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Racially Neutral Policing?: Puerto Rican and Mexican Young Adults' Experiences with Order Maintenance Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Despite the proliferation of seemingly racially neutral police strategies, Latinos continue to report unfavorable views toward police. Limited attention has been given to how urban strategies, such as order maintenance policing, are experienced by young Latino males. The present study uses data from in-depth interviews conducted with male Latino youth in two Chicago neighborhoods: one majority-Latino, predominantly Mexican; and one mixed-race, gentrifying Puerto Rican. Results show that youth in both neighborhoods report enhanced surveillance and aggressive stop-and-frisks. Additionally, neighborhood context shapes the dynamics between police and young Latinos. In the Puerto Rican neighborhood, policing is enmeshed in culture clashes. In the Mexican neighborhood, policing is structured by a battle against drugs and gangs. The implications for order maintenance policing are discussed.

Introduction

Despite the national proliferation of police strategies widely touted as race neutral, young Latino males residing in urban neighborhoods continue to report unfavorable perceptions of the police (see Solis, Portillos, & Brunson, 2009). Limited attention has been given, however, to how inner-city policing strategies are experienced by young Latino males. Order maintenance strategies, particularly those grounded in stop-and-frisk procedures, are examples of police strategies that display apparent racial neutrality and are defended under the auspices of public safety, but, in practice, subject inner-city minority residents to disproportionate quantities of unwelcome police contacts (Fagan & Davies, 2000) and can foster mistrust of the police (Gau & Brunson, 2010).

Wilson and Kelling (1982) introduced order maintenance policing, a police strategy aimed at dissolving serious neighborhood crime by targeting minor disorder. According to Wilson and Kelling, encouraging police officers to do such things as remove rowdy youth from the corner, force panhandlers to move along, or dissuade men from drinking in public involved harmless strategies aimed at establishing an orderly environment. Aggressive enforcement against low-level crimes and nuisance offenses was theorized to ultimately prevent serious crimes by creating an environment wherein it was clear that misbehavior would not be tolerated. While they acknowledged the need for police officers to understand the local customs and values within a community, Wilson and Kelling delineated an approach that, in practice, could criminalize longstanding cultural behaviors and be perceived as harassment by residents of minority neighborhoods (see Gau & Brunson, 2010). Order maintenance policing quickly became a staple of police departments' strategies nationwide (e.g., Harcourt & Ludwig, 2006). Its influence on police practice—particularly in urban communities—has been profound (Duneier, 1999; Harcourt, 2001; Kelling & Coles, 1996).

At the same time, an amassed body of research shows racial discrepancies in how order maintenance policing plays out on inner-city streets (e.g., Fagan & Davies, 2000; Fagan, Geller, Davies, & West, 2009). The signature tactic of the order maintenance strategy is the pedestrian stop. An officer with reasonable suspicion that an individual is engaged in criminal activity is permitted to briefly detain that person and, if there is a reasonable belief that the person is armed, to frisk the suspect's outer layer of clothing (*Terry v. Ohio*, 1968). Due to a series of decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court (e.g., *Illinois v. Wardlow*, 2000), police officers are permitted to consider neighborhood-level crime rates as a factor in determining whether there is reasonable suspicion for a stop. This has resulted in harsh criticism of police stop-and-frisk strategies in distressed inner-city neighborhoods (e.g., Harris, 1994), which are disproportionately home to impoverished minorities (Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1987). Studies have shown that Blacks and Latinos are more likely to be subject to pedestrian stops than are Whites, even controlling for area crime rates (Fagan & Davies, 2000), and that the stop-to-arrest ratio is higher for minorities than for Whites, which suggests that stops of minorities rest on shakier legal grounds (Fagan & Davies, 2000; see also Harris, 1994).

Qualitative studies have provided a picture of how minorities, particularly youth, experience order maintenance policing in their urban neighborhoods of residence. These studies have yielded important information about how aggressive law enforcement can undermine police legitimacy (Gau & Brunson, 2010), deter people from calling the police to report crimes (Carr, Napolitano, & Keating, 2007), and even lead to beliefs that the police are racist (Brunson, 2007). These studies, however, have focused primarily on Black youths and young adults; less research has been devoted to young Latinos' experiences with urban policing tactics (Martinez, 2007). This is a significant gap in the knowledge base, as it has been shown that Latinos' attitudes toward police tend to be more positive than Blacks' are, but more negative than Whites' are, a finding especially pronounced in police-initiated contacts such as pedestrian stops (Skogan, 2005; see also Weitzer & Tuch, 2006). Latinos tend to fall in between Blacks and Whites on measures of trust in police (Tyler, 2005). Thus, Latinos cannot be presumed to have the same experiences with police, or the same attitudes toward them, as either Whites or Blacks have. Latinos are a separate group and require individualized research attention (Weitzer, 2014; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006). As yet, there is a paucity of attention in general and, in particular, a lack of understanding about how a staple of urban policing—order maintenance—affects them and shapes their attitudes toward the police. There is, moreover, limited information on the ways in which urban policing is differentially experienced by subgroups within the overarching Latino umbrella category.

The current study addresses these gaps in the literature by presenting the results of a qualitative study conducted in two predominately Latino neighborhoods in Chicago, one occupied by a racial plurality where the slight Puerto Rican majority faces gentrification efforts by incoming Whites, and the other where Mexican immigrants constitute the majority. Both neighborhoods are characterized by socioeconomic distress and high crime rates, although each also confronts unique cultural

challenges and problems with police. Due to male youth being the group most likely to experience contacts with police—particularly involuntary contacts initiated by officers (Skogan, 2005)—the current study focuses on young males within these neighborhoods. Analyses of data gleaned from in-depth interviews will add to the existing body of literature tapping into the lived experiences of minority youths as they navigate socioeconomically depressed urban environments and the policing tactics deployed therein. Moreover, the themes drawn from the data will highlight the differences between the two Latino subgroups—Mexicans and Puerto Ricans—in the types of interactions had with officers, thus demonstrating the heterogeneity of experiences within the overarching Latino categorization.

Literature review

Order maintenance policing in the urban environment

The advent of order maintenance policing marked a fundamental shift in policing strategies, one eagerly embraced by politicians and police organizations. Some academics, too, sought to defend, support, and find empirical proof for the effectiveness of order maintenance policing. Skogan (1990), for example, applauded order maintenance policing and concluded that, “[b]roken windows do need to be repaired quickly” (p. 53). Kahan (1997) concluded that order maintenance policing has been implemented with remarkable results in places such as New York City (see also Kelling & Bratton, 1998; Kelling & Sousa, 2001).

Other scholars are skeptical of the order maintenance approach. Harcourt (1998) argued that order maintenance policing imposes tremendous costs. In New York alone, arrests for misdemeanors increased by 50% after the introduction of the strategy in the 1990s. Those arrests impose considerable burdens upon those caught in the crossfire of order maintenance policing; being arrested, handcuffed, transported, booked, strip-searched, and jailed, he suggests, are costly and undesirable experiences. Furthermore, complaints of excessive force increased after the introduction of order maintenance policing (see also Greene, 1999). Harcourt contended that there is a counterfeit logic proposed by order maintenance advocates, whereby “[d]isorder becomes a degree of crime: breaking a window, littering, jumping a turnstile become grades along a spectrum that leads to homicide” (p. 74).

In addition to the potential conceptual problems arising from order-maintenance strategies, targeting low-level offenses may also lead to racial discrepancies in enforcement activities. According to Parascandola, Fermino, and Gregorian (2013), 85% of individuals stopped by the NYPD are minorities (see also Fagan & Davies, 2000). A popular defense raised to explain these disparities is that officers are simply searching for guns and drugs in high crime neighborhoods, which coincidentally are inhabited by minorities; however, in 98.5% of the stop and frisk cases, no guns or drugs are found, which seems to undermine this claim (Alexander, 2012; Pascandola et al., 2013; Romero, 2006). Moreover, most of those stopped are not ultimately arrested for criminal wrongdoing (Weisburd,

Telep, & Lawton, 2013), and arrest rates among stopped minorities are even lower than among stopped Whites (Fagan & Davies, 2000), further weakening the argument that enhanced surveillance of minorities is legitimate due to disproportionate criminal involvement. Despite warnings against aggressive order maintenance policing (e.g., Drakulich, 2013; Harcourt & Ludwig, 2006), order maintenance has become a cornerstone in many urban police departments (Kubrin, Messner, Deane, McGeever, & Stucky, 2010). According to zimring (2012), the police are not really interested in turnstile jumping offenses by youth or removing youth from corners; instead, their ultimate goal is serious crimes such as eliminating guns off the street (see also Kelling & Coles, 1996). Attention to minor offenses is the pretext that provides the legal basis for police to intervene in an individual's freedom of movement.

Order maintenance policing and Latino neighborhoods

Bonilla-Silva (1997) introduced a structural framework of race, the premise of which is that police strategies need not be explicitly racially coded to produce harmful outcomes for Latino communities. Bonilla-Silva (2002) contended that American society is operating within a "post race" paradigm, where racist or racially coded strategies become invisible to the general public. As he wrote, "[T]he language of color blindness is slippery ... and often subtle" (p. 42). In a "post race" society, the bulk of organizational strategies and practices are colorblind or racially neutral; "[T]he Jim Crow overt style of maintaining white supremacy was replaced with 'now you see it, now you don't' practices that were subtle, apparently non-racial, and institutionalized" (p. 43). These supposedly colorblind strategies give the American public the impression of a fair, neutral, non-biased system of policing. If officers are stopping Latinos or African Americans disproportionately, it is reasoned that this occurs not because the police are racist or that police strategies fuel the number of arrests, but instead that people in those neighborhoods are responsible for the crime in the neighborhood. When highly controversial cases emerge (such as unarmed men of color being killed by police), they are often understood as aberrations or "rare incidents" limited to specific geographic locations, or as a byproduct of criminal activities in an area, instead of patterns of aggressive policing prompted by organizational strategies disproportionately applied to neighborhoods of color.

Bonilla-Silva (1997) assumed that despite their colorblind appearance, racially neutral police strategies can shape the aggressive policing that Latino neighborhoods experience. Giroux (2013) underscored how inner-city Latinos are exposed to strategies and policies in their neighborhoods that facilitate their criminalization. The seemingly innocuous zero tolerance policies, militarization of schools, and controversial police strategies (e.g., wolf packs, contact cards, special units), prompt early contact with police and the acquisition of an arrest or adjudication record that can have serious consequences in future interactions with officers (see also Durán, 2009a, 2009b). Applying Bonilla-Silva's ideas, officers' personal racist beliefs, or lack thereof, are irrelevant in comparison to the organizational strategies that are manufactured and adopted within inner-city police departments. Bonilla-Silva (2002)

concluded, “Analysts unaware of these developments [colorblind policies] (or unwilling to accept them) will continue producing research suggesting that racial matters in the United States have improved dramatically and, like color blinders, urge for race-neutral social policies” (p. 63). Despite their facial neutrality, racially neutral police strategies such as order maintenance policing can, in practice, be the starting point of a broader process of aggressive policing that disproportionately criminalizes the actions of Blacks and Latinos residing in urban environments.

The colorblind policies that Bonilla-Silva warned about, in this case order maintenance policing, also promote the criminalization of cultural behaviors (e.g., young people playing ball in the street, loud music playing during community functions, parking cars in the front yard) in Latino neighborhoods. While police attempts to remove or prevent physical disorder (e.g., graffiti, litter) are perhaps uncontroversial, their efforts to regulate social disorder raise complex dilemmas surrounding the definition of what is, and is not, acceptable public behavior (Duneier, 1999). The police may define the standard practices that exist within Latino neighborhoods as disorderly. According to Perez (2010), what changes from one day to the next is not Latinos’ cultural behaviors, but rather the criminalization of such actions. In his study of a Latino Chicago neighborhood embroiled in the process of being gentrified, Perez found that normative cultural practices became the precursor to routine police stops under a wide range of circumstances.

The impact of policing and order maintenance strategies within Latino neighborhoods has been largely overlooked in the academic literature, with few exceptions (see Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004; Solis et al., 2009). Little information is currently available regarding how young Latino males experience seemingly racially neutral order maintenance strategies, or the extent to which Latino neighborhoods are policed in the same ways and for the same reasons as their White counterparts (see Varsanyi, 2010). Scarce data has been offered to answer these questions, despite the fact that the Latino population is growing rapidly in the United States (Brown, 2014). In some communities and even in some states, the White majority has given way to racial plurality where Whites and Latinos constitute roughly equal proportions of the population (Lopez, 2014). Whites and Latinos are increasingly living in close proximity to one another, which can heighten intergroup tensions and conflict. In Latino neighborhoods, there are longstanding cultural behaviors that could be incorrectly defined as disorderly by the police and the public alike (see Perez, 2010). There are several often-overlooked factors and processes that contextualize the Latino neighborhoods under which order maintenance strategies are often employed.

For example, entrepreneurship in Latino neighborhoods can easily be misinterpreted as disorder. There are numerous entrepreneurial enterprises in Latino neighborhoods that are outside the boundaries of typical business ventures, yet are inaccurately characterized as falling under the umbrella of an “underground economy” or unlawful activities. For example, it is not uncommon to find

a Latino neighborhood where vendors are selling *aguas frescas* (flavored waters), *elotes* (shredded corn with cheese), *churros* (Mexican pastries), *gelatinas* (flavored gelatin), *tamales* (corn pastries), and other foods in the street (Vera Sanchez & Adams, 2011). Other entrepreneurial efforts can range from selling legal items (e.g., hand-sewn blankets) to peddling prohibited items (e.g., fake social security cards, passports). Individuals who sell goods on streets and corners without a permit appear visibly disorderly to the outside observer, yet are a standard part of the neighborhood order within many Latino residential areas. While some of these activities are illegal (e.g., selling stolen items or forged documents), much of it is benign commerce that reflects cultural norms. The emergent problem is that police might not see or acknowledge these differences and instead simply treat all activities as uniformly disorderly.

Other commonplace activities within Latino neighborhoods, such as youths' leisure activities, can be defined by outsiders as disorderly rather than being recognized as traditional recreational pastimes. One study centered on Latinos and policing found that cultural behaviors of minor legal significance, such as youth playing baseball in the street, became aggressively policed to appease the wishes of the incoming middle-class Whites in a Puerto Rican neighborhood (Perez, 2010). Forcing youth to play baseball at a local park instead of in the street may appear innocuous at face value, but playing baseball in the street actually promotes family bonding and community engagement as onlookers cheer players on and watch to see who wins. It is also a method of informal social control whereby parents can keep an eye on their children (see Horowitz, 1983).

Current study

The present study focuses on order maintenance policing in distressed urban areas, as experienced by young Latino males who live in these places and bear the brunt of officers' scrutiny. In-depth interviews with male Latino youth in socioeconomically depressed Chicago neighborhoods were used to examine the ways that this group experiences urban policing, particularly policing that operates under an order-maintenance framework. This study contributes to the literature in two ways. First, it adds to the emerging body of research showing that although order maintenance policing is racially neutral on its face, it can be highly problematic in practice. The problem arises largely from the lack of a shared definition of social disorder, and the attempts by more powerful groups to impose their definitions of order onto groups whose social and political marginalization make it difficult for them to effectively resist these enforcement efforts. Second, this investigation addresses a noticeable gap in existing research by focusing solely on Latinos residing in predominately Latino neighborhoods. A fair amount of research has illuminated the ways in which urban policing strategies can exacerbate tensions between police and Black residents, but Latinos continue to be underrepresented in research studies (Weitzer, 2014) despite their increasing presence in the population nationwide and the unique sets of experiences they have with police (Martinez, 2007). Prior work suggests that there are important aspects of the encounters between police and Latinos that differentiate Latinos from other

minority groups (see, e.g., Duran, 2009a, 2009b; Weitzer, 2014; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006). The present study sheds light on how young Latino males residing in distressed inner-city neighborhoods experience, interpret, and navigate urban policing.

Methods

Sample and neighborhoods

The data for the present study were drawn from the final stages of ethnographic research conducted in Chicago during the year 2007. Most studies documenting minority experiences with the police involve close-ended survey research with adult samples. Qualitative studies that center on the views, experiences, and attitudes of young minority males are less common (see Brunson & Weitzer, 2009; Carr et al., 2007). The present research project capitalizes upon the detailed understanding that can be gleaned from the use of face-to-face, in-depth interviews.

All interviews followed IRB guidelines as stipulated by the University of Illinois at Chicago. In addition, all interviewees received compensation of 10 dollars each for their participation. The interviewees were told, uniformly, that this study was about young people's experiences with the police. Given the sensitive nature of the information, coupled with the fact that these youth represent vulnerable populations, the interviews were not tape-recorded. The researcher took detailed notes of youths' accounts and then imputed the information into a word document no later than three hours after an interview was completed. The youth were sampled by contacting community organizations. In both neighborhoods, several community organizations that worked with young adults were contacted (e.g., after-school programs) and the directors assisted with setting up the interviews. Thereafter, through snowball sampling, young persons were recruited and asked to participate in the study. No one who was approached refused to participate.¹

Latinos are not a pan-ethnic group, and as a result, the first author, who is Mexican, had to negotiate an insider and outsider status depending on the Latino group he interviewed (i.e., Mexican or Puerto Rican). In the Mexican neighborhood, cooperation was seamless; his insider status was advantageous (similar to Durán, 2013). In the Puerto Rican neighborhood, however, given some of the previous conflicts between Mexican and Puerto Rican individuals documented in Chicago (Ramos-Zayas, 2003), it was initially challenging to find a group willing to be interviewed. Ultimately, several Puerto Rican residents did decide to participate.

Although we recognized that a sample cannot cover the full range of experiences with police, these interviews were a subset of years of published ethnographic research in the same communities (see Vera Sanchez & Adams, 2011; Vera Sanchez & Rosenbaum, 2011). The primary author has spent considerable time and effort conducting interviews with youth, adults, and police officers in the same neighborhoods for a total span of five years.

All interviews were semi-structured and followed a flexible interview schedule. Some questions were asked verbatim from all respondents, such as “Can you please describe your neighborhood in as much detail as possible?” In addition, questions like “Have you ever been stopped by the police, and can you tell me about those experiences?” were asked. Probes such as “Can you tell me more about that incident?” encouraged interviewees to elaborate on their experiences. Importantly, the interviewer did not ask about harassment and excessive force. These were themes that surfaced consistently throughout their narratives and originated directly from the interviewees.

Although this study focuses on young Latino males, some of the themes that emerged were confirmed while conducting ride-alongs with police officers and interviews with adults in the same neighborhoods. These sources were used to triangulate the data to ensure reliability. Only the interviews with the young-adult respondents are used for the current analyses.

The sample of young Latino males (n=20) was gathered through snowball sampling techniques, initially through community organizers who assisted in locating interviewees during the process of data collection. A “young Latino male” was defined as any male from 18 to 26 years of age. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted by the first author.

Two Latino neighborhoods were selected through a process of writing neighborhood profiles and analyzing census data, followed by a narrowing procedure conducted by a research team; this yielded a Mexican and a Puerto Rican community. The neighborhoods were also defined by mapping corresponding data with census-block data. The Puerto Rican community was chosen because it had the largest Puerto Rican presence in the city, although the Puerto Rican presence has been waning due to gentrification efforts by city planners and incoming Whites. The Mexican neighborhood was also chosen because of its high proportion of Mexicans living in the area. Finally, both neighborhoods were selected because they registered higher homicide and socioeconomic disadvantage in comparison to the city of Chicago as a whole.

The table presents 2010 census data for the two neighborhoods and for the city. The sampled neighborhoods had higher rates of poverty, low education, and homicide; lower median incomes; and lower rates of home-ownership. These two neighborhoods thus typified distressed urban neighborhoods nationwide. The Mexican neighborhood was clearly predominated by Latino residents, while the Puerto Rican neighborhood showed more of a plurality, with Latinos constituting a slight majority, African Americans trailing close behind at 41%, and Whites constituting 4%. Thus, the Puerto Rican community was not entirely Puerto Rican. Community members and scholars were convinced that due to gentrification, Puerto Ricans were or would soon become the minority in this neighborhood (Betancur, 2002). Nevertheless, there was a significant Puerto Rican presence in demographic size, cultural heritage and practices, as well as political activism.

Table 1. Community and city demographics

Community	% Poverty	% Latino	Median income	% Homeowners	% Adults with no HS diploma	Homicide per 100,000
Mexican	28.1	83.0	\$33,593	36	54.8	24
Puerto Rican	32.6	53.0	\$29,605	37	34.6	22
Chicago	21.4	28.9	\$47,371	47	19.8	16

Note: All above information reflects Census 2010 information. The only exception is homicide data, which reflects 2007 information.

Analytic techniques

The coded themes were generated systematically. Silverman (2005) suggested that one method to maximize data analysis is to begin the process once the first interviews are conducted. The data analysis took approximately six months. In order to become acquainted with the data, a careful reading of the text was conducted (Lofland & Lofland, 1984; Ryan & Russell, 2000). For a theme to be considered valid, at least 30% of the sample has to demonstrate some evidence of the finding. Most themes, however, exceeded this modest benchmark. For example, 100% of the Mexican participants reported experiencing excessive force. Throughout the data-collection phase, analytic memos were maintained to record observations and insights and to explore theoretical directions. Analytic memos operate as a journal of the research process. They support themes coded from the interviews and offer opportunities to explore key moments.

Comparisons and contrasts were made between the respondents in the two neighborhoods. For example, after a theme was discovered in one group, such as police harassment, comparison with the other group was made (Puerto Rican versus Mexican male youth) when applicable. A repeated comparing and contrasting of the themes and concepts was conducted until thematic saturation had occurred.

Summarized findings were provided in hard copy to select interviewees in the organizations interested in the results. These individuals provided feedback through discussions. This type of triangulation (O'Connell Davidson & Layder, 1994) was an invaluable source of insight and was implemented to do justice to the voices of the interviewees. The results were not altered, however, based on respondents' comments. Instead, their comments were employed to further refine themes. Finally, past research was used to confirm, challenge, or develop the generated themes.

In the following analysis of the interview data, it is acknowledged that respondents' accounts of contacts with police were subjective. All efforts were made to validate the respondents' descriptions of their experiences through extensive ethnographic research in both communities, but, nonetheless, the perspectives of police or of others in the community were not represented in these accounts. This is consistent with the intent of the research, for it is the narratives that young men construct around their experiences that matter in a cultural sense. The discourse is of greater theoretical importance to this study than is the objective accuracy of the events themselves (see Brunson & Weitzer, 2011).

The Puerto Rican sample

The Puerto Rican interviewees (n=11; average age=19.5 years) spent their time improving their communities. Every time that the researcher visited the Puerto Rican community, some type of pro-social activity occupied the time of the young Puerto Rican men. In one instance, an organizational meeting of young people was in progress, with coordinators as young as 15 years of age. On separate occasions, groups of youth planted flowers in the community, set up a skate night, received homework tutoring, and watched a film about gentrification. Unlike the pathological Puerto Rican barrio that Bourgois (1995) described in New York City, this community registered strong elements of social organization.

The majority of the Puerto Rican young adult men interviewed had graduated from high school or were attending an academy in the community committed to social change. A number of participants were taking college preparatory courses or were currently enrolled in college. The mean level of education was 12.9 years or some college. The interviewed men were arguably some of the most politically active and promising in the community a persona seemingly incompatible with police-initiated contacts; however, this proved to be a faulty assumption that was quickly disconfirmed.

The young Puerto Rican males reported harassment and excessive force by the police. On average, the Puerto Rican participants experienced 2.13 acts of harassment by the police, and 5 cases of excessive force involving being punched, kicked, or hit with an object (e.g., baton). The youngest age of an experienced negative encounter was 13. The most recent encounter with the police ranged from 1 day before the interview to 5 months previously. There was not a single interviewee who had never been stopped by the police. Lastly, many of the Puerto Rican youth admitted minor forms of delinquency (e.g., painting graffiti).

The Mexican sample

The sample in the Mexican community (n=9) differed from the one in the Puerto Rican neighborhood. These interviewees were involved in prosocial activities, such as obtaining their high-school equivalency degrees, yet the selected community organization that helped identify potential respondents for the study was not oriented toward social justice. Hence, the Mexican respondents

were attempting to improve the likelihood of securing a job or attending college through basic skills proficiency. Most of the Mexican interviewees had not completed high school. The highest grade completed was 9th, and they were older, averaging 21.2 years.

The young men in the Mexican community resembled each other in characteristics such as gang affiliation and victimization. Some of the men admitted prior gang affiliation and involvement in serious criminal activities. In addition, in the sample of nine, three had been shot with a firearm in the head, groin, or stomach. All men reported experiencing victimization by either the gangs or the police. They reported an average of 2.2 incidents of police harassment. Every participant reported physical abuse by the police (mean=1.4 incidents). These incidents included, but were not limited to, being punched, kicked, or hit with an object (e.g., baton). The youngest age at which a negative police encounter occurred was 14. All interviewees had experienced pedestrian or motor vehicle stops by police.

Results

Neighborhood context and aggressive policing

The gentrifying Puerto Rican neighborhood

Gentrification was an overarching theme in the Puerto Rican community. Gentrification is a recurring process in many distressed neighborhoods in Chicago. Hagedorn (2005) underscored how during the 1960s, white flight occurred in Chicago and other major cities. However, with the advent of deindustrialization and globalization, downtown areas became highly valorized. The result is a reversal of white flight by young, middle class, mostly White professionals. Generally, the first newcomers are artists who want to move into a community that has cheap rents. Thereafter, community developers and other actors initiate a process of community “beautification.” Once the community reveals some elements of improvement, the property taxes begin to increase. Once the taxes increase, the rent and mortgage gets more expensive. Families unable to pay either sell their properties or move elsewhere. Many of the current residents in this Puerto Rican neighborhood were well aware of this process and saw it as an unfair usurpation by middle class Whites. The lofts and newly constructed housing on the east of the community, constant antagonism with incoming Whites, and police efforts convinced several long-term, minority residents that they were losing their community.²

Puerto Rican males described being aggressively policed as a function of this gentrification process. The interviewees pointed out that longstanding cultural behaviors suddenly became criminalized. According to Rafael, “There are classes of Bomba [music] and the White people call the police because the music is too loud.” Sound ordinances, which were rarely enforced previously, became the impetus for officers’ actions even during or before annual Puerto Rican’s Day celebrations in Chicago. Alberto

illustrated, “We used to have a celebration before the big event until 12 pm [midnight], now we have sound ordinances.”

Those sound ordinances, however, did not appear to be imposed on the incoming White residents. As Ramon suggested, “The yuppies have loud music until 3 or 4 in the morning. They [Puerto Rican residents] call the police, the police do not do anything.” According to interviewees, the differential treatment that Puerto Ricans experienced was so obvious that it is difficult to ignore. As Ramon recounted, “The yuppies had a bathtub with an umbrella in the street. They were in shorts and bikinis. You could not pass by [blocking traffic], and they had a dog that was barking at people. The police came, waved, and left.” Hence, the seeming criminalization of Puerto Rican cultural activities was coupled by police disinterest in enforcing order maintenance codes against Whites engaged in similar behaviors. This finding is consistent with Perez’s (2010) observations; in his study of Puerto Rican youth in a gentrifying neighborhood, respondents reported that while they were subject to increased scrutiny by police, White youth who used drugs and behaved in a disorderly fashion were generally ignored by police or handled informally. The present findings affirm the link between enhanced White presence and perceptions of police unfairness by long-time Latino residents.

According to the respondents, officers also began to criminalize several informal recreational activities which they previously ignored, such as youth playing baseball in front yards, gambling in the park, and so on. While these activities were perhaps disorderly or were minor law violations, young men in the sample were disturbed by the marked change in enforcement patterns that accompanied the influx of White residents. Interviewees lamented that incoming Whites wished to remove cultural symbols such as the two large metallic Puerto Rican flags in the neighborhood. Rafael explained, “This is the cultural heart of Puerto Rico in Chicago. Due to gentrification they [Whites] want to take the flags down. Those who come back will have nothing ... there is a threat to the cultural symbols, a loss of identity, culture.” Hence, the chasm between incoming Whites and Puerto Ricans, prompted by gentrification efforts, revealed the heated neighborhood context under which Puerto Ricans are being policed. As Roberto described,

There is a lot of hostility due to the gentrification. There is a loss of identity and even affects more social ills ... now you have gentrification so you have more blue lights [placed by the police], cameras on every block, which is ridiculous ... now you increase patrols, but you also increase gang shootings, arrests, and fights—because they [gangs] are sometimes also fighting for their neighborhood.

This quotation illustrates that gentrification was salient to interviewees, as well as its perceived impact on the Puerto Rican neighborhood. Technological monitoring (e.g., cameras), saturation of police, and increased violence were some of the trends that Puerto Rican youth identified. Moreover, as the community began to change (e.g. Whites moving in, removal of cultural artifacts, suppression of

cultural activities), these youth described the loss of the community in terms of cultural identity, coupled with the advent of newfound unfavorable trends (e.g., gang fights, problems with police, etc.). Gentrification was then not simply about individuals moving in to the neighborhood; instead, it represented a significant destruction of cultural identity, a shift in community dynamics, and an unwelcome style of policing.

A war against drugs and gangs in the Mexican neighborhood

Young Mexican males reported that the neighborhood context under which police operated centered on a traditional battle against drugs and gangs. Participants reported being victimized by gangs who occupied several territories in the community. Luis illustrated his apprehension about gang violence: “You don’t want to walk at night time. The [gang name] come through and start bucking [shooting].” Three of the nine interviewees had survived shootings by gangs. Additionally, the neighborhood context paved the way for gang affiliation. Marcos explained, “We didn’t grow up around doctors. We grew up around drug dealers, killers, rapists, those are our heroes here ... I grew up around gang members, so I became a gang member.” Many interviewees described violence in the Mexican community, an element of the neighborhood context that structures aggressive policing tactics. Javier offered insight into this phenomenon:

Lots of fights over gang territory ... One half is [gang A] and [gang B]. Students who are not in the gang stop going to the school. That is why a while ago there was a hunger strike to get a new school because people were getting harassed trying to get their education. Once they got past [street name], it got rough.

In the Mexican neighborhood, order maintenance practices, according to the respondents, targeted cultural practices of a different kind. For example, youths’ baggy clothing, hairstyles, colors, or any other insignia, part of the culturally standard and valued attire of inner-city youth, were equated with criminality (Anderson, 1999; Fine et al., 2003). According to interviewees, wearing baggy clothing or sporting shaven haircuts inspired street encounters with the police. One interviewee suggested, “Being a Latino with a bald head [hairstyle of many gang members], cops are all over you [stop you].” These experiences cultivated a deep dissatisfaction with the police, as explained by Victor:

I get stopped every day by the police. Their job is to discriminate. Not in the rule-book, but no matter what, we are animals, can’t see past the skin, we still get harassed. Every nine out of ten youth are harassed by the police. You asked me what is the most memorable time I got stopped, every time is memorable. They are not here to protect and serve. They are evil, a gang, the strongest gang in Chicago.

In the Mexican neighborhood, a traditional war against drugs and gangs (a strategy stemming from the Nixon administration that employs racially neutral language but has been recognized as having

consequences for racial groups; Alexander, 2012; Durán, 2009b), was a recurring theme among the interviewees. Street oriented styles of dress, hair, mannerisms, and speech, often valued by inner city youth, and have been found in various neighborhoods across the nation (Anderson, 1999), were believed to heighten police suspicion and aggression. In fact, some of the interviewees unapologetically referred to the police as a “gang” and described routine harassment, brutal treatment, and the gang-like behavior (e.g., dropping of gang members in their rival’s territory, beatings, etc.) they experienced.

Order maintenance policing as a precursor to harassment in both neighborhoods

The independent accounts by Mexican and Puerto Rican young adult males suggest that order maintenance strategies were perceived as the starting point of a broader process of aggressive policing. Chief among officers’ order maintenance tactics were pedestrian stops of the sort derived from the *Terry* case. The majority of stops involved street encounters, while the youth was alone or in the presence of others, prompted by some seemingly innocuous activity by the youth (e.g., playing loud music, hanging out late at night in front of someone’s house) and followed by questioning about drugs sales or gang affiliation. The sample reported an average of 2.18 incidents of harassment, with Puerto Ricans reporting fewer accounts (mean=2.13) than Mexicans (mean=2.22). The most frequently described scenario involved walking down the street, often with companions, and being stopped for what appeared to be an insignificant offense. According to respondents, stops involved intimidation by officers who cut pedestrians off with moving police cars on the sidewalk, sprinted from vehicles to make contact, spoke in a confrontational manner, or had guns drawn. Individuals were typically ordered to place their hands in a visible position (e.g., hood of the car) or behind their heads, along with kneeling on the ground. These street encounters bore strong resemblance to those reported by youth in past research (e.g., Fine et al., 2003; Gau & Brunson, 2010). Searches were invasive—officers’ handled young people’s genitals, unzipped their pants, or had them disrobe in public.

Roberto described a resurfacing narrative of police-youth street encounters initiated during the process of hanging out in the Puerto Rican neighborhood:

We were sitting with chairs outside my friend’s house with other people ... enjoying the street at 11 pm, not drinking, not smoking ... the cop [gets out of the car and] says, ‘You selling weed?’ They [other people] made a smart remark and said that if they sold weed, they would be living in a better place. They [police] put their gloves on and searched them between their testicles—how embarrassing. In the middle of the street and obviously they did not have anything.

Longstanding cultural behaviors were associated with police—youth encounters, as well as questioning that centered on gang affiliation, drug sales, or illegal contraband (e.g., carrying guns). Some interviewees admitted occasional marijuana use or delinquency in the past, yet the majority of

stops occurred in the absence of criminal activity. Police questioning was assumptive (“You selling weed?”, “What gang are you in?”) and threatening (“You wanna get locked up?”). Many of these assumptions were unwarranted, since neither contraband nor arrest materialized. These young men resented officers’ presumptions about their criminal involvement. Thus, these young men reported experiencing a combination of personal and vicarious harassment (see Brunson, 2007) at the hands of officers ostensibly engaged in order maintenance policing.

Order maintenance policing as a precursor to excessive force

Both Puerto Rican and Mexican young adult males experienced what they saw as excessive force after being stopped for supposed orderly conduct violations. Excessive force included physical contact such as punching, kicking, and even hitting respondents with objects in situations where the totality of circumstances did not appear to require force. Participants reported an average of 1 incident of excessive force, with Mexican interviewees voicing more incidents than Puerto Ricans (1.4 and 0.6, respectively). Excessive force episodes sometimes involved minor criminal activity by participants (e.g., carrying marijuana). Interviewees primarily experienced excessive force either personally or while with their associates, yet police reportedly also occasionally exercised force toward participants’ families. One respondent reported, “[Officer’s name] ... takes me to the house ... when the door opened, my friend’s mom was there. He kicked my friend’s mom, she fell to the floor, put a gun to her face.” Excessive force was not limited to street encounters, but also carried over to custodial situations. Mario indicated, “Every time one of us looked up [when held at the police station], they had this compressed ball of paper that they would hit us with over the head. They called ... one person at a time to rough us up before we went to the cell.” Excessive force was attributed to “teaching you a lesson [street justice]” for participating in criminal wrongdoing (e.g., when arrested at the police station), for showing a lack of deference to police authority, or sometimes for no apparent reason at all (e.g., victimizing family members).

Similar to instances of harassment, excessive force incidents for Mexican youth involved some behavior assumed to be a proxy for gang affiliation. In some street encounters, wearing colors associated with gangs, especially if those gangs had allegedly been involved in criminal activity, inspired stops and accompanied a type of street justice that officers applied to Mexican youth. Cristobal and Jose reported, respectively:

Someone killed a cop in the crossfire. I was walking with some friends with a t-shirt of the color [gang colors]—I had some lemonheads [hard candy] in my mouth. I remember the cop got out of the car, walked up to me and punched me. The candy just popped inside my mouth, I was all cut up and shit. It was one White and one Latino. Told me to get my hands on the car, took my shirt off. The neighbors came out. They [police] kept the shirt. I was shirtless, they gave me no explanation.

They [police] have kicked me from behind in the groin. They know I was shot in the testicles, that I had surgery. They hit me there. I have scars. They make fun of it. They ask, 'Does your dick still work?' Some people have been shot in the knees, they tell the officer, 'Officer, I can't get on my knees, I've been shot in the knees.' They still make them get on their knees. They [police] start laughing.

Puerto Rican interviewees also recounted events wherein even pro-social activities such as playing football were the starting point of police encounters that culminated with excessive force. These incidents, according to these respondents, did not involve interviewees resisting arrest or aggression against an officer or committing serious criminal activity, but nevertheless climaxed with excessive force. Carlos and Marcos each recalled personal victimization by police:

We were playing football. They frisked us, found someone who had drugs, shoved us all to the floor. One cop told the other, 'Hey, I got something.' The got all of us, kicked me in the shins—I fell to the floor, slapped the cuffs on me. Other four cops showed up, ran up [approached quickly], shoved us to the floor. No warning or nothing. One cop pulled out his nightstick, said 'Get to the floor.' They just slapped the handcuffs on.

I have been pushed against the brick floor before and they called my friend a nigger and my other friend a spic. They look at our record and find nothing. Then leaders [Puerto Rican leaders recognized by the community such as lawyers and professors who came to the aid of youth] have to come out or they [police] will arrest you for no reason.

These accounts demonstrate that routine activities, such as playing football or going to the store, did not shield interviewees from what they describe as excessive force. Kicking interviewees in the shins or shoving them to the floor or against the wall, as well as using derogatory language, was unjustified to the interviewees based on minor incidents such as carrying a small amount of marijuana or doing nothing at all (e.g., hanging out in the street). Puerto Rican interviewees sometimes were able to invoke adult professionals who helped young people out of these predicaments and would assist in avoiding criminal processing or criminal records.

Race and aggressive policing

Race has been heavily intertwined with order maintenance policing nationwide, given the enormous discretion that this strategy vests in individual police officers. Critics point to the data showing that Blacks and Latinos make up the majority of persons stopped in urban areas (Fagan & Davies, 2000; Pascandola et al., 2013), which raise questions about whether order maintenance policing is a proxy for racial profiling. In the interviews reported here, both Puerto Rican and Mexican respondents spoke to the issue of race. It became clear that neighborhood characteristics were salient in determining how and when police were perceived to use race as a basis for stopping a person.

Puerto Rican respondents

Puerto Rican youth were convinced that race was an ingredient of aggressive policing. In these young men's experiences, racial differences and racial bias operated in two distinct ways—*intergroup* differences, wherein Latinos were juxtaposed against Whites, and *intragroup* differences, where the skin-color variation within the group resulted in lighter-skinned Puerto Ricans being treated better than their darker-complexioned neighbors. Differential policing on an intergroup basis is illustrated by Puerto Rican men's accounts of circumstances where Whites and Puerto Ricans occupied the same setting and Whites went unnoticed by the police. As Rafael indicated, "they [police] see a yuppie smoking weed, they don't stop them. I hang out with my friend and there is a White guy smoking weed and drinking, walking around with it, then they see us and grab us." Intragroup differences surfaced as well, and not all Puerto Ricans were equally policed or seen as vulnerable to police maltreatment.

Puerto Rican men suggested that some Puerto Ricans possessed "White privilege" which enhanced their immunity against aggressive policing. Individuals described as "White Puerto Ricans" were assumed to possess more privilege than "Black Puerto Ricans." Whiteness operated as a type of capital that enhanced upward mobility. As Rafael illustrated, "When you come to the U.S. some [Puerto Ricans] are White and pass as White, get a better job, better pay." The capital of Whiteness was so invaluable that many of the interviewees' parents and grandparents had rejected their African roots. According to Jose, "When my grandmother came to the U.S., they called her a nigger on the bus; she did not know what that was. She has internalized that racism saying, 'I am not like those people.'" Furthermore, Black Puerto Ricans encountered intragroup racism similar to that experienced by African Americans. Rafael reported, "There is always hatred against Blacks, racism, ignorance. They sometimes push Black Puerto Ricans to assimilate to Black. If you are a Black Puerto Rican, you have to prove it." For some Puerto Ricans, "proving it" signified demonstrating to others one's place within the Puerto Rican in-group after being categorized as "Black."

Several interviewees were convinced that "White Puerto Ricans" possessed privilege that extended to police encounters. These categorizations were far from being fixed; as Roberto suggested, "I identify with just being Puerto Rican but we joke around that you are Puerto Rican until you get stopped [by the police]; then you're Black." Within-group racial variations have consequences for economic gain (Hunter, 1998, 2002) and for criminal sanctioning (e.g., Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns, & Johnson, 2006). Racial categorizations remained fluid and were offset by other characteristics (e.g., Spanish names). Ramon stated, "A time I was arrested, two Latinos [officers] and they thought that I was Black. When I said my name was Ramon, they calmed down. They had assumed that I was Black." Based on youths' accounts, being thought of as Black made them susceptible to aggressive policing, while being viewed as Latino offered temporary immunity from negative police encounters. Angel reported, "Police look for Black or those who look like Black ... the police move toward Black Puerto Ricans, then

dress, then behavior—that has to be the order.” Juan further explicated this phenomenon among Puerto Rican young people:

Those that that are lighter skin get better treatment. Straight hair, light skin, that is the standard of what is considered beautiful, the privilege of being White than having dark skin, nappy hair. They [police] look at you different if light or dark skin. A dark skin nappy hair Puerto Rican.

What Puerto Rican respondents described is a racial caste system that makes some Puerto Ricans vulnerable to aggressive policing, depending on which part of the phenotypic spectrum they occupy. This racial caste was not only contingent on skin color, but also on language, Spanish surnames names, and other signifiers that made some interviewees easily occupy the category of being Black. These racial categorizations were not limited to police encounters. For example, Juan indicated, “I have gone to Puerto Rican restaurants and they start speaking to me in English [thinking he is African American] and explaining what is on the menu. I tell them ‘*Yo se que es*’ [I know what the dishes are]. Then they start speaking to me in Spanish.” These racial categorizations are complex, fluid, and imperfect, and underscore how race is socially constructed. Miguel suggested, “In the U.S, I am a Puerto Rican, in Puerto Rico I am a mulatto. I am also a Latino in the U.S. racially. I have always been considered Black, less so now for some reason. Now people think that I am mixed Black and White [because of his speech and mannerisms] ... I am Puerto Rican.” Therefore, what the Puerto Rican respondents describe in terms of police encounters, as well as White Privilege, appears to be part of a much larger racialized process described among Puerto Rican populations and their categorizations in the U.S., with broader implications beyond the field of policing (see Thomas, 1997).

Mexican respondents

In contrast to Puerto Rican respondents, young Mexican males indicated that officers were rarely inclined to stop young people based on race. In the Mexican community, most of the community were ethnically Mexican (83%); the participants pointed out that racial homogeneity made racial differentiations by the police unlikely. The racial demography was more diverse in the Puerto Rican community, thus allowing for intra-neighborhood differences in the treatment of individuals. A different racial self-awareness (see Lee, Steinberg, & Piquero, 2010) and neighborhood racial homogeneity were possible reasons why Mexican participants did not often believe race structured the aggressive policing style they described.

The Mexican interviewees also had a straightforward way of articulating their racial identities as Latino, Hispanic, or to a lesser extent, Mexican. They often responded with one or two words and repeated their prior answer when probed. When Joel was asked how he would describe himself in terms of race or ethnicity, he answered “Latino” without further elaboration. The interviewees sometimes even self-identified with terms considered to be politically incorrect in academic circles

such as “Hispanic.” The term Hispanic has been criticized for being federally imposed, recognizing Spanish but not indigenous lineage. Mexican interviewees did not at all feel that the term Hispanic was offensive, nor did they identify a racial caste system in the neighborhood. Past research, however, has found that individuals of Latino descent can possess highly indigenous (*Indios*) to European (*Gueros*) features, and that those categorizations are associated to social, economic, and political outcomes (Gonzales, 2000). Whether or not these characteristics impact vulnerability to stops with the police, however, was not reported among the participants.

Instead of race, markers of gang affiliation such as wearing hoodies (sweat shirts with hoods), oversized jeans, particular colors (e.g., gold and black for certain gangs), or baseball caps positioned in a specific direction were believed to heighten police suspicion. Some young people alluded to the importance of race, but did not make differentiations between lighter skinned Mexicans or those appearing to be indigenous. Approximately half of the participants appeared to acknowledge the fact of race but to place greater emphasis on what might be called behavioral, as opposed to racial, profiling. Alejandro’s account illustrated this attitude: “It’s not only about skin color, the way you talk, walk, the way you look. How you walk, they will think you’re in a gang.”

The other half of the Mexican sample stressed the importance of race. These individuals were mixed in their beliefs about whether African Americans were more vulnerable than Latinos to mistreatment, or whether both groups faced similar hazards. Interviewees such as Mario indicated what being Latino represents within a larger social context, “If you are labeled Latino, from a White perspective, you are a Black or Brown piece of shit, don’t deserve to live, you live off welfare, you’re lazy and do not work.” However, when probed deeper about the police, he further elaborated, “They [police] all equal [treat people the same] but not with Black people. White cop with Black guy pulled over, you know why. Equal for Latinos.” Similar to the Puerto Rican respondents, these young Mexican interviewees believed that those defined as Black suffered the worst treatment. Jose stated, “I would not say better, but African Americans get treated worse than Latinos. In the U.S. they are the bad people, especially gang bangers.”

Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine how young Latino males experience urban policing within the context of order maintenance. Data derived from in-depth interviews with Puerto Rican and Mexican youths showed, overall, that the gentrification of the Puerto Rican neighborhood was viewed as placing these youths at risk for aggressive order maintenance. Traditional recreational and cultural behaviors, such as hanging out in the front yard, playing baseball in the street, or being out late at night, become aggressively pursued under loitering and sound ordinances. In the Mexican neighborhood, by contrast, a more traditional crusade against drugs and gangs appeared to structure order maintenance strategies. Respondents reported high rates of *Terry*-type stops, many of which

occurred without apparent legal justification, according to these youths. Despite occasional wrongdoing on the part of respondents, the majority of stops involved questioning and assumptions about their involvement in criminal activities irrespective of whether they were engaged in illegal acts at the time of the stop.

The primary conclusion from the study results is that, in practice, seemingly racially neutral order maintenance strategies shaped by gentrification or traditional campaigns against drugs and gangs criminalize Puerto Rican and Mexican youth. As the youths' reports made clear, young Latino males' encounters with police evinced wide variation; it would be erroneous to believe that all Latino males experience urban policing in the same way.

Two frameworks can be used to understand the experiences of youths in these two neighborhoods and to contextualize the similarities and differences of their experiences. First, Puerto Rican youths' exposure to order maintenance policing might be best understood within the parameters of the defended neighborhood thesis. Young minority males report widespread problems with police in areas with substantial White populations (Stewart, Baumer, & Brunson, 2009; see also Meehan & Ponder, 2010), and the current study suggests that this phenomenon may carry over into neighborhoods undergoing gentrification processes. Although defended neighborhoods are generally considered to be those traditionally occupied by Whites but that have recently experienced an influx of minorities, the present study speaks to the opposite set of events, where Whites seek to establish residential territory in a neighborhood traditionally occupied by non-Whites. Gentrification may spark a process whereby incoming middle-class Whites, eager to take advantage of low-cost property, see the activities of existing Latino residents not as culturally derived but, rather, as symbols of disorganization. As Green, Strolovitch, and Wong (1998) wrote, "Conflict over neighborhood territory [can be traced to] the onset of racial integration" (p. 376). White newcomers, having invested in the area and formed an attachment to it, may engage in cognitive mapping where they use environmental cues to draw inferences about the general state of social (dis)organization in the area (see Unger & Wandersman, 1985). When alarmed by what they see as disorderly or threatening behaviors by Latino youth, White residents may enlist police assistance in imposing a version of organization that is more conducive to Whites' perceptions of a good neighborhood.

The second framework that can be used to contextualize respondents' experiences is that of the war on drugs and gangs. This framework applies to the male Mexican youth, who, like the Puerto Rican respondents, reported a high rate of involuntary police contacts that they felt were unjustified. However, unlike the Puerto Rican youth, Mexican youth experienced these contacts under the backdrop of an urban war on crime and felt that the poor treatment visited upon them by officers was less a result of their race, *per se*, than the product of police assumptions about these youths' involvement in crime. Interviewees' comments revealed that assumptions about gang affiliation and

gang violence consumed officers' attention. The Mexican community has a noticeably higher rate of homicide than the rest of the city. When the zeal for crime control becomes an obsession, however, one must carefully evaluate the consequences for those being policed. The war on drugs, in particular, has been linked to high rates of unlawful stops and frisks (Gould & Mastrofski, 2004), and institutional practices such as an emphasis over the quantity of arrests rather than the quality of them can function to pipeline young Latino males into jail and prison (Rios, 2011). In the present study, Mexican respondents reported feeling that police frequently stopped them for no reason, merely to manufacture an opportunity to question them about their potential involvement in drug or gang activity. Police researchers have critiqued the war model as creating problematic divisions where one side is designated as the enemy that must be conquered or suppressed (Bittner, 1970). Mexican respondents' accounts seemed to confirm the validity of this concern.

The clear differences that emerged between Puerto Rican and Mexican youths have implications for future research. This variation suggests that it would be erroneous to assume that all Latinos experience urban policing in a similar way, even Latinos who live in the same city, as the present respondents did. The discrepancies between the two groups was likely a function of the racial variation between the two neighborhoods; Puerto Rican youth lived in a racially mixed neighborhood and thus were easy to categorize on the basis of their race, while the Mexican youths' neighborhood was predominantly Latino. The relative homogeneity of the Mexican respondents' area of residence did not remove race from the equation, but it changed the dynamic insofar as it muddled respondents' perceptions of officers' ability to discriminate between different people inside the neighborhood boundaries.

Overall, the present study's results speak to the inherent racialization of an order maintenance style police strategy that, while race-neutral on its face, plays out in practice as notably discriminatory (see Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Zimring (2012) described the same situation in his commentary on the New York City Police Department's massive order maintenance campaign:

The problem with using a predicate offense-alcohol, loud radio noise in a car, marijuana—as justification for selective enforcement of non-serious crimes—is that it really does become the more equivalent of racial profiling. A much larger percentage of the African American and Hispanic kids picked up for truancy and curfew will be on parole, probation, or “criminal record” group (p. 119)

Thus, seemingly racially neutral order maintenance strategies which police organizations justify under the guise of public safety may, in practice, have a powerful impact on the nationwide overrepresentation of Latinos in the criminal-justice system.

The results of this study lend themselves to policy recommendations for urban police departments engaged in order maintenance or similar policing strategies. These departments should place a premium on understanding the cultural milieus in which they operate. Police administrators should acknowledge that certain activities currently constituting an unquestioned, integral element of police training and socialization (e.g., looking out for people who “don’t belong” in a certain area) can be interpreted by minorities as race-based and highly discriminatory (see Engel & Johnson, 2006). Awareness of existing racial or cultural tensions within the neighborhoods they police is necessary for officers to deal effectively with the resultant clashes and to approach conflict situations willing to see both parties’ sides. Police officers assigned to multi-racial areas should adopt heightened awareness of the delicacy of their position, since they will often be called upon to serve as mediators rather than law enforcers. In this way, order maintenance policing can be used in a manner that avoids criminalization of minorities’ cultural activities and traditional modes of recreation, as well as the appearance of race-based profiling or discrimination. Also, equal enforcement of laws against disorder and nuisance offenses is crucial; the present study highlights the resentment that Latinos feel when officers turn a blind eye toward Whites engaged in the very same activities that likely would have invited scrutiny had the participants been Latino. The appearance of fairness and neutrality must be maintained if urban police are to earn trust and enjoy legitimacy (e.g., Tyler, 2006).

This study has limitations that warrant some caution in the interpretation of the results and that provide avenues for future research on Latinos and policing. The study was qualitative and thus prioritized depth over breadth; although respondents were able to give detailed accounts of their experiences, the sample size was small and of unknown generalizability to Latino males, as a group, in Chicago or elsewhere. Future research could gather larger samples containing a mix of races and ethnicities to compare different groups’ experiences with urban police strategies that are supposed to be colorblind. Despite these limitations, the present study offers insight into an area of research that is currently sparse and in need of greater attention. Researchers should continue efforts to uncover the unique way that Latinos, and the various sub-groups within that larger designation, experience policing within the urban context and under the rubric of order maintenance and the war on drugs, gangs, and crime in general. Better understanding will help inform police policy and facilitate informing the public and policymakers that although policies may appear to be race-neutral on their face, this may not be the case.

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Footnotes

1. The lead author explained to interviewees the general scope of the study, and all were eager to participate. None of the community organizations outright refused to participate, although the Puerto Rican neighborhood was wary of strangers since they were undergoing gentrification efforts. The Puerto Rican organization that finally agreed, whose mission was centered on social justice, felt that it was their duty and responsibility to help out a graduate student in desperate need of finishing their dissertation and to describe their accounts of policing in their community. In fact, one person pressed for time agreed to be interviewed by stating that *la causa* (the cause) is more important than his tight schedule. After spending months with young people in both organizations, rapport was established, which led to a richer picture of their neighborhoods. [↵](#)
2. Gentrification was a recurring theme that the first author noted in extensive field notes surfacing not only from the interviewees, but also the political action, grassroots efforts from various organizations, fliers posted around the community, etc. The process of gentrification was happening east to west beginning closer to Lake Michigan and moving outward. Other nearby communities in the east had already been gentrified at the time this research was conducted (e.g., Cabrini Green). The residents saw what can be described as the beginning of the gentrification efforts. Thus, although Whites represent a minority, gentrification was salient in these youths' minds. [↵](#)