampson and Bartusch, 1998) that give shape to such beliefs? Furthermore, does legal cynicism among youth foreshadow a diminution in police legitimacy in high-crime neighborhoods (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler and Huo, 2002; Tyler and Wakslak, 2004)? Police legitimacy is important because recent work has posited that new hybrid forms of informal control showcase partnerships between the police and the citizenry at the neighborhood level, which often have efficacious results in terms of controlling crime and disorder. Whether this new parochialism (Carr, 2003) or empowered participation (Fung, 2004) has any impact depends on the willingness of ordinary citizens, young and old, to trust, cooperate with, and empower police and other agents of formal control (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003). However, other research has demonstrated that legal cynicism is very high among residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods (Anderson, 1999; Sampson and Bartusch, 1998), and scholars have documented high levels of dissatisfaction with police among residents of poor neighborhoods (Huang and Vaughan, 1996; Smith, Graham, and Adams, 1991). Furthermore, recent controversy over so-called “Stop Snitching” campaigns in Philadelphia, PA; Baltimore, MD; and other cities (Gregory, 2005; Lee, 2006; White, 2005) has focused attention on youthful opposition to, and disaffection for, law and order, and some of this coverage has raised the specter of a lawless youth subculture that eschews the assistance of formal social control in controlling crime. This youthful alienation from police is, in the words of one commentator, emblematic of “a lethal counterculture [where] guntoting teenagers rule the roost” (Lee, 2006: 17). In this scenario, police will never gain the trust of youth who are so thoroughly enmeshed in the “code of the street” (Anderson, 1999; Hannerz,

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1969), and thus, police–community partnerships in many inner-city neighborhoods seem destined to fail. Such a conclusion offers a bleak and dystopian vision of the future for many disadvantaged neighborhoods where crime is high (Krivo and Peterson, 1996; Phillips, 2002) and where the only practicable policing model becomes one that focuses on aggressive order maintenance (Fagan and Davies, 2000). It is, therefore, crucial to investigate the dispositions of young people in high-crime neighborhoods toward police and the role that these young people envisage for formal social control in their communities.

Despite the apparent need to understand youthful views of formal social control, young people, particularly those under 18 years of age, are often absent from many studies of interactions with, and attitudes toward, police (exceptions are Bazemore and Senjo, 1997; Black and Reiss, 1970; Borrero, 2001; Brunson and Miller, 2006; Cox and Falkenberg, 1987; Daiute and Fine, 2003; Fine et al., 2003; Giordano, 1975; Leiber, Nalla, and Farnworth, 1998; Piliavin and Briar, 1964; Rusinko, Johnson, and Hornung, 1978; Taylor et al., 2001; Waddington and Braddock, 1991), and very few in-depth investigations have been performed regarding the encounters youth have with police in high-crime neighborhoods (notable exceptions are Brunson and Miller, 2006; Werthman and Piliavin, 1966). In this article, we showcase the experiences young people have with police and investigate the narratives they construct around crime reduction and, in so doing, seek to accomplish two main aims. First, we investigate the origins and illustrate the implications of legal cynicism among youth from high-crime urban neighborhoods. We draw on narrative data to illustrate how dispositions toward police are formed, and we further examine what role youth envisage for police in crime reduction. Second, we examine whether negative experiences with, and dispositions toward, police and legal officials lead to alienation from formal social control and a rejection of police legitimacy, or whether the discourses young people construct around police and the law are more ambivalent. Specifically, we frame the discussion in terms of whether youth dispositions toward police are subcultural in nature, where young people reject the rule of law outright (Anderson, 1999), or are more indicative of cultural attenuation (Warner, 2003) borne of procedural injustice (Tyler and Huo, 2002), where disaffection with the law is temporary and based on negative experiences with police.

Below, we place this work in the context of previous research on experiences with, and attitudes toward, the police and in the context of the literature on cynicism toward legal authority, police legitimacy, and the social construction of law. We go on to describe the study and to profile the neighborhoods. Next, we present the data on encounters with, and dispositions toward, police and on the narratives that youth construct about crime

reduction. Finally, we analyze the findings in terms of subcultural or cultural attenuation/procedural justice interpretations, and we offer suggestions for future directions in policy and research.

## LITERATURE

### HOW PEOPLE VIEW THE POLICE

Scholars have long recognized the role of the citizenry in the coproduction of police services (Huang and Vaughn, 1996; Reiss, 1971), which is a role that has become even more central as many police departments embrace variants of community policing (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997; Trojanowicz, Kappeler, and Gaines, 2002). Having a favorable attitude toward the police is a staple finding of opinion surveys (for example, Apple and O'Brien, 1983; Decker, 1985; Gallup, 1999a, 1999b; Walklate, 1992). However, surveys conducted since the 1970s have shown that African Americans are less likely than whites to trust the police and that whites are more favorably disposed to the police (Gallup, 1999a; Harris, 1999; Jacob, 1971). Although the attitudes of Hispanics to the police vary, they are usually more favorable than those of African Americans and less so than those of whites (Carter, 1985; Lasley, 1994). In terms of other demographic factors, attitudes toward police have also been shown to vary with age (Campbell and Schuman, 1972; Jesilow, Meyer, and Namazzi, 1995; Sullivan, Dunham, and Alpert, 1987), in terms of conservatism (Zamble and Annesley, 1987), and along class lines (Garofalo, 1977; Jacob, 1971), whereas the relationship between gender and attitudes toward police is more inconsistent (Cao, Frank, and Cullen, 1996; Griffiths and Winfree, 1982; Taylor et al., 2001). Research has also shown the critical importance of contact with the police and, moreover, satisfaction with the interaction in the formation of attitudes and dispositions (Huang and Vaughn, 1996; Russell, 1998; Smith and Hawkins, 1973; Worrall, 1999), a point supported by recent national data on public contact with the police (Durose, Schmitt, and Langan, 2005).

As stated above, one key finding in previous research is the relationship between satisfaction and police contact (Bayley and Mendelsohn, 1969; Griffiths and Winfree, 1982; Schafer, Huebner, and Bynum, 2003; Winfree and Griffiths, 1977) or, as Weitzer and Tuch (2004a) frame it, the role of experience in structuring attitudes, favorable and unfavorable, toward police (Rusinko, Johnson, and Hornung, 1978) or in structuring perceptions of injustice (Hagan, Shedd, and Payne, 2005). Scaglione and Condon (1980) found that personal contact with police matters more than socioeconomic variables in determining attitudes toward the police. The current study privileges experience over general attitude; in the in-depth interviews, the research team explored the experiences of the respondents with

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police and legal authorities as well as the narratives of the young people about such encounters.

### THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF DISPOSITIONS TOWARD POLICE

As scholars investigate the causal mechanisms that explain attitudes toward police (Brown and Benedict, 2002), increasing attention is being paid not only to comparative studies of African Americans, Hispanics, and whites (Weitzer, 2002; Weitzer and Tuch, 2004a, 2004b) but also to the community context of dispositions toward the police (Cao, Frank, and Cullen, 1996; Davis, 2000; Gallagher et al., 2001; Sampson and Bartusch, 1998; Stone and Pettigrew, 2000; Weitzer, 2000). Community context seems to matter in two ways. First, residents of high-crime neighborhoods are more likely to be negatively disposed toward police (Reisig and Parks, 2000; Sampson and Bartusch, 1998). Second, other studies have illustrated that community context matters, specifically insofar as police behave differently depending on the type of neighborhood they patrol (Smith, 1986). Variation exists along neighborhood context in terms of the likelihood of police using force (Smith, 1986; Terrill and Reisig, 2003); police are more likely to use force on suspects (Fagan and Davies, 2000; Terrill and Reisig, 2003; Websdale, 2001) or engage in misconduct (Kane, 2002, 2005) in disadvantaged neighborhoods. The emphasis Websdale (2001) puts on place-based encounters between police and citizenry as well as his attention to the actual experiences of his subjects underscore the importance of ecological context to the understanding of dispositions toward police. This study focuses specifically on the context of high-crime neighborhoods<sup>1</sup> because they are so often the staging grounds for complex interactions between citizens and police and law enforcement.

As a growing body of research has illustrated the crucial role of neighborhood context in explaining dispositions toward police (for example, Cao, Frank, and Cullen, 1996; Davis, 2000; Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane, 2003; Smith, Graham, and Adams, 1991; Thurman and Reisig, 1996), some of the work has illustrated the often complex effect that context has on dispositions toward police. For example, Jefferson and Walker (1993) find

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1. The neighborhoods for the study were chosen on the basis of their long-standing reputation as dangerous places. After the research team had spent several months of ethnographic fieldwork in each area, the team secured access to police data and found some variation in the official crime rates between the neighborhoods. Taken together all three neighborhoods accounted for one sixth of all homicides in Philadelphia from January 1, 2002 through June 30, 2004. In addition, the neighborhoods had 18 percent of all rapes, 15 percent of all robberies, and 16 percent of aggravated assaults. The violent crime rate in each of the three neighborhoods is considerably higher than for the city as a whole.

that blacks and whites from comparable neighborhoods have similar attitudes to the police, which cannot be explained by their experiences with law enforcement. However, a key limitation in previous research on perceptions of the police is the failure to connect dispositions toward police to wider social processes. Simply put, many authors have failed to spell out the possible consequences of negative experiences with and attitudes toward police and the legal system (exceptions are Albrecht and Green, 1977; Hahn, 1971; Hindelang, 1974). Thus, although several studies have established the importance of context in shaping dispositions toward police, few have considered the wider implications of their findings.

#### SUBCULTURE, VALUE ATTENUATION, AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF POLICE LEGITIMACY

Some notable research examines the potential effects of legal cynicism. Scholars have theorized disaffection with police and the legal system in two main ways, in keeping with the distinction by Warner (2003), derived from the work of Kornhauser (1978), between subcultural and attenuated value systems.

The first approach emphasizes oppositional values, where people are negatively disposed toward police because of their overall immersion in a subculture that validates deviant behavior and is antagonistic toward the rule of law (Anderson, 1999; Cohen, 1955; Leiber, Nalla, and Farnworth, 1998). Warner (2003) notes that this approach argues that subcultural norms propagate because of the increasing social isolation of the poor and disadvantaged in many American cities (see also Wilson, 1987, 1996). In this scenario, social isolation fosters an oppositional set of norms that repudiate the rule of law, foster antipathy toward police, and privilege the informal settling of disputes (Anderson, 1999). Police are not worthy of trust either because they do not respond effectively to problems or because cooperating with them is actively discouraged under the stigmatized rubric of snitching (Rosenfeld, Jacobs, and Wright, 2003). The subcultural approach views legal cynicism as the logical outcome of the marginalized status of minorities in disadvantaged neighborhoods and, simultaneously, as a coping mechanism for a situation where police are not accorded legitimacy. Thus, according to Anderson (1999), a “code of the street” emerges as a normative system, which is often rooted in negative experiences, that undermines police legitimacy and all but destroys the prospect of meaningful police–community partnerships to reduce crime. Youth who espouse the subcultural code should therefore be negatively disposed toward police and envisage little or no role for them in neighborhood crime control.

A second approach offers a more tempered view of legal cynicism, where the normative system is not wholly oppositional but is attenuated

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(Warner, 2003). Warner explains that attenuation occurs when societal values, in this case support for police and formal social control, cannot be fully realized or they fall into disuse. Crucially, no outright rejection of the value system occurs. In their examination of legal cynicism, Sampson and Bartusch (1998) make the critical distinction between tolerance of crime and deviance and tolerance of legal cynicism; they argue that people can be intolerant of crime and deviance while being negatively disposed toward the police and the criminal justice system. Several other studies have argued directly or indirectly from the perspective of attenuation, especially those that have examined the complex relationship that people have with the law (Erez, 1984; Ewick and Silbey, 1998), and the work of Tyler and his colleagues on procedural justice and police legitimacy (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1990, 1998, 2002; Tyler and Huo, 2002). In terms of how people socially construct law, Tyler (1998) argues that people obey the law not because they fear sanctions but because they feel that laws are morally appropriate, whereas Ewick and Silbey (1998) find that, although people may resist the law, they rarely do so in a wholly oppositional manner. The police are the most common manifestation of the law and the node through which people construct narratives about the law and the justice system generally (Hagan and Albonetti, 1982). Sunshine and Tyler (2003) argue for the centrality of police legitimacy in determining whether people will obey the law, cooperate with, and/or empower the police, and they find that people accord the police legitimacy when they feel that they are treated fairly by them. The attenuation approach allows for youth to be negatively disposed toward police, while simultaneously envisaging a crime-control role for a procedurally just police force.

In sum, with respect to what young people think about formal social control, two competing explanations exist. The first, the subcultural argument, advances the thesis that young people in high-crime neighborhoods are generally negatively disposed toward police because of the oppositional value system embodied in a "code of the street." The subcultural approach does not decouple cynicism from tolerance of crime and is thus prone to argue that the inevitable result of negative attitudes toward police and the legal system is a descent into a legitimization crisis (Habermas, 1990). The second approach, cultural attenuation, argues for a more complex and episodic response to formal social control, where youth can be temporarily legally cynical about police but be intolerant of crime. In the cultural attenuation approach, youth can envisage a role in crime control for a procedurally just police force.

### LIMITATIONS OF PAST RESEARCH

This work seeks to remedy several limitations in previous research. First, as we noted, much of the research on what people think of formal

social control has examined attitudes toward police (Apple and O'Brien, 1983; Carter, 1985; Huang and Vaughan, 1996), and consequently, a lack of attention is given to narrative in the research. Although some studies have used observation as the primary field method (Bazemore and Senjo, 1997; Black and Reiss, 1970; Jefferson and Walker, 1993; Mastrofski, Reisig, and McCluskey, 2002; Smith, Visher, and Davidson, 1984; Sykes and Clark, 1975), a notable absence of in-depth narratives exists that describe encounters with, and attitudes toward, the police (but see Weitzer, 2000; Werthman and Piliavin, 1966). The use of in-depth narratives helps explore the often complex views young people have of police and law enforcement and uncovers the cognitive landscapes within which these views are formed. Second, although several recent studies have examined the experiences of youth (Brunson and Miller, 2006; Hurst, Frank, and Browning, 2000), we still know relatively little about how young people view formal social control. Here we focus on young people because, as Hagan, Shedd, and Payne (2005) note, perceptions of justice that are formulated in adolescence persist through adulthood and, as the recent "Stop Snitching" controversies have shown, because it is increasingly critical to take the pulse of youth views of police and law enforcement. A final limitation in previous work has been the limited comparative focus in terms of race and gender. Some comparative studies of African Americans, Latinos, and whites (for example, Weitzer, 2002; Weitzer and Tuch, 2004a) either exclude youth or lack narrative data, and research that privileges narrative data (for example, Brunson and Miller, 2006) only focuses on African-American males and thereby has a limited comparative focus. This study attempts to address this limitation by providing narrative data for officially delinquent and nondelinquent African-American, Latino, and white males and females in high-crime neighborhoods. In so doing, we draw on in-depth data from a diverse array of experiences.

Several questions are grounded in the discussion of the literature that this study will seek to answer. First, what are the dispositions of youth living in high-crime neighborhoods toward police and the legal system, and do dispositions vary by race and context, gender, and whether the youth is officially delinquent? Second, given their dispositions toward police and the legal system, what would the young people do to reduce crime in their communities? Third, to what extent do the narratives about police and crime reduction provide support for a subcultural or cultural attenuation/procedural justice interpretation? Finally, what do these data augur for community-based crime-reduction initiatives?

### THE STUDY

The project entitled "Young People and Crime Control" is a multiwave comparative study that focuses on delinquent and nondelinquent youth



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living in three high-crime Philadelphia neighborhoods, renamed Cedar Grove, El Barrio, and Plymouth. Neighborhood was conceptualized initially both in terms of the cognitive maps employed by area residents to describe where they live and on the basis of colloquial designation of neighborhood areas in the city. That Cedar Grove covers a larger area and houses a significantly larger population than the other two neighborhoods is therefore a function of the perceptions and the civic traditions of the residents. We have employed an expert or purposive sampling strategy (Kalton, 1983) to recruit youth from each neighborhood. The respondents were recruited in a variety of ways. Some were contacted through community-based organizations, and some were recruited during participant observation in each neighborhood. Still others were recruited using a chain referral technique (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981; Watters and Biernacki, 1989). The sampling strategy was designed to recruit comparable groups of young people in each neighborhood. The original goal was to sample equal numbers of young men and women and equal numbers of officially delinquent and nondelinquent youth in each neighborhood. However, some categories of youth, for example, female delinquents, proved very difficult to recruit. For such difficult-to-recruit populations, the research team adopted a more targeted approach. For instance, researchers contacted day-treatment facilities and probation offices for referrals to officially delinquent youth. In all, we have conducted qualitative in-depth interviews and administered self-report questionnaires with 153 (we use only 147 here) respondents in the three neighborhoods. We attempted to recruit 164 youth, but we only completed interviews with 153, for a 7 percent refusal rate. Male delinquents were the most likely group to refuse to be interviewed; reasons given for refusal ranged from suspicion about how the data would be used to disdain for the size of the honorarium. Each subject was paid a \$25 honorarium for the interview and self-report survey, and the money was given to respondents before the interview commenced to ensure that the compensation was noncoercive. All subjects were promised strict confidentiality, and all subject names and specific places, such as streets or neighborhoods that we refer to here, are pseudonyms.

All interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the interviewee, and they were later transcribed by the research team and coded using the ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti GmbH, Berlin, Germany). The coding process entailed the derivation of family codes and theme codes. Examples of family codes are gender, race, delinquent status, and age grouping, which are used to classify categories of informants and thereby to facilitate comparison across groups. Theme codes are more sensitive than family codes, and the research team developed a set of codes that best exemplified the emergent topics. Examples of theme codes are

“coping strategies,” “drug sell/hustle,” and “popularity and peer pressure.” For the purposes of the following analysis, the germane theme codes were “police” and “how to reduce crime,” which were used to code all passages where subjects mentioned anything about police and crime reduction, respectively. Two members of the research team coded the interviews using the set of family and theme codes developed by the group. Intercoder reliability was 94 percent, which was achieved partly because the coding was completed collaboratively. The interview and questionnaire data were supplemented with intensive participant observation in each neighborhood, expert interviews with community residents, and official crime data and statistics.<sup>2</sup>

The sample is 51.7 percent male, 36.4 percent African American, 28.1 percent Latino, and 32.8 percent white (See table 1). Almost 30 percent of the sample is classified as officially criminal or delinquent,<sup>3</sup> although others have engaged in delinquent and criminal activities but have never been officially convicted. Over one third of the respondents have been arrested at least once, and many of the youth have been arrested multiple times. About three quarters of those we have recruited were still in school at the time of the interview, about 65 percent of these were in high school, and about 70 percent of the sample was under 18 years of age. The age range of respondents is from 12 to 23 years, which is intended to capture the experiences of young people at different stages of development.

#### THE NEIGHBORHOODS

The three Philadelphia neighborhoods that provide the context for our study of youth and crime control are Cedar Grove, a predominantly African-American neighborhood; El Barrio, a predominantly Latino neighborhood; and Plymouth, a predominantly white neighborhood. From table 2, we can observe that Cedar Grove has the largest population and that Plymouth has the smallest. In terms of disadvantage, the residents of El Barrio are poorer and have less education than the other two neighborhoods. The three neighborhoods are residentially stable; about two thirds of residents have lived there 5 or more years. However, with respect to violent crime rates, some differences exist between El Barrio and the other two neighborhoods. The homicide rate in El Barrio (149.5 per

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2. All official crime data were provided by the Philadelphia Police Department Crime Analysis and Mapping Unit. All incidents are geocoded so that only crime reported in each neighborhood is included in the description.

3. By “officially delinquent” we mean that, for those under 18 years of age, they have been convicted of a delinquent act. For those over 18 years of age, “officially criminal” includes any convictions after age 18.

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**Table 1. Demographic Information about In-Depth Sample**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Sex</b> ( <i>N</i> = 147)		
Male	76	51.7
Female	71	48.3
<b>Age</b> ( <i>N</i> = 146)		
12	10	6.8
13	12	8.3
14	20	13.7
15	20	13.7
16	21	14.4
17	18	12.3
18–19	24	16.4
20–21	14	9.6
22–23	7	4.8
<b>Race</b> ( <i>N</i> = 146)		
African American/black	53	36.4
Hispanic/Latino	41	28.1
White	48	32.8
Mixed: black/Hispanic	1	0.7
Other	3	2.0
<b>R Arrested</b> ( <i>N</i> = 147)		
Never	90	61.2
Once	17	11.6
Twice	16	10.9
3–4 times	17	11.6
5–9 times	4	2.7
10–19 times	3	2.0
<b>R Convicted of Crime</b> ( <i>N</i> = 147)		
Never	104	70.7
Once	24	16.3
Twice	15	10.2
3–4 times	4	2.8
<b>Education: Whether R Is Currently in School</b> ( <i>N</i> = 145)		
Middle school/junior high	23	15.9
High school	70	48.3
Third-level college	16	11.0
Not in school	36	24.8
<b>Yearly Family Income</b> ( <i>N</i> = 133)		
Under \$15,000	22	16.5
\$15,000–\$24,999	34	25.6
\$25,000–\$39,999	34	25.6
\$40,000–\$54,999	25	18.8
\$55,000–\$69,999	7	5.3
\$70,000 and over	11	8.3
<b>Home Ownership<sup>a</sup></b> ( <i>N</i> = 138)		
Own	101	73.2
Rent	37	26.8
<b>How Long Have You Lived at Current Address?</b> ( <i>N</i> = 140)		
Less than a year	21	15.0
1–5 years	40	28.6
5 or more years	79	56.4
<b>How Involved Are You in the Local Community?</b> ( <i>N</i> = 140)		
Not at all	55	39.3
Somewhat involved	64	45.7
Very involved	16	11.4
Used to be involved	5	3.6

<sup>a</sup>Includes whether parents rent or own the home.

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100,000) is twice that of Cedar Grove and almost three times that of Plymouth, and the overall violent crime rate (aggravated assault, rape, and robbery) in El Barrio is over twice that of Cedar Grove and Plymouth. However, when we compare the three neighborhoods with the city as a whole during the same time period, we observe that violent crime rates are much higher in each neighborhood we studied than in the city. For instance, Plymouth, which has the lowest violent crime rate of our three sites, has a homicide rate three times and a violent crime rate three and a half times that of the city as a whole.

**Table 2. Demographic Profile of the Neighborhoods and the City<sup>a</sup>**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>El Barrio</b>	<b>Cedar Grove</b>	<b>Plymouth</b>	<b>Philadelphia</b>
<b>Population</b>	16,052	28,985	7,320	1,500,000
<b>Gender</b>				
% Male	47.2	45.8	49.6	46.4
% Female	52.8	54.2	50.4	53.6
<b>Race</b>				
% African American	28.2	94.1	2.5	43.0
% other	51.7	3.6	3.0	11.9
% white	20.1	2.3	94.5	45.1
<b>Hispanic Population</b>				
% Hispanic	64.3	1.4	4.7	8.4
<b>Educational Attainment</b>				
% over 25 less than high school	60.1	34.6	35.4	28.7
% high-school diploma only	25.2	32.7	34.8	33.3
% college graduate	6.4	14.8	18.1	22.8
<b>Income and Poverty</b>				
Median household income (1999) in US \$	14,524	22,659	36,078	30,746
% in poverty	50.8	29.4	15.4	22.8
<b>Residential Stability</b>				
% living in same house in 1995	64.4	63.2	66.8	61.9
<b>Homicide Rate Per 100,000</b>	149.5	74.1	60.1	21.6
<b>Violent Crime Rate<sup>b</sup> Per 100,000</b>	11,459.7	5,395.8	4,713.2	1,351.2

<sup>a</sup>All information is based on U.S. Census 2000 data.

<sup>b</sup>The violent crime rate is calculated using official police data for all robberies, rapes, and aggravated assaults for the period January 1, 2002 through June 30, 2004.

Each of these neighborhoods is a tough place in which to grow up. When we asked the young people to describe their neighborhoods for people who had never been there, many of their responses focused on the harsh and dangerous nature of a high-crime community. The formal authorities

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are often a last resort for safety, despite their obvious presence in these neighborhoods.

### YOUTH ENCOUNTERS WITH, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD, THE POLICE

The study included one question on the quantitative self-report instrument on whether youth would call the police if they saw a group of teens misbehaving. Perhaps not surprisingly, a little less than 10 percent would call the police in any circumstance (that is, sometimes or always call police). Although the sample size is too small to perform any meaningful statistical analysis, the narrative data can expound on the reasons for and against calling police. The questions that elicited the most qualitative responses concerning police were as follows: “What do you think of the police in general and in your neighborhood?” and “Can you talk a little bit about any experiences or encounters you have had with police?” [Probe: “What happened in each instance?”] However, as is common with many in-depth interviews, respondents talked about police in response to other questions and probes. For example, some respondents spoke about police when we asked them to describe their neighborhood or to talk about the dangers they encounter in their daily lives. When respondents mentioned police, interviewers probed subjects to elaborate about incidents or dispositions. The research team collated all theme-coded incidences in which respondents expressed a disposition toward the police, whether positive, negative, or mixed, where the mixed category includes elements that are positive and negative in the same passage of conversation. In all, the interviews yielded 223 separate instances where respondents expressed a disposition toward police; the categories and subcategories are presented in table 3. Negative disposition is the largest category with 61.8 percent of all responses, followed by positive disposition at 26.3 percent, and mixed disposition at 11.8 percent. In general, the young people we interviewed had very definite views of the police, which were predominantly negative. As we analyzed the data further, we identified several subthemes in each category.

#### NEGATIVE DISPOSITION

Within the category of negative disposition, the largest subtheme is where respondents described an actual negative interaction with the police; this subtheme accounts for almost a fifth of all responses. The second most popular category is where our subjects talked about police being ineffective (15.2 percent of all responses). Other categories are a generalized negative view of the police (9.8 percent), where the police harassed people or used excessive force (6.7 percent), where the respondent said

**Table 3. Collated Responses about Attitudes Toward Police<sup>a</sup>**

<b>Responses<sup>b</sup> (N = 223)</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Negative Disposition</b>		
Generalized negative view	22	9.8
Negative interaction described	41	18.4
Police as crooked	13	5.8
Police as ineffective	34	15.2
Not call police in an emergency	13	5.9
Police harassment/excessive force	15	6.7
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>138</i>	<i>61.8</i>
<b>Positive Disposition</b>		
Generalized positive view	30	13.4
Police as authority/effective	9	4.0
Call police	15	6.7
Positive interaction described	5	2.2
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>26.3</i>
<b>Mixed Disposition</b>		
Generalized mixed view	13	5.9
Distinction between good and bad cops	13	5.9
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>11.8</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>99.9<sup>c</sup></b>

<sup>a</sup>Note that the units in this table are responses.

<sup>b</sup>Multiple responses were coded.

<sup>c</sup>Due to rounding total does not add up to 100 percent.

that they would not call the police in an emergency situation (5.9 percent), and where the police were said to be crooked (5.8 percent).

The most common way in which respondents revealed a negative disposition toward police was through describing an actual interaction with officers. This theme was consistent across neighborhood, gender, and whether the respondent was delinquent or nondelinquent. For example, 18-year-old Dana from Plymouth recounts how she was pulled over by the police. She prefaces her comments by saying that she knows a lot of cops, and “I don’t think they are doing a bad job.” However, she continues:

I see cops so often in my neighborhood, but when I see something bad going on, I look around and say “where are the cops?” And I got pulled over in my neighborhood a couple of weeks ago cause the cop, a couple of blocks from my house, said I rolled through a stop sign. And I said “No I didn’t! You just pulled me over.” You know what I mean, this little girl in a brand new car, right? In my neighborhood,

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for rolling through a stop sign? And someone's getting shot down the street, you know like?

Although described negative interactions are common in all of the neighborhoods, some of the African-American and Latino respondents constructed these events in terms of race (Brunson and Miller, 2006).

The second largest group of negative responses centers on the perception, on the part of the youth, that the police are ineffective. It is worthwhile to bear in mind that these young people live in high-crime neighborhoods, and thus, it might be easy to tag the police as ineffective. Respondents spoke about both a general ineffectiveness at stopping crime and a more specific ineffectiveness that centered on poor response time. Yasmeen, a 15-year-old from Cedar Grove who has been arrested twice, summarizes this response when she says that police "don't do nothing." Other respondents complained about slow response and echoed a sense of underpolicing often common in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Kane, 2005).

Other smaller categories in the area of negative disposition warrant attention, mainly because of their serious nature. In particular, some discourse involves so-called "crooked cops" and narratives where respondents detailed incidents of police harassment or the use of excessive force. All groups in the study referred to crooked cops, and most did so by referring to specific incidents. Often crooked cops were contrasted to an idealized good cop, whereas other times crooked cops were illustrative of deeper problems. For example, Luis, a 17-year-old from El Barrio, describes a police officer on the take:

I seen a lotta crooked cops in my little time you know what I'm sayin'? You give 'em, you give 'em a certain amount of money, say you give that cop fifteen hundred, two Gs, two thousand dollars, or whatever, and he act like he don't see nothing. He just roll around, but act like he don't see nothing. Knowing that in the corner [they] selling all types of drugs but he act like he don't see nothing cause by the end of the day he gonna get his own little pay check.

Latino and white respondents were more likely than African Americans to mention incidents of police harassment or excessive force, and within these two groups, delinquent Latino males had the most experience of excessive force.

In sum, negative dispositions toward the police are plentiful among our respondents and mostly based on lived experience and interactions that the youth in the study had with police in their neighborhoods. This finding is in line with other research on experiences with police (Brunson and Miller, 2006; Scaglione and Condon, 1980; Schafer, Huebner, and Bynum, 2003; Weitzer and Tuch, 2004a). Negative disposition toward police does

not vary across the three neighborhoods or along gender lines, which is a finding that runs counter to findings in previous studies that have shown minorities, especially African Americans, to be more alienated from police than whites and, to a lesser extent, Latinos. A significant bivariate relationship exists between arrest and disposition toward police ( $p < .10$ ), with those who have been arrested more likely to be negatively disposed toward police (table not shown). The association between arrest and negative disposition could lend weight to a subcultural argument, which is that those individuals most embroiled in deviance, as indicated by arrest, are likely to be negatively disposed toward the police. We will return to this point later in the article. However, not all of the youth we interviewed were negative about police, and a significant number did have some good things to say about the officers that serve their area.

#### POSITIVE DISPOSITION

Although less plentiful than negative comments, positive comments were made about the police by several of the young people. White and Latino respondents were more likely to say positive things about police than African Americans. For example, Maria, a 17-year-old from Plymouth, talked about how the police were nice to her when “my step-dad used to beat me.” Maria remembers the kindness and concern shown to her by the police officers long after the actual events. At least some positive feelings respondents had toward police were from successive initiatives in their neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup> For example, 18-year-old Monica from El Barrio stated that: “I guess they’re doing better now because they are actually like trying to get involved; they’re not just riding around. They standing in the corners and talking to people.”

Other subcategories in positive disposition are when the young people talked about a general willingness or comfort in calling police and when they see police as emblematic of the rule of law and order. Overall, positive dispositions are much less plentiful than negative ones, and they are less likely to be based on an actual interaction, except when the respondents mentioned the benefits of the various policing strategies operating in

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4. El Barrio and Plymouth are two areas that have been singled out for special policing attention, first in the summer of 1998 and more recently with a policing initiative that began in May 2002. The 1998 initiative was an attempt to dismantle the large-scale narcotics trade in El Barrio and in areas bordering the northwestern part of Plymouth. The main tactic was for police to flood the target area and make large numbers of arrests. In all, the 1998 program saw police make over 20,000 arrests in an effort to crack down on the illicit drug trade. In contrast, the 2002 initiative was designed to move criminals off the streets without arresting them (Benson, 2003).



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their neighborhoods or where they remembered a specific positive interaction with officers.

### MIXED DISPOSITION

The smallest subcategory was where the young people expressed a mixed disposition toward police or where they included both positive and negative comments in the same narrative passage. Youth in all three neighborhoods distinguished between the different types of officers, for example, by contrasting paycheck and crooked cops with superhero cops.

To summarize, the young people we spoke with in each community are mostly negatively disposed toward police, and this negativity is based mainly on the lived experience of encounters with law enforcement, some of which include instances of excessive force. Negative dispositions and experiences are common across neighborhood and gender, although those subjects who have been arrested are more likely to be negatively disposed than those never detained.

The data presented thus far seem to indicate a high degree of legal cynicism among the youth we interviewed. However, it is unclear whether the dispositions of youth toward police are emblematic of a subcultural orientation (Anderson, 1999; Kane, 2005) or whether the views are caused by an attenuation/procedural justice process (Tyler and Huo, 2002; Warner, 2003). For example, one could make a case that young people are negatively disposed toward police because of a deep-seated alienation that is symptomatic of their wider subculture or that the negativity derives from an attenuation brought about by procedural injustice. It is worth noting that the young people we interviewed made it apparent that they would like to live in neighborhoods that have less crime (Meares and Kahan, 1998; Sampson, 1999), which begs the question of what role they envisage for formal social control in crime reduction. We explore this question as a further test of whether youth narratives are indicative of subculture or cultural attenuation by examining data on what these young people suggest with respect to crime prevention. Here a markedly different picture emerges with respect to views about formal social control that is less oppositional to police and criminal justice.

### WHAT YOUTH WOULD DO TO REDUCE CRIME

Despite the often unfavorable dispositions the youth in our study had toward the police, when we asked our respondents to tell us what they would do to reduce crime and disorder in the city, most responses centered on improving or augmenting law enforcement. In an interesting twist on the theme of legal cynicism, many young people who were negatively disposed toward law enforcement would choose to fight crime with more

police. We coded all responses to the questions we asked about crime reduction, and in all 197 separate instances occurred, which are collated here in table 4.<sup>5</sup> The most germane dichotomy for the current analysis is the contrast between pro-criminal justice solutions and any other type of solution. The pro-criminal justice category of responses is the larger of the two and makes up 54.3 percent of the total, whereas other solutions make up 45.5 percent of the total.

#### PRO-CRIMINAL JUSTICE SOLUTIONS

The largest category of suggestions on how to reduce crime centers on augmenting law enforcement. Within this category, the subtheme of having more police, or as most respondents put it, “more cops on the block,” was by far the most prominent and consistent across race, gender, and type of youth. In fact, some youth in the study who were most involved with street crime were among the most ardent advocates of an increased police presence. James Clark, a 15-year-old high-school dropout from Plymouth, who has been arrested three times, enunciates the theme of an increased police presence. He says that what would reduce crime is a “lot more cops. Keep piling them up. If there’s a cop on every corner, you can’t do nothin’ can you?”

The second main way in which enhancement of the criminal justice system is observed as the antidote to high crime is through tougher enforcement of existing laws, which is a more sophisticated version of more cops on the block. Here young people advocate that police should get tough with the enforcement of existing laws and ordinances. Jason Topps, a 15-year-old white delinquent from Plymouth, exemplifies this approach:

I’d make things way more harder, like harder on people. I would like instant [snaps fingers] just lock somebody up. Not lock somebody up for not doing nothing, but you know prior crime. I would have the streets on lock [down] more you know, have more cops, have more things and start thinking about concentrating on the worse neighborhoods you know.

Other subcategories in the criminal justice-based solutions are where the young people argue for stricter gun control and drug interdiction, which respondents describe in terms of the control of supply and of “drug

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5. The responses were collated mainly from the following two questions we asked about crime reduction: “If you were mayor what would you do to reduce crime?” and “What can be done to prevent crime?” However, respondents also spoke about crime reduction in response to questions such as follows: “What would you like to see happen in your neighborhood?” and “Why do you think young people get involved in illegal activities?” Where responses to these latter questions spoke about crime reduction, they were included in the theme code “how to reduce crime.”

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**Table 4. Collated Responses on the Issue of Crime Reduction<sup>a</sup>**

<b>Responses<sup>b</sup> (N = 197)</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Support for Formal Social Control</b>		
<i>Law Enforcement/Criminal Justice</i>		
More cops	60	30.5
Tougher laws/stricter penalties	23	11.7
Drug interdiction	15	7.6
Tougher gun laws/control	9	4.5
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>107</i>	<i>54.3</i>
<b>Support for Other Than Formal Social Control</b>		
<i>Solutions Directed at Youth</i>		
More amenities/activities	18	9.2
Parent involvement	7	3.6
Avoidance	6	3.0
Socialize youth	6	3.0
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>18.8</i>
<i>Structural Solutions</i>		
More jobs	10	5.1
Better opportunities/schools	6	3.0
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>8.1</i>
<i>Community-Based Solutions</i>		
Neighborhood activism/engagement	9	4.6
Community/town watch	6	3.0
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>7.6</i>
<i>No Solution</i>		
Pessimism	22	11.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>99.8<sup>c</sup></b>

<sup>a</sup>Note that the units in this table are responses.

<sup>b</sup>Multiple responses were coded.

<sup>c</sup>Due to rounding total does not add up to 100 percent.

fiends.” In terms of gun control, the youth spoke about enforcing existing gun laws and limiting the number of firearms on the street.

The advocacy for criminal justice-based solutions was consistent across gender, race, and age groups, and equally popular among delinquents and nondelinquents, and most responses focused on providing more police. Other crime-reduction solutions were proffered by the youth in the study, which we group together as non-criminal justice-centered solutions.

## NON-CRIMINAL JUSTICE-CENTERED SOLUTIONS

Several subcategories existed in the noncriminal justice solutions. For example, some respondents advanced youth-centered solutions, which concentrate mainly on the provision of amenities and activities for young people. Chaunte, a 20-year-old from Cedar Grove, outlines her vision for a youth-centered response to crime:

I would have a lot more community involvement as far as with young people. Give them an alternative to being out there. You know, you don't have anything to do, so they see guys out on the corner and they think they're having fun-getting money, buying clothes, looking nice. So you give them an alternative and activities to keep their minds off negative things, you know I think they would be a lot better off.

Other youth-center solutions focus on parent involvement in the lives of their children, the need for youth to avoid trouble, and on the general socialization of youth. Providing a structural solution was another category favored by youth; the focus here was mainly on the provision of better opportunities and more jobs.

Community-based mobilization is another small subcategory of solutions, which is hardly surprising given that young people are often deliberately excluded from community-led efforts at controlling crime and disorder (Carr, 2005). Some respondents spoke eloquently about the need to build internal neighborhood responses to crime, such as those centered on block clubs and wider community engagement.

Finally, a few of the young people we interviewed were very pessimistic about the prospects for crime reduction. In some ways the pessimistic discourse takes up where the discussion of ineffective police ends, and in other ways, it would seem to be a by-product of a deep-seated legal cynicism. Those youth who were pessimistic view crime as inevitable, and they hold out little hope for change. For example, Jualo, an 18-year-old from El Barrio, remarked, "Not even the cops can stop crime, how I'm a stop it?"

Overall, although the suggestions for crime-reduction strategies are almost evenly split between pro-criminal justice solutions and any other type of solution, the pattern contrasts to the narratives on police, which were predominantly negative. Before interpreting the data, we perform some additional analysis on the narrative data.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES ON  
POLICE AND CRIME REDUCTION

The narrative data seems to indicate that youth are inconsistent in their views of formal social control, which is that overall they are negatively disposed toward police but still see a role for them in crime reduction. This

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inconsistency would seem to show more support for the attenuation/procedural justice approach than for subculture. The comparatively large sample size for a qualitative study allows us to perform some additional quantitative analysis to investigate the extent of bivariate associations in the data. One way to investigate the apparent contradiction is to establish whether some pattern exists in the views held by our respondents. It could be the case that the youth in this study are consistent in that those who are positively disposed toward police are more likely than those who are negatively disposed to opt for criminal justice-based solutions. The converse, where those individuals negatively disposed toward police show support for non-criminal justice solutions, could indicate support for the subcultural approach. We examined the bivariate relationship between dispositions toward police and proposed crime-reduction solutions. First we excluded respondents who primarily expressed a mixed disposition toward police. Then we recoded the solutions into two distinct categories, one where the respondent advocated a criminal justice-based solution (for example, more cops or tougher laws) and the second where respondents chose any other solution, including no solution.<sup>6</sup> The results of this analysis are displayed in table 5.<sup>7</sup>

The relationship between disposition toward police and whether the respondent favors a criminal justice solution to reduce crime is not significant. In fact, those who are negatively disposed toward police and who suggested a crime-reduction strategy are equally divided between pro-criminal justice and other solutions. The respondents who were positively disposed toward police were slightly more likely to favor criminal justice solutions, but overall, the relationship is not statistically significant. In other analyses not shown here, we examined whether a relationship exists between dispositions and solutions along gender or race/ethnicity lines. Again, neither relationship is statistically significant, although women who are negatively disposed toward police are more likely to choose a non-criminal justice solution to crime than men, and whites who are positively disposed toward police are more likely to choose a pro-criminal justice solution than either African Americans or Latinos.

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6. Where respondents advocated more than one type of solution (6 of the 121 or 5 percent of the valid cases), one of the authors reexamined the complete transcript before designating which solution was preeminent in the narrative.
  7. Note that the *N* for the cross-tabulation is 121, and so 26 missing cases exist. The missing cases are when respondents either did not have coded passages in which they spoke about dispositions toward police *and* suggested a crime-reduction strategy or when the respondent only expressed a mixed disposition toward the police and could not be said to have a definitive positive or negative disposition. In the latter instances, which accounted for 5 of the 26 cases, the research team reanalyzed whole transcripts to ensure that we had correctly designated each subject.

**Table 5. Bivariate Relationship Between Disposition Toward Police and Support for Criminal Justice Solutions for Crime Reduction<sup>a</sup>**

	Disposition Toward Police		Total
	Negative	Positive	
<b>How Reduce Crime?</b>			
Pro-criminal justice	35 (50%)	31 (60.8%)	66
Any other solution	35 (50%)	20 (39.2%)	55
<b>Total</b>	<b>70 (100%)</b>	<b>51 (100%)</b>	<b>121</b>
$\chi^2$	1.384 ( <i>p</i> value not significant)	<i>df</i> = 1	

<sup>a</sup>Note that the units represented in this table are individual respondents.

The data in table 5 confirm the sweep of the narrative data in that inconsistency exists in views of formal social control, which would seem to provide more support for the attenuation/procedural than for the subcultural approach. Another way of quantitatively probing the bivariate relationships in the data that could yield support for the subcultural approach is to examine disposition toward police and proposed crime-reduction strategies by whether the respondent was arrested. Earlier we mentioned that arrest is significantly associated with negative disposition toward police. Arrest is indicative of involvement in deviance (albeit alleged), and perhaps the experience intensifies the negative disposition toward police. In this scenario, arrest reinforces a deviant subcultural orientation, which should be further evidenced by a lack of support for formal social control in crime reduction. However, the bivariate relationship between arrest and crime-reduction strategies, as represented in table 6, is not significant. In fact, most of those youth who have been arrested profess support for pro-criminal justice crime-reduction strategies. These data need to be interpreted against the theoretical framework we proposed.

## DISCUSSION

What does the inconsistency of the respondents between disavowing police and wanting to see more of them to solve crime tell us about how young people view formal social control? Do youth in high-crime neighborhoods view the police and the law from a subcultural standpoint or do

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**Table 6. Bivariate Relationship Between Arrest and Support for Criminal Justice Solutions for Crime Reduction<sup>a</sup>**

	<b>Respondent Arrested:</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Never</b>	<b>At least Once</b>	
<b>How Reduce Crime?</b>			
Pro-criminal justice	41 (53.9%)	25 (55.6%)	66
Any other solution	35 (46.1%)	20 (44.4%)	55
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>45</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>121</b>
$\chi^2$	.029	<i>df</i> = 1	
	(p value not significant)		

<sup>a</sup>Note that the units represented in this table are individual respondents.

they socially construct formal control from a position of cultural attenuation? The data on disposition toward police indicate that most youth we interviewed view the police in negative terms mainly because of their experiences with them. However, the narrative data on crime reduction suggest that youth are not completely alienated from police and that most of them see a crucial role for police and law enforcement in efforts to control crime. A quantitative examination of the narrative data confirms that no significant pattern exists in the narratives about police and crime reduction that would indicate support for the subcultural approach. However, a case can be made for interpreting the data in terms of the notion of cultural attenuation borne from procedural injustice (Hahn, 1971; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Warner, 2003). Young people are negatively disposed toward police in part because they experience procedural injustice. For example, they are stopped for no good reason, they are harassed or treated roughly, or they encounter dishonest or lackadaisical police. As they describe these encounters, young people complain not so much about the outcomes but about the fairness of the procedure, which is a finding very much in accord with research by Tyler and his colleagues (see especially 2001). Therefore, the experiences of the youth we interviewed do not necessarily set them on a path to complete opposition to police and the legal system. Rather, their disenchantment is temporary, in keeping with the notion of attenuation, and is based in what many youth view as an unfair and unjust exercise of authority.

Perhaps a more straightforward explanation exists, which is that youth

in high-crime neighborhoods opt for increased formal social control to reduce crime because they are exposed to saturation policing on a regular basis and thus perceive it as the logical response to crime. Even more than the mere experience of saturation policing may be the heavily ingrained political, ideological, and psychological notions that promote get-tough policies (see Beale, 1997 for a more thorough discussion of this process). So the inconsistency between dispositions and strategies for crime reduction can be explained as youth advocating for the types of responses to crime that they know from experience. However, the narrative data provide a glimpse into a more complex and nuanced view of what formal social control should be, and it is one that emphasizes fairness and procedural justice. Specifically, many of the young people have an idealized notion of a just police officer who is the epitome of law and order. For example, 13-year-old Vaughn from El Barrio elaborates on this basic belief in law and order, especially as demonstrated by the police. He says:

If there was no police round every corner there would be a riot or a mob. That would be like there is no rules. And the police need to set rules and laws, because if there was none there would be chaos around this world.

Also, 22-year-old Pete from Plymouth, a self-described delinquent with no official record, outlines a vision for crime reduction that relies mostly on locally based law enforcement:

Police are no longer part of the community. They're considered an outside element. The cops are the man, you know you wanna fight the man. Back in the day it used to be beat cops. You would know the cop for your block. He knew Mr. Eddy. He knew you. You know there's no personality to them anymore. It's all impersonal.

The paradox embodied in the narratives of our respondents is echoed in the Richard Brooks (2000) study of the perceptions of African-American residents of high-crime communities. Brooks discusses what he terms the dual frustration of African Americans in high-crime urban communities who are disproportionately affected by high-crime rates, which is what Bobo and Johnson (2004) refer to as the "salience of crime," but who are also fearful of the police. Brooks concludes that many poor African Americans desire tough legal enforcement in their communities but with limited police discretion, which simultaneously fulfills the "high-crime black communities' desire for safety and fairness" (2000: 1271). It seems from our data that Latino and white youth who are similarly situated in high-crime neighborhoods share this aspiration for safety and fairness.

In sum, youth in this study are not in a state of normlessness (Merton, 1938) nor do their narratives about police and crime reduction seem illustrative of complete opposition to the conventional order. They construct



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narratives about the law that are often negative toward police but that do not cohere into a subcultural response (Anderson, 1999; Cohen, 1955; Matza, 1964). Youth are negatively disposed toward police because they have experienced procedural injustice, and their opposition is temporary, which is illustrated by the widespread support for pro-criminal justice solutions to crime. The implications of this study for future research still need to be examined as well as the policy ramifications with respect to community-based crime reduction.

### CONCLUSION

The youth in this study live in high-crime neighborhoods and probably encounter police and the legal system more than their counterparts in low- or medium-crime neighborhoods. They are, on the whole, negatively disposed toward the police, and this disposition is based primarily on the lived experience of negative interactions. Notably, no huge variations exist along race, gender, or age lines, although it should be noted that the sample is nonrandom; so we should be cautious about the implications of these findings.<sup>8</sup> Even though many of the youth we interviewed have negative encounters with police and the legal system, these do not seem to cohere into a subcultural opposition to formal social control. Many young people who are negatively disposed toward police perceive a vital role for them in crime-reduction efforts, and their narratives concentrate more on fairness and justice than on outcomes.

Our data show consistent support for the cultural attenuation/procedural justice approach that views negative disposition toward police not as indicative of a wholesale rejection of formal control but as transitory and

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8. The lack of a pronounced race effect is an interesting finding here, and although it seems to go against most research on disposition toward police (for example, Campbell and Schumann, 1972; Cao, Frank, and Cullen, 1996; Fine et al., 2003; Hurst, Frank, and Browning, 2000; Jacob, 1971), a few studies (notably Jefferson and Walker, 1993; Taylor et al., 2001) have found that, when the neighborhood context is similar, specifically where crime levels are high as in this case, young people have similar experiences with police and law enforcement, and they construct comparable discourses about the law. The common experience and dispositions of the youth in this study invoke a variation on the insight first promulgated by Shaw and McKay (1942), and since refined by Sampson and Wilson (1995), that the bulk of the racial difference in violent crime is caused by the different ecological contexts in which whites and blacks reside. The variation here is that, under somewhat similar ecological conditions, African Americans, whites, and Latinos have similar experiences with police and construct similar narratives about police, crime reduction, and law and order. Again we urge caution in interpreting these results, but we would suggest that future research pay attention to exactly how ecological context and race impinge on the development of narratives about police and crime.

context-dependent. Our respondents are negative about police because of their experiences, which they interpret mainly in terms of the fairness, or lack thereof, with which they were treated. This attenuation is transitory because many youth who are negatively disposed toward police express support for pro-criminal justice solutions to crime.

We would hope that future research continues to focus on the narratives that youth construct about police and the law. The current study is limited to youth in high-crime neighborhoods, and we would suggest that future work of this kind include comparisons with the experiences of youth in medium- and low-crime neighborhoods. The broader comparative frame can help analyze exactly how context matters, by fleshing out the different cognitive landscapes and how they shape the narratives of young people. Furthermore, subsequent exploration of legal cynicism should combine qualitative and quantitative methodologies. A limitation of this study is that we only had one item on the self-report instrument that dealt with these issues, and we would suggest that researchers seek ways to combine survey item analysis with narrative data to better analyze the ways in which young people talk about police, crime reduction, and the law. A final and important limitation of the current work is the fact that the sample is not representative, and thus, our results are not generalizable. It is an intriguing empirical question as to whether our results would be replicated in larger random sample studies.

In terms of public policy, the central message from our study is a hopeful one, which is that youth growing up in high-crime neighborhoods are not all destined to be profoundly alienated from the police and the legal system. Many of those young people who are negatively disposed toward police envisage a role for them in crime-control efforts. Specifically, the youth we interviewed want police and other representatives of the legal system they encounter to be professional, responsive, and honest, and a sincere and almost anachronistic belief exists in law and order. Similar to the citizens of Los Angeles (reported in Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane, 2003), the youth in our study want police to be more visible, to talk with citizens, and to be part of the community, as opposed to a perceived alien occupation force. Far from espousing subcultural values (Anderson, 1999; Cohen, 1955; Leiber, Nalla, and Farnworth, 1998), these young people want desperately to believe in a system where there is justice. We would suggest that youth can be negatively disposed toward police but retain the notion of an idealized police force and perceive the rule of law as the foundation for crime reduction. However, a danger exists that the pessimism evident in some responses may develop into an oppositional stance that stymies chances for successful crime-reduction programs that have strong community inputs (Carr, 2003; Fung, 2004; Von Hoffman, 2003). If

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youth are increasingly alienated from formal control, then the new parochial strategies (Carr, 2003) for crime control, which depend on meaningful partnerships with police and other agencies, will have little chance of success. On the latter point, the recent work by Wilkinson (2007) on the dynamics of violent events and their implications for social control offers a more tempered view of how new parochial strategies might work in high-crime neighborhoods.

Despite negative encounters with police, great potential exists to win youth over and to develop efficacious strategies in the most dangerous of environments (see also Reisig and Parks, 2004). The young people we interviewed were, for the most part, loquacious and animated about reducing crime in their communities and were fully aware of their stake in the community. In sum, our respondents have a complex and often contradictory way of viewing formal social control that is more in line with notions of cultural attenuation and procedural justice than with subcultural arguments. When these young people think about crime prevention, they do so in ways that envisage solutions based around a fair and impartial police force that applies the rule of law equally to all. That they do so despite their negative encounters with, and dispositions toward, police and law enforcement speaks to the largely untapped potential of young people to actively contribute to community-based crime reduction.

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Patrick J. Carr is assistant professor of sociology at Rutgers University and is an associate member of the MacArthur Network on the Transition to Adulthood and Public Policy. He is the author of *Clean Streets: Controlling Crime, Maintaining Order and Building Community Activism* (NYU Press, 2005), and his current research focuses on informal social control, youth violence, and the transition to adulthood for vulnerable populations.

Laura Napolitano is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests are in the areas of urban education, poverty and inequality, and youth and criminal behavior.

She is currently conducting research on homeless youth and the transition to adulthood in Philadelphia.

Jessica Keating received her BS degree in philosophy and sociology from Saint Joseph's University in 2004. She worked as a research assistant on the Young People and Crime Control Study at the Institute for Violence Research and Prevention at SJU, and she is currently volunteering at the Red Cloud Indian School, South Dakota.