

Police Use of Force and the Racial Disparities in  
Policing

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## **Introduction**

The focus of this research paper is police use of force and the racial disparities in policing. What I find interesting about the topic of police use of force and the connection to racial differences in the system of policing is how people are treated differently based on their race or skin color. Society depends on police to enforce the laws and to keep communities safe, however, there are certain individuals who may be targeted and treated in a harsher manner either verbally or physically, thereby creating a divide between those who are protected and those who are policed. I am drawn to studying this topic as in recent years the use of excessive force by police officers has been heavily portrayed in the news and media we consume, but also because the factor of race is often scrutinized in police and civilian encounters. Furthermore, I am drawn to understanding the racial differential treatments in police use of force in how it connects to misconduct in policing, stops, lethal and less-lethal force tactics, and the variety of treatment experiences of African American and Latino communities.

The connection between police use of force and racial disparities in policing may be of interest to others because in understanding this relationship, we can learn about how the system of policing works and subsequently develop positive relationships and safe interactions with police officers. We must acknowledge that police officers are people too but are also tasked with and ultimately responsible for the well-being and safety of all people and communities regardless of race, class, or gender. With previous Black Lives Matter movements that have caused protests and chaos for police in the negative portrayal of their use of force tactics in

the media, it is important to recognize why they originally occurred. These movements started with the purpose of remembering those killed by police and advocating against brutal treatment and racial discrimination African Americans and people of color experience during police encounters. Thus, additional public interest in this topic may also connect to the idea that if some individuals are treated in an unjust manner, it can cause fear and distrust of the system of policing and its officers who are supposed to serve the public and ensure protection. Dismantling possible distrust and ensuring a safe policing system for all communities may be a common interest for others in reducing excessive use of force and racial disparities found in the system.

Drawing upon my knowledge and research regarding police use of force and racial disparities, the criminal justice studies courses I have taken at San Francisco State University have allowed me to intelligently discuss such topics. In my Crime, Data, and Analysis course, I learned about how policing data effectively demonstrates, from a probability standpoint, the racial disparities in the likelihood of who is more likely to be searched and handcuffed when analyzing African American, Latino, and White data. I also learned about the text message scandal in the Antioch, CA police department where certain officers have sent and participated in racist messaging. These racial disparities in policing and the connection to police use of force increased my interest in writing about this topic. Similarly, in the course Criminal Justice: A Cross-Disciplinary Perspective, I learned about police militarization, and how this can systemically affect policing by possibly creating violent policing tactics and creating racial divides in who is put under surveillance and who is protected by the police. I learned that

police militarization can connect to racial disparities and could affect excessive use of force in policing. Additionally, in this class through Orisanmi Burton's work "To Protect and Serve Whiteness", I learned about the history of policing and how it connects to the context of slavery and the control of African Americans. Further, how the concept of Whiteness is connected to being more dominant and superior in racial order, and the concept of Blackness relates to those who are meant to be targeted and policed (Burton, 2015, p. 41). Due to past systemic racial hierarchies, this creates racial profiles that have been identified as needing surveillance or protection. This type of racial ideology is connected to racial prejudice and bias that is seen in society today where racial groups are targeted or possibly categorized as inferior, suspects, criminal, or dangerous. These racial categorizations may be connected to the racial compositions of communities where police cognitive suspicion can result in higher stops in specific minority neighborhoods as assessed in the 2012 scholarly work by Gelman et al. which will be further discussed. Thus, these concepts of Whiteness and Blackness allowed me to recognize the racial hierarchies and disparities in policing today.

Differently, what I know in connection to the topic of police use of force is that law enforcement has the responsibility of enforcing the laws to create order and protection in our communities by managing public safety and protection, through their duty to investigate, arrest, and detain individuals who are possible suspects of criminal offenses (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021). However, while police are supposed to provide protections for all, they must detain possible criminals which may lead to situations that escalate to levels of force between an offender and police officers.

Through the Department of Justice Policy on Use of Force, police can use force when there is “. . .no reasonably effective, safe, and feasible alternative appears to exist and may use only the level of force that a reasonable officer on the scene would use under the same or similar circumstances” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2022). While police can use force, data finds that “. . .250 gunshot injuries occur each year during police encounters, and more than half of these (57%) are fatal” (Premkumar et al., 2021). Police officers can legally use force to deescalate potential situations of violence, however, the use of excessive force that can result in fatalities or severe injuries of suspects helps us see the realities of this legal power.

In addition, based on academic literature, an officer’s tone of voice in traffic stops is connected to creating racial disparities. For instance, in a study done by Nicholas Camp, a group of college students and local drivers were asked to assess body cam audio of police officer’s tone of voice and analyze the person they were addressing. The findings suggest that “. . .when officers spoke to Black men at traffic stops, their tone of voice conveyed less warmth, respect, and ease than when they spoke to White men” (Camp, 2021). The way police officers speak to White and African American men varies and it is important to understand how racial stereotypes and bias held by police officers change police actions and level of force. This raises greater questions as to the relationship between civilians and police officers with differential treatment experiences and whether there is a distrust in the system of policing.

Moving forward, this topic is going to be narrowed down through its focus on how police use of force connects to police misconduct

in terms of stops of individuals, understanding the lethal and less-lethal policing tactics, and analyzing the racial differential treatment African American and Latino people experience in their interactions with the police. Therefore, the question and focus of this paper is understanding: How does police use of force connect to racial disparities in policing in police stops of individuals, lethal and less-lethal police tactics, and the racial differential treatment of African Americans and Latinos? Some of the search terms used throughout my research include: “police use of force”, “excessive force”, “police force tactics”, “police bias”, “implicit bias”, “racial disparities in policing”, “racial bias and discrimination”, and “race and policing”. Where I hope to concentrate my efforts is on how the factor of race affects law enforcement’s use of force and if racial discrimination or bias connects to officer misconduct in policing. Lastly, I believe my research will give insight into the topic of police use of force and racial disparities in how law enforcement makes decisions on how to act in certain situations and their policing tactics. This research will also help uncover racial disparities and provide solutions to reducing the need of excessive use of force in policing to create safer communities and the protection for both police and the public.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Prior History and Knowledge of Policing and the Use of Force Continuum**

In discussing police use of force and racial disparities it is important to understand the historical framework of policing and the metrics used when assessing levels of use of force by police. The origins of policing started in South Carolina during the 1700s

when there was a large population of slaves in comparison to the public. Carolina planters in 1704 created the first slave patrol group that included “. . .armed white men who roamed the territory, policing and surveilling the black population — enslaved and free alike” (Burton, 2015, p. 43). This group created racial divides with the purpose of ending resistance of slaves against the practice of slavery. Similarly, during the post-reconstruction era, Black Codes were instilled and created surveillance of the African American population and were focused “. . .against mundane acts of vagrancy, unemployment, loitering, and public drunkenness” (Burton, 2015, p. 43). The black codes created restrictions in the lives of African Americans and most importantly caused racial discrimination in society. The increased targeting of African Americans forced “. . .former slaves back into an exploitative labor system that resembled the plantation regime in all but name” (Hinton et al. 2018, p. 2). With this brief history of the 1704 law and the black codes we learn of the racial differential treatment in history and the racial prejudice experienced —composed of negative attitudes of a group of people based on the characteristic of their skin color (Nogueira, 2006 as cited in Carvalho et al., 2021).

However, understanding the racial hierarchies reflected in olden day society helps us understand the origins of policing to assess racial disparities and the use of force practices in law enforcement today.

Police or law enforcement officials are supposed to enforce laws, create order and safety in communities, and have the duty of investigating, arresting, and detaining offenders (Bureau of

Justice Statistics, 2021). Police have various responsibilities in the protection of the people, although their appropriate use of force was determined by the *Graham v. Connor* case of 1989. The use of force policy police follow is by the United States Department of Justice, and states that police officers are allowed to use force in objective reason (based on an officer's perception) to create safety for everyone involved (The United States Department of Justice, 2022). The objective reasoning by an officer, granted through this policy and the decision of *Graham v. Connor* grants police the power to act in a manner they see fit for the situation they assess. This includes police officer's need to make split-second decisions which may cause fear for an officer, increased heart rate or distorted ability later discussed in Baldwin's (2022) study, or perceived dangerousness of encounters with suspects. An officer's decision-making may connect to their use of force levels, however, their approach towards a situation that may escalate and put the safety of the officer or community at risk connects to the Use of Force Continuum.

Important to analyzing policing and use of force is the Use of Force Continuum which according to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) has many levels in which an officer is allowed to assess the level of force needed to handle a situation, but officers may also jump from one level to the next in a short amount of time dependent on the situation (NIJ, 2009). The NIJ's example of this use of force model categorizes the continuum into five different categories. Officer's presence is used (presence of an officer should reduce crime in a non-threatening manner), verbalization (officer commands with no physical force), empty-hand control (bodily force in attempt to restrain an offender),



less-lethal methods (impact, conducted energy devices (CEDs), or chemicals), and lastly lethal force (use of a weapon to gain control in a threatful situation or offender) (NIJ, 2009). The Use of Force Continuum is a model that allows police officers to use levels of force that escalate into more severe means of addressing a situation, however, while this model has separate levels, its application varies by agency. For instance, Terrill and Paoline's (2013) study focused on examining 1,083 policing agencies in connection to the Use of Force Continuum and less-lethal force practices. What they found was that 80% of policing agencies use the force continuum model, the linear design was most used in police agencies (design uses de-escalation tactics in police force during resistance), and 86% of police agencies put officer verbalization and police presence on separate levels as tactic options with 97.8% place use of deadly force its own level (Terrill & Paoline, 2013, p.45, 57, 48). This suggests that there are multiple applications of the Use of Force Continuum in policing agencies. Thus, the use of force model provides different levels of force for the purpose of de-escalation measures to be applied in the system of policing. The force levels in police agencies, creates public awareness as to the guidelines police need to follow before resorting to deadly force levels during an encounter. However, the reality of this truth is that it is difficult to regulate the continuum's enforcement as "Departments pick and chose. . .with little to no empirical evidence as to which approach is best or even better than another" (Terrill & Paoline, 2013, p.58). This study fills in this gap in research through explanation of force tactics in police agencies and further shows how the continuum serves as a guideline in controlling police use of force tactics. Similarly, the author's approach demonstrates its controversial assessment that may cause police misconduct and excessive force.

## **Police Misconduct and Racial Bias in Stops**

Police misconduct connects to incidents where the actions of an officer are considered out of line with the code of conduct and may not be connected to the use of force used in a situation (Premkumar et al., 2021). However, misconduct of an officer may even connect to their racial prejudice in having negative attitudes or bias against certain groups of people and if this occurs it can be reflected in the stop data and the perceptions of the public. For instance, Gelman et al. (2012) analyzed New York Police Department pedestrian data to identify the relationship between race and crime data. They believed that police might substitute the racial characteristics of individuals for the racial composition of communities, and police cognitive suspicion would result in higher stops in specific minority neighborhoods (Gelman et al., 2012, p.814). The findings of this study found that Black (23%) and Hispanic (39%) of individuals were stopped more often than white individuals in which Hispanics had the highest stop rate, (Gelman et al., 2012, p. 817), which is different from other studies (Kramer & Remster, 2018). In these findings we see racial bias in police stop data with minorities being the most affected. However, in further expanding on the possible social implications of these findings we can understand how different neighborhood environments are policed in society and the likelihood of police stopping minority individuals. Police pedestrian stops and racial bias connect to the concept of order maintenance, which is a “. . .pervasive policing philosophy that prioritizes low-level ‘quality of life’ violations over violent crimes. . .” (Burton, 2015, p. 38). Order maintenance policing may be an underlying factor that harms people in the lower economic class or those who are experiencing poverty. These neighborhoods may be heavily

policed which has the potential to harm the trust in policing systems in minority communities composed of people of color, due to over-policing and surveillance in these areas. This may call for additional areas of research to investigate the possible societal influences in neighborhood perceived criminality and racial bias in police use of force and stop disparities.

Differently, connecting to the theme of racial bias in policing, Kramer & Remster (2018) also analyzed New York police stop data from the years 2007-2014 to understand the relationship between police force and an individual's age and race. An important concept that is highlighted is the idea of a productive stop—where a police officer arrests a person due to their possession of a contraband or a weapon— but if possession of these items is found this may lead to resistance and force used by the officer (Kramer & Remster, 2018, p.965). In stops done by the police there are racial differences and biases present in the data similar to Gelman et al. (2012). Kramer and Remster (2018) found that African American civilians have a 27% higher likelihood of experiencing force than White Americans and were 28% more likely for police to draw a gun on them. Additionally, if there was a 10% increase in Latino or Black residents in a community this results in a 4.2% higher risk that police would use a gun. Young black civilians also have a 0.82% higher chance of experiencing force than an adult who is 50 or higher (Kramer & Remster, 2018). Thus, in comparison to Gelman et al. (2012), Kramer found more factors of racial bias in police stops and force used on African Americans and Latinos. However, these studies have a similar approach on identifying police stops in neighborhoods which highlights that minority communities are more policed and under surveillance like the targeting of Carolina

Planters in 1704 on African Americans during the time of slavery (Burton, 2015, p. 43). The racial bias seen in police stop data emphasizes certain racial groups are more targeted by police. However, the perception of the public in terms of the use of force and stops is important to understand, as if certain racial groups are potentially targeted more than others this can lead to different perceptions of police actions by racial groups. This idea is supported by Carvalho et al. (2021) whose perspective is that use of force can lead to distinct attitudes towards the role of police where “. . . Whites could be more prone to see the police force as a positive and necessary group in society, Blacks and other underrepresented groups could be more likely to associate the police force with negative attributes” (Carvalho et al. 2021 p.1214). This is proven to be true as Black Americans are 35% less likely to support the idea that the police treat racial and ethnic groups equally in comparison to White Americans and like this sentiment Black adults are five times more likely than Whites to feel that they were stopped by a police officer unfairly (Desilver, 2020). Thus, we see that public experiences and perceptions of police affirm the racial bias in data that minorities are more often stopped by police which justifies the sentiment of the unfair treatment African Americans perceive from police. In the next section, I will discuss how police use of force varies on the type of force tactics used by police.

## **Lethal and Less-lethal Use of Force Tactics in Policing**

While the Use of Force Continuum is a model used by police agencies and officers to assess the level of force required to address a situation (NIJ, 2009), the lethal and less-lethal means of force is controversial amongst the police and public perceptions. One form of lethal or deadly force is through shooting a firearm. Although, the amount of deadly force an officer may use is dependent on their surrounding environment and the level of risk in connection to the jurisdiction the officer is working in (Premkumar, 2021). Police use force in situations that may escalate, but in considering injury and fatality consequences of this force demonstrates racial disparities. For instance, fatalities of civilians shot by a police officer reveal that Latinos represent 45% of deaths, Black Americans are 16-19%, and White Americans are less with 1/3 of fatalities during police use of force encounters (Premkumar, 2021). In police use of deadly force those who are most affected are minorities (Black and Latinos). However, an alternative to lethal force is less-lethal force tactics with conducted energy devices (CEDs), use of chemicals, batons, and verbal talk downs which will be further reviewed after analyzing police stress.

In understanding less-lethal force measures it is important to identify police officer's experiences in using less-lethal tactics. Baldwin et al. (2022) analyze use of force in police to examine police behavior through a lethal force scenario designed with an armed offender to identify the actions of police. Their findings suggest a self-report by a police officer revealed when use of force was applied, distortions of perception and cognitive thinking were negatively impacted.

For example, 70% of police officers experienced decreased visual clarity and diminished sound (a form of hearing) during the scenario. While under stress, more than a quarter of police officers are likely to commit fact (16%) and decision-making errors (7%) (Baldwin, 2022, p.12 & 14). This demonstrates that police experience physical effects that challenge their ability to act and make decisions which can cause error. However, despite the error and stress police may feel, officers believe that less-lethal force weapons like tasers are safe. For instance, De Angelis & Wolf (2013), discuss police taser use and community perceptions of CED weapons through a qualitative approach to this controversy. The authors found that police officers are shocked by the taser through their training to experience firsthand the power of these devices, CEDs were seen as safe devices by police and that related deaths of tasers are due to other factors (ex. drugs or medical problems), and that public misunderstandings of tasers is influenced by the media and their negative portrayal of the events (De Angelis & Wolf, 2013, p. 6 & 15). Police perceptions of public opinions being skewed by the media lead to misinformation in CED force, thus, the use of CED's by police must be understood through policy and its administration.

For instance, frequent use of tasers and policies are dependent on its enforcement and guidelines followed by separate policing agencies. Terrill & Paoline (2017) analyzed use of force incidents in different police departments and found that Albuquerque officers used tasers 6 times more often and Colorado Springs officers were 23 times more likely to use tasers which connect to their lower restrictive policies in less-lethal force (Terrill & Paoline, 2017, p.209). Thus, the likelihood of police use of force tactics that use

tasers as a less-lethal force is affected by administrative policy. Similarly, this may be dependent on the situation an officer is placed in where these authors found that higher levels of resistance against police resulted in their use of higher levels of police force, especially when there was clear possession of a weapon, male, and officers used tasers more often on Black suspects in comparison to White individuals (Terrill & Paoline, 2017, p.206 & 209). Differently, a critique in research is the need for national regulation use of tasers and less-lethal force weapons in policing as Ciavaglia (2021), described that “No federal agency tracks how many people are killed or seriously injured after Taser use by law enforcement officers, nor how many departments are equipped with the devices.” This shows a gap in research for the need of restrictive force policies at the federal level to decrease levels of police misconduct in their use of lethal vs. less-lethal use of force.

A different perspective is that police are not prepared to handle situations and weapons that control situations like protests. For instance, in the Black Lives Matter movements in George Floyd protests in Philadelphia police used tear gas chemicals on crowds of protesters which caused difficulty in breathing, and in Los Angeles police controlled protests with highly technical foam-projectile launchers to control the crowd with only having two hours of training on how to use this weapon (Barker et al., 2021). The critique of this situation is that police are not adequately trained and instead resort to being reactive in assessing crowd controls instead of proactive (Barker et al., 2021). However, we must keep in mind the reality that police officers are human and as stated above may commit fact and decision-making errors (Baldwin, 2022, p. 14) and may lean towards the use of deadly force dependent on their

surrounding risk and environment (Premkumar, 2021). This approach to criticizing the unpreparedness of police officers in using less-lethal force tactics demonstrates the need for increased training in how to use less-lethal weapons in stressful situations that cause less harm to both the public and police. Lastly, in further understanding the public perceptions of police use of force with less-lethal tactics and the public's trust and legitimacy towards police, Kypriandies et al. (2021) found that police using a weapon (taser or baton) was less acceptable by participants and that handcuffing and talking down to a person through physically restraining them was more acceptable, actual force used by police was less acceptable than threats of force by police, and that participants who trusted police did not reduce their trust and accepted police actions of force (Kypriandies et al., 2021, p. 182). In comparison to police officer's perspectives that CEDs are a safe form of lethal force (De Angelis & Wolf, 2013, p. 15), the public disagrees with the use of lethal weapons like tasers, batons, and sprays, this may call for change in police taser use to adjust to public opinion.

### **Racial Disparities in Police Treatment of African Americans and Latinos**

To analyze the racial disparities in policing it is important to understand the amount of force inequalities individuals receive due to higher risk and the differential treatment specific racial groups experience from police. For instance, Edwards et al. (2019) conducted a study focused on analyzing the lifetime risk in social groups of racial/ethnic and sex groups in being killed by police violence and use of force in the United States.



This study found differences in racial and sex group lifetime risk of death by police violence where Black men (2.5) and Latino men (1.3-1.4) times more likely to be killed by police when compared to White men. Black women are (1.4) times more likely to be killed. Latina women are less likely (12-23%) to be killed by police in comparison to White women. Thus, there are vast differences where men are at a higher risk than women and minority racial groups are at a higher risk of being killed by police. These findings highlight the need to treat police violence as a public health issue to identify racial factors in policing, but also describes the gap for future studies to assess social groups in an intersectional lens to identify how officer's perceive people's identity and its connections to dangerousness and criminality (Edwards et al, 2019, p. 16796). Regardless of lethal and less-lethal force, these statistics emphasize the racial disparities of who is at an increased risk of being killed by police and adds to the need for understanding how policing fails due to police violence against specific racial groups.

While African American deaths to police force are more often seen in the media, it's important to also consider Latino's experiences in excessive use of force by police that have led to the death of a victim. For instance, in 2013, Andy Lopez was shot 7 times and killed by police due to carrying a toy gun. In 2014, Alex Nieto was killed and shot 23 times by police due eating a burrito at a public park was perceived as suspicious by a passerby who called the police (Arce, 2020). It was found by the Unidos US group, which collected data from activists who were family members of victims killed by police and found that since the year 2014 "more than 2,600 Latinos were killed by police or died in custody" (Foster-Frau, 2021). However, the data reported may be lower than it

should since Latinos are “. . . often undercounted in criminal-justice data since many states report race but not ethnicity” (Arce, 2020). Thus, Latinos are categorized as a different race (e.g., White), which identifies a needed change in categorizing statistics of police killings in terms of race and ethnicity to gain clarity as the true number of Latinos being killed at the hands of police.

Differently, racial differential treatment of police officers can also be seen during stops and frisks due to the perceived size of a suspect. For example, Milner et al. (2016) focused on a suspect's race, size, and treatment of police to understand their interconnected relations. The findings in this study suggest that Hispanics and Blacks had a higher risk of being stopped than White individuals. In comparison to White medium-sized (66-72”, 141-205 lb.) suspects, Blacks had a 9.5% risk increase and Hispanics had 9.8% increase of having a police officer use force on them. For large-sized (73” and taller, over 250 lb.) suspects, Blacks and Whites had experienced higher risk and Hispanics had a lower risk. Thus, this demonstrates a problem of racial prejudice in police force on minorities that are medium-large sized but, also reinforces the idea of officer’s perspective on a person’s racial identity connects to a suspect’s dangerousness and criminality (Edwards et al, 2019, p. 16796) which causes force. Further, in police use of force, the years of service an officer has may affect an officer’s suspicion of criminality due to their racial identity. A study by Wright & Headley (2020) found Latino (1.27) and White (1.28) officers are more likely to use higher force on Black civilians. White officers use 1.15 times more force on Black civilians than White civilians. Furthermore, as officer years of service increased for White and Black officers there was an increase in police use of force

against both female and male civilians.

Lastly, when connecting to public perceptions of police officer's, forceful tone of voice towards civilians during traffic stops the public's trust can vary based on interaction. For example, Camp et al. (2021) blinded participants to analyze body camera audio recordings retrieved through body camera footage to assess officer's tone and found that participants exposed to positive tones and interactions created more trust in representations than negative police tones, and police "communicated more respect, ease, and warmth toward the White men they stopped than they did toward Black men" (Camp et al. 2021, p.7 & 9). Through public perception, police had more negative tones towards Black individuals thereby creating unfairness and racial differences in treatment. The problem of public trust in police can be explained by procedural justice theory —where negative or positive encounters individuals have with police affect perceptions of police (Camp et al., 2021, p.9) — but this may connect to the need of procedural justice training by police as a possible solution a possible solution.

Through this review I have discussed police use of force and the racial disparities in policing to focus on the question: How does police use of force connect to racial disparities in policing in police stops of individuals, lethal and less-lethal police tactics, and the racial differential treatment of African Americans and Latinos? Furthermore, the study of police use of force and racial disparities in policing with focus on history, police misconduct through racial bias during stops, lethal and less-lethal force tactics, and the racial differential treatment of African Americans and Latinos all serve to

serve to understand the problems in policing. However, this also allows us to analyze potential approaches in reduction strategies of police use of force so we can gain a greater perspective as to the changes needed through policy, force, and training by police to address the racial disparities in policing.

### **Topic Analysis** **Intervention for Racial Disparities in Policing**

Through previous review, I have discussed police use of force, and the racial disparities present in policing today, however, have not addressed possible strategies or solutions to reducing police force and racial bias. The idea of implicit bias in society may be a way to address racial disparities in policing, as implicit bias involves the “automatic positive or negative preference for a group, based on one’s subconscious thoughts,” which can produce discriminatory behavior even if individuals are unaware that such biases form the bases of their decisions” (Hinton et al. 2018, p. 7).

Implicit bias can be held by any individual and be manifested in preferences or different treatment where bias may not be explicitly shown or aware to a person which creates major problems in policing. For instance, when police officers use force we have learned that there is racial bias where Blacks and Hispanics are more likely to experience force from an officer due to their larger size (Milner et al., 2016), police use a friendly tone towards White individuals than Blacks during stops (Camp et al. 2021), Blacks and Hispanics are more often stopped by police officers than Whites (Gelman et al., 2012), and tasers are more often used on Black suspects in comparison to White suspects (Terrill & Paoline, 2017). Thus, implicit racial bias perceived by an officer may be the cause of these racial disparities in policing which must be further studied, as

in society people feel judged due to their race. For instance, 34% of Hispanics and 65% of Black adults state that they have been in situations where other people believe they were suspicious, due to their race or ethnicity and in comparison, to White adults one quarter believed this happened to them (Desilver, 2020). Implicit bias training of police may be an intervention to help reduce this perception people feel of themselves and can help address potential bias and racial prejudice police hold to eliminate the targeting of individuals based on the color of their skin. However, some may view and assume implicit bias training of police as not doing much in changing “. . . behaviors and reduce violent conduct against people of color, said Smith, who cites studies suggesting a majority of Americans hold negative biases against Black and brown people, and that unconscious prejudices and stereotypes are difficult to erase” (Walsh, 2021).

Not attempting to address officer’s unconscious stereotypes and bias can interfere with the “. . . population’s trust in the alleged aims of the police—that is, safety and order—especially that of people of color and other underrepresented individuals” (Carvalho et al., 2021, p. 1218). Thus, while it is true that negative bias against people of color exists in society and in the system of policing, acknowledgement of the bias and implicit bias training is an important intervention to teaching officers to be aware of their personal bias. Eliminating racial prejudice and bias by police would serve to attempt to reduce racial disparities found in policing and can help ensure that police officer’s conduct and behavior are equitable and impartial during their interactions with civilians.

## **Reduction Strategies in Police Use of Force**

To reduce use of excessive force the implementation of de-escalation training may be a solution for police behavior and actions. De-escalation involves the use of “. . . techniques as command presence, advisements, warnings, verbal persuasion, and tactical repositioning” (White et al., 2021, p.420). Police training in these techniques allows officers to have multiple options to assess and react in a situation rather than resorting to violent force as a first response. White et al. (2021) analyzed the de-escalation tactics used by police in the Tempe, Arizona police department and found that 91.5-100% of police officers were willing to participate in de-escalation training and officers who received the training used more of the 10 de-escalation tactics including communication, use of appropriate words and language, compromise (the highest tactic used), knowing when to walk away, and maintaining decrease civilian injuries or distrust in police. Thus, as a officer safety were the last three most used de-escalation tactics (White et al., 2021, p.426 & 431). These findings provide a solution or alternative to helping police reduce or avoid the use of force to ensure both police and civilian safety. This method may allow less excessive use of force incidents if applied in multiple policing departments, as police use of these tactics allow for less violent options that can solution to police use of force, de-escalation tactics are an important part in regulating police behavior and their course of action based on a particular situation they are assessing. Common de-escalation tactics and policy across various policing agencies could also help keep track of police use of force data and the impact of less-lethal tactics used by police.

De-escalation training in police is important to reduce excessive force during police actions. An example of a situation where this type of training can be helpful is during civilian protests in cities, as these protests sometimes lead to chaotic events that may cause police to resort to using force and less-lethal weapons for controlling a crowd. An intervention strategy would call for improvements in police department planning in how police need to deal with organized protests in the community. Police departments may also need to create protest-management policies, participate in longer trainings in the use of less-lethal weapons like tear gas for supervision and crowd control, but also officers can receive “. . . training to manage their emotions and aggressions as part of de-escalation strategies” (Barker et al., 2021). Together with previous de-escalation tactics described by White et al. (2021) and emotional regulation training by police in protest can help police keep calm in these situations. Protests and activism can cause emotional triggers for all involved including police, where these interventions can help reduce potential violence and confrontations.

Similar to reducing police force through de-escalation training and less-lethal tactics demonstrated by White et al. (2021), this is also supported by Wood et al. (2020) who studied if training of police could change officer’s treatment towards civilians. A potential solution to police use of force is through the study’s focus on procedural justice training of police which emphasizes “. . . transparency, explaining policing actions, and responding to community concerns, has been identified as a strategy for decreasing the number of interactions in which civilians experience disrespectful treatment or the unjustified use of force” (Wood et al., 2020, p.9815).

Procedural justice training of police would allow for officers to be more involved with the communities they are serving and help both the public and police become informed of new policies, procedures, or practices performed. The findings of this study indicates that procedural justice training resulted in a 6.4% decrease in police use of force and police use of weapons, 10% reduction of civilian complaints against officers' misconduct, and that police who had earlier procedural justice training (12-24 months) had a more pronounced effect on police officers' de-escalation tactics (Wood et al, 2020, p.9817 & 9819). The findings of the authors connect procedural justice and de-escalation training through an emphasis on police encounters with the public like Camp et al. (2021) as a form for reducing police use of force.

As part of an implication of procedural justice training by police, this connects to procedural justice theory, described as public trust in police being formed due to the negative or positive encounters individuals have with police can affect their perceptions of police (Camp et al. 2021, p.9). This solution would be feasible under the circumstances where police departments —instead of creating strict distinctive roles of police and civilians in society that limits communication—end this communication disconnect through a positive police-community relationship. As a society, we could respond to the issue of police use of force by not only creating engagement between the police and community members, but also instilling a relationship of dependency, participation, and trust, where both are informed of their rights, changes, and procedures during interactions that foster respect.

Lastly, the control-command model in policing is most dominant in



Lastly, the control-command model in policing is most dominant in American police and is connected to creating compliance using dominance and threat (Wood et al, 2020, p.9819).

An alternative to reducing excessive police force, may be the change in focus of policing into a less dominant stance at the community level. Instead, the system of policing should focus on “trying to help reweave some of the threads of community, a system that is more focused on healing than just on stopping harm” (Rachel Viscomi, as cited in Walsh, 2021). We recognize the responsibility of police to enforce the laws to maintain protection and order in our communities through their duty to investigate, arrest, and detain criminal suspects (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021), but this method as reviewed through the literature has created damaging effects in communities through public distrust and police violence in excessive use of force. While Walsh (2021) does not explicitly state the term “community policing”, their implication of a more healing focused form of policing allows for officers to be conscious of their actions, communicate, and engage with the community. Reconnecting with members of communities is key for police to understand those they serve and work with civilians in encouraging transparency and partnership between both parties. This can further allow for racial bias or assumptions of certain racial groups perceived as dangerous or criminal held by police to become disproved and allow for a reduction in force against minority communities and can potentially fix the relationship and trust of civilians and police. Thus, in researching police use of force and racial disparities in policing some of the interventions and reduction strategies to address this issue are through implicit bias training for police officers, de-escalation training for reducing

excessive force performed by police, procedural justice training to build police-civilian relationships and transparency, and changing the focus of policing's command and control model to emphasize community policing that heals civilian trust in police. Through recognizing not only the problems in police use of force and racial disparities in policing, but also the possible interventions and strategies for reducing and eliminating these inequalities allows us to create new approaches of reforming the system of policing into one that aims to eliminate racial injustice. Further, it allows police to maintain their duty of protecting and serving the community in the best manner that does not target specific groups, but rather provides protection and safety for all.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the issue of police use of force and its connection to racial disparities in policing needs to be further studied and addressed to make necessary changes that not only limit excessive force tactics from police, but also eliminate racial bias in the system. Analyzing police officer's behaviors and misconduct during stops and the lethal and less-lethal force tactics that are available to police is important in understanding the levels of force or use of force continuums that policing departments follow. This is where changes in policy and policing practices like de-escalation and procedural justice training can be key in reducing use of force problems in policing that is increasingly seen in the media we consume.

Similarly, when understanding the connection between police use of force and racial disparities we have come to learn the vulnerability

of minority groups (African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos) in being targeted through being overrepresented in stop, injury, and use of force data. This data also reflects the public sentiment of being judged and experiencing racial differential treatment of these racial groups which must change through implicit bias training and community centered policing to reconstruct police-civilian trust. Reform in policing and use of force is much needed to address racial disparities and differential treatment minorities experience during their interactions with police. Fixing this relationship between civilians and police will have a long-lasting impact that is essential to improving the system of policing into one that inspires equity, safety, and trust.

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