

Labels for Some: Long-term Consequences of Police Encounters and Arrests for African  
American and White Youth

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**Abstract**

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**Abstract**

Policing programs, including community policing, and school policies that increase opportunities for interactions between law enforcement officers and youth have become increasingly common over the past two decades. However, scholars remain uncertain about the long-term impacts of police-youth encounters. Since the 1950's, labeling theorists have warned that such encounters may increase youths' deviant behavior by shaping identities and behavior, making contacted youth believe that they are worthy of police intervention. According to recent empirical work, such interactions may create a cycle in which police contacts with youth negatively impact others' perceptions of the youth, therefore decreasing opportunities for engagement in positive or

pro-social activities and increasing the chance that youth will engage with delinquent peers. The current paper attempts to fill a gap in the literature by examining whether police encounters have *different* long-term impacts on African American and white youths' behavior and justice system involvement. The paper uses longitudinal data from 331 African American and white youth enrolled in the Seattle Public School District as 8<sup>th</sup> graders in 2001 and 2002. Results suggest that police encounters have no identifiable long-term impact on white youths' behavior or subsequent criminal justice involvement. However, the impacts of early police encounters for African American youth are striking. Early encounters increase the odds of illegal behaviors nearly 6 years later for African American youth. In addition, African American youth who experience contact by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade have a nearly 13 times greater odds of experiencing arrest when they are 20 years old than their non-contacted African American peers, even while holding constant self-reported criminal behavior. The current study highlights the need for additional research on racial differences in impacts of policing practices and also cautions that programs that increase exposure to police may have negative impacts for youth of color.

## INTRODUCTION

Policies that bring youth into increased contact with police officers have grown in popularity over the past few decades—from community policing to the presence of police officers in schools (BJS 2010). Increased opportunities for police-youth encounters lead some to question the potential impacts of these encounters. Encounters with police might discourage youth involvement in crime and delinquency—both through acting as a deterrent and by encouraging youth to adopt more positive behaviors. Although this perspective is implied in scared-straight models and other similar programming, it does not appear to have much empirical support (Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino and Buehler 2003). Some theories, such as labeling theory, caution that encounters with the criminal justice system may lead to delinquency and criminal justice involvement by negatively effecting the contacted youths' self-perceptions and the perceptions of others. Contacted youth might come to believe that they are “bad kids”—ultimately acting out in ways that align with a “bad kid” identity. There are also the potential unintended impacts of encounters. Youth who police contact may become familiar to the officers who stop them and to the system more generally. Such familiarity may lead to youth being more closely monitored, increasing the likelihood of a later arrest.

Encounters with police officers are the first point of entry into the criminal justice system. Such interactions may develop into a warning, a citation, or even an arrest. In addition contacts made during the delicate developmental time period of childhood and early adolescence may be particularly damaging for youth who are actively engaging in a process of identity formation. Despite the importance of these first contacts in either introducing youth to the juvenile justice system or diverting them from the system, relatively little research has explored the consequences of police encounters with youth—particularly as it relates to justice system

involvement in young adulthood. We know even less about how early contacts with police officers may operate differently based on the race of the youth. The current paper attempts to fill a gap in the literature by examining how early contacts and arrests impact youth during their entry into young adulthood. The current paper explores first, whether youth who have an early police contact (either in the form of an encounter or arrest) are more likely to be arrested at age 20 than those without a police contact. Second, I explore whether the impact of such encounters differ by the race of the contacted youth. Finally, I explore the extent to which the relationship between a contact with police by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and arrest in young adulthood is mediated by concurrent involvement in illegal behavior.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The process by which police encounters with adolescents may lead to later criminal justice involvement is described using concepts from labeling theory. Labeling theory uses the basic tenets of Symbolic Interactionism to describe how interactions with the criminal justice system may impact subsequent delinquency for youth (Schur 1969). Symbolic Interaction suggests that individuals in a given situation are self-aware actors, able to reflect on the interpreted meaning of a situation/interaction and react in accordance to their interpretation and self-conception (Blumer 1962). During police encounters with youth, youth and the police officers engage in a process of interpretation. A police officer may interpret the actions of the youth as suspicious or indicative of participation in illegal behavior. A youth experiencing the contact may interpret the encounter as happening for either legitimate or illegitimate reasons.

Traditional labeling theory argues that because of their position of authority, police officers have the ability to label and treat individuals they contact as criminal. These labels may

have important consequences for youth self-perceptions. Lemert (1951) argues that societal reactions to “primary deviance” through official intervention may result in stigmatizing an individual and this stigmatization affects the opportunities that are available to the individual, pushing them towards “secondary deviance.” Over time, criminal justice intervention along with the combination of responses to the intervention may impact the way the youth views herself/himself. An individual who has had contact with the criminal justice system, especially multiple contacts, may begin to view themselves as criminal, engage with delinquent peers, and may be more apt to act out in criminal ways. However, this process does not guarantee that an individual will develop a delinquent identity. Schur (1969) argues that even in cases where individuals are unwilling to view themselves as offenders, those individuals may become hostile towards the police, increasing the likelihood of delinquent or antisocial behavior. Labeling theory suggests that the impact of the contact on the youth will be negative, with the propensity to motivate criminal behavior.

Labeling theory has been criticized for being not thoroughly empirically tested (see Matsueda 2014 for a history of labeling theory). However, recent work on labeling theory has attempted to unpack and measure the mechanisms by which the process of labeling might lead to later delinquency and criminal justice involvement. In 1997, Sampson and Laub suggested that the theory could be modified to include a social control perspective. They argued that, “structural effects of labeling may emerge through social allocation mechanisms that have nothing to do with a redefinition of the self or other social-psychological processes that operate within the individual” (Sampson and Laub 1997: 141). Recent key contributions have taken up this issue, focusing on how a deviant label in adolescence, given as a result of police intervention

or juvenile justice system involvement, may create structural barriers for youth in schools, employment, and other institutional settings.

In the past decade, much research using a labeling theory approach has addressed how structural barriers increase the likelihood that a youth will engage in delinquency (Bernburg and Krohn 2003; Bernburg, Krohn, and Rivera 2006; Lopes et al. 2012; Wiley, Slocum, and Esbensen 2013). Police intervention in the form of being stopped or arrested during adolescence has been linked to multiple problematic academic outcomes, such as poor grades (Wiley et al. 2013) and school dropout (Bernburg and Krohn 2003; Kirk & Sampson 2013; Lopes 2012). Kirk and Sampson (2013) test three main mechanisms by which labeling perspectives might explain the relationship between juvenile justice involvement and dropout: reduced educational expectations, a decline in educational attachment, and peer support. They find little support for any of these mechanisms, hypothesizing that students might “dropout not because of voluntary mechanisms but because arrested students are involuntarily pushed out of the school through enforcement mechanisms.” (Kirk & Sampson 2013: 53). Dropping out of school limits the chances that a youth will find stable employment in young adulthood (Bernburg & Krohn 2003; Lopes et al. 2012) and increases the risk of engaging in delinquent behavior in young adulthood (Bernburg & Krohn 2003) and beyond (Lopes et al. 2012).

A deviant label might increase chances of a youth aligning themselves with deviant friends (Bernburg, Krohn, and Rivera 2006; Johnson, Simons, and Conger 2004; Wiley et al. 2013). Bernburg et al. (2006) found that official juvenile processing lead youth to associate with delinquent peers and that these associations increased the risk of engaging in later delinquent behavior—a finding that has been echoed by other recent research (Restivo and Lanier 2013; Wiley et al. 2013). Non-official system involvement, such as being stopped by police, might

also create a greater commitment to a delinquent peer group (Wiley et al. 2013). From a developmental perspective, delinquent friendships have been found to be more “sticky” (Warr 1993). Warr (1993) notes that friendships with delinquent peers tend to have a longer duration than those with non-delinquent friends. Therefore, a labeling process could increase attachment to delinquent peers who then have a longer-lasting impact on already labeled individuals.

### *Race and Labeling Theory*

One of the main concerns of this paper is whether police encounters with youth might differentially trigger the labeling process depending on the race of the youth. Little empirical work has examined the relationship between race and labeling, although there is reason to believe that police encounters may not have the same impact on African American and white youth. First, the labeling process may be triggered by either official system involvement (arrest, detention, etc.) or unofficial involvement (such as being stopped by a police officer). Both being stopped and being arrested are events that disproportionately impact African Americans, especially African American youth and young adults. In 2010, the rate of arrest for African American youth was almost 50% higher than the rate of white youth (OJJDP 2012). Official estimates of police encounters with juveniles are difficult to obtain, however some studies have suggested that African American youth are more likely to experience being stopped by police than white youth (Crutchfield et al. 2012; Hagan, Shedd, and Payne 2005). The disproportionality in both official and unofficial sanctioning may make African American youth more likely to be subjected to the labeling process.

Explanations for overrepresentation in the earliest stage of the criminal justice system are varied and complex. Scholars have noted that neighborhoods and schools play a role in

disproportionality in police contacts and arrests for African Americans. In the United States, a historical legacy of slavery, discriminatory policies, structural and individual racial discrimination have made it challenging for individuals of African descent to gain upward economic mobility (Oliver and Shapiro 2006; Wilson 1987). African Americans are therefore more likely than their white counterparts to live in disadvantaged neighborhoods, including neighborhoods with high rates of joblessness, residential turnover, and crime (Massey 1990; Peterson and Krivo 2010; Wilson 1987). Neighborhoods with high rates of crime and disadvantage are more often targeted by policing efforts, drawing African Americans into more frequent contact with police officers. However, disproportionality often extends beyond what can be accounted for by neighborhood factors (Piquero 2008). In qualitative interviews with white and African Americans, Brunson and Weitzer (2009) found that police tended to stop African Americans living in poor Black neighborhoods but were less likely to stop poor white youth living in predominantly poor white neighborhoods.

In addition to neighborhoods, schools have also become sites where police may encounter young people. The past few decades have seen a rise in the presence of police in schools through the use of School Resource or Enforcement Officers (SRO or SEOs) (BJS 2010). Increased use of police officers in schools has been shown to increase reports of non-serious violence to police (Na & Gottfredson 2013). Such practices pose a particular problem for African American youth who are already over-represented in public school disciplinary practices (Eitle and Eitle 2004; Nicholson-Crotty, Berchmeier and Valentine 2009; Skiba et al. 2002). African American students are more likely to be harshly disciplined than white students—including being suspended or expelled from school despite a lack of behavioral differences (Eitle and Eitle 2004; Nicholson-Crotty et al. 2009; Skiba et al. 2002). Nicholson-Crotty and

colleagues found that suspensions were related to juvenile justice referrals. The authors argue that the findings indicate the existence of a “pipeline” from the school disciplinary system to the juvenile justice system. These findings have been echoed by others who suggest that SROs, zero-tolerance policies, and other policies that increase referrals from schools to the criminal justice system are often counterproductive (Kupchik 2010).

Not only are disparate conditions involved with exposing youth to the labeling process, but the process itself might also be different for African American and white youth. It has been well documented that African American and white youth experience police encounters differently—from content to outcomes of encounters. Qualitative work has helped elucidate the experiences that young people of color have with police officers. Interactions between police officers and young men of color from disadvantaged neighborhoods are frequently negative (Jones-Brown 2000). African American youth often report harassment, both physical and verbal, by police officers (Brunson 2007; Brunson and Weitzer 2009; Jones-Brown 2000) and feel targeted by police. As Brunson (2007:85) points out, “Young men expressed that the police behaved as if their participation in crime was a forgone conclusion and that they merely needed to locate the supporting evidence to make an arrest.” These negative interactions have an impact not only on the individual but also on others who hear stories of police harassment and incorporate those stories into overall attitudes about officers (Jones-Brown 2000). Negative experiences, either from personal experience or experience of close others, can have an impact of perceived legitimacy of officers.

Some scholars speculate that contacts with the criminal justice system, broadly defined, that are perceived as illegitimate and/or racially biased may lead adolescents to question police legitimacy (Fagan and Tyler 2005), weaken overall authority of the police (Brunson 2007),

decrease chances that youth will follow directives (Brunson and Weitzer 2009), and increase the chances of the adolescent engaging in delinquent behavior (Fagan and Tyler 2005). Perceived racial discrimination may be very damaging for African American youth. A recent study of the impact of perceived racial discrimination on young African American males showed that racial discrimination both increased delinquency directly and indirectly, through depression, disengagement from conventional norms, and by creating a hostile view of relationships (Burt, Simons, and Gibbons 2012). If the perception of or actual legitimacy of the stop varies by race, then we may expect to see differences in the impact of stops for African American and white youth. This may be especially true if encounters with police are viewed as racially motivated.

Finally, being African American and being involved with the criminal justice system may amplify the consequences of the labeling process—especially by negatively impacting educational and employment opportunities (Bernburg and Krohn 2003; Pager 2003). In a seminal audit study, Pager (2003) found that African American applicants with or without a criminal record were less likely to be called-back for a job interview than white applicants, and African American applicants without a criminal had a 4:1 greater rate of receiving a call-back than African American applicants with a criminal record, compared to the 3:1 rate of white applicants with versus without a record. The results suggest that official system involvement may amplify discriminatory practices in hiring, particularly for African Americans. It is possible that unofficial system involvement might have a similar stigmatizing effect that is also more amplified for African American youth and could impact the institutions which those youth are involved in, such as school and, for some, employment.

This study adds to the literature in a number of ways. Police contacts or juvenile justice involvement has most frequently been limited to official justice system involvement in the form

of an arrest or detention, with some recent exceptions (see Wiley et al. 2013). The current project examines the impact of both early adolescent arrests and encounters with police on criminal justice involvement approximately six years later—when adolescents are now young adults. The second, and perhaps most important addition, is the examination of how early police encounters might have differential impacts on young adult criminal justice involvement for African American and white youth. Encounters with youth can be construed as benign events; however these events may have particularly harmful consequences for young people of color.

## DATA

### *Sample*

The current paper uses data from the Family Connections Study—a stratified random sample of 8<sup>th</sup> grade African American and European American students in the Seattle Public School District in 2001 or 2002. Parents of eligible eighth-grade students in the Seattle School District received a letter describing the study and were contacted by phone. Eligibility included student records indicating that the student was either African American or European American, speaking English as their primary language, and planning to live in the area for at least 6 months. Families were included if the teen and one or both parents consented to participate. Forty-six percent consented (55% of African Americans and 40% of whites). Parents who refused to participate were more likely to be white, married, and had a higher education on average than those who did consent. The sample was stratified by teen race and gender. However, a portion of the teens in each racial group self-identified as more than one race (19.6% African American youth, 12.5% white youth), but were included in these analyses. At the time of the first

interview, respondents were enrolled in one of 18 different schools throughout the Seattle Public School District.

Data collectors went to the families' homes four times in 3 years: fall and spring of the 8th grade, spring of 9th grade, and spring of 10th grade. Questionnaires were self-administered to teens and their parents in their homes using laptop computers while the data collector was present, insuring that parents did not monitor their teens' responses. Family members received \$15 each time they completed questionnaires. The family received additional funds for completing other components of the assessment. At the two young adult assessments (when youth were on average, ages 20 and 22 years old) respondents who completed the survey received \$50 as well as additional funds for completing other components of the assessment.

The original sample consisted of 331 respondents. However, respondents with missing values on the outcome or predictor variables were excluded for the current analyses. The current analyses use data from 261 (79% of the original sample) respondents and 4 waves of data: baseline (fall 8<sup>th</sup> grade parent and youth, 10<sup>th</sup> grade youth, and approximately age 20 youth surveys). In adolescence, overall attrition of participants from the study was relatively low: 5% at post-test, 8% in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and 9% in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Furthermore, there were no race differences in attrition ( $X^2 [1, 331]$  at post-test=2.56,  $p=.11$ ; 9<sup>th</sup> grade=.082,  $p=.77$ ; 10<sup>th</sup> grade=.50,  $p=.48$ ), and almost no differences between non-responders and participants on key outcomes at baseline (i.e., index of substance use initiation,<sup>1</sup> violent behavior<sup>2</sup>, initiation of sex, favorable attitudes

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<sup>1</sup> This is a count of the number of different types of substances that participants had (ever) used: cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, and other illicit drugs. The variable range is 0 to 4.

about substance use, perceived harm of substance abuse). In young adulthood, attrition was 9% at age 20. There were differences by race (age 20 loss for white 5% vs African Americans 14%,  $X^2 [1, 331] = 7.66, p < .01$ , as well as other demographics (see Klima, unpublished manuscript). Non-responders at ages 20 were not different from participants on 10<sup>th</sup> grade variables related to criminal behavior (i.e., use of illicit drugs, marijuana, heavy episodic drinking, daily smoking)

### *Measures*

*Early Police Contact* is the primary predictor of interest for the current paper. Unlike many previous studies, contact for this paper includes both encounters that do not result in an arrest and those that do end in arrest. Police contact is measured using three self-reported items in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Contact was coded as having occurred if the teen responded affirmatively to any of the following questions: Have you 1) ever been stopped by the police, but not arrested; 2) ever been stopped by the police and arrested; 3) ever been in trouble with the police for something you did. By the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 74 (28.4%) of the youth had a police contact. This proportion is similar to another multiple-city analysis during a similar time-frame (see Wiley et al. 2013), suggesting that Seattle is similar to other locations in rates of police-juvenile encounters. Responses to the police contact questions differed by race, with African American youth being more likely than their white peers to experience a police encounter by the time they were in 8<sup>th</sup> grade (36.8% vs. 21.5%, respectively)<sup>3</sup>. This difference is statistically significant ( $t[228.6] = -$

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<sup>2</sup> Non-responders at post-test were lower on baseline violent behavior than were participants ( $t[48] = 4.37, p < .001$ ); however, there were no significant differences on violence between non-responders and responders in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades.

<sup>3</sup> Two-tailed unequal variance t-tests were conducted.

2.698,  $p < .01$ ) and is consistent with the literature on racial disproportionality in the juvenile justice system. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics by race (See table 1).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

*Arrest at Age 20* was measured using a count item from the survey. Respondents were asked the number of times they had been arrested in the past year. Responses range from 0 to 10 times. I am only interested in involvement in the criminal justice system and not the level of involvement. Therefore, the variable is dichotomized, where 0 indicates the individual did not experience an arrest and 1 indicates the individual had an arrest in the past year. Ten percent (26) of the sample reported having experienced an arrest in the past year. Responses to the question differed by race with African American respondents being significantly more likely to report an arrest than white respondents (14.5% vs. 6.3%, respectively) ( $t[198.23] = -2.15, p < .05$ ).

*Age 20 Illegal Behavior* is treated as a mediating variable in the subsequent analyses. I combine measures of *property crime*, *violent crime*, and *illegal drug use* from the age 20 survey. Participants were asked about the number of times that they engaged in a variety of illegal behaviors in the past year. I included crimes that violated the law and could have been enforced by police. Property crime consists of four items: 1) arson; 2) stealing from a store 3) breaking into property 4) drawing graffiti without permission. Sixty-three (24.1%) participants reported engaging in at least one property crime in the past year. Violent crime consists of three items: 1) using weapon/force strong arm to get something from someone 2) hitting someone with the intention of hurting them 3) throwing object at a car or person. At age 20, 40 (15.3%) participants reported engaging in violent crime in the past year. Illegal Drug Use includes 8 questions about past year frequency of use for the following drugs: LSD/Psychedelics, cocaine/crack, stimulants, party drugs, non-prescribed steroids, non-prescribed Vicodin, non-

prescribed OxyContin, and any other illegal drugs. The response categories for each of the drugs were “Never”, “1-2 times”, “3-5 times”, “6-9 times”, “10-19 times”, “20-39 times”, and “40+ times”. 74 (28.4%) of respondents reported having used at least one illegal drug in the past year. The items were then combined for an overall score of illegal behavior. 115 (44%) of respondents reported engaging in at least one illegal activity in the past year. Engagement in illegal behavior differs by race, with white youth being more likely to report participating in illegal behavior than African American youth (53% vs. 32%) ( $t[253.55]=3.48, p<.001$ ). When crime types are examined separately, white youth were significantly more likely to report using illegal drugs in the past year (40% vs. 14%) ( $t[252.84]=5.12, p<.001$ ). There are no statistically significant differences between violent or property crime offenses by race.

*Adolescent Property Crime, Violent Crime, and Drug Use* at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade are used as controls. The addition of these variables ensures that we are not simply capturing “bad kids”. For example, an argument could be made that youth who engage in property crime, violent crime, and illegal drug use when they are young are more likely to be contacted by police. Therefore, any impact of police contact would simply be capturing misbehaving youth who have persisted into adulthood. Property crime was measured using three items. Respondents were asked to mark “yes” if they had ever engaged in the following behaviors: 1) arson, 2) theft, or 3) drawn graffiti without permission. Responses were then summed for an overall property crime indicator with a minimum of 0 and maximum of 3. The mean number of property crimes at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade was .38. Violent crimes consisted of three variables: 1) carrying a handgun to school, 2) hitting someone with the intention of hurting them, and 3) throwing an object at a person or vehicle. Responses were summed for an overall violent crime indicator with a range from 0 to 3 with a mean of .34 violent crimes. In addition to violent and property crime, at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade

individuals were asked if they had ever used alcohol, tobacco, or other illegal drugs<sup>4</sup>. Responses were summed for an overall drug use indicator with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 3. The mean number of drugs used was .38. None of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade indicators of illegal behavior differed by race.

*Race* was based on parents' reports of their child's race on school enrollment forms (0 = white, 1 = African American). *Gender* was reported by teens on the survey (0 = male, 1 = female) and is used as a control in the current analyses. *Household Per Capita Income* is also used as a control. Household per capita income was calculated from 2 items from the parent survey when the child was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The items ask for family income before taxes in the past year. Respondents were presented with 18 categories representing ranges from 10,000 or under to 200,000 or over. The mid-point of the range for each category was divided by the number of people in the household. Missing data were assigned the median value (\$45,000) for income on six missing cases. One case was missing household size, this case was assigned the median household size of 4. Per capita household income has a minimum value of \$786 per year/per person and maximum value of \$75,000 and mean of \$15,582. Consistent with national research on wealth and income inequality (Oliver and Shapiro 2006), parents of African American respondents reported significantly lower per capita household incomes than parents of white youth with means of \$8,254 per person/per year for households of African American youths and

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the age of the respondents at the time of the survey, I have included measures of marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco use that would be illegal to use and enforced. However, these items were not included at age 20 because of their position as status offenses (alcohol and tobacco) and changes in the enforcement of marijuana possession in Seattle between the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and age 20 survey (Media Relations 2010).

a mean of \$21,537 per person/per year for households of white youths ( $t[249.49]=9.15, p<.001$ ). *Income* data is right skewed and therefore a log transformation of the variable was created. *Age* was based on the calculated age of the respondent at the time of their young adult interview. Respondents' ages at this data collection point ranged from 18.73 to 22.42 years with a mean of 20.26 years<sup>5</sup>. Since the opportunity of the individual to experience an arrest would be different for an 18 year old versus a 22 year old, age is used as a control in the following analyses.

## ANALYTIC METHOD

Using STATA version 12.1, I perform a series of logistic regression models with a robust variance estimator that adjusts clustering of participants within 18 different public schools. This method adjusts for within-school correlations (Williams 2004)<sup>6</sup>. I then use three separate sets of logistic regression models. The first set of models use a step-in approach, looking at the impact of early police encounters on young adult arrest with background and demographic characteristics, early illegal behaviors, 10<sup>th</sup> grade criminal justice involvement, current illegal behavior, and adding an interaction term for race by police contact. The second set of models

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<sup>5</sup> The age range at this point is wide due to the initial sampling and surveying method. The youth were part of one of two waves of data collection. The first wave consisted of respondents in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade during the Fall of 2001 and second wave consisted of respondents in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade during the Fall of 2002. While respondents were interviewed as they advanced one academic year, at the time they were 20, all respondents were interviewed during the same year, creating a wider age range.

<sup>6</sup> Using the robust variance estimator (`vce(robust schools)`) is necessary, given that the OLS assumption of independent cases is being violated and addresses the fact that individuals within a given school are more likely to have similar responses than those between schools.

examines the impact of the previously mentioned variables separated out by race/ethnicity—examining the impacts of these variables for African American and white youth. The final model examines the groups separately to determine whether or not the relationship between early police encounters and later criminal justice involvement can be fully explained by concurrent illegal behaviors.

## RESULTS

### *Adolescent Encounters with Police and Young Adult Arrest*

Table 2 displays the impact of early police contacts/encounters on arrest while controlling for demographic and background variables (Model 1), 8<sup>th</sup> grade illegal behaviors (Model 2), 10<sup>th</sup> grade arrest (Model 3), and concurrent (age 20) illegal behaviors (Model 4).

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE.

The first model examines the impact of early police contact on arrest in young adulthood while controlling for background variables that have been shown to increase the chances of arrest. Net of background variables, individuals who have a police contact by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade are more likely to experience an arrest in young adulthood. Moving from no contact to contact increases the odds of experiencing an arrest by 5.17 times. The second model controls for both background variables that might be associated with arrest and early engagement in illegal behaviors. I want to make sure that the relationship between police encounters and later arrest are not operating by simply identifying “bad kids”. For example, one argument might be that youth who engage in illegal behaviors are more likely to have a police contact *and* be arrested in young adulthood. To ensure that I am not simply identifying individuals with a propensity to engage in illegal behavior, I control for early illegal behavior: property crimes, violent crimes,

and illegal drug use by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Net of both background variables and 8<sup>th</sup> grade illegal behaviors, having a police contact is still a statistically significant predictor of arrest. Youth with a police contact have 3.99 greater odds of an arrest in young adulthood than those without a police contact. In model three, I add in 10<sup>th</sup> grade arrest—a measure of arrest at least two years after the reported police contact. I want to test whether having an early police encounter matters for young adult arrest above and beyond the impact of a potential short-term arrest, as is explored in earlier work (Crutchfield et al. 2009). Net of background factors, 8<sup>th</sup> grade illegal behaviors, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade arrest, having an early police contact is still a statistically significant predictor of arrest. Individuals with a police contact have 3.66 greater odds of experiencing an arrest in young adulthood. None of the other predictors in these are statistical significant. Model 4 includes concurrent behavior. After controlling for self-reported past year illegal behavior, the relationship between early police contact and arrest in young adulthood is no longer statistically significant. In addition, engaging in illegal behavior is, as expected, associated with arrest at age 20. Net of other factors, individuals who have engaged in illegal behavior during the past year, have nearly 10 times greater odds of experiencing an arrest during the same year compared to those who report engaging in no illegal behavior. These early analyses seem to suggest that impact of police encounters in adolescence on arrest in young adulthood may be fully explained by or mediated through concurrent illegal behavior.

However, the addition of the police contacts by African American interaction term (model 5) indicates police contacts have a different impact on arrest for African American youth as than white youth. To explore potential race differences in the relationship between police contact and arrest, I examine logistic regression models separately by race.

#### *Race and Adolescent Encounters with Police*

Using two sets of regression equations, I estimate the differential impact of police contact on African American and white youth (See Table 3). Model one explores whether police contact is a significant predictor of arrest in young adulthood, net of background factors, 8<sup>th</sup> grade illegal behaviors, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade arrest.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE.

Model 1 indicates that white youth with a police encounter are no more likely than their non-contacted white peers to experience an arrest in young adulthood after controlling for background characteristics, early illegal behavior, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade arrest. However, holding all other factors constant, the odds of African American youth with a police contact being arrested in young adulthood are 12.5 times larger than their non-contact African American peers. The addition of concurrent behavior in Model 2 fails to completely explain the relationship between early adolescent police contacts and young adult arrest for African American youth. Net of all other factors, African American youth who have experienced a police contact by the time they reach adolescence have a nearly 13 times greater odds of experiencing an arrest when they are young adults than African American youth without a contact. Concurrent illegal behavior is also, not surprisingly, related to young adult arrest for both African American and white youth. African American youth who reported having engaged in illegal behavior in the past year have just over 13 times greater odds of being arrested than do their African American peers who do not report illegal behavior. Similarly, white youth who report illegal behavior have almost 8 times greater odds of being arrested in young adulthood than those who did not report illegal behavior. The relationship between young adult illegal behaviors and young adult arrest are statistically significant for African American and white youth at the  $p=.001$  level and  $p=.05$  level, respectively.

*Mediational Relationships: Early Arrest, 10<sup>th</sup> grade arrest, and Delinquency*

Thus far, I have concluded that 1) the relationship between police contacts and young adult arrest differs by race and 2) the relationship between police contacts and later arrest cannot be completely accounted for by recent illegal behavior. A labeling theory perspective would assume that some of the relationship between police contacts and later arrest would be explained by behavior. Police contact would lead to illegal behavior and illegal behavior would ultimately lead to arrest. To test the relationship between police contacts and illegal behavior, I run a logistic regression using 8<sup>th</sup> grade police contacts to predict the mediator variable, age 20 self-reported illegal behaviors. In Model 2, I control for background characteristics, early illegal behaviors, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade arrest. Net of all other factors, the relationship between police contacts and illegal behavior for African American youth is statistically significant. African American youth with a police contact have 2.48 times greater odds of reporting engaging in at least one illegal behavior at age 20 than African American youth without a police contact.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE.

The argument could be made that early contacts with police influence more proximal arrest patterns and these arrests would affect later arrests. To test for this, I explore whether the relationship between early police contact and later illegal behavior is partially explained by an arrest at 10<sup>th</sup> grade. A 10<sup>th</sup> grade arrest was not a significant predictor of later illegal behavior for African American or white youth. I find that including 10<sup>th</sup> grade arrest as a predictor does not significantly diminish the impact of police contact on delinquency for African American youth. It appears that the labeling process has long term implications that do not work through more proximal measures of arrest.

## DISCUSSION

The findings highlight important distinctions in the impact of early police encounters and contacts by race. While full-sample models imply a relationship between police contacts and young adult arrest that is completely mediated by concurrent behavior, the story is different when we examine the relationship between these variables separately for African American and white youth. White youth with police contacts are no more likely to experience delinquency or arrest in young adulthood than non-contacted white youth. These findings would imply that the labeling process does not operate for white youth—or at least not in the predicted ways (see Figure 2). On the other hand, African American youth with police contacts have, a nearly, 2.5 times greater odds of engaging in delinquency in young adulthood, as labeling theory would predict. Delinquency is significantly related to young adult arrest. However, for African American youth there is also a significant and direct relationship between police contact by early adolescence and young adult arrest, net of all other factors, including concurrent criminal involvement. For African American youth, the relationship between police contacts and arrest is not completely mediated by delinquency involvement. Even after accounting for behavior, African American youth with a police contact still have a 12.6 times greater odds of being arrested in young adulthood than their African American peers who did not experience an early police contact (see Figure 1). These findings suggest that something beyond a change in youths' behavior explains the relationship between early encounters with police and young adult arrest.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

## INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

The analyses add to the discussion of police intervention in two central ways. First, the analyses highlight the importance of non-official criminal justice involvement on arrest in young adulthood. African American youth who experienced a police encounter or arrest by the time they were in early adolescence were more likely to experience criminal justice involvement when they were young adults—suggesting that the labeling process might be triggered simply through being stopped or questioned by police. This finding appears to agree with recent research that found youth who had been stopped by police were more likely to engage in delinquency than their non-stopped peers (Wiley et al. 2013).

Second, these analyses underscore the importance of race in understanding the relationship between police contacts and criminal justice involvement. Being African American and having a police contact increases young adult illegal behavior which is related to later criminal justice involvement and directly increases the chances of later arrest—even after accounting for behavior. For white youth, contact had no such impact on either delinquency or later arrest. Although the mechanisms by which the processes operate were not tested in the current model, in the next section, I draw on existing literature to help explain the current results.

### *Double Label*

One possible explanation for the finding that police encounters with youth in early adolescence and childhood increases illegal behaviors for African American youth is that being African American might make youth more susceptible to the labeling process. Labels might block access to normative pathways through schools and later employment and lead to an increase in delinquency. Individuals from disadvantaged social locations have fewer resources

to combat these labels (Bernburg and Krohn, 2003). In a study of minority youth in schools—African American and Latino/Latina youth reported that teachers were biased and youth felt labeled as “bad kids” (Rosenbloom & Way 2004). African American youth with a police encounter may experience a type of “double stigmatization” where having a police encounter enhances the stigma already associated with being African American. For white youth, the experience of being contacted might not trigger the labeling process—especially if the perception of the encounter by those surrounding the individual (e.g. teachers, administrators, etc.) is viewed as benign or erroneous. In addition, it is also possible that white youth have access to resources to combat a negative label. For African American youth a “double stigma” may reduce educational opportunities and later employment opportunities. Reduced employment opportunities leave fewer options for individuals to engage in the legal employment sector (Crutchfield, 2014) and may lead to delinquency.

It is also important to note that labeling may start in the schools and then lead to referrals or criminal justice system involvement (and not vice-versa). The presence of SROs and SEOs along with zero-tolerance policies have often meant that even minor acts of delinquency get passed to the official justice system. As Kupchik (2010) points out, youth who are referred to the justice system, even if the case is dismissed, may withdraw from school or experience other negative consequences as a result of going through the juvenile justice process. In this case the initial labeling begins at the school level and behavioral events are reported to juvenile justice, which could further amplify a pre-existing negative label.

### *A Cycle of Contact and Arrest*

Of central importance for the current paper is the direct effect between early police encounters and arrest in young adulthood for African Americans. At the time that police officers make contact, they have already made a number of assumptions about the behavior of the individual. They may believe that the youth was involved in illegal behavior or questioned the youth as part of a group. Qualitative work gives us some sense of assumptions that officers make about individuals based on what they say during an encounter and how they treat the individual. As Brunson (2007) noted, in many instances young African American men reported that police treated them as if they had already done something illegal and police just needed enough evidence to make an arrest. A youth that a cop believes is involved in illegal behavior or is a “bad kid” might be more likely to keep on receiving attention from law enforcement. A study by McAra and McVie (2005) in Edinburgh found that youths’ behavior and being friends with individuals who have had police contact explains the first contact that a youth has with police, but it doesn’t explain further contact. Rather, similar to the present findings, further contact with police, in the form of an arrest, is most strongly predicted by having had previous contact. Initial contacts disproportionately affect African American youth and these differences are not explained by behavioral differences. Therefore, African American youth would be more likely to experience an early first contact, sending them down a path of increased contacts and eventually, arrest.

### *Limitations*

The current paper is a step towards understanding the consequences of police encounters by race, but it leaves many questions about the potential mechanisms. I have provided a few possible explanations for the findings that both seem to fit with the data and align with current research. However, these explanations have not been tested in the current paper and more

research needs to be done in order to ascertain the actual mechanisms by which police encounters in adolescence lead to arrests in young adulthood for African American youth. It is important to acknowledge limitations of the current study. The data used in the present study are extremely rich—there is a great amount of information known about respondents during an important development time-point. However, the sample is small. Therefore, it is hard to parse out how other potentially important factors might contribute to the impact of police encounters on later arrests. For example, we do not have the statistical power to explore differences in the impact of police encounters by race *and* gender or race, gender, and socioeconomic status, although there is reason to believe these variables interact to form different experiences (Brunson & Miller 2006; Brunson & Weitzer 2009; Chesney-Lind 1989). For example, involvement in criminal justice and school disciplinary actions may have a different impact on later employment opportunities (Davies and Tanner 2003) and deviance amplification or reduction for young men and women (Keane, Gillis and Hagan 1989). The study also has limited information about the police encounters. Examining criminal justice involvement was not the original study's intent, therefore detailed information about the content of the police encounters, such as where they took place, others who were present during the encounter, the reason for the encounter, or what was said during the encounter were not collected. Certainly, these factors might influence others' reaction to the encounter and the way the youth interprets the encounter—both of which might help to explain overall race differences in police contacts. Due to available data, the current analyses also focus solely on differences between African American and white youth. However, we know that these processes may also be present for Latino/Latina youth (Rios 2006), Native American youth, and other racial/ethnic groups that may be susceptible to police intervention and less able to resist the labeling process. It is important that future research

continues to consider how various racial/ethnic groups experience policing and the impacts of policing

### *Implications*

African Americans and particularly African American males are at a greater risk than their white counterparts of being arrested by the time they are young adults. A recent study suggests that by the time they are 22 years old, nearly half of African American men have experienced an arrest (Brame, Bushway, Paternoster, and Turner 2014). Criminal justice involvement is particularly troublesome, since it tends to have consequences that extend well into adulthood—negatively affecting employment opportunities (Pager 2003), economic conditions both proximally through the accrual of legal financial obligations (LFOs) that increase individual debt (Beckett and Harris 2011; Harris, Evans, and Beckett 2011) and decreased earnings (Western, Kling, and Weiman 2001), and may be disruptive to life-course events, such as stable relationship formation, that have been shown to lead to criminal desistance (Laub and Sampson 2003). Therefore, policy makers and others should consider ways to decrease events that perpetuate and contribute to racial disparities in the criminal justice system and beyond. The current findings, although initial, suggest that police encounters with children and adolescents have consequences for Black youth well into young adulthood—challenging the assumption that such events are benign or even helpful in changing youth behaviors. Policies, such as the use of SROs and SEOs and other similar programs that increase contact between police and youth should be carefully considered before being implemented—particularly in communities of color.

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## TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Means and Standard Errors by Race with Two-Sample t-test with unequal variances

	African American Respondents n=117	White Respondents n=144	Difference
Per capita Income	8,254 (.860)	21,536 (1,170)	13,282 (1,452)***
Female	.53 (.046)	.49 (.042)	-.04 (-.044)
Age at last survey	20.24 (.061)	20.26 (.050)	.02 (.079)
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Police Contact	.37 (.045)	.22 (.034)	-.15 (.056)**
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Property Crime	.36 (.055)	.39 (.055)	.03 (.078)
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Violent Crime	.38 (.062)	.30 (.048)	-.09 (.078)
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Drug Use	.68 (.097)	.53 (.088)	-.15 (.130)
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Arrest	.11 (.029)	.05 (.018)	-.06 (.034)
Age 20 Illegal Behavior	.32 (.043)	.53 (.042)	.21 (.060)***
Age 20 Arrest	.15 (.033)	.06 (.020)	-.08 (.038)*

\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001 (two-tailed tests)

TABLE 2: Logistic Regression of Arrest at Age 20 for Full Sample (N=261)

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<i>Variable of Interest</i>					
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Police Contact	5.17 (2.30)***	3.99 (2.21)*	3.66 (2.15)*	2.90 (1.94)	0.82 (0.79)
<i>Demographics</i>					
Age	1.18 (0.24)	1.11 (0.28)	1.16 (0.29)	1.08 (0.30)	1.16 (0.39)
African American	1.25 (0.45)	1.29 (0.48)	1.31 (0.52)	2.21 (1.11)	0.71 (0.41)
Female	1.07 (0.31)	1.06 (0.30)	1.05 (0.31)	1.12 (0.36)	1.07 (0.39)
Log Income	0.64 (0.17)	0.66 (0.17)	0.70 (0.19)	0.68 (0.21)	0.65 (0.20)
<i>8<sup>th</sup> Grade Illegal Behavior</i>					
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Property Crime	---	0.98 (0.28)	0.91 (0.28)	0.80 (0.27)	0.84 (0.30)
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Violent Crime	---	1.26 (0.39)	1.26 (0.40)	1.17 (0.36)	1.08 (0.36)
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Drug Use	---	1.14 (0.24)	1.09 (0.23)	1.10 (0.19)	1.15 (0.24)
<i>Early Criminal Justice Involvement</i>					
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Arrest	---	---	2.32 (1.21)	2.12 (1.06)	2.39 (1.18)
<i>Concurrent Illegal Behavior</i>					
Age 20 Illegal Behaviors	---	---	---	9.82 (6.20)***	10.22 (6.48)***
<i>Interaction Term</i>					
Police Contact x African American	---	---	---	---	8.72 (9.02)*
Pseudo R2	.139	.147	.157	.266	.291

Note: Robust estimators used to account for clustering of respondents within 18 Seattle Public Schools

a. Odds ratios reported with robust standard errors in parentheses

\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001 (two-tailed tests)

TABLE 3: Logistic Regression Predicting Arrest at Age 20 by Race- Examining Delinquency as a Mediator

Predictor	African American (N=117)		White (N=144)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Variable of Interest</i>				
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Police Contact	12.50 (8.75)***	12.63 (10.19)**	0.85 (1.00)	0.74 (0.94)
<i>Demographics</i>				
Age	2.39 (0.61) **	2.13 (1.01)	0.51 (0.34)	0.61 (0.40)
Female	2.09 (1.39)	2.66 (2.26)	0.46 (0.27)	0.41 (0.25)
Log Income	0.61 (0.20)	0.54 (0.22)	0.86 (0.33)	0.87 (0.40)
<i>8<sup>th</sup> Grade Illegal Behavior</i>				
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Property Crime	1.04 (0.47)	0.96 (0.64)	0.68 (0.43)	0.49 (0.34)
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Violent Crime	1.58 (0.63)	1.14 (0.41)	1.85 (1.46)	2.24 (2.09)
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Drug Use	0.79 (0.22)	0.87 (0.33)	1.73 (0.47)*	1.70 (0.51)
<i>Early Criminal Justice Involvement</i>				
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Arrest	2.46 (2.63)	2.83 (3.40)	0.60 (0.48)	0.45 (0.40)
<i>Concurrent Illegal Behavior</i>				
Age 20 Illegal Behavior		13.74 (9.80)***		7.83 (7.37)*
Pseudo R2	.290	.433	.084	.155

Note: Robust variance estimators used to account for clustering of respondents within 18 Seattle Public

a. Odds ratios reported with robust standard errors in parentheses

Schools \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001 (two-tailed tests)

TABLE 4: Logistic Regression Predicting Mediating Variable (Age 20 Illegal Behavior) by Race

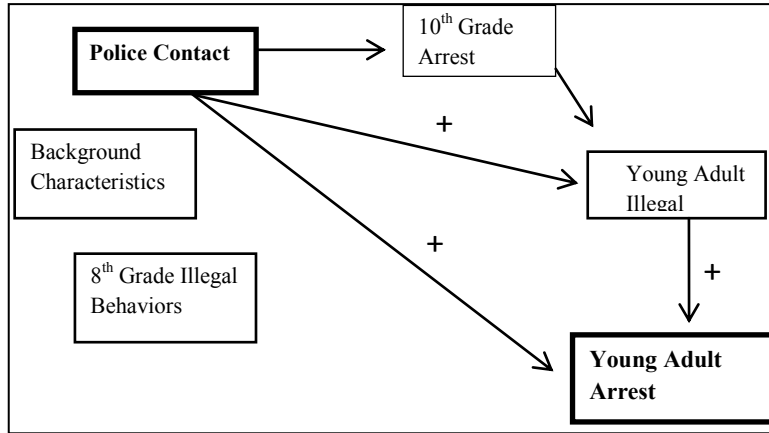
Predictor	Model 1			Model 2		
	Full Sample (N=261)	African American (N=117)	White (N=144)	Full Sample (N=261)	African American (N=117)	White (N=144)
<i>Variable of Interest</i>						
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Police Contact	2.00 (0.41)**	2.66 (0.87)**	1.78 (0.76)	1.90 (0.47)**	2.48 (0.85)**	1.74 (0.76)
<i>Demographics</i>						
Age	0.96 (0.25)	1.51 (0.57)	0.71 (0.20)	0.97 (0.26)	1.52 (0.62)	0.73 (0.21)
African American	0.35 (0.10)	---	---	0.35 (0.10)***	---	---
Female	0.74 (0.21)	0.70 (0.20)	0.81 (0.37)	0.75 (0.22)	0.70 (0.20)	0.83 (0.39)
Log Income	1.01 (0.15)	1.04 (0.26)	1.06 (0.23)	1.05 (0.16)	1.10 (0.25)	1.07 (0.23)
<i>8<sup>th</sup> Grade Illegal Behavior</i>						
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Property Crime	1.83 (0.45)*	1.27 (0.54)	2.42 (0.39)***	1.79 (0.48)*	1.19 (0.58)	2.42 (0.40)***
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Violent Crime	1.10 (0.25)	1.37 (0.44)	0.98 (0.32)	1.11 (0.24)	1.39 (0.44)	0.97 (0.30)
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Drug Use	1.08 (0.12)	0.90 (0.21)	1.28 (0.19)	1.06 (0.12)	0.89 (0.20)	1.24 (0.17)
<i>Early Criminal Justice</i>						
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Arrest				1.76 (1.30)	1.74 (1.22)	2.44 (2.73)
Pseudo R2	.101	.083	.088	.103	.0872	.091

Note: Robust variance estimators used to account for clustering of respondents within 18 Seattle Public Schools

a. Odds ratios reported with robust standard errors in parentheses

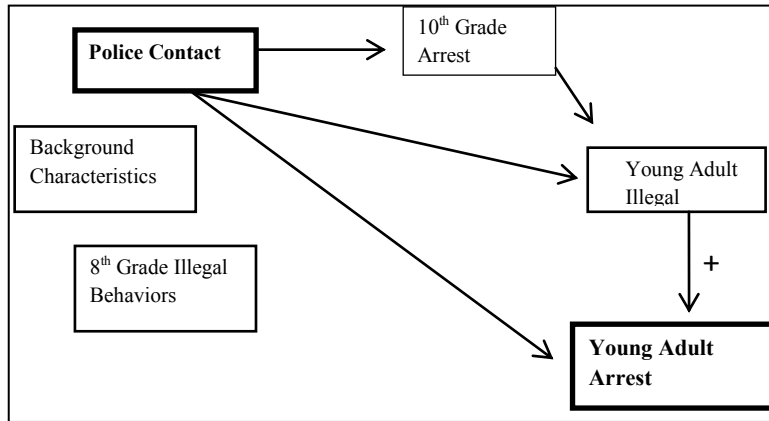
\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001 (two-tailed tests)

Figure 1: African American youth- selected pathways from police contact to arrest



Note: + indicates positive relationship with variable at p<.05.

Figure 2: White youth-selected pathways from police contact to arrest



Note: + indicates positive relationship with variable at p<.05.