"When the Cruiser Lights Come On": Using the Science of Bias & Culture to Combat Racial Disparities in Policing

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In this essay, we highlight the interplay between individuals' psychological processes and sociocultural systems in producing and maintaining racial bias. We use a conceptual tool we call the culture cycle to map these dynamics, and illustrate them with research and in-depth examples from our work reducing racial disparities in routine policing in Oakland, California. We feature the most common police encounter – the vehicle stop – and highlight evidence-based interventions we developed both to reduce the frequency of vehicle stops and mitigate racial disparities in stops. Throughout, we draw on our expertise in the social psychology of bias, culture, and inequality, as well as our experiences building research-driven partnerships with public- and private-sector leaders, to inform organizational and societal change.

It was 1999. By almost anyone's account, crime was out of control in Oakland, California. And it seemed as though Oakland police officers would stop at nothing to curb it. Innocent residents described cops slipping drugs into their pockets or purses. A woman was forced to strip naked in the street, as one officer searched her and another planted drugs in the trunk of her car. A father, who was taking his son to his first visit to a barber shop, had his nose broken and teeth knocked loose by a cop. A man who made the mistake of double parking his car was beaten. The list went on and on.[1] Officers were on a mission to "handle" anyone who looked like they were prone to make trouble. It was the beginning of a pattern that would last for years.

Civil rights attorneys John Burris and Jim Chanin were used to Oakland residents coming to their offices with stories about police misconduct and brutality. By the summer of 2000, these stories increasingly featured the same group of Oakland officers working in the same part of the city and using the same violent and illegal tactics.[2] Francisco "Choker" Vazquez was the ringleader of this group of vigilante cops who called themselves "the Riders." They worked the night shift

"ruling their beat with an iron fist."[3] They allegedly assaulted, kidnapped, planted evidence on, and filed false police reports against their victims, almost all of whom were Black.

Burris and Chanin had spent their careers fighting the mistreatment of Black people at the hands of police. The attorneys dismissed the most immediately obvious explanation that the Riders were a "few bad apples" – four racist, violent officers out of a force of more than seven hundred – who had gone rogue. They considered the Riders' misconduct to be symptomatic of a larger, systemic problem. And so, instead of suing the four officers, Burris and Chanin filed a claim against the City of Oakland that named dozens of members of the Oakland Police Department (OPD), including the chief of police, and alleged that cover-ups and poor supervision allowed such egregious misconduct to happen with impunity.[4]

In the words of former Oakland police captain Ronald Davis, the emergence of the Riders in the late 1990s was "completely predictable." Davis, who spent twenty years with the OPD and would later go on to lead Barack Obama's President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, described the Riders as "part of this culture [at the OPD]. They didn't come out of nowhere....Everything was tied to it from the leadership, to the messaging, to the strategies, to the tactics, to the lack of accountability."[5] Burris and Chanin's claim was their first step toward trying to bring about meaningful change to the department as a whole.

Within the OPD, a number of organizational levers could have been pulled to learn about rogue cops and improve the nature of police-community interactions. Stakeholders in Oakland began to pull some of those levers for change over the next two decades. The catalyst was Burris and Chanin filing a civil rights lawsuit against the City of Oakland, arguing that the OPD had engaged in a sustained pattern and practice of denying Black Oaklanders' civil rights and would need to eliminate the toxic aspects of its police culture.[6] Some of these cultural features were particular to the OPD, but others reflected more widespread issues in the profession and its troubled history with Black communities.[7] Armed with the science of racial bias and culture, we later joined their quest – not by marshaling the justice system, but by using data to spur change.

Racial disparities and bias are not static properties of institutions and organizations that can be found and extracted. Rather disparities can lead to bias, and bias can lead to disparities in a mutually reinforcing process. Racial bias is deeply ingrained in the architecture of our minds and woven throughout all facets of our society: our history and narratives; our institutions, laws, and policies; our norms and practices; our interpersonal interactions; and our psychology and actions.[8] In other words, our culture.

Culture can be broadly defined as a socially meaningful system of shared ideas, histories, policies, practices, norms, and products that structure and organize behavior.[9] Conceptualizing implicit racial bias as merely a byproduct of human

cognition overlooks the critical scientific insight that racial bias exists not only in the head, but also in the world. Implicit bias is the residue that an unequal world leaves on an individual's mind and brain, residue that has been created and built into institutional policies and practices and socialized into patterns of behavior over hundreds of years through the workings of culture.[10] After decades of a narrower cognitive approach to bias, a broader, more systemic, multilevel perspective is having a rebirth in social psychology: what we call a *sociocultural approach* to racial bias.

To help make that sociocultural approach more concrete, we developed and have long used a conceptual tool called the *culture cycle*,[11] which can map the complex, dynamic interplay between racial bias as an individual-level phenomenon and the systemic ways in which bias might operate at other levels of culture. More specifically, the culture cycle contains four levels of culture – ideas, institutions, interactions, and individuals – and each level dynamically influences and interacts with the other levels. As such, the culture cycle can help researchers and practitioners alike identify where bias lurks and how it manifests in different settings. It can also be used to diagnose which features of an institution or organization produce and maintain bias, and prescribe how those features can be altered to mitigate bias and to reduce racial disparities.[12]

For more than a decade, we have been using this tool and approach in the field.[13] We and our collaborators have worked with a variety of stakeholders in the criminal justice system to identify, unpack, and address racial disparities and the bias that can spring from them.[14] Through in-depth analyses of law enforcement policies and procedures, as well as actual police-community encounters, we have used this approach to reduce racial disparities in policing in particular. We start by focusing on the most familiar police encounter: the vehicle stop. Though the public's attention on matters of racial justice and policing often centers on the fatal use of excessive force, everyday police stops are in fact the most common point of contact by which members of the public meet – and in some ways collide with – the institution of policing.[15] The police stop nearly 18.7 million drivers each year in the United States, yet not all racial groups have the same experience during these stops.[16] Black drivers are not only more likely to be stopped than any other racial demographic, they are also more likely to be searched, handcuffed, and arrested.[17] And they experience such outcomes at an elevated rate, despite the fact that they are significantly more likely than white drivers to be stopped for discretionary reasons that have little to do with public safety (such as having incorrectly displayed license plates).[18]

Our work excavating the culture of policing began in Oakland. The OPD had been plagued by scandals for decades.[19] In fact, the four officers engaged in the Riders' scandal were highly respected in the department,

shaping the very idea of what it meant to be an effective cop in the city and contributing to an aggressive culture of policing.[20] It was a rookie officer with just nine shifts on the job who became the internal whistleblower, setting off an investigation and ultimately shutting down the operation.[21] As brand new to the OPD, he could recognize the Riders' actions as violating everything he had just learned in the police academy. The four officers were fired and charged with forty-eight felonies, but not one of them was ever convicted.

The whistleblower's claims going public and the "high-visibility arrest of the Riders was really the impetus for clueing us in on this," Burris recalled.[22] Burris and Chanin began tracking down the Riders' victims and building a case that highlighted the systemic issues at the OPD that were in need of change. In December of 2000, Burris and Chanin filed a class-action lawsuit against the City of Oakland on behalf of 119 plaintiffs, 118 of whom were Black.[23] Collectively, they spent over forty years (14,665 days) in prison for crimes they did not commit.[24] The lawsuit eventually led to a $10.9 million settlement for the plaintiffs, mandatory federal oversight of the OPD, and a series of more than four dozen reforms required of the agency.

The oversight agreement required the OPD to collect data on its routine police stops by race. Yet it took nearly ten years for the department to collect reliable data. In the spring of 2014, the plaintiffs' attorneys and the federal monitor asked Jennifer Eberhardt to serve as a subject matter expert. She was brought in to analyze the department's stop data, determine whether there were significant racial disparities, and suggest ways to improve police-community interactions. Burris and Chanin made it clear that what they really wanted to know was "What happens when the cruiser lights come on?" That is, why are so many Black people stopped by police in Oakland? How do officers approach them? And how do those interactions unfold?

After assembling an initial team, including Rebecca Hetey and Benoît Monin, a fellow social psychologist and colleague at Stanford, our first step was to learn how to navigate the broader context and to learn the roles of the people within it.

While a vehicle stop may at first appear to be an interaction between two individuals, on-duty law enforcement officers are in fact acting in their capacity as representatives of a powerful institution and the government itself.[25] As institutional actors, individual police officers are embedded in complex power dynamics and are bound up by systems and subject to policies, practices, and laws that could put them in a position to produce and reproduce racial disparities and systemic inequity, all without their needing to personally endorse racial stereotypes or inequality or even be aware of the broader impact their actions could potentially have.[26] Police officers are part of a hierarchical, highly interdependent, paramilitary organization with strong social norms and rigid expectations, if not explicit policies, that dictate nearly all aspects of their behavior.[27] Status is accorded based on years of experience and rank. Deference to those higher up the chain of command is re-

quired, and loyalty to peers within the same rank is of supreme importance.[28] The Riders' illegal tactics, for instance, were open secrets at the OPD.

Aided by the culture cycle (Figure 1),[29] our first step was to map the multilevel dynamics at play. We interviewed and spoke with a diverse set of individuals to take the pulse of police-community relations in Oakland, to be better positioned to diagnose the problems we learned about, and to see how they manifested in the local context. From the police chief to the rank and file, from the mayor to the city council, from the federal judge to the federal monitor appointed to provide oversight, from the plaintiffs' attorneys to the residents of Oakland, many different perspectives are activated when the cruiser lights come on. Interactions between police officers and community members that take place during the vehicle stop are guided, in part, by relevant laws, policies, and practices, and can lay the foundation for an entire community's relationship with police. Each encounter holds the potential to significantly increase or decrease public trust, to become the site of police violence that can set off racial unrest, or everything in between. Our focus on the vehicle stop was sadly prescient: George Floyd was killed after a Minneapolis police officer forcibly removed him from his car, igniting one of the largest public mobilizations in U.S. history as people took to the streets to protest racial injustice.[30]

Initially, many people at the OPD expressed skepticism about our presence there; some displayed outright hostility. We were outsiders – outsiders from the reputedly liberal, elitist world of academia. They were convinced that we had set out only to uncover evidence that would prove our preexisting conclusion that they were all racists who engaged in deliberate racial profiling. Instead, the officers with whom we collaborated found that we were invested in this work for the long haul. We were driven to find strategies for improving policing and police-community relations. The rank and file discovered that we were genuinely interested in how they made sense of their jobs and how they saw themselves vis-à-vis the community members they encountered daily. We sought out opportunities to learn about their lived experiences, including going on ride-alongs (riding in the passenger seat of police vehicles to observe officers on patrol during their shift) at all hours of day and night, sitting in on trainings, delivering trainings, and witnessing how officers interact with one another. As we heard repeatedly and saw firsthand, there is an intense loyalty and interdependence among officers, forged in the knowledge that whether one would live to go home at the end of their shift could depend on a fellow officer's actions.[31] We had conversations with members of the OPD about why they had chosen to become police officers, what the worst elements of the job were, and what they wished the public knew.

At the same time, we engaged the community. We held meetings and hosted focus groups to learn about the OPD's enforcement practices directly from those who were impacted. Centering the voices of Oakland community members in our work shed light on sources of tension between the police and the community. It

Figure 1
Applying the Culture Cycle to Map Racial Disparities and Bias in Law
Enforcement
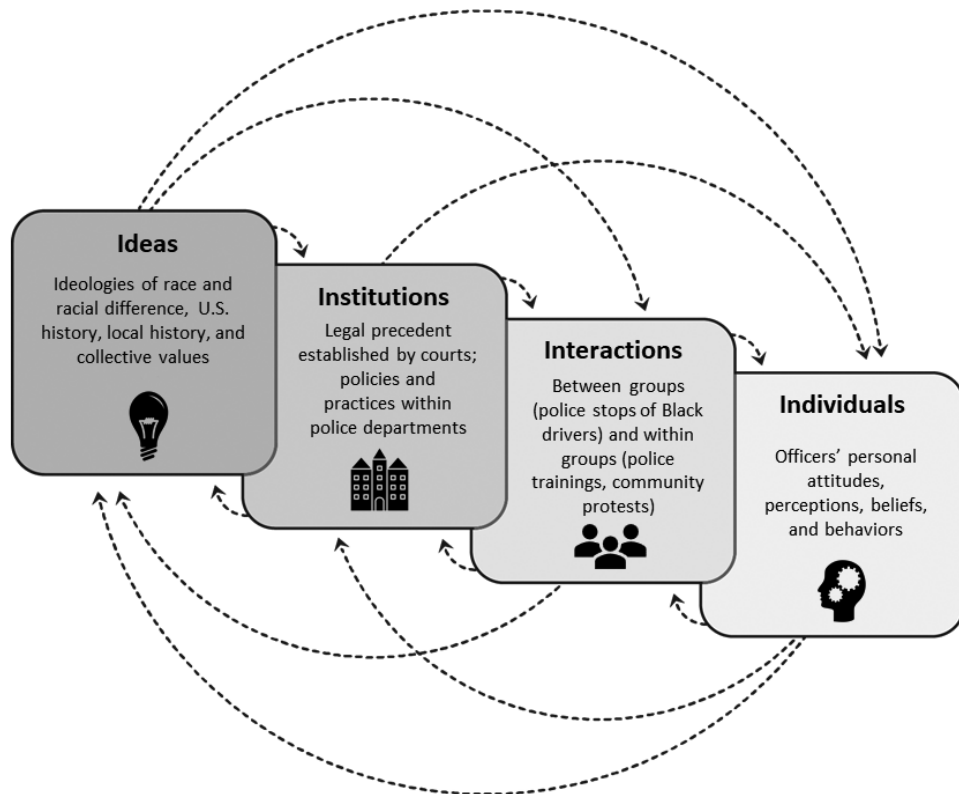
The culture cycle is a conceptual tool representing a sociocultural approach that can also be used to guide culture change. Here, we apply it to locate and address racial disparities and bias in law enforcement. All four levels of culture–ideas, institutions, interactions, and individuals–dynamically interact and influence one another (as indicated by the cycling arrows) and are equally important (all four boxes are the same size). Source: Image adapted from Alan P. Fiske, Shinobu Kitayama, Hazel Rose Markus, and Richard E. Nisbett, "The Cultural Matrix of Social Psychology," in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. Daniel T. Gilbert, Susan T. Fiske, and Gardner Lindzey (New York: McGraw Hill, 1998), 915–981; MarYam G. Hamedani, Hazel Rose Markus, Rebecca C. Hetey, and Jennifer L. Eberhardt, "We Built This Culture (So We Can Change It): Seven Principles for Intentional Culture Change," *American Psychologist* (advance online publication, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001209; Hazel Rose Markus and Alana Conner, *Clash!: How to Thrive in a Multicultural World* (New York: Plume, 2014); and Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, "Cultures and Selves: A Cycle of Mutual Constitution," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 5 (4) (2010): 420–430.

was during these meetings that we heard about the central role that respect plays in police stops.[32] And as a result, we focused on the issue of respect in our own research. Black men, in particular, described their concerns about being stopped and assumed to be criminal. They spoke not only about the lack of respect they received during those stops, but also described being handcuffed for minor infractions like driving with expired registration tags – as officers fished for a reason to arrest them.

Building relationships with community members also came with challenges. Some people felt the problems were intractable and the department too broken to be salvaged. We heard stories about the physical and emotional scars left by the OPD's often brutal history. We read about the political pressure in Oakland in the late 1990s to hire more police and adopt aggressive crime fighting tactics as part of the mayor's "campaign against crime and grime," and how this climate helped give rise to the Riders.[33]

Appreciating the role of history is integral to this work. We observed current officers watch a documentary about the OPD from 1974 that aired on a local Bay Area television station at the time.[34] The narrator explained: "During the fifties, Oakland became a stagnant, seething ghetto of impoverished Blacks and Chicanos surrounded by the white affluence of the Oakland Hills.… To contain the misery and violence of the ghetto, Oakland's all-white police department earned a reputation for head-knocking brutality that has left a well-remembered legacy of bitterness in the minds and hearts of many who lived in that time and place." We saw the expressions on the current officers' faces, as they wrestled with the evidence right before their eyes that history can keep repeating itself, and asked what that meant for them and how it affected the ways residents still view them. As many have noted, the very origins of policing as an institution in the United States can be traced back to slave patrols – and that history has been woven into the fabric of policing, whether the officers who wear the uniform today realize it or not.[35]

In the next phase of our work, we conducted a statistical analysis of twenty-eight thousand pedestrian and vehicle stops made by the OPD between 2013 and 2014 and found a consistent pattern of racial disparities across the entire course of the stop, from an officer's initial decision to stop a person to subsequent decisions to search, handcuff, and arrest that person.[36] The raw disparities were striking: roughly 60 percent of the stops officers made in Oakland were of Black people, although Black residents made up only 28 percent of Oakland's population at that time. Black people were disproportionately stopped even when we statistically accounted for two dozen factors, including the crime rate and the racial demographics of residents in the areas where the stops occurred. Further, once stopped, Black people were significantly more likely to be handcuffed, searched, and arrested – echoing a pattern of results found in cities across the country.[37] In fact, in Oakland we found that one in four Black men were handcuffed during the course of routine

stops (compared to only one in fifteen white men) – a statistic in complete alignment with what we heard directly from Black men themselves.

But simply uncovering the existence of racial disparities is not the same thing as understanding *where*, *why*, and *how* those disparities originated. What else is needed? Our approach as social psychologists was to rely on core principles that we know can disrupt and mitigate bias, once we had located both its situational triggers and the features of the sociocultural environment that perpetuate and sustain it.[38] We understood that change at the OPD, and for the policing industry more broadly, would have to be brought about purposefully and deliberately and it would require a supportive climate. We had to build relationships with those in power within the organization to put interventions in place that could alter the features of the OPD's culture that contribute to bias. Aided by the culture cycle, we probed for the sources of racial disparities across all levels of culture.

Although we found evidence for significant racial disparities at every point in the course of stops, many OPD officers pushed back. They believed our stop-data analysis to be incomplete, that "numbers can't tell the full story." They offered two common refrains: 1) "We don't racially profile, we *criminally* profile"; and 2) "If we don't make as many stops as we do now, crime will go up." We listened as one officer after another described how they often could not even see the race of the driver through the car window, making it virtually "impossible" to stop someone simply because they are Black. Yet we knew that the stop-data form they completed during stops included the question, "Could you determine the race/ethnicity of the individual(s) prior to the stop?" Among stops made in which the officer had reported not knowing the race of the driver prior to the stop, we found 48 percent of those stopped were Black. In contrast, among stops made in which the officer reported knowing the race of the driver, 62 percent of those stopped were Black.[39] In other cities, researchers have found that Black drivers are less likely to be stopped after sunset, when presumably officers are less able to see the race of the driver.[40] Nevertheless, officers insisted that the "vast majority" of the stops that the OPD made were, in fact, based on previous intelligence. Here, intelligence refers to information, such as suspect descriptions provided by crime victims or specific patterns of gang activity or illegal drug dealing, as opposed to relying on intuition. In other words: could the officer tie that particular person to a specific crime prior to the stop? We were told that since many of the drivers the OPD stopped were already on their radar for some reason, the stops served as a deterrent. And, they said, if the OPD did not make as many of these stops, crime would increase, and the community would not be happy.

Were officers simply using a straightforward crime reduction strategy? Or was their approach potentially laden with bias? When officers on patrol ask themselves, "Who should I pull over?" might cultural as-

sociations between Blackness and crime supply an answer? Bias can be embedded in our ideologies and our history, which in turn shape institutional and organizational policies and practices, which then influence interpersonal interactions, as well as individuals' attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors.[41] An individual's behaviors can then either reinforce or disrupt those biases. Bias can also be situationally triggered.[42] In the realm of policing, we can see these larger cultural forces at play, specifically ideas and associations that link race and crime in the mind, institutional practices that prompt officers to rely on implicit stereotypes when judging suspicion and potential criminality, and interactions police have with each other and with the community that reify racial stereotypes.[43] Going deeper into the mechanics of the vehicle stop can help illustrate the situational nature of bias, as well as reveal ways to alter the situation to curb bias.

The Black-crime association can pervade all levels of law enforcement culture, just as it can pervade mainstream U.S. culture more generally.[44] This association has been passed down through history and persists today, promoted, for example, through social media posts by police departments that overrepresent Black suspects relative to local arrest rates.[45] Though not necessarily intentional, these posts nonetheless can amount to the government reinforcing racial associations between Blackness and crime. Implicit associations linking Blackness with crime, violence, and animals have been shown to be strong enough to alter individuals' basic perceptions in ways that further reinforce these stereotypes and serve to rationalize the harsh treatment of Black people.[46]

Experiments, for instance, have demonstrated that, in a mutually reinforcing way, exposure to Black people prompts thoughts of crime, and the concept of crime draws attention to Black people.[47] In one experiment, Eberhardt and colleagues subliminally primed police officers with the concept of crime by exposing them to words like "arrest" and "shoot" on a computer screen for mere fractions of a second, so fast that they could not say what they had seen. After being primed, officers became significantly more likely to attend to pictures of Black faces. When officers were asked directly, "Who looks criminal?" they chose more Black faces than white faces, and the more stereotypically Black the face, the more likely officers were to report that the face looked criminal. If the mere concept of crime causes police officers to be more vigilant to Black faces, what are the ramifications of being in a patrol car for ten- to twelve-hour shifts looking for criminals while hearing "male Black" continuously broadcast on the radio as fellow officers describe who has drawn their suspicion?[48]

These studies provide empirical evidence that pervasive stereotypes and associations linking race and crime at the ideas level of culture affect people's perceptions and actions at the individuals level; in policing, these biases become formalized and can have life and death consequences at the levels of institutions and interactions. Most apparent is the way stereotypes are acted out through the inter-

actions a police officer has with community members and the ways in which the officer may – intentionally or not, subtly or not – treat the Black and white civilians they encounter differently.

Officers also interact with each other. They watch their fellow officers disproportionately pull over Black people who are not engaged in any serious crime. They watch supervisors fail to address this behavior as problematic, or even praise officers who engage in it as "productive" and "proactive." Norms around what "we" (for example, police officers in this department) do and are supposed to do in a given situation powerfully shape behavior.[49] In the world of policing, norms influence routine enforcement practices by signaling to institutional actors what their own behavior could and should look like, separate from particular officers' individual motives and intentions. Moreover, research has shown that people go beyond conforming to norms to also making prescriptive leaps, justifying what we do as what we *should* do.[50] The result is that the underlying Black-crime association is reinforced.

Official policy, practice, and trainings encourage individual police officers to make stops simply to check people out and see who might be "up to no good," which also implicitly prompts officers to rely on stereotypes about race and crime.[51] In *Whren v. United States* (1996), the U.S. Supreme Court held that police officers can use traffic violations as a pretext to make a stop and investigate an unrelated crime for which they have little or no evidence.[52] The court ruled that, under the Fourth Amendment, once a police officer has probable cause or reasonable suspicion that a driver has committed a traffic violation, they can legally stop and detain the driver, regardless of what the officer's actual motive or reason for the stop may be. As such, the *Whren* decision effectively enshrined law enforcement's ability to act on their hunches about who is "up to no good."[53] Because violations can be minor and the underlying traffic law not normally enforced (for instance, driving less than five miles an hour over the speed limit), the majority of drivers likely commit one or more traffic infractions on a given day, meaning that law enforcement has broad discretion to detain people.[54] As such, so-called pretextual stops have been called "America's most egregious police practice" and some jurisdictions, including the State of Virginia in 2020, have moved to ban or limit their use.[55]

Race can shape the practice of routine police stops and routine police stops can shape ideas about race.[56] Baked into law enforcement exerting a larger footprint with Black communities, while engaging in underenforcement with white communities, are assumptions about who is more likely to have committed some offense and therefore "deserves" to be treated punitively. At play, too, are assumptions about who is "worthy" of being treated with compassion and given the benefit of the doubt. Americans have been shown to associate the concepts of payback and retribution with Black people, and the concepts of mercy and leniency with

white people.[57] More generally, people are willing to go the extra mile to help members of their in-groups, while simultaneously being more likely to harm members of out-groups.[58]

Community members who witness law enforcement's disparate interactions with the public likely leave with very different lessons depending on their own race and prior experiences with police. Every time a passerby observes a Black man being stopped by police and handcuffed on the side of the road, even when he has not committed a serious offense, another opportunity is presented for the Black-crime association to be strengthened. Indeed, exposure to such stark racial disparities in the criminal justice system has been shown to cause white people to become more supportive of harsh and punitive criminal justice policies that contribute to those disparities in the first place, further fueling the vicious cycle.[59] White community members might similarly become more likely to call the police on Black people for noncriminal activities (such as walking while Black), bringing police and members of marginalized communities into contact, and potentially putting them on a collision course. This occurs without any institutional actor from the justice system needing to initiate the encounter. Calling the police on Black people for mundane, noncriminal activities and/or making ill-informed claims of misconduct based on one's own biases has been termed "bias by proxy."[60] When police act on such calls, they risk being co-opted as an apparatus of other people's racial bias and being cast in the role of perpetuating the fear of Black people.

Black people not only report being disproportionately stopped by police, they witness each other having these interactions.[61] Racial disparities in such stops create additional interactions with a government institution that they feel regards Black people with suspicion and calls into question their status as equal citizens, free to move about without government intrusion and surveillance.[62] The vehicle stop, therefore, can strengthen the countervailing association that police are unfair and racist, which further affects how Black people will feel and interpret the actions of police the next time the cruiser lights come on.

Because of the ramifications of routine enforcement, we first worked to identify evidence-based strategies to, as our colleague Benoît Monin would say, "reduce the footprint of policing" in Oakland. With Monin playing a leading role, our research team worked with a task force of changemakers assembled by a deputy chief to reduce the number of stops of Black drivers who were not committing any serious crimes. We were prepared for officers to push back, to tell us that the "vast majority" of their stops were based on prior knowledge, or intelligence. For the most part, they would say, they stop Black drivers they can link to criminal activity. And because Black people are disproportionately linked to criminal activity, they are disproportionately stopped. When we asked what percent-

age constituted a "vast majority" of stops based on prior intelligence, we heard responses like 85 percent, 90 percent, even 99 percent. Our next question was what evidence supported their claim. The answer: None. "We don't track which specific stops are intelligence-led."

As an intervention strategy, we decided to leverage the decision-making process and officers' own understandings of *why* they were making these stops. The method we co-constructed with the OPD was simple on its face. Yet, while practical and easy to implement, it was grounded in the principles of social psychology. To decrease the likelihood that an officer's decision-making was being driven by their association between Blackness and crime, we would require all officers to ask themselves a specific question before each and every stop they considered making: *Is this stop intelligence-led?* We added this question to the stop-data form officers are required to fill out whenever they make a stop. If they indicated that the stop was intelligence-led, they had to list the specific source of that prior knowledge. This intervention would allow us to collect data on how often OPD officers were making stops based on prior intelligence, and empirically test whether objective reality matched officers' subjective reality.

Requiring officers to indicate whether each stop was intelligence-led is an intervention designed to mitigate specific situational triggers of bias and, in the process, alter the way officers make the decision to pull someone over. Responding quickly, relying on subjective standards, following cultural norms that do not challenge bias, a lack of accountability, and a lack of training have all been shown to exacerbate bias.[63] First, the intelligence-led question forced individual institutional actors to slow down in the moment and consider their reasons for making the contact. Second, directing their attention to previously collected intelligence encouraged officers to use more objective information rather than relying on their hunches and intuition about which drivers might be "up to no good," which we know can be tainted by racial bias. Third, by collecting and tracking the data and asking officers to document the specific source of intelligence, the question signaled that they were being monitored and could be held accountable for the nature of their stops. Fourth, OPD officers were trained on how to complete the form and what it meant for a stop to indeed be intelligence-led. What at first felt obvious to officers in fact necessitated discussion and guidelines to arrive at a consensus definition, which provided more clarity and explicit direction from supervisors. Finally, OPD leadership began to prioritize intelligence-led stops. The question on the form served as a salient, constant reminder. A seemingly small change helped shift broader norms in the department for what good policing looks like.

In the year before adding the intelligence-led question to the form, roughly thirty-two thousand people were stopped across the city; in the year after adding this question, the number dropped to less than twenty thousand. Stops of Black drivers in particular fell by 43 percent.[64] Again, a common refrain within

this context (that can block change) is that if police are not proactive and do not make as many stops, crime will increase. Yet as OPD officers made fewer stops, the crime rate in Oakland continued to decline. Reducing the number of stops, then, can both lessen the negative impact on people's lives and maintain public safety. These results pushed officers to rethink what they had always taken to be true and to make a change that was ultimately in their own best interests and also helped the agency prioritize its limited resources.[65]

What of officers' claim that the "vast majority" of stops were based on intelligence? Deciding on a standard definition of an intelligence-led stop and tracking the data showed that the percentage was not somewhere between 85 percent and 99 percent, as officers had maintained, but closer to 20 percent. This gap between what officers believed was happening and what was actually happening sparked another change in the agency. Officers experienced (perhaps for the first time) the benefit of collecting data. This one question – is this stop intelligence-led? – and the ensuing data collection provoked conversations. It pushed both police executives and the rank and file to be more reflective. It led them to a deeper understanding of issues of race and policing. As another sign of broader culture change at the agency, the OPD now routinely questions how race could influence their decision-making and seeks out data to inform the development of policy and practice, one of fifty recommendations we made to the OPD and other agencies to mitigate racial disparities and improve police-community relations.[66]

In addition to working to reduce the likelihood that Oaklanders would be stopped, we also intervened so stops that did occur would proceed more respectfully. We leveraged officers' body-worn camera footage to better understand the nature of police-community interactions during vehicle stops and how to change those interactions for the better. Working closely with Dan Jurafsky's computational linguistics lab at Stanford, we developed an entirely new approach to examining and quantifying how vehicle stops unfold, unlocking the power of police body-worn cameras as a tool for change.[67]

Harnessing the potential of this technology in Oakland first required shifting the institutional norms and expectations around what body-worn camera footage is and what its purpose *could be*. Within many law enforcement agencies, the hundreds or thousands of hours of footage recorded daily by officers' body-worn cameras is thought of as evidence. This evidence is intended to shed light on a specific case should an investigation arise. Within the broader context of the criminal justice system, evidence tends to be used to exonerate or incriminate, and so many in law enforcement fear that routine collection of evidence about an agency's own practices could likewise be used to indict them. We worked to persuade the OPD executives that to make the most of the footage they were already collecting, it should be understood not as evidence, but as data. Data are neither "good" nor "bad," but can provide an inventory of the impact of an agency's practices

carried out in the aggregate by hundreds of officers per day, as opposed to solely being used to investigate allegations of misconduct against a particular officer. Body-worn camera footage can be leveraged to document and understand common patterns of engagement between the police and the public. Moreover, applying computational tools to the footage enables researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to, for the first time, measure and quantify police encounters to diagnose the health of police-community relations. Body-camera footage marries the strengths of big data with the dynamics of day-to-day interactions. These tools can be scaled to mine insights from any number of interactions while remaining sensitive enough to capture their subtle interpersonal qualities.

We worked as part of an interdisciplinary research team to develop novel computational tools to analyze body-camera footage and gain a better understanding of the mechanics and tenor of police-community interactions. In an initial study, we analyzed nearly one thousand vehicle stops in Oakland and found that officers consistently spoke less respectfully to Black drivers than to white drivers.[68] These racial disparities in police language remained even after controlling for the location of the stop, the outcome of the stop, the severity of the offense, and the race of the officer. We found, for example, that officers were more likely to offer reassurance ("No problem") to white drivers than to Black drivers and express concern for their well-being and safety ("Drive safe"). We found differences in the language officers used throughout the stop, even during the first seconds of the interaction, before the driver had much of a chance to speak. We also found disparities in officers' tone of voice, such that officers spoke in a more positive tone to white drivers than to Black drivers.[69] In fact, we found that when community members listened to clips from the body-camera footage of officers speaking in a more negative tone of voice, as officers are more likely to do with Black drivers, they rated having less institutional trust in the entire police department from which those clips originated and had a more negative view of police more generally.[70]

We also used our computational linguistics tools to map the conversational sequence and key events that take place as routine stops unfold over time, breaking them down and identifying particular stages.[71] The stages of a vehicle stop include : offering a greeting ("Hello, I'm Officer…"), providing a reason for the stop ("The reason I stopped you…") , asking for documents ("You have your driver's license, registration, and insurance?), asking for details ("Where do you live?"), a sanction ("The reason I'm citing you is for failure to yield to oncoming traffic"), and a closing ("All right. Drive safe"). This level of granularity enables researchers and police executives alike to explore how race may play a role at each turn of the interaction, and whether officers follow institutional norms and comply with relevant policies. For example, do officers consistently and clearly explain the reason they pulled the driver over? More than a style of communication, stating the reason for a stop amounts to providing a legal justification for the stop, which is

required by the Fourth Amendment.[72] The use of body-camera footage can thus aid efforts to ensure that police-community interactions are carried out in a constitutional and procedurally just manner.[73]

In addition to feeling like they are treated with respect and in a fair and transparent manner, community members also want assurance that they will be safe in interactions with police. Amid calls for police to de-escalate encounters with people from Black communities in particular, we are working to shed light on when and how routine interactions escalate. Using a different dataset, we are finding evidence of police escalation in the routine vehicle stops of Black male drivers. Vehicle stops that ultimately result in escalation differ in their conversational structure from the very beginning. In fact, the first forty-five words an officer utters – roughly the first twenty-seven seconds of a stop – predict whether that stop will end with the officer handcuffing, searching, or arresting the driver.[74] In these escalated stops, officers are more likely to issue commands as their opening words ("Keep your hands on the wheel"), and are less likely to tell drivers the reason they are being stopped ("The reason I stopped you is because your headlight is out"). When we asked Black men to listen to these escalated encounters in an online study, the clips evoked anxiety, suspicion, and worry that the officer would use force.[75]

After our initial paper was published and the findings about racial disparities in officers' language came out, Oakland community members told us that the research put numbers and data to their experiences. Feeling emboldened, they called on the department to do more to close the respect gap and address racial disparities. How did the OPD respond? We knew the respect gap in officers' language was certainly not in alignment with what those officers had been taught in the procedural-justice training program the entire department had gone through just a few years earlier. Training officers on procedural justice has been a popular policing tactic in recent years. It emphasizes fair treatment and transparent practices on the part of the officer when interacting with community members, regardless of the outcome of the encounter.[76] As part of the federal monitorship and in response to our stop-data report recommendations, the OPD was already planning to deploy a custom procedural-justice training as a follow-up to the standard training. Specifically, OPD leadership wanted to design their own agency-wide program to highlight concrete steps officers should take to put the principles of procedural justice into action in their local context.

Due to both the community's reaction and officers' own questions about our research on body-worn camera footage, OPD leadership came to us for help. We agreed to work with the agency's trainers to codevelop a training module on using respectful language during vehicle stops. This module provided the opportunity for sworn and civilian staff to openly discuss the research findings about the respect gap in language. The module also provided concrete, actionable, evidence-

based steps officers could take during vehicle stop interactions to improve the treatment of community members and decrease racial disparities.

When we codeveloped this module with the OPD, we were excited by the potential to demonstrate that body-worn camera footage could be used as a training tool, namely to give officers feedback on their behavior in the aggregate and to provide recommendations for how to improve based on their own agency's data. At the same time, however, we realized many of the officers would be resistant to this information for a variety of reasons. Just as after the release of our stop-data report, some officers felt attacked and wanted to discuss what they saw as the burning question on everyone's mind: "Do these findings mean that we are all racist?" Other officers felt like the data unfairly pointed the finger at them, blaming them for the agency's practices when they, unlike the command staff, have relatively little power within the organization. The findings gave rise to a host of identity-based threats, and so we set out to help the agency respond to them. Specifically, we leveraged the module to bolster internal procedural justice, which is fair treatment and transparent processes not just in police interactions with the external public but also internally, regarding policies and procedures within the organization.[77] We codesigned the module while keeping in mind several key social psychological strategies shown to mitigate bias and reduce threat, foster internal procedural justice, and support behavior changes.[78]

First, the module was delivered by OPD trainers who were well-liked and respected "insiders" and took place at the end of the training, once cohesion, comfort, and trust had been built among the group. This enabled an open and frank discussion about the research findings and their implications. Second, a main component of the module was a video Q&A between Eberhardt (the lead researcher) and then Deputy Chief LeRonne Armstrong (a high-ranking leader who was also well-liked and respected within the OPD) who asked hard questions on behalf of the officers, giving them "voice," which is a key tenet of procedural justice. Third, throughout the module, five concrete, actionable ways that officers could convey respect through their language (for example, by expressing concern for the driver's safety: "Take care tonight, sir") were highlighted. And finally, a brief role-play dialogue that the trainers performed grounded the information in a familiar and relevant scenario.

We did not stop there. We developed a method to compare the body-worn camera footage of police-community interactions before and after the training, to empirically examine training effectiveness. This was a bold move – as most police trainings designed to improve police-community relations are rarely evaluated. And if a training is evaluated at all, it tends to be by simply asking officers, "Did you like the training?"

Here, we focused on officers' use of communication techniques to convey respect to drivers. Compared to stops that occurred prior to the training, post-training

we found that officers employed more of these techniques. In particular, officers were more likely to express concern for drivers' safety, offer reassurance, and provide explicit reasons for why they made the stop.[79] More generally, examining footage pre- and post-training can help us determine whether and how the substance of what is taught in a training translates to specific behaviors that actually improve police-community interactions. These objective metrics can help a variety of stakeholders hold police departments accountable and improve upon the data used to do so.

For all the strides that have been made in Oakland, not all of the problems are solved. More than twenty years later, the OPD remains under federal oversight. There are limits to external methods of reforming policing. In fact, such methods can contribute to dichotomous evaluations of police departments as either broken or fixed.[80] But by taking a sociocultural approach to locating and combating racial bias, the focus shifts from whether a department, industry, or institution has managed to "fix" itself to whether they understand the ways the culture can contribute to where, how, and why racial disparities and bias manifest and spread.

By bringing together the psychological science of racial bias and culture and enacting a sociocultural approach for the purpose of reducing bias and racial disparities, we have provided an example of change that can be applied in the context of research-driven partnerships more broadly. Elsewhere, we have called this approach *intentional culture change*, and describe how to leverage the science of culture, bias, and inequality for behavioral, organizational, and societal change.[81] We provide a useful and actionable framework of seven core principles that can be applied to the issues of racial disparities in policing discussed here and to tackling social disparities across other domains.

Our research-driven collaboration with the OPD certainly looks different than what we as academics were originally trained to do. It has been difficult and time-consuming. It requires being out in the field, getting close to the social problems of the day, putting in the effort to learn practitioners' and stakeholders' worlds, cultivating meaningful relationships, identifying problems and being willing to work alongside key changemakers to fix them, all while navigating numerous cultural clashes and divides. Although it is certainly hard, we believe that science has a role to play, if not an obligation, to help society understand and reduce the racial disparities that can dramatically shape people's life outcomes.

Together, with stakeholders both within and outside the OPD, we constructed problem-focused research and explored change strategies across various levels of the organization's culture. This collaboration helped ensure that the strategies we developed were feasible, practical, and tailored to the context, and therefore had a greater likelihood of being implemented with fidelity and of being effective. This

type of work involves being humble and curious, listening more than talking, and not being discouraged by the messiness and complexity of the real world. By "getting proximate,"[82] researchers can learn more about context, establish a presence in the organization – hearing from those embedded within and outside it – and learn more about its intricacies, needs, challenges, and unique levers for change that might be available, or that could be created anew.

In the summer of 2021, twenty-one years after they filed the class-action lawsuit against the City of Oakland, civil rights attorneys John Burris and Jim Chanin wrote in a brief filed with the federal court: "The Oakland Police Department has moved from being one of the worst police departments in the San Francisco Bay Area to being one of the best police departments in comparable cities in the country."[83] Indeed, in our most recent conversations with Burris and Chanin, they describe a changed department. No longer are there illegal detentions of Oakland's Black residents. No longer are officers arresting people for "resisting arrest" without any other underlying offenses, which, according to Burris, "was pretty common back in the day." He says that the cases that "have a dramatic impact on people's lives are not happening at the same high level as before."

So much has changed. Most notably, neither Burris nor Chanin have the "beat up" cases anymore. Years ago, it was common for Black Oakland residents to show up at their law offices bruised and battered, claiming they had been assaulted by Oakland police officers, that they had been publicly humiliated, their lives undone. "It's been almost twenty years since these clients have come in," Burris says, "and some of these people were beaten as badly as Rodney King – they had these cases that generated outrage." Without a doubt, both Burris and Chanin believe that the negotiated settlement agreement they entered into with the City of Oakland on behalf of people who suffered such horrific harms at the hands of Oakland police officers had a "dramatic impact on the type of brutality officers engage in." Those brutality cases have all but disappeared. "The culture has changed there [at the OPD]," says Chanin. The number of stops of innocent Black residents has dropped dramatically, and when these residents are stopped, they are treated with more dignity and respect. It was a collective effort, for which we can all feel proud.

But change can be fragile. This is what worries Burris and Chanin most. It worries us too. There is no doubt that the OPD made dramatic changes – when crime was declining. But now crime is rising again. From 2022 to 2023, for example, motor vehicle theft alone increased by 36 percent.[84] Oakland's violent crime rates are significantly higher than other cities in California, and nearly two and a half times as high as in San Francisco, just a short ride across the Bay Bridge.[85] It is difficult to turn on the local news without hearing about the troubles in Oakland. And the numbers are no more comforting when comparing 2022 with a five-year average: motor vehicle theft is up by 21 percent, homicide is up by 23 percent, carjacking up by 53 percent, commercial burglary up by 56 percent.[86] The conditions are moving closer to

those that coincided with the formation of the Riders. In this moment of crisis, Oakland residents are desperately seeking solutions. Something has to be done.

Burris and Chanin have been on the job for more than twenty years now – protecting Oakland residents from those who have been sworn to protect them. But their stint is drawing to a close. What will happen when they leave? What will happen when the federal monitor leaves – when a federal judge is no longer presiding over the case? What will happen when *we* leave? Both Burris and Chanin are "hopeful, but cautious." Such is the work of change.

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There are a few notes that we would like to provide to accompany the culture cycle. First, cultures are always dynamic systems. Second, the culture cycle includes and incorporates organizational and institutional structures and dynamics. The concepts of "culture" (such as collective beliefs, practices, and products) and "structure" (such as societal institutions and organizations) are integrated rather than separated. Third, culture cycles are embedded in broader historical, ecological, and evolutionary systems that interact with and exert influence on a given culture, both in the past and present. Fourth, different cultures can also interact with and influence one another, sometimes in expected and sometimes in unexpected ways. And fifth, while there are various other models that represent culture as a multilevel system that have various aims and distinctions, they often share the goal of delineating the key features of culture in a simplified, usable form.

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