

---

# Race, Gender, and Responses to the Police Among Ferguson Residents and Protesters

Race and Justice  
2019, Vol. 9(3) 276-303  
© The Author(s) 2017  
Article reuse guidelines:  
sagepub.com/journals-permissions  
DOI: 10.1177/2153368717699673  
journals.sagepub.com/home/raj



Jennifer E. Cobbina<sup>1</sup>, Michael Conteh<sup>1</sup>  
and Collin Emrich<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

A large body of research has examined police behavior toward citizens and shown that police practices are geographically patterned. Disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to receive punitive policing than more affluent communities. However, little is known about how citizens manage encounters with police when they occur and few studies have examined how gender intersects with race and neighborhood context in determining reactions to and outcomes of police encounters. Using Black feminist theory as an analytical framework, we draw from in-depth interviews with Black residents and protesters in Ferguson, Missouri to analyze men and women's narrative accounts of involuntary police encounters to investigate how they respond to encounters with officers, how such tactics shaped police-citizen outcomes, and whether these patterns vary by gender. Our findings suggest that the strategies that citizens employed are common across both genders; however, the police-citizen outcome is demonstrably shaped by gender.

## Keywords

African/Black Americans, race/ethnicity, race and policing, race, class, and gender articulation, criminological theories, problem-oriented policing, traffic stops

On August 9, 2014, 18-year-old Michael Brown, an unarmed Black male, was fatally shot by Darren Wilson, a White officer of the Ferguson Police Department. On November 24,

---

<sup>1</sup> School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Jennifer E. Cobbina, School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, 560 Baker Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA.

Email: cobbina@msu.edu

2014, at 8:30 p.m., St. Louis County prosecuting attorney, Robert McCulloch, announced that the grand jury would not be indicting Officer Wilson. The killing of Brown in conjunction with the announcement sparked civil unrest across the nation.

Michael Brown's death, along with the social unrest following the recent killings of Blacks at the hands of the police, have driven issues of race, justice, and policing to the forefront of the American conscience. Nearly five decades of research has generated a wealth of studies on police officers' treatment of civilians. Scholars have shown that Blacks are less likely to have confidence in the police and more likely report negative police encounters compared to Whites and Hispanics (Gabbidon & Taylor Green, 2009; Russell-Brown, 2009). In particular, Blacks, males, juveniles, and individuals of low socioeconomic status have less favorable attitudes toward the police than Whites, females, adults, and those with high socioeconomic status (Taylor, Turner, Esbensen, & Winfree, 2001). Others have explored the social ecology of policing and the disproportionately negative effect of police practices on people of color (Boyles, 2015; Brunson & Weitzer, 2009; Weitzer, 1999, 2000). Specifically, Blacks who reside in disadvantaged neighborhoods experience increased levels of surveillance and stops, disrespect and abuse, use of force, and slow police response time (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009; Mastrofski, Reisig, & McCluskey, 2002; Weitzer, 1999).

While researchers have sought a number of explanations to describe Blacks' perceptions of and experiences with the police, important gaps remain in our understanding of race, gender, and policing. First, there has been an increasing emphasis on the intersection of race, class, gender, and crime (Barak, Flavin, & Leighton, 2006; De Coster & Heimer, 2006; Gabbidon, Higgins, & Potter, 2011; Like & Miller, 2006). Much research has examined the plight of Black men and their treatment by the police, with many scholars demonstrating that minority youths who reside in poor urban communities are subject to aggressive policing tactics (Kochel, Wilson, & Mastrofski, 2011; Warren, 2011; Weitzer & Brunson, 2009). Fewer studies, however, have paid specific attention to how gender intersects with race and neighborhood context in determining reactions to and outcomes of police encounters (Brunson & Miller, 2006b). It is taken for granted that young, Black men are the central targets of negative police interactions. While Black males report more dissatisfaction with and discriminative treatment by police compared to Whites and minority females (Cochran & Warren, 2012; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006), Black women also have negative experiences with the police and are not immune from harmful police encounters (Brunson & Miller, 2006b; Bush-Baskette, 1998; Crenshaw, Ritchie, Anspach, Gilmer, & Harris, 2015; Gabbidon et al., 2011). Black females' experiences may adversely affect the way they respond to involuntary police stops.

Second, much of the research on this topic is largely quantitative, based on survey research or official data on citizen complaints (Mastrofski, Snipes, & Supina, 1996). Thus, it is difficult to fully investigate the nuances of gendered patterns of police encounters. Few studies have drawn from in-depth interviews, which provide an opportunity to understand both the social context of events and the "lived experiences" for the individuals involved (Boyles, 2015; Brunson & Gau, 2015; Brunson & Miller, 2006; Phillips & Bowling, 2003; Weitzer, 2000; Weitzer & Brunson, 2009).

Such examinations are particularly warranted in economically distressed, high-crime neighborhoods, where residents face increased unwelcome police attention and the police–citizen relationship is tenuous (Kane, 2002; Klinger, 1997; Terrill & Reising, 2003). Against the backdrop of a high profile incident that garnered national media attention for weeks, the purpose of this study is to analyze the narrative accounts of 50 involuntary police encounters among Black residents and protesters in Ferguson, Missouri. Drawing from in-depth interviews, we investigate how Ferguson residents and protesters respond to encounters with the police, how such tactics shaped police–citizen outcomes, and whether these patterns vary by gender. In particular, this exploratory study examines whether there are key similarities and variations among Black men’s and women’s responses during police encounters.

Before moving to our present research, we will briefly examine the facts of the Michael Brown shooting. This is followed by a review of three bodies of literature which are relevant for our research. First, we draw on Black feminist theory to provide an analytical framework that places the lived experiences of Black women at the focal point of the analysis. Second, we discuss the scholarship on gender, race, and policing, which serves as a basis for understanding the nature of citizen–police interactions. Third, we explore Braithwaite’s (2003, 2009) work concerning the various ways in which people respond to and manage encounters with regulatory authorities.

## **The Michael Brown Incident**

In their criminal investigation into the shooting death of 18-year-old Michael Brown, an unarmed Black male, by Darren Wilson, a White officer of the Ferguson Police Department, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) determined that the evidence did not support the conclusion that Wilson violated federal law (2015). According to the DOJ, at approximately 12 p.m., on August 9, 2014, while on duty, Officer Wilson observed Brown and his friend walking in the middle of the street on Canfield Drive in Ferguson, Missouri. Both young men had just come from a convenience store where the store’s surveillance video captured Brown stealing several packages of cigarillos and forcefully shoving the store clerk away. Because a dispatch call went out over the police radio for a “stealing in progress,” Wilson was aware of the theft when he encountered Brown and his friend in his vehicle and told them to get out of the street. Based on Wilson’s statement to the prosecutor and investigators, after instructing the teens to move to the sidewalk, Wilson suspected they were both involved in the robbery. Wilson testified that as he tried to open the door of his vehicle it closed,<sup>1</sup> Brown punched him, reached for his gun, and a struggle for the gun ensued during which Wilson fired two shots, one of which struck Brown in the hand. After the shooting occurred inside the vehicle, evidence showed that Brown ran, and Wilson gave chase, ultimately shooting Brown after he turned and charged him. Reports show that Wilson fired 12 bullets, 6 of which hit Brown, including 2 in the head.

Although several witnesses asserted that Brown had his hands up in an act of surrender prior to Wilson shooting him dead, the DOJ concluded that such accounts were not congruent with physical and forensic evidence and pointed to inconsistent

and changing statements from witnesses (U.S. DOJ, 2015). The St. Louis Prosecutor, Robert McCullough, decided to bring the case in front of a grand jury to determine whether there was probable cause to indict Wilson for his actions. On November 24, 2014, McCullough announced that the grand jury had decided not to indict Wilson. The killing of Brown and the grand jury announcement sparked civil unrest across the nation, including Los Angeles, New York, Seattle, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Protesters rallied for several weeks outraged by the death of Brown and protested the use of excessive and lethal force by law enforcement officials toward Black civilians.

The Michael Brown incident reaffirmed the pressing need to understand how Black (and other) individuals deal with police, as they are vulnerable to experiencing police violence. This includes the need to understand how minority females in particular interact with and respond to police, as they remain understudied. Responsive to the gaps in knowledge, our goal is to describe how Black men and women understand and negotiate police encounters. More generally, this study fills gaps in research by examining the intersection of race, gender, and neighborhood context.

In the next section, we provide a brief overview of feminist theory and the concepts on which Black feminist criminology is construed. After discussing the theoretical framework, a review of the existing body of literature on gender, race, and policing is provided. This is followed by a discussion of motivational posturing framework, which is the framework used as the foundation to help determine how people react and behave toward authorities.

## **Conceptual Framework**

Over the past few decades, feminist scholars have postulated three common ways in which women are criminally processed. First, the equal treatment hypothesis claims that gender does not shape how individuals are criminally processed. Since this perspective asserts that both men and women are treated similarly in the criminal justice system, theories are often gender neutral and too often “men’s experiences are taken as the norm and are generalized to the population” (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 500). Second, the chivalry or paternalism thesis purports that women are processed more leniently than men; thus, explaining women’s lower crime rates compared to men. That is, because of male chivalry toward women, this perspective argues that criminal justice actors do all that is within their power to protect women and divert them from the justice system (Belknap, 2007; Pollak, 1950). Third, in contrast to the chivalry or paternalism thesis, the evil women model asserts that females are treated more harshly than males because in addition to violating the law, they have violated traditional gender roles (Moyer, 1992). Despite the models used to explain how women come into contact with the criminal justice system, many feminist writers have expressed that such models do not pertain to Black women (Farnworth & Teske, 1995). Arguably, Black women are not afforded chivalrous treatment by actors in the criminal justice system because they are often perceived as not conforming to traditional gender behaviors and characteristics (Visher, 1983; Young & Adams-Fuller,

2006). As Simpson (1989, p. 614) stated, “although chivalry may be alive and well for White women, it appears to be dead (if it ever existed) for Blacks.”

While feminist criminologists have placed gender as a focal point of an analysis regarding crime, criminality, and the criminal justice system, Black feminists have criticized mainstream feminism, expressing dissatisfaction with its insufficient attention to the intersecting nature of race, gender, class, and other inequalities (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1994). Arguing that such inequalities cannot be understood in isolation to one another, Black feminists assert that these “intersecting oppressions” result in variation in the nature and effects of inequality (Andersen & Collins, 2004; Collins, 2000; Daly, 1993). Nevertheless, greater emphasis has been placed on the plight of Black men in the criminal justice system. Consequently, Black women have remained largely invisible in research on race and policing (Rice, 1990), even though evidence indicates that Black females receive more severe treatment within the criminal justice system than White females (Bush-Baskette, 1998; Miller, 1999). In fact, Gabbidon, Higgins, and Potter (2011) called for “additional qualitative research that provides insights into the observed differences in police encounters between Black men and women” (p. 16). As such, we apply a Black feminist theoretical lens to investigate and explain reactions to police encounters among Blacks and how such responses are gendered.

## **Race, Place, Gender, and Policing**

Much of what we know about police–citizen relations and perceptions regarding each other stem from research on public attitudes toward police. Race is consistently found to be the strongest predictor of attitudes toward the police. In particular, Blacks are more likely than Whites to express feelings of distrust and negative sentiments toward the police (Schafer, Huebner, & Bynum, 2003; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). While Whites are more satisfied with the police than other racial/ethnic groups, Blacks are more likely than Whites to believe that police abuse citizens, treat people of color more punitively, and are rarely held accountable for misconduct (Crow & Adrion, 2011; Paoline & Terrill, 2005; Sobol, Wu, & Sun, 2013; Terrill, 2005; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006).

Studies also show that citizens’ experiences with police influence their general satisfaction with the police. Police treatment of citizens during an encounter has a larger effect on perceptions of the police than the outcome of the encounter (e.g., a citation, arrest; Tyler, 1990; Tyler & Huo, 2002), suggesting that the process trumps the outcome. When police treat citizens in a harsh, disrespectful, or unfair manner, citizens are more likely to be dissatisfied with the police (Wortley, Hagan, & Macmillan, 1997). However, when police treat citizens in a respectful and courteous manner, and explain to them their rights and the reasons for specific actions, citizens are more likely to be satisfied (Stone & Pettigrew, 2000; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Nevertheless, Blacks are more likely to report negative experiences with the police and to feel that they have not received fair or respectful treatment (Davis, Henderson, & Cheryachukin, 2004; Tyler & Huo, 2002).

Research also suggests that citizens' relations with the police are ecologically patterned, as police actions in disadvantaged communities differ from those in middle-class or affluent neighborhoods. Aggressive styles of policing are common in poor neighborhoods and disproportionately experienced by poor Blacks (Kane, 2002; Mastrofski et al., 2002; Terrill & Reisig, 2003). This is a product of popular stereotypes of young Black men as criminal predators—what Skolnick (1966) calls the “symbolic assailant” or what Russell-Brown (2009) refers to as the “criminal blackman” (see also Dowler & Zawiliski, 2007; Jones-Brown, 2007). As a result, economically distressed Black communities are often subject to increased surveillance and stops (Kennedy, 1997; Weitzer, 1999), disrespectful treatment and verbal abuse (Mastrofski et al., 2002; Weitzer, 2002), use of force (Terrill & Reisig, 1996, 2003), police misconduct (Kane, 2002), and underresponsive policing (Anderson, 1990; Brunson & Weitzer, 2009; Klinger, 1997; Weitzer, 2000). A considerable body of research shows that urban Blacks often bear the largest share of unwelcome police contacts (Brunson, 2007; Brunson & Miller, 2006a, 2006b). For instance, in their examination of young Black youths' perceptions of and experiences with police in St. Louis, Missouri, Brunson and Miller (2006a) found that both delinquent and non-delinquent young men reported persistent harassment and disrespectful treatment from police. As a result, “[t]he combination of frequent involuntary police contact coupled with what young men felt to be poor treatment during some contacts created an accumulated body of lived experiences that shaped young men's perceptions of the police” (Brunson & Miller, 2006a, p. 635).

Not only do young men's senses of themselves as symbolic assailants in the eyes of the police occur in inner city neighborhoods, but such sentiments are common among suburban Blacks. Conducting her work in Meacham Park, a Black enclave of Kirkwood, Missouri, Boyles (2015) analyzed how race and disadvantaged contexts shape suburban Blacks' assessment of the police. She found that many of her respondents detailed accounts of being harassed and mistreated by police, challenging the conventional wisdom that suburbia protects Blacks from potential harms generally faced in inner cities, including aggressive policing tactics. Moreover, Meehan and Ponder (2002) found that Blacks were more likely than Whites to be stopped in a predominately White Midwestern suburb. Likewise, Novak (2004) reported a small but statistically insignificant overrepresentation of Blacks stopped in suburban neighborhoods. Boyles' work, along with other scholars, draws attention to the significance of place regarding police–citizen encounters.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to the way in which Blacks are treated by the police, much of the research has focused primarily on unfavorable police encounters involving Black men (Brunson, 2007; Brunson & Miller, 2006a; Jones-Brown, 2007). While scholars have increasingly examined the plight of Black women in the criminal justice system (Brunson & Stewart, 2006; Bush-Baskette, 1998; Collins, 2000; Jones, 2004, 2010; Oliver, 2000), only a few studies examine the perceptions of and experiences that Black women have with the police. For example, in their examination of how gender shapes police interactions, Brunson and Miller (2006b) found that young Black males reported being treated as suspects and were the recipients of police

violence while young Black females reported being stopped by police at night for curfew and truancy violations. Further, in their qualitative investigation of 154 life histories with poor and working-class young adult men and women in Buffalo, New York, and Jersey City, New Jersey, Fine and Weis (1998) reported that views on police were deeply classed, raced, ethnized, and gendered. More specifically, while the majority of White men in the study trusted the police and denied acts of police brutality, in their discussions of community violence, both Black and Latino men were more likely to underscore violence and corruption perpetrated by the police. Like men of color, Black and Latina women in the study reported mistrust of the police.

Although research has documented that stops and searches, displays of disrespect, and the use of excessive force disproportionately occurs in poor communities of color, less is known about how gender shapes responses to involuntary police-initiated encounters. The few studies that have been conducted are primarily quantitative in nature with some revealing that males show a greater inclination to acquiesce than females (Mastrofski et al., 1996) and others asserting that females are more inclined to comply with police (Lanza-Kaduce & Greenleaf, 1994). Weitzer and Brunson (2009) are one of the few qualitative studies to examine how youths manage their interactions with police. They found that young Black men rely on both proactive and reactive tactics to reduce the likelihood of contact and conflicts with police. In particular, youths rely on exit (avoidance of police), voice (verbal resistance, lodge complaint), and loyalty (to family, friends, and community members who provide cautionary advice as to how to avoid police and guide interactions when they do occur) strategies to navigate contact with law enforcement. An important note, however, is that Weitzer and Brunson (2009) limit their examination to young males' reactions to police. To date, very little research of this type has explored how gender shapes citizens' reactions to the police, and we are unaware of any studies that examine the relationship between citizens' strategies to police and the outcome of police interactions. Building on prior work of Weitzer and Brunson (2009), we examine the extent to which gender shapes Black Ferguson residents' and protesters' reactions to police and the outcome of police–citizen encounters.

## **Motivational Posturing Framework and Police–Citizen Encounters**

Braithwaite's (2003, 2009) motivational posturing framework suggests that one of five postures determine how people respond when they find themselves in a personal encounter with a regulatory authority. These include commitment, capitulation, resistance, disengagement, and game playing. *Commitment* reflects a high level of moral obligation and internalized acceptance to act in the interest of the law. *Capitulation* signals acceptance of institutional authority as legitimate; thus, a conscious decision is made to comply with legal authorities. *Resistance* is a motivational posture that represents the degree to which individuals adopt a confrontational approach to the way authorities use their power or the laws they enforce. *Disengagement* signifies the degree to which individuals have emotionally or mentally removed themselves from

the system and its consequences. *Game playing* reflects a particular kind of attitude whereby the law is viewed as something to be manipulated to suit one's own purposes. Commitment and game playing represent internal attitudes that individuals have toward legal authorities, while capitulation, resistance, and disengagement reflect behavior postures people have toward regulators. Capitulation and resistance are the focus of the present study, as we are interested in citizens' behavioral responses toward police when they have direct, involuntary interactions with law enforcement.

Within the context of policing, a resistant posture indicates doubt as to whether the police will act appropriately because they are perceived as oppressive; hence, resisters strongly object to the way the system operates and display their right to challenge treatment from authorities that they view as unfair. These reactions can be expressed verbally (e.g., arguments) or nonverbally (e.g., physical aggression, noncompliance, flight; Braithwaite, 2003; Weitzer & Brunson, 2009). By virtue of their power, authorities pose a threat to people's social identities (Braithwaite, 2009, 2013). Braithwaite (2009, p. 20) notes that as an authority's threat increases, individuals "use their motivational postures to adjust their social distance and establish a comfort zone for themselves in relation to the authority." Accordingly, when citizens perceive that the police have challenged their social identities, restricted their freedom, displayed disrespect, or treated them unfairly during the encounter, resistance becomes likely (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994; Tyler & Huo, 2002). In contrast, those who adopt the capitulation posture perceive resistance to authorities as useless (Braithwaite, 2003). In the context of policing, capitulation reflects acceptance of law enforcement as the legitimate authority as well as the belief that police are a benign power as long as one acts appropriately and defers to their authority (Braithwaite, 2003).

Situational analyses that take into account police actions have underscored a few issues. First, when police act aggressively and disrespectfully toward citizens from the onset of the encounter, citizens are less likely to acquiesce (Mastrofski et al., 1996; Terrill, 2003). Second, when police behavior is held constant, Black citizens and males are *more* likely to show compliance (Mastrofski et al., 1996), and high rates of compliance occur among encounters with White police officers and Black citizens. Third, evidence demonstrates that poor Black males use reactive (e.g., verbal and physical resistance, noncompliance, lodge a complaint) and proactive (e.g., inform others of negative experiences with police, provide tips on how to handle encounters) tactics to minimize the likelihood of police contacts and manage encounters when they do occur (Weitzer & Brunson, 2009). Results suggest that the relationship between race and citizen demeanor is multifaceted and tied to the way police interact with Blacks in poor communities. Nevertheless, such research tells us little about how Black women respond to direct contacts with the police and the relationship between citizens' reactions and the outcome of police-citizen encounters.

## Current Study

Although few studies have compared how Black men and women experience and react to interactions with the police, the Michael Brown incident and scholarship

above suggest this is an important inquiry. While young, Black men experience higher rates of involuntary contact with police, Black women are also vulnerable to experiencing racialized police violence. Currently, it remains unknown whether Black men and women manage interactions with police in similar or distinct ways. Thus, using an all-Black sample, we seek to answer the following questions:

1. How do Black individuals manage involuntary police-initiated encounters?
2. How does gender shape reactions to and outcomes of police interactions?

## **Methods**

Data for this study come from a broader study of neighborhood violence and policing among Black adults. Here we analyze 50 incidents of police citizen encounters drawn from qualitative interviews with 20 Black males and 18 Black females who self-identified as having engaged in some form of community action in Ferguson following the death of Michael Brown. Study participants ranged in age between 18 and 65 years, with a mean of 37 years of age. Related to educational status, 16 of the respondents had some college education, with respondents reporting that they were either currently in college or had attended/taken some college courses. In terms of economic standing, 28 respondents reported that they were currently working part- or full-time at the time of the interview and the remainder was unemployed. Finally, 18 respondents lived in Ferguson for nearly 10 years, while the rest resided in St. Louis for an average of 15 years. The study draws from qualitative, in-depth interviews that were conducted between October and November, 2014. Prior to the commencing interview, the research team<sup>2</sup> outlined the study objectives and assured respondents of strict confidentiality. Participation in the study was voluntary and respondents were paid US\$40 for their involvement.

We used a maximum variation sampling strategy designed to capture a wide range of perspectives that would reveal a variety of strategies to manage police encounters (Creswell, 2013). We targeted a heterogeneous group of individual protesters and residents of Ferguson who varied across race, gender, and age; thus, yielding a nonprobability sample. In particular, individuals were recruited to participate in the project if they resided in Ferguson, Missouri, or engaged in some form of community action (e.g., protests, marches, rallies, etc.) following the death of Michael Brown. Several approaches were used to recruit respondents to participate in the study. First, effort was made to purposefully recruit from sites that we knew would contain larger proportions of young people, as protest movements in Ferguson have comprised largely of young millennials (Corley, 2014). Thus, a flyer describing the research project was placed on the first author's Facebook and Twitter accounts, which was disseminated to others on social media. Also, the editor of a Black newspaper in St. Louis announced the project several times on Twitter to his 7,000 plus followers. Second, in addition to reaching young millennials, effort was made to recruit a diverse array of millennials and nonmillennials of all ages and backgrounds. Specifically, in

an attempt to reach an older population, an advertisement was placed in the employment section of a weekly newspaper serving the Black community in St. Louis.<sup>3</sup> Finally, effort was made to contact individuals with diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds by posting and passing out fliers to students at a local community college and a university in St. Louis.

Data collection began with a digitally recorded in-depth semistructured interview, which lasted approximately 1 hr. Interviews were conducted in several locations across the Greater St. Louis metropolitan area, including in a conference room at a local university, in fast food restaurants, coffee shops, and a local public library. The interviews were later transcribed and serve as the primary data for this contextual examination.

The unit of analysis for the current study is the police–citizen encounter. In all, respondents in the study provided detailed descriptions of 50 incidents of direct, face-to-face encounters with police before and after the death of Brown.<sup>4</sup> As a general rule, narrative accounts of a police encounter had to specify details of the incident, including information about involuntary police-initiated stops, respondents' reaction to being stopped, and the outcome that resulted from citizens' response.<sup>5</sup> The use of in-depth interviews allows us to understand the social world from the research participants' points of view. Such an approach is necessary because so few studies explore how Black women describe their experiences with and views of police (see Gabbidon et al., 2009). Our study allows for a detailed examination of how Black men and women manage their interactions with police. The goal of the current study is to focus on Black adults, as studies show that they are more likely to have involuntary contact with the police compared to other racial/ethnic groups (Fagan & Davies, 2000; Mastrofski et al., 1996).

To enhance the validity and reliability of the data, respondents were asked to describe their experiences with police at multiple points during the interview by questioning their observations of police practices and their personal experiences.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the questionnaire probed for concrete detailed descriptions of all recounted events.<sup>7</sup> The authors identified respondents' responses to police and the transcripts were formatted and read into NVivo 11, a qualitative research software. The first and third author independently coded five cases for themes and then met to discuss, compare, and refine the codes. Each author identified strong patterns tied to respondents' accounts regarding reactions to the police, and a codebook was generated for this study. Once the categories were agreed upon, the first and third author then independently coded an additional 10 cases. In cases where there were discrepancies in coding, we worked together to refine our analysis of the thematic patterns reported. Once the discrepancies were resolved, the first and third author independently coded 20 cases. The Cohen's  $\kappa$  score was .889, which signifies substantial agreement between codes. The remaining transcripts were coded independently by the third author. This analytic approach established interrater reliability and resulted in a more systematic and rigorous examination.

We used several inductive analytic techniques to strengthen the internal validity of our analysis. We began with multiple readings of the data, during which we coded

**Table 1.** Select Neighborhood Characteristics.

	Ferguson	St. Louis County
Percentage of Black	67.5	23.7
Median family income	US\$38,685	US\$58,910
Percentage of unemployment	12.2	8.6
Percentage of poverty	24.9	10.9
Percentage of female-headed household with children	17.5	8.1

Source. U.S. Bureau of Census (2010).

passages and noted preliminary analytic observations. A constant comparative approach was also used, which entailed developing and reworking categories as the data are coded (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The transcripts were examined to identify concepts and themes that reoccurred, which the first and third author compared and refined (Holsti, 1969). In our analysis, we took care to ensure that the concepts developed and illustrations provided reflect the most common patterns in respondents' accounts. This determination was achieved using grounded theory methods, including the search for and illumination of deviant cases (Strauss, 1987). Finally, basic tabulations were utilized to identify the strength of the patterns uncovered (Silverman, 2006, pp. 296–301). Our examination is informed by Braithwaite's (2003, 2009) conceptual framework, as it was used to interpret the data.

## Study Setting

Ferguson is a city with a population of slightly more than 21,000, which is located in St. Louis County, Missouri, and is part of the Greater St. Louis metropolitan area. The city of Ferguson is suburban; yet, the structural conditions resemble that of many urban cities. Table 1 provides a comparison of demographic and socioeconomic indicators for residents and protesters in Ferguson and St. Louis County overall. The table depicts clear differences between the characteristics of residents who live in the city of Ferguson compared with those who live in the County. In particular, there are 3 times as many Blacks who reside in Ferguson compared to St. Louis County. Residents of Ferguson experience higher unemployment and poverty rates than residents of the County; moreover, Ferguson residents have a median income US\$20,000 lower than those in the County. The proportion of female-headed households is also 2 times greater in Ferguson. Overall, those residing in Ferguson fare worse on a number of socioeconomic indicators when compared with individuals who reside in St. Louis County.

## Findings

Qualitative data were used to determine the various ways Black adults managed encounters with police. In particular, 50 police–citizen incidents were described by Black men and women in the sample. Below we provide in-depth descriptions of the three most common strategic responses, the outcome that resulted from the response,

and how gender shapes responses toward the police and police–citizen outcomes. Using Braithwaite’s (2003, 2009) motivational posturing framework, we found that the top three strategies in managing encounters with the police include resistance, capitulation, and a combination of both resistance and capitulation.<sup>8</sup>

### *Resisting Police*

When asked about the nature of police encounters they experienced, Black men and women in the study identified a number of ways they managed encounters with police, most of which occurred prior to the death of Michael Brown.<sup>9</sup> In particular, 23 incidents were mentioned by both men ( $N = 14$ ) and women ( $N = 9$ ) who resisted the police by questioning or challenging their authority. In 13 of the 14 incidents, when Black males questioned the police, it proved unfavorable for them. One month prior to Michael Brown’s death, Marcus was on his way to visit his mother early in the morning in the city of St. Louis and reported that “[t]he police swooped down on me undercover . . . tell[ing] me they’ve seen me with a gun.” Even though Marcus showed them it was a cell phone charger and not a gun, he asserts that “they took me in [to jail] and gave me resisting arrest. I didn’t resist. I just asked them ‘what are you locking me up for?’ and they called that resist.” Likewise, Kevin recounted a police encounter he had while driving a friend’s car through Pawn Lawn, a city in St. Louis County:

I’m driving or whatever and I see a big crowd or whatever and I just see all the police driving around or whatever and I’m just driving . . . And I guess they tripped off my friend having tints in his car . . . so they come chasing me down.

Although Kevin tried to explain “I’m coming from home . . . Why y’all mess with me?,” he explained that the police “pulled me out the car or whatever, started searching me and all that—pulled me on the trunk of the car like I really did something and had guns and everything.” Several Black men in the study were subject to frequent vehicle and pedestrian police stops, which they believed was unwarranted. As a result, some responded in a hostile manner when confronted by police. Tyrone’s account is illustrative:

I did not have a good experience with no Ferguson police officer ever. I’ve been stopped more than I can count on my hands . . . One morning, I was walking to work. I was walking to the bus stop to go to work taking public transportation. The police pulled up on me. He was asking me like “where you going?” I’m like, “why?” “Like why are you asking me where I’m going? It’s early in the morning. Obviously, I’m going to work or I’m going to school. Like leave me alone.” Then, he [the police] was like “get down on the ground.” I’m like, “for what? I’m not getting down on the ground. I’m waiting on the bus. Like leave me alone.” So he got out of the car and put me in handcuffs. He told me it was a failure to cooperate with an officer. I got locked up right then and there.

Several studies show that a citizen’s demeanor toward the police strongly predicts subsequent police action (Lundman, 1996; Mastrofski et al., 2002; Sykes & Clark,

1979; Worden & Shepard, 1996). That is, when suspects refuse to defer to the authority of law enforcement, they are more likely to be sanctioned by police through arrest, citations, or the use of force (Lundman, 1996; Worden & Shepard, 1996).<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, when Black men challenged or questioned the authority of law enforcement, it resulted in the threat of or actual use of force by police. For example, regarding Ferguson police, DeShawn complained about how he is generally treated when stopped by the police:

[A]n officer never comes to my vehicle and . . . [says] ‘sir this is why I’m pulling you over.’ They always came with ‘license and registration.’ If I asked, ‘why you pulling me over?’ [They say] ‘can you step out of the vehicle? Why are you being aggressive? Calm down before I taze you.

And Darnel recounted an incident in which he experienced involuntary contact with Ferguson police following Brown’s death:

Right after the Michael Brown stuff, the police over there was going insane. They were flagging anybody . . . I walked to the store one day and they [the police] just jumped out the bushes on me. I don’t know who they were looking for or whatever; they just jumped out the bushes, held me . . . “I’m like “man, what is you all doing?” [They said] “[w]e’re looking for drugs.” I’m like “you all should’ve ask[ed] me if I had that” . . . [T]hey jumped out like literally out the bushes and kind of just grabbed me, me and my friend. They kind of just grabbed us and like you know, “what you all got? Where you all going? Who you all staying with?” I’m like, “I don’t have to answer none of those questions,” so he put the cuffs on me because I’m talking stuff. He put the cuffs on me. He didn’t lock me up though. He slammed me against the car . . . He just roughened me up a little bit and just let me go.

Despite being handcuffed, Darnel was eventually free to go from the scene where the stop occurred because he had no drugs on him. However, it was not before experiencing physical assault at the hands of the police. Likewise, Donte explained his encounter with the police after leaving a demonstration for Michael Brown:

[W]hen I left, he [the police] flagged me over [had his sirens on me]. Flagged me over. He walked up to my car. He dragged me out of the car and he threw me on the ground . . . So I ask him “why? What’s the cause for [this]?” He told me, “Shut the f\*\*k up, ni\*\*er.” So you know, as a man . . . I’m not going to lie to nobody. He talked crazy to me so I said . . . “who the f\*\*k you talking to?” . . . He took out his night club, stick, or whatever and hit me with it.

As Donte and Darnel’s comments suggest, there are negative consequences for Black men who resist the police, as it can result in the use of aggressive policing tactics. Though it is important to note that while men in our study often questioned or challenged authorities when stops occurred, they typically did so in situations that they believed warranted no suspicion (see Brunson & Miller, 2006b).

Although Black women in the study had fewer police encounters than men in which they resisted the authority of law enforcement, when they did so they were generally let go or, at the very worst, received a traffic ticket. Among the nine incidents in which women challenged or questioned cops, four resulted in receiving a fine. Ebony, for instance, claimed: "I've received two tickets for failure to stop at a stop sign and I received one for running a red light." She complained that when she attempted to challenge the police officer's claim that she had not stopped at the stop sign, he replied "I don't want to hear it. Hands up." Likewise, while in commute to work a night shift, a Ferguson police officer accused Aliyah of being under the influence because she swerved into a lane. Aliyah told him, "I have a medical condition called lupus. It affects my muscles in my body at certain points in times." Although the police officer insisted on giving her a breathalyzer, she refused because she did not know who else's mouth had been on the device. Although she told him she would be willing to go to the hospital to take a blood test, she received a ticket for "for improper lane change," which was later thrown out by the judge when she went to court.

In a couple of incidents, prior to the death of Michael Brown, women questioned or opposed police point blank when they believed they were treated suspiciously because of the type of vehicle they were driving. In both cases, the two women were free to go after the traffic portion of the stop was over. Consider the following incident detailed by Dyshelle:

I personally got pulled over right outside about two years ago. It's my first car and I had an accident and so the grill was knocked out of it . . . . So the Ferguson police officer pulled me over and said "ma'am your car matches the description of a hit and run." I was like, you know, "I've never hit anyone, when did this happen?" Then he just let me go, he didn't say anything else about it. But I had tints on my windows . . . [I had a] '94 Oldsmobile so it's an older car . . . . I think that I was profiled because it looks like a guy's car—a Black male's car.

Dyshelle believed she was stopped for no other reason than the fact that she was driving an older car with tinted windows. Though she questioned the officer's motive for stopping her, she was ultimately allowed to go. Likewise, after having purchased a new vehicle, Nia explained a police encounter she had while travelling through North County:

[A cop] said that I had a taillight out. It was a brand new car. Yeah, so it was just nonsense. It was just nonsense. And so he comes to the car, "Did you know you have a taillight out?" I said, "Well first of all it's a brand new car, so I know that that is not true. And secondly I'm an attorney and I work in the city of St. Louis, and I'm certain that I know your boss. And I'm certain that I know everybody in your courtroom and I doubt very much that they would be happy with knowing that someone like me is stopped for something that is not true."

As a result of her response, the police officer responded, "[h]ave a good day ma'am" and walked away. Her willingness to challenge the police officer's statement coupled

with having access to courtroom officials, resulted in her being let go, as the vehicle check stop was unfounded. Interestingly enough, even though both Dyshelle and Nia confronted the police when they were stopped, they were both free to go from the scene where the stop occurred without receiving tickets or being subject to police violence or arrests, like some of their male counterparts.

Overall, Black men and women's verbal resistance entailed questioning the police and challenging their authority when they considered the suspicion to be undeserved. Although such reactions were common across gender, the police–citizen outcome was gendered. Men in our sample were more likely to experience arrest, police violence, or jail time. While Black men experienced negative consequences for enquiring about and contesting the appropriateness of police officers' actions, Black women who did so were more likely to be let go or simply receive a ticket.

### *Capitulating With Police*

According to Braithwaite's (2003, 2009) motivational posturing framework, capitulation is one of many postures that determine how people respond when they find themselves in a personal encounter with a regulatory authority. Capitulation reflects a conscious decision to comply with legal authorities. Despite the dominant strategy of resisting police in the current study, compliance with law enforcement was not uncommon ( $N = 9$  for men;  $N = 4$  for women). In all but one case, the use of this strategy among the men resulted in their being free to go without a citation or being placed under arrest. Lyonel, for example, explained that when his "alarm system was going bonkers . . . the [Ferguson] police officer came by . . . [because he] thought they were breaking in." Lyonel understood the police were simply responding to a potential break-in, but after he cooperated and showed his identification along with the alarm system, "it was totally fine" and the police officer left without any other issues. Regarding Ferguson police, Derrell explained that "if you more than three deep [walking with more than three people], then they're [the police] going to stop you and get all your information to make sure you ain't doing nothing wrong." When this happens Derrell said that he just will "do what they say" and they would leave him alone. Although Derrell was only 19 years of age and reported having been stopped 6 times by the police, he seemed to believe it was best to defer to law enforcement during encounters. Nevertheless, even though some abided by police orders, it still did not alleviate questions as to why one was initially held up. For example, Andre explained that while going to the barbershop early one weekend in Overland, a city in St. Louis County, "an Overland police officer, a White officer, pulled up to me . . . and started questioning me" as he got off the bus. Although Andre responded to his questions when asked "where are you coming from? . . . [and] where [are] you heading?" he pondered what led to "this random stop and questioning."

Others believed that compliance coupled with respect was necessary to show toward law enforcement. Willie proclaimed, "[o]n the occasion that I have been stopped, I've never been taken in . . . [and I] think that a lot of that goes back to showing respect, being respectful." In fact, when pulled over, Willie often went the

extra mile by informing the police that “I’ve never been in jail, never done anything wrong . . . If you wanna give me a ticket I totally understand, I understand you’re doing your job. You got a hard job to do.” Because of his courteous and deferential attitude toward the police, Willie managed to avoid receiving traffic citations. Similar to Willie, Eric believed that his submissive attitude toward police coupled with his high socioeconomic status has proved advantageous:

I’m always violating the law. I make improper turns, I speed, I change lanes without signal[ing], I make U-turns in the middle of the street. I do all that nonsense, and I get stopped for doing it. I remember one time, I was in Creve Coeur, which is kind of an upbeat community. I made a U-turn in a major street across double yellow lines. A cop—as soon as I made the U-turn, I heard the siren, I pull over. He said, “Sir, do you realize you just made an illegal U-turn?” I said, “I did, you’re right, let me tell you why I did it.” I told him why I did it, I said, “I’m lost, I’m confused, I don’t know where I am, I don’t know where I’m going or how to get there, and I just thought I was going the wrong way. I apologize, I’m terribly sorry.” And the police forgave me if I would never do it again.

Eric, however, acknowledged:

[H]ad I been part of the underclass, when he stopped me [and] I wouldn’t have talked with any degree of enunciation . . . I probably would’ve been arrested, my car would’ve been impounded, and right there, I’m looking at US\$600.00 for impound fees.

Eric admits that his status has helped him to avoid traffic tickets and moving violations. He explained:

*Eric:* I’ve been stopped in West County by a police officer who said, “Sir, are you aware why I stopped you?” and I said, “Well, no, I really don’t” and he told me why he stopped me. And I said, “Oh, I’m sorry, that was terrible, I shouldn’t have done that.” He said, “Well I know, but I ran—as I’m stopping you, I ran a check, I got your address, so you live in an area that’s very affluent, and apparently, you are a very professional person.” He said, “So obviously, when we approach people like you, we approach you differently because we know you can cause us trouble, where other people who can’t cause us trouble, it doesn’t matter how we approach them.”

*Interviewer:* And so when he said, “You can cause us trouble,” what did he mean by that?

*Eric:* Legal trouble. He means I’m connected, and perhaps somebody that I know is in a position of authority to create some kind of problem with [them]. At a patrolman level, it’s common sense. Let’s face it, if I know a guy that’s well connected, I’m not going to—do to him what I’ll do to a guy who’s not connected at all; and policemen are no different. They should be, but they’re not.

Although residents of poor neighborhoods are generally powerless in the face of police practices, residents of affluent neighbors, such as Eric, have greater resources and access to elites (see Weitzer & Tuch, 2006), which proves advantageous when stopped by the police.

Contrary to the men in the study, only four women in the study described having police encounters in which they complied with police directives. Interestingly, unlike their male counterparts, in all of these incidents, women received a ticket for violation of traffic laws. However, a few women noted that obeying direct orders did not necessarily prohibit the police from treating them harshly. Evelyn acknowledged that “when I was 16 I got my first ticket in Ferguson” for speeding. While she “was really polite,” he was “very stern . . . and seemed like he was belittling me.” Although she got a ticket, the treatment she received from the cop “made me feel some kind of way to the point where I didn’t even want to drive through here.” Likewise, Isabelle said that while driving her kids to school in Ferguson, she was stopped for speeding. She explained that when she showed the police officer “a copy of my insurance card he still gave me a ticket for not having insurance.” She responded that “he was yelling . . . [and] very rude” insisting that her insurance card was fake even though it was legit. Despite the negative disposition of the police who stopped both Evelyn and Isabelle, neither verbally resisted. However, what remained particularly troubling was the disparaging treatment they received during vehicle stops.

A couple of women also emphasized the need to cooperate with cops because there was a belief that some police are corrupt. In her discussion of Ferguson cops, Rachel claimed,

[i]f they say stop doing something, I stop. I might not probably think it’s right or whatever or whatever, but I . . . try to stay out of their way because if they want to get you, they’ll get you.

Likewise, Jada explained a cover up by a Ferguson police officer that she witnessed personally when she was part of a street gang in her younger years:

There was this one guy named Cid. He was killed. His body was found and we watched the whole thing . . . Before the coroner came, they had already pulled his body. We don’t know what they set down but they set something down. At the time we didn’t know but when the story came out, they told us he had a gun on him, but when we first saw him, he had nothing on him . . . There was this one officer. He would tell us a lot of times, “you know, y’all need to come out and shut your damn mouths. You don’t shut your damn mouths; something bad’s going to happen.” Not in those exact words but just telling us to shut up.

Jada noted, “we saw it . . . [but] we didn’t say anything.” Although police corruption was not a dominant theme in the study, both Jada and Rachel did what they were instructed to do by law enforcement, not necessarily out of a sense of respect but rather fear that the police could potentially retaliate.

### *Resistance and Capitulation With Police*

While a large number of Black respondents resisted the authority of police or complied with their directives, many respondents reported incidents in which resisting law enforcement was followed with capitulating with their orders. Specifically, 14 incidents were described in which Black men ( $N = 9$ ) and women ( $N = 5$ ) questioned or challenged the legitimacy of police actions, yet still followed their directions. For Black men, in four cases, the response led to release; in three incidents it led to arrest; and in two occurrences it led to the receipt of a traffic ticket. Black women's description of resisting the authority of law enforcement while complying with orders corresponded with men's. That is, it led to being let off ( $N = 2$ ), arrested ( $N = 2$ ), or receiving a traffic ticket ( $N = 1$ ).

It was particularly common for respondents to question police when they believed there was no basis for suspicion. For instance, while on his way to a friend's house, Mike was abruptly stopped by a police car and Ferguson officers questioned where he was going. Though Mike asked the police officer, "what're you all looking for?" he asserted, "I cooperated . . . and they ran my name and you know they let me go." Similarly, Malik explained that while jogging through a neighborhood in Ferguson post-Michael Brown's death, two female police officers stopped him and asked what he was doing in the area. Because Malik was surprised by the question, he replied, "I'm sorry, like what do you mean what I'm doing here? . . . I'm just enjoying a morning jog." Though the police informed him that a suspect was knocking on people's door, Malik sarcastically responded, "did I fit the description?" Nevertheless, when asked to show identification and search his backpack, Malik complied and was eventually free to go. Likewise, when Dyshelle was pulled over at night by a Ferguson police officer who questioned where she was going, she enquired, "'why did you pull me over?' [The police officer asked] 'Where's your insurance? Do you have proof of everything?'" When she insisted on knowing the basis for the stop, the police officer simply responded, "drive safely," handed Dyshelle her insurance card, and walked away. According to both male and female respondents, police often refused to answer specific questions regarding what led to their suspicion. When the police did provide an answer, they usually stated that the respondent fit a vague description of a criminal suspect, as was the case with Malik and Mike.

Although the combination of resistance coupled with capitulation with police orders was a common response used when Black adults encountered the police, it did not always lead to being let go without a citation or a ticket. For instance, Toby explained that after a police officer followed him to a parking lot at the church he pastored in Ferguson, he stepped out of the car to see if he could assist him. The police officer

immediately tells me, 'get back in the car!' I said, 'okay,' so I get back in the car and he comes to my window [and says] 'license and insurance!' I'm like, 'okay well, this is not necessary.' You know, I said, 'Officer, what's wrong?' [He said] 'your plates are expired!'

Although Toby tried to explain that he realized his plates were expired the day before and planned to take care of it that day, the policeman wrote him a ticket. Similarly, Rachel asserted that she was stopped even though she did not violate any traffic laws. When she questioned the reason for the stop, the Ferguson police officer explained that she “had lots of warrants;” however, she informed him, “I didn’t do anything for you to run them. Why did you run them?” Though she complied with the officer’s directives and was not arrested, the police officer wrote her “a gang of tickets.” Despite such response, neither Rachel nor Toby were able to get off scot-free.

In some cases, the response of questioning and complying with the police resulted in being handcuffed. Latoya, for instance, stated,

I’ve been pulled over in Ferguson . . . for absolutely no reason.” When stopped, the cops asked her and her friends: ‘Is there weed in this car? Have you guys been smoking? You guys look like you’ve been smoking.’ We’re like, ‘No. We have not. We just came from a party.’ [They asked] ‘[w]hat was that party? Where is the party? What were they doing at the party? Were other people doing drugs there?’

In Latoya’s case, she and her friends ended up being handcuffed and eventually let go from the scene of the stop when the police did not find anything with which to charge them. Xavier mentioned that while walking home late at night in the city of Northwood, which is located in St. Louis County, a police officer instructed him to “put your hands up . . . put your items on the ground . . . get down on the ground and . . . [interlace your fingers behind your head].” Xavier “cooperated with him . . . [and asked] ‘what seems to be the problem’ as I was down on the ground.” Though he was initially handcuffed, he was eventually let go without being taken to custody when the police realized that Xavier was not the robbery suspect they were looking for. In some cases, respondents were arrested and sent to jail. For instance, after his brother was pulled over and questioned by a police officer in Florissant, which is a suburban city in St. Louis County, the cop asked for Javonte’s identification even though he was the passenger. Javonte asked, “Why do you need to see my ID? I’m not the one driving.’ He says, ‘Don’t ask me why. Just do what I tell you.’” Although Javonte was complicit, he went to jail because of a prior ticket that he insisted was supposed to have been thrown out by the court. In summary, questioning and complying with police was a common response among Black men and women. Both effected similar outcomes, ranging from being let go to being handcuffed to receiving a traffic citation.

## **Discussion**

Research on race and policing has largely neglected the question of how gender shapes Black citizens’ responses toward the police. Most studies focus on the plight of Black men in the criminal justice system despite growing evidence showing that Black women also experience negative police encounters (Brunson & Miller, 2006b; Gabidon et al., 2011). However, Black feminist scholars insist on the need to take into

account intersecting identities to examine the nature of gender and racial inequalities (Collins, 2000). With these insights in mind, the current study described Black adults' accounts of how they managed direct encounters with police, comparing men and women's responses and the outcome associated with such responses. Our research offers evidence that the strategies citizens employed are common across both genders; however, the police–citizen outcome is demonstrably shaped by gender.

Overall, the findings suggest that our sample of Ferguson residents and protesters used several behavioral methods to negotiate police encounters. Braithwaite's (2003, 2009) framework regarding how people react to being regulated is helpful in understanding Blacks' reactions. Black adults in the study managed police encounters using several techniques, including resistance, capitulation, or a combination of the two.

Braithwaite (2003, 2009) asserted that a resistant posture signifies doubt as to whether a legal authority will behave appropriately. In the context of policing, citizens will express resistance toward the way police use their power and enforce the law. Both male and female respondents in the study questioned police during encounters. This response qualifies as verbal resistance given that police officers' authority was challenged. Many respondents questioned authorities when they were stopped and believed there was no basis for suspicion. While both men and women manifested a resistant posture during police encounters, the outcome was clearly gendered. That is, Black men were more likely to be recipients of arrests, incarceration, and police violence than their female counterparts. Interestingly enough, Black women who did not acquiesce to the instructions of law enforcement were either free to go or received a ticket for a traffic violation. Perhaps police–citizen outcomes differed because the manifestation of women's resistance was less physically threatening than that of men (Mastrofski et al., 1996).

Braithwaite also acknowledged that a capitulation posture signifies a conscious decision to comply with legal authorities, as they are accepted as the legitimate authority; thus, a conscious decision is made to obey them. We found that compliance was more common among Black males than females in our study. This is in line with research revealing that the highest rates of police compliance are found among Black men (Mastrofski et al., 1996). This is likely tied to the fact that police encounters with young males of color are seen to pose danger to them (Anderson, 1990; Brunson, 2007; Brunson & Miller, 2006a, 2006b). Accordingly, when men did defer to the police, they were often free to leave after initial contact was made. This is in sharp contrast to women who complied with the police but still found themselves receiving a citation for a traffic ticket. However, beyond receiving a ticket, a few women recalled the disparaging way they were treated by authorities, as some complained of being belittled and treated in a disrespectful manner. Although these women acquiesced to the authority of law enforcement, this was largely out of fear that police would retaliate should they challenge their authority. Yet, there is no guarantee that an individual who has been treated disrespectfully by police will acquiesce to them in the future. People are more likely to cooperate with authorities when they believe they have been treated in a fair, respectful, and objective manner by that authority (Murphy, 2013; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Perhaps that is one reason

why some men in our study complied with law enforcement, as no mention was made among men who complied in the study that they were treated unfairly in their accounts or that they were stopped for unjustifiable reasons. Previous studies suggest that when individuals believe they have received procedural justice from an authority, they are more likely to report subsequent compliance (Murphy, 2014). Specifically, using longitudinal survey data collected from individuals who had a recent police–citizen interaction, Murphy (2014) found that procedural justice had a positive effect in fostering compliance for both low and high resisters. Moreover, the study demonstrated that procedural justice can help promote compliance over time by counteracting the negative effects of some forms of defiance.

More generally, 14 respondents both questioned police officers' authority and complied with their directives. When individuals in the study did challenge police actions, it was because they believed that suspicion was undeserved and there were no legal grounds for the stop in the first place. However, when respondents challenged or questioned the police and then eventually complied with their directives, it resulted in varied outcomes. In some cases, such tactics led to being let go; in other cases, it led to arrest; and in some incidents, it led to the receipt of a ticket. Although the mixed results make it difficult to interpret, it does reveal that this specific police–citizen outcome was similar across gender and warrants further research.

Our findings are drawn from both Black men and women who resided in Ferguson and other municipalities in St. Louis, and there were similarities and differences across gender. In general, we found that many respondents, both male and female, reported being stopped by police in several cities throughout St. Louis County. As Boyles (2015) argues, the suburbs do not insulate Blacks from unwarranted police scrutiny. Because of their close proximity to Whites, Blacks who reside or traverse through suburban cities may experience similar or worse police treatment than those who reside in inner cities (Boyles, 2015). In the current study, we found that when Black men challenged the police, it proved harmful for them, as they were often handcuffed, jailed, or assaulted. Black women were more likely to question the police than any other tactic during police–citizen encounters. Despite challenging officers' actions, they were generally freed without an adverse outcome. In contrast, compliance toward the police led to favorable outcomes for men (generally let go) and unfavorable for women (generally received a ticket). Yet, when verbal resistance was coupled with compliance, it led to mixed outcomes across gender. The literature on race and policing contains almost no qualitative examination of how gender intersects with race to determine citizens' response to police and the outcome of police–citizen encounters.

Although these findings are suggestive, they are not without limitations. First, while we rely on Braithwaite's motivational posturing framework as a template for understanding the strategic responses citizens rely on to manage police encounters, we only focus on two forms of posturing: resistance and capitulation. While both of the posturing domains emerged as relevant in examining the phenomena under study and representing behavioral responses, we did not have the capacity to measure Braithwaite's other motivational postures, including commitment, disengagement,

and game playing. We do not conclude that these elements are not present, as they very well may be. Future investigation should rely on different methods to measure how the five motivational postures further explain how people respond to involuntary police contact.

Second, we solicited detailed narrative accounts about incidents of police–citizen interactions but did not systematically ask about respondents’ specific responses to police. It is certainly possible that our analysis underestimates various ways Black adults manage encounters with the police. It is also likely that some respondents would not specify how they reacted to police if they deemed it inappropriate or illegal.

Third, we only examined the strategies that Black citizens used to navigate police encounters. While Black individuals are more likely to report distrust and negative sentiments toward the police than Hispanics and Whites, (Schafer et al., 2003; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004), it is worth investigating if and how citizens of other racial/ethnic groups react to law enforcement. Finally, the findings are based on incidents of police–citizen encounters among Black men and women who resided or protested in Ferguson, Missouri, following the death of Michael Brown. We are aware that Ferguson, Missouri is not representative of cities across the nation and we make no claims that these results would emerge in a similar study of a different location. Despite the study’s limitations, we nonetheless believe the patterns we uncovered are sufficiently strong to warrant future investigations of our theoretical model. Future research is needed to confirm our findings regarding Black men and women’s reactions to the police and the outcomes associated with citizen responses. Such an approach will allow us to better understand how Black individuals negotiate encounters with police and the results of such responses.

The racially charged unrest that occurred since the shooting of Michael Brown indicates that many Black citizens across the nation have deep-seated feelings of criminal injustice. Thus, understanding how Black individuals manage their contact with police and how that management effects police–citizen outcomes is crucial. This exploratory study reveals that while Black men and women from Ferguson, Missouri, react to the police in similar ways, the result of such interactions are deeply gendered. This finding supports the notion of Black feminist theory that intersectionality of both women’s and men’s police experiences must be considered.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Notes**

1. Wilson reported being uncertain whether Brown closed the door or if the door rebounded closed after it made contact with Brown’s body when he swung it open.

2. The team included the first author who is a Black woman and the second author who is a Black male graduate student. The study was approved by the institutional review board of the first author's academic institution.
3. According to the Pew Research Center (2012), print newspapers are primarily read by individuals over the age of 50.
4. We do not include incidents of police interactions during protests since the nature of such interactions varied greatly from day-to-day encounters with police.
5. While respondents recounted multiple experiences with police, several police-citizen encounters were excluded because these accounts did not detail the type of response used or the outcome of police interactions.
6. While we asked about respondents' experiences with police at different points in the interview, we did not use multiple sources to confirm information.
7. Respondents were not asked to give their accounts of police from a specific jurisdiction, like Ferguson. The current study entails respondent's general experiences with police.
8. There were three incidents in which respondents fled the police and one incident of non-compliance. Since few study participants offered statements about these responses to police it could not be considered a theme in the data and thus are not discussed.
9. Unless otherwise stated, police interactions occurred prior to Brown's death in August 2014.
10. We define arrests as someone having been jailed.

## References

- Andersen, M., & Collins, P. H. (2004). *Race, class, and gender* (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Anderson, E. (1990). *Code of the street: Decency, violence, and the moral life of the inner city*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Barak, G., Flavin, J., & Leighton, P. (2006). *Class, race, gender, and crime: The social realities of justice in America* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Belknap, J. (2007). *The invisible woman: Gender, crime, and justice* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Boyles, A. S. (2015). *Race, place, and suburban policing: Too close for comfort*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Braithwaite, V. (2003). Dancing with tax authorities: Motivational postures and non-compliant actions. In V. Braithwaite (Ed.), *Taxing democracy: Understanding tax avoidance and evasion* (pp. 15–40). Aldershot, England: Ashgate.
- Braithwaite, V. (2009). *Defiance in Taxation and Governance: Resisting and Dismissing Authority in a Democracy*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, USA: Edward Elgar.
- Braithwaite, V. (2013). Resistant and dismissive defiance towards tax authorities. In A. Crawford & A. Hucklesby (Eds.), *Legitimacy and compliance in criminal justice* (pp. 91–115). Oxon, England: Routledge.
- Brunson, R. K. (2007). "Police don't like black people": African-American young men's accumulated police experiences. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 6, 71–102.
- Brunson, R. K., & Gau, J. M. (2015). Officer race versus macro-level context: A test of competing hypotheses about black citizens' experiences with and perceptions of black police officers. *Crime & Delinquency*, 61, 213–242. doi:10.1177/0011128711398027

- Brunson, R. K., & Miller, J. (2006a). Young black men and urban policing in the United States. *British Journal of Criminology*, *46*, 613–640. doi:10.1093/bjc/azi093
- Brunson, R. K., & Miller, J. (2006b). Gender, race, and urban policing: The experience of African American youths. *Gender & Society*, *20*, 531–552. doi:10.1177/0891243206287727
- Brunson, R. K., & Stewart, E. A. (2006). Young African American women, the street code, and violence: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of Crime & Justice*, *29*, 1–19.
- Brunson, Rod K., & Weitzer, Ronald. (2009). "Police Relations with Black and White Youths in Different Urban Neighborhoods." *Urban Affairs Review*. *44*:858–885.
- Bush-Baskette, S. R. (1998). The war on drugs as a war against black women. In S. Miller (Ed.), *Crime control and women: Feminist implications of criminal justice policy* (pp. 113–129). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cochran, J., & Warren, P. Y. (2012). Racial, ethnic, and gender differences in perceptions of the police: The salience of officer race within the context of racial profiling. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, *28*, 206–227.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Corley, C. (2014). With Ferguson protests, 20-somethings become first-time activists. *NPR*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2014/10/24/358054785/with-ferguson-protests-20-somethings-become-first-time-activists>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity, politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 1241–1299.
- Crenshaw, K. (1994). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity, politics, and violence against women of color. *The Public Nature of Private Violence*, 93–118.
- Crenshaw, K. W., Ritchie, A. J., Anspach, R., Gilmer, R., & Harris, L. (2015). *Say her name: Resisting police brutality against black women*. New York: African American Policy Forum.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Crow, M. S., & Adrion, B. (2011). Focal concerns and police use of force: Examining the factors associated with taser use. *Police Quarterly*, *14*, 366–387.
- Davis, R. C., Henderson, N. J., & Cheryachukin, Y. (2004). *Assessing police-public contacts in Seattle, WA*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice.
- Daly, K. (1993). Class-race-gender: Sloganeering in search of meaning. *Social Justice*, *20*, 56–71.
- Daly, K., & Chesney-Lind, M. (1988). Feminism and criminology. *Justice Quarterly*, *5*, 499–535.
- De Coster, S., & Heimer, K. (2006). Crime at the intersections: Race, class, gender, and violent offending. In R. D. Peterson, L. P. Krivo, & J. Hagan (Eds.), *The many colors of crime* (pp. 138–156). New York: New York University Press.
- Dowler, K., & Zawilski, V. (2007). Public perceptions of police misconduct and discrimination: Examining the impact of media consumption. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *35*, 193–203.
- Fagan, J., & Davies, G. (2000). Street stops and broken windows: Terry, race, and disorder in New York City. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, *28*, 457–503. doi:10.2139/ssrn.257813
- Farnworth, M., & Teske, R. H. (1995). Gender differences in felony court processing. *Women & Criminal Justice*, *6*, 23–44.

- Fine, M., & Weis, L. (1998). Crime stories: A critical look through race, ethnicity, and gender. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 3, 435–459.
- Gabbidon, S. L., Higgins, G. E., & Potter, H. (2011). Race, gender, and the perception of recently experiencing unfair treatment by the police: Exploratory results from an all-black sample. *Criminal Justice Review*, 36, 5–21.
- Gabbidon, S. L., & Higgins, G. E. (2009). The role of race/ethnicity and race relations on public opinion related to the treatment of Blacks by the police. *Police Quarterly*, 12, 102–115.
- Gabbidon, S. L., & Taylor Greene, H. (2009). *Race and crime* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Holsti, O. R. (1969). *Content analysis for the social sciences and humanities*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Jones, N. (2004). It's not where you live, it's how you live: How young women negotiate conflict and violence in the inner city. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 595, 49–62.
- Jones, N. (2010). *Between good and ghetto: African American girls and inner-city violence*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Jones-Brown, D. (2007). Forever the symbolic assailant: The more things change, the more they remain the same. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 6, 103–122.
- Kane, R.J. (2002). The social ecology of police misconduct. *Criminology*, 40, 867–896.
- Kennedy, R. (1997). *Race, crime, and the law*. New York: Pantheon.
- Klinger, D. A. (1997). Negotiating order in patrol work: An ecological theory of police response to deviance. *Criminology*, 35, 277–306. doi:10.1111/j.1745-9125.1997.tb00877.x
- Kochel, T. R., Wilson, D. B., & Mastrofski, S. D. (2011). Effect of suspect race on officers' arrest decisions. *Criminology*, 49, 473–512.
- Lanza-Kaduce, L., & Greenleaf, R. G. (1994). Police-citizen encounters: Turk on norm resistance. *Justice Quarterly*, 11, 605–623. doi:10.1080/07418829400092451
- Like, T. Z., & Miller, J. (2006). Race, inequality, and gender violence: A contextual examination. In R. D. Peterson, L. P. Krivo, & J. Hagan (Eds.), *The many colors of crime* (pp. 191–212). New York: New York University Press.
- Lundman, R. J. (1996). Demeanor and arrest: Additional evidence from previously unpublished data. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 33, 306–323. doi:10.1177/0022427896033003002
- Mastrofski, S. D., Reisig, M. D., & Mccluskey, J. D. (2002). Police disrespect toward the public: An encounter-based analysis. *Criminology*, 40, 515–551. doi:10.1111/j.1745-9125.2002.tb00965
- Mastrofski, S. D., Snipes, J. B., & Supina, A. E. (1996). Compliance on demand: The public's response to specific police requests. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 33, 269–305. doi:10.1177/0022427896033003001
- Meehan, A. J., & Ponder, M. C. (2002). Race and place: The ecology of racial profiling African American motorists. *Justice Quarterly*, 19, 399–430.
- Miller, J. (1999). An examination of disposition decision-making for delinquent girls. In M. D. Schwartz & D. Milovanovic (Eds.), *The intersection of race, gender and class in criminology* (pp. 219–245). New York: Garland.

- Moyer, I. L. (1992). Police/citizen encounters: Issues of chivalry, gender and race. In I. L. Moyer (Ed.), *The changing roles of women in the criminal justice system: Offenders, victims, and professionals* (pp. 191–212). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Murphy, K. (2013). Policing at the margins: Fostering trust and cooperation among ethnic minority groups. *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 8, 184–199. doi:10.1080/18335330.2013.821733
- Murphy, K. (2014). Turning defiance into compliance with procedural justice: Understanding reactions to regulatory encounters through motivational posturing. *Regulation & Governance*, 10, 93–109.
- Novak, K. J. (2004). Disparity and racial profiling in traffic enforcement. *Police Quarterly*, 7, 65–96.
- Oliver, W. (2000). Preventing domestic violence in the African American community. *Violence Against Women*, 6, 533–549.
- Paoline, E. A., & Terrill, W. (2005). Women police officers and the use of coercion. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 15, 97–119.
- Pew Research Center. (2012). *In changing news landscape, even television is vulnerable: Trends in news consumption: 1991-2012*. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2012/09/27/section-1-watching-reading-and-listening-to-the-news-3/>
- Phillips, C., & Bowling, B. (2003). Racism, ethnicity and criminology: Developing minority perspectives. *British Journal of Criminology*, 43, 269–290. doi:10.1093/bjc/43.2.269
- Pollak, O. (1950). *The criminality of women*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Rice, M. (1990). Challenging orthodoxies in feminist theory: A black feminist critique. In L. Gelsthorpe & A. Morris (Eds.), *Feminist perspectives in criminology* (pp. 191–212). Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
- Russell-Brown, K. (2009). *The color of crime* (2nd ed.). New York: New York University Press.
- Schafer, J. A., Huebner, B. M., & Bynum, T. S. (2003). Citizen perceptions of police services: Race, neighborhood context, and community policing. *Police Quarterly*, 6, 440–468. doi:10.1177/1098611102250459
- Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction* (3rd ed.). London, England: Sage.
- Simpson, S. S. (1989). Feminist theory, crime, and justice. *Criminology*, 27, 605–631.
- Skolnick, J. H. (1966). *Justice without trial: Law enforcement in democratic society*. New York: John Wiley.
- Sobol, J. J., Wu, Y., & Sun, I. Y. (2013). Neighborhood context and police vigor: A multilevel analysis. *Crime & Delinquency*, 59, 344–368.
- Stone, V., & Pettigrew, N. (2000). *The views of the public on stops and searches*. London, England: Home Office, Policing and Reducing Crime Unit, Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.
- Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Sunshine, J., & Tyler, T. R. (2003). The role of procedural justice and legitimacy in shaping public support for policing. *Law & Society Review*, 37, 513–548. doi:10.1111/1540-5893.3703002
- Sykes, R., & Clark, J. (1975). A theory of deference exchange in police-civilian encounters. *American Journal of Sociology*, 81, 584–600.

- Taylor, T. J., Turner, K. B., Esbensen, F. A., & Winfree, L. T. (2001). Coppin' an attitude: Attitudinal differences among juveniles toward police. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 29, 295–305. doi:10.1016/S0047-2352(01)00089-7
- Tedeschi, J. T., & Felson, R. B. (1994). *Violence, aggression, and coercive actions*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Terrill, W. (2003). Police use of force and suspect resistance: The micro process of the police-suspect encounter. *Police Quarterly*, 6, 51–83. doi:10.1177/1098611102250584
- Terrill, W. (2005). Police use of force: A transactional approach. *Justice Quarterly*, 22, 107–138.
- Terrill, W., & Mastrofski, S. D. (2002). Situational and officer-based determinants of police coercion. *Justice Quarterly*, 19, 215–248.
- Terrill, W., & Reisig, M. D. (2003). Neighborhood context and police use of force. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 40, 291–321. doi:10.1177/0022427803253800
- Tyler, T. R. (1990). *Why people obey the law: Procedural justice, legitimacy, and compliance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Tyler, T. R., & Yuen, J. H. (2002). *Trust in the law: Encouraging public cooperation with the police and courts*. New York, NY: Russell-Sage.
- U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. (2015). *Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Visher, C. A. (1983). Gender, police arrest decisions, and notions of chivalry. *Criminology*, 21, 5–28. doi:10.1111/j.1745-9125.1983.tb00248.x
- Warren, P. Y. (2011). Perceptions of police disrespect during vehicle stops: A race-based analysis. *Crime & Delinquency*, 57, 356–376.
- Weitzer, R. (1999). Citizens' perceptions of police misconduct: Race and neighborhood context. *Justice Quarterly*, 16, 819–846. doi:10.1080/07418829900094381
- Weitzer, R. (2000). White, black, or blue cops? Race and citizen assessments of police officers. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 28, 313–324. doi:10.1016/S0047-2352(00)00043-X
- Weitzer, R. (2002). Incidents of police misconduct and public opinion. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 30, 397–408.
- Weitzer, R., & Brunson, R. K. (2009). Strategic responses to the police among inner-city youth. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 50, 235–256. doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.2009.01139.x
- Weitzer, R., & Tuch, S. A. (2004). Race and perceptions of police misconduct. *Social Problems*, 51, 305–325.
- Weitzer, R., & Tuch, S. A. (2006). *Race and policing in America*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Worden, R. E. (1996). The causes of police brutality: Theory and evidence on police use of force. In W. A. Geller & H. Toch (Eds.), *Police violence: Understanding and controlling police abuse of force* (pp. 23–51). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Wortley, S., Hagan, J., & Macmillan, R. (1997). Just des(s)erts? The racial polarization of perceptions of criminal injustice. *Law and Society Review*, 31, 637–676. doi:10.2307/3053983
- Young, V. D., & Adams-Fuller, T. (2006). Women, race/ethnicity and criminal justice processing. In C. M. Renzetti, L. Goodstein, & S. Miller (Eds.), *Rethinking gender, crime, and justice: Feminist readings* (pp. 191–212). Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury.

### **Author Biographies**

**Jennifer E. Cobbina** is an associate professor in the School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University. Her research interests focus on gender and prisoner reentry, desistance, and recidivism. Her work also examines the intersection of gender, race, class, and crime. Jennifer's work has appeared in *Criminology*, *Justice Quarterly*, *Crime and Delinquency*, *Deviant Behavior*, and *Race and Justice*.

**Michael Conteh** is a doctoral student in the School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University. His research interests include gender-based violence in Namibia and Southern Africa and he has worked on several research projects on human and child trafficking.

**Collin Emrich** completed his undergraduate studies at Michigan State University with a major in Criminal Justice. His research interests include race and crime, and policing.