

Enforcing Race: A Neighborhood-Level Explanation of Black–White Differences in Drug Arrests

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Abstract

This research investigates the source of Black–White differences in drug arrests by conducting a neighborhood-level test of the differential police scrutiny and racially discriminatory policing hypotheses. The study examines drug arrests made across 78 neighborhoods in St. Louis between 2009 and 2013. Results from the negative binomial regression analyses lend the greatest support to the racially discriminatory policing perspective. Neighborhood racial composition significantly shapes drug law enforcement practices, net of neighborhood-level violent and property crime rates, drug-related calls for service by citizens, and socioeconomic disadvantage. Specifically, findings suggest that officers engage in “out-of-place” racial profiling in drug law enforcement, as they tend to target suspects whose race is incongruent with the neighborhood racial context. Implications of the study findings are discussed.

Keywords

racial disparities, policing, drug arrests, neighborhoods, racial inequality

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Introduction

Racial inequity in the criminal justice system is one of the most pervasive social problems in the United States. Although Whites comprise most of the nation's arrestees, it is well known that Blacks have long been overrepresented in the criminal justice system relative to their small makeup of 13% of the U.S. resident population (Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, & Drewery, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Researchers have been only partly successful in explaining racial differences in criminal justice sanctioning. For example, evidence suggests that Blacks' overrepresentation in arrests and incarceration for violent crimes is largely attributable to their disproportionate involvement in violent offending (Elliott & Ageton, 1980; Huizinga, Loeber, & Thornberry, 1994; Katz, 1988; Lauritsen, 2010; Sampson & Lauritsen, 1997). Although scholars can account for Blacks' high arrest and incarceration rates for violent offenses, the source of Blacks' disparate arrests for nonviolent crimes—the majority of the nation's crimes—remains less understood. This is particularly the case for drug arrests, which contain relatively large Black–White race differences that have persisted for decades (Blumstein, 1982; Langan, 1985; Tonry & Melewski, 2008), even long after the peak of the War on Drugs in the late 1980s. The stark race difference in punishment for drug crimes is incongruent with evidence on race and drug offending. Numerous self-report, social, and public health data sources reveal that Blacks are no more likely than Whites to use or sell drugs (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2011; Mitchell, 2009; Mitchell & Caudy, 2015; Mitchell & Lynch, 2011; Ramchand, Pacula, & Iguchi, 2006; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 1998; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999, 2006; Welty et al., 2016), and in some cases, the greater involvement is for Whites (Jones, Logan, Gladden, & Bohm, 2015). This is especially true in recent years during the opioid and heroin epidemic that overwhelmingly involves White drug users. Since the race difference in drug arrests cannot be explained by drug offending and appears to be unwarranted, the question remains: What factors can explain why police arrest Blacks and Whites for drug crimes at disparate rates? The goal of the current study is to empirically answer this important, unresolved inquiry using neighborhoods as the units of analysis and examining the contextual factors that shape officers' arrest practices.

Theoretical Background

Scholars have attributed the source of the racial difference in drug arrests to two possible factors: differential police scrutiny and racially discriminatory policing.

Differential Police Scrutiny

The differential police scrutiny perspective argues that Blacks' greater risk for drug arrests is a function of the ecological nature of police activity coupled with neighborhood differences in the nature of drug offending (Mitchell & Lynch, 2011). Also known as the "deployment hypothesis," the differential scrutiny explanation contends that high-crime, disadvantaged neighborhoods where Blacks are more likely to live are subject to intense police scrutiny. This is due to the tendency of police agencies to concentrate officers and directed patrol efforts in areas with high violent crime rates, high levels of economic disadvantage, and large volumes of citizen complaints (Engel, Smith, & Cullen, 2012; Warren, Tomaskovic-Devey, Smith, Zingraff, & Mason, 2006). Crimes reported to the police and citizen calls for service have historically shaped workload formulas, such as determining the size of police beats and the location of patrols (Coe & Wiesel, 2001; Cordner, 1979; O. W. Wilson, 1941). To reduce crime and maximize resources, agencies often deploy enforcement activities to areas signaling the most need (Leonard, 1982; Skogan & Frydl, 2004; Weisburd, Mastrofski, McNally, Greenspan, & Willis, 2003; Willis, Mastrofski, & Weisburd, 2004; O. W. Wilson, 1963). As a consequence, officers situated in such contexts are likely to engage in rigorous proactive and reactive policing practices that make Blacks more susceptible to police detection.

Further increasing police scrutiny is the potential visible and violent nature of drug involvement in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Researchers suggest that in such areas, drug use and drug dealing are more likely to occur publicly (e.g., street corners) and semi-publicly (e.g., drug houses) locations that are visible to police rather than in private places where White drug offenders are more likely to use and deal drugs (Blumstein, 1993; Coker, 2003; Dunlap, Johnson, & Manwar, 1997; Goode, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2008; Ramchand et al., 2006; Tonry, 1995). In addition, drug transactions that occur publicly in disadvantaged areas tend to be characterized by frequent, small transactions between strangers whereas drug transactions in private spaces tend to involve the exchange of large quantities of drugs among acquaintances (Dunlap et al., 1997; Ramchand et al., 2006). Taken together, the differential police scrutiny perspective points to the heavy police presence in high-crime neighborhoods and the possible public and violent nature of drug offending in such areas as the reasons Blacks are overrepresented and Whites are underrepresented as drug arrestees.

Racially Discriminatory Policing

In contrast to the seemingly race-neutral policing strategies at the center of the differential scrutiny hypothesis, racially discriminatory policing

theory contends that Blacks' overrepresentation in drug arrests reflects racial discrimination. This perspective argues that policy makers, police agencies, and police officers hold racial attitudes that shape their construction of policies, perceptions of crime problems, and responses to crime in a way that disproportionately disadvantages people of color (Alexander, 2010; Beckett, Nyrop, & Pfingst, 2006; Beckett, Nyrop, Pfingst, & Bowen, 2005; Ghandnoosh, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2008, 2009). The racially discriminatory policing hypothesis is rooted in racial conflict theories—such as racial threat, defended neighborhoods, and benign neglect perspectives.

Racial conflict perspectives posit a strong relationship between neighborhood racial composition and law enforcement. For example, racial threat theory contends that as the relative size of the Black population increases in a given area, Whites perceive a threat to their political, economic, and social dominance and use social control to curtail perceived threats (Blalock, 1967). Racial differences in drug arrests, therefore, may reflect officers' excessive use of social control of Blacks to protect White interests and keep Blacks subordinate. Similar to racial threat, the defended neighborhoods hypothesis argues that Blacks face more social control in mostly White neighborhoods at the hands of White citizens and police (Green, Strolovitch, & Wong, 1998; Lyons, 2007; Stewart, Baumer, Brunson, & Simons, 2009). This is because racial stereotypes linking Blacks to social problems, such as drugs, crime, violence, and poverty, are pervasive (Bobo & Kluegel, 1997; Loury, 2002), and White citizens and police might view Blacks as a threat to the neighborhood social order. Animosity toward Blacks in these contexts might motivate White citizens to defend their territory and protect their interests by relying on the police, and Blacks might be relatively powerless to defend themselves (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004, 2005).

Racial threat or defended neighborhoods might only potentiate in racially heterogeneous areas where both Whites and Blacks are present (see Gaston & Brunson, forthcoming, for example). In predominantly White or Black neighborhoods, racial segregation might placate perceived racial threat (Spitzer, 1975). Although some researchers have found a positive effect of Black percentage on police size, police expenditures, police killings, and total arrest rates (Jackson & Carroll, 1981; Liska & Chamlin, 1984; Liska, Lawrence, & Benson, 1981), the inverse effect of Black percentage has emerged when examining race-specific arrest rates, a phenomenon known as "benign neglect" (Chamlin, 1987; Chamlin & Liska, 1992; Liska & Chamlin, 1984; Parker & Maggard, 2005; Parker, Stults, & Rice, 2005). The benign neglect hypothesis predicts less social control of Blacks in predominantly Black neighborhoods because crime in such areas is expected to involve a Black perpetrator and a Black victim and fewer instances of Black-on-White crime.

Since Whites are not threatened and the government views Black victims as less deserving of official response (Hawkins, 1987), less social control is expected to be imposed on Blacks in these contexts.

Prior Studies

Despite the social, political, and criminological significance of the problem, few empirical studies have directly tested the aforementioned theories to understand why officers disproportionately arrest Blacks for drug crimes given the racial parity in drug involvement. In two individual-level studies using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, Mitchell and Caudy (2015, 2017) tested whether race differences in self-reported drug arrests were explained by race differences in self-reported drug offending (e.g., use/sale of marijuana/hard drugs, drug sales income), controlling for nondrug offending (e.g., assault, gun carrying, property offenses), neighborhood contextual factors (e.g., living in the city center and living in neighborhoods with gangs), and other confounders. Focusing on arrests for any drug charge, they found that race differences in drug offending and race differences in nondrug offending reduced the magnitude of the Black–White disparity in drug arrests by only 15% and could not explain the racial disparity (Mitchell & Caudy, 2015). Mitchell and Caudy's (2017) subsequent study of drug distribution arrests drew similar conclusions. In fact, accounting for the offending measures *increased* the magnitude of the racial disparity. This was because Blacks and Hispanics reported lower levels of drug use and drug distribution than Whites although Blacks and Hispanics were significantly more likely to report being arrested for such offenses (Mitchell & Caudy, 2017). Findings from Mitchell and Caudy's (2015, 2017) studies point to unwarranted racially disparate drug law enforcement. However, because these studies were conducted at the individual level, they were unable to adequately test whether the differential scrutiny of neighborhoods—such as officers responses to differential crime rates and citizen complaints—could be a possible source of the racial disparity.

Katherine Beckett and colleagues have conducted seminal studies on race and drug law enforcement in Seattle (Beckett, 2012; Beckett et al., 2006; Beckett et al., 2005). For example, Beckett et al. (2006) used several data sources to examine drug distribution arrests in Seattle, including: (a) Seattle's Needle Exchange Survey data which described more than 900 transactions and the race/ethnicity of drug deliverers, (b) drug delivery arrest data from the Seattle Police Department (SPD) between 1999 and 2001, and (c) ethnographic observations of two well-known open outdoor drug markets. The researchers compared the racial composition of drug deliverers with the racial composition

of those arrested for drug delivery and found statistically significant race disparities. Investigating further, Beckett, Nyrop, and Pfingst considered several possible explanations for such disparities, including police deployment indicators, such as crime rates and citizen complaints, which failed to account for the race disparities. Like Mitchell and Caudy (2015, 2017), Beckett et al. (2006) uncovered evidence of racially discriminatory drug law enforcement, contending that the SPD's organizational practices (e.g., focus on crack rather than all drugs, focus on less-lucrative outdoor drug markets) explained why Blacks were overrepresented as drug arrestees. The researchers concluded that race shaped the perceptions of Seattle's drug problem.

In a reanalysis of Seattle's drug arrests, Engel and colleagues (2012) critiqued Beckett et al.'s (2006) measure of citizen complaints, arguing that their reliance on Narcotic Activity Reports—written nonemergency reports of drug activity citizens made to police precincts—underestimated citizen complaints about drug activity. When changing the benchmark to traditional measures of citizen complaints—drug-related calls to 911 for immediate service—Engel and colleagues (2012) found small, nonsignificant race disparities in drug arrests. This counter finding suggests the potential importance of police scrutiny, specifically police response to citizen complaints, in drug law enforcement and the need for additional analyses of such relationship.

Parker and Maggard (2005) tested structural and racial threat theories by examining race-specific drug arrests among a sample of large U.S. cities from 1980 to 1990. The researchers examined several measures capturing racial economic threat, including Black composition, racial inequality (e.g., Black-to-White educational attainment and unemployment rate), and measures of structural disadvantage. The results showed, most notably, evidence of benign neglect rather than racial threat. Percent Black was negatively related to Black drug arrests and not significantly related to White drug arrests. Moreover, economic disadvantage was positively related to arrests for both groups although its effect differed by race. These results suggested that benign neglect and concentrated disadvantage contributed to Blacks' and Whites' different drug arrest rates, showing evidence of racially discriminatory policing and some of differential scrutiny.

Current Study

Prior explanatory studies of race differences in drug arrests have made significant contributions (Beckett et al., 2006; Mitchell & Caudy, 2015, 2017; Parker & Maggard, 2005). This small body of studies collectively points to factors other than drug offending in explaining the race difference. However, additional studies across geographical areas, units of analysis, and time periods are

needed to make assertive claims about the sources of racial differences in drug arrests. Prior studies on this topic examined drug arrests among individuals across the United States in 1997 (Mitchell & Caudy, 2015, 2017), census tracts in Seattle in the early 2000s (Beckett et al., 2006), and large U.S. cities from 1980 to 1990 (Parker & Maggard, 2005), leaving more to be learned about the important context of neighborhoods. Findings at the individual or city levels might not hold at the neighborhood level where drug activity, crime, and drug law enforcement manifest. Importantly, police behavior varies across neighborhoods, and investigations into the interplay between neighborhood context and drug law enforcement might help to advance knowledge on racially disparate drug arrests (Klinger, 1997; Lum, 2011; Quillian & Pager, 2001; Smith, 1986). For example, scholars have hypothesized that officers use more aggressive or proactive policing tactics in high-crime neighborhoods while others argue that officers use less vigor in areas with high disadvantage and crime (Black, 2010; Klinger, 1997). Neighborhood racial composition can also shape policing practices (Fagan & Davies, 2000; Smith, 1986; Stewart et al., 2009) and the perceptions of neighborhood problems. Studies have found a positive association between percentage of Black residents and perceptions of neighborhood crime and disorder, controlling for actual levels of crime and disorder (Quillian & Pager, 2001; Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004). With the aforementioned considerations in mind, the current study aims to empirically answer the following research question: What neighborhood contextual factors explain Blacks' and Whites' differential risk for drug arrests? This research contributes to the literature by offering criminology a multivariate, neighborhood-level test of the differential scrutiny and racially discriminatory policing hypotheses, using multiple sources of unique data for years 2009-2013.

Setting

The current study examines race-specific drug arrests made across neighborhoods in St. Louis, Missouri, between 2009 and 2013. St. Louis is divided into 79 city-established neighborhoods.¹ An industrial, Midwestern city, St. Louis has a resident population of roughly 319,000 residents, split almost evenly between Black (49%) and White (46%) residents. Hispanics and persons of other races comprise 5% of the population, limiting the analysis to a study of Black and White drug arrests. Table 1 presents St. Louis's characteristics in comparison to those of other Midwestern cities (e.g., Chicago, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Kansas City, and Cincinnati) and the United States.

Another defining feature of St. Louis is its marked racial segregation. Similar to industrial, Midwestern cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, St. Louis remains one of America's most hyper-racially

Table 1. Comparison of St. Louis to Five Midwestern Cities and the United States, 2010.

	St. Louis, MO	Chicago, IL	Indianapolis, IN	Milwaukee, WI	Kansas City, MO	Cincinnati, OH	United States
Population size	319,294	2,695,598	820,445	594,833	459,787	296,943	308,745,538
Black	49%	33%	28%	40%	30%	45%	13%
White	46%	45%	62%	45%	59%	49%	62%
Hispanic (of any race)	4%	29%	9%	17%	10%	3%	16%
Median household income	US\$34,800	US\$47,270	US\$41,962	US\$35,467	US\$45,275	US\$34,116	US\$53,046
Individuals in poverty ^a	27%	23%	21%	28%	19%	30%	15%
Unemployment rate ^a	14%	14%	12%	14%	10%	13%	10%
Vacant housing units	19%	13%	13%	10%	13%	17%	11%
Violent crime rate per 100,000 ^b	1,943	1,054 ^c	1,190 ^d	1,064	1,198	1,215	404

Note. FBI = Federal Bureau of Investigation; UCR = uniform crime report.

^aData are 2009-2013 averages from the U.S. Census.

^bCalculation of rate per 100,000 residents using violent crime counts (murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) from the 2010 FBI's UCR and 2010 U.S. Census Population data.

^cExcludes rape because Chicago's data collection methodology for rape did not comply with guidelines of the UCR program.

^dBased on violent crime in 2009 since crime data for Indianapolis are unpublished by the UCR in 2010.

segregated cities since the migration of southern Blacks to the north (Massey & Denton, 1989). In addition, economic disadvantage is pronounced in St. Louis and tends to be synonymous with race. Having relatively high poverty, 27% of St. Louis residents have incomes below the poverty level, and 14% of residents are unemployed. White households have a median income nearly twice that of Black households (US\$41,843 vs. US\$23,067, respectively), and Black unemployment rates more than triple White unemployment rates (24% vs. 7%, respectively).²

Consistent with a wealth of studies linking high levels of racial residential segregation and economic disadvantage to violence (Krivo & Peterson, 1996; Logan & Messner, 1987; Peterson & Krivo, 1993; W. J. Wilson, 1987), violent crime rates in St. Louis are much higher than those at the national level and those in comparable cities, as shown in Table 1. St. Louis's violent crime rate was 1,943 per 100,000 in 2010, a rate 5 times the national average (404 per 100,000). In 2011, the rate of firearm assaults and robberies in St. Louis was 4 times higher than that of all U.S. cities with more than 250,000 residents (Rosenfeld, Deckard, & Blackburn, 2014).

St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department (SLMPD). The SLMPD is the agency responsible for making the drug arrests examined in this study. SLMPD's patrol and enforcement responsibility is limited to the city of St. Louis rather than the entire St. Louis metropolitan area. I interviewed a high-ranking official from SLMPD to learn about the agency's priorities and organizational policies before and during the 2009-2013 study period. He explained that the primary focus of the department was decreasing violent crime and disorder. SLMPD developed and deployed a variety of task forces and specialized operation units to target serious crimes and problems, such as street violent crime, gangs, and car break-ins. The official maintained that concerted drug law enforcement efforts, such as large-scale drug interdictions and buy/bust operations, were infrequent given the priority to reduce violent crime. A study of the nature of SLMPD's drug law enforcement practices confirms his assertion, showing that patrol officers—rather than special unit officers—conduct most of the city's drug arrests and that routine policing (i.e., pedestrian or traffic stops, responses to citizen complaints) initiates 90% of drug arrests (Gaston, 2016).

Dependent Variables

Drug Arrests

Race-specific counts of drug arrests are the outcomes of interest. Drug arrests reflect drug law enforcement activity. Between 2009 and 2013, SLMPD

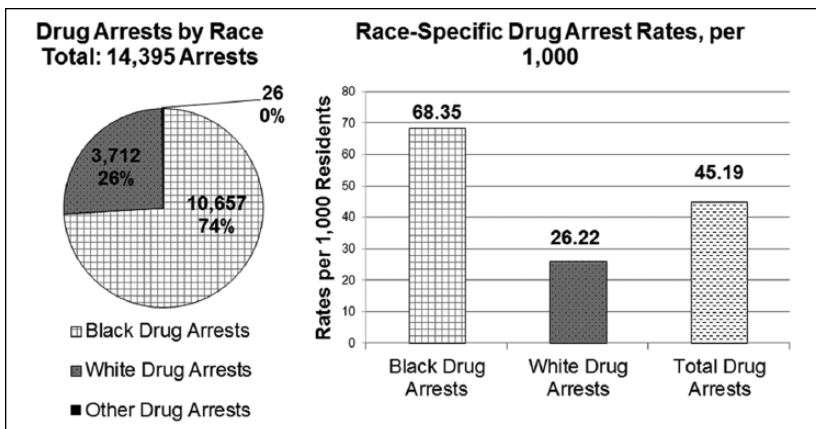


Figure 1. City-level drug arrests in St. Louis 2009-2013, by race ($N = 14,395$).

officers made 14,805 arrests for which the primary charge—the most serious offense—was drug possession or drug sale/manufacturing. The arrests were geocoded to their respective neighborhood using the address of the arrest location. Only 3% of arrests were missing addresses, resulting in a final examination of 14,395 drug arrests, most being for drug possession (89%) rather than drug sale/manufacturing (11%).³ Black and White drug arrest counts were summed over the 5-year period for each of the 78 St. Louis neighborhoods.

Like most jurisdictions across the United States, St. Louis has salient Black–White differences in drug arrests, even long after the height of the War on Drugs in the late 1980s and during a period when SLMPD deemphasized drug law enforcement and prioritized violent crime control. As shown in Figure 1, Blacks were overrepresented and Whites were underrepresented in drug arrests during the study period. Although Blacks made up 49% of the St. Louis resident population, they comprised 74% of drug arrestees. Whites made up 46% of the St. Louis resident population but accounted for only 26% of drug arrests. Put into a different perspective, Black drug arrest rates (68.35 per 1,000 Black residents) were more than 2½ times greater than White drug arrest rates (26.22 per 1,000 White residents). Though striking, this Black–White race disparity ratio of 2.5 in St. Louis is smaller than the national average of 3.6 (Black rate of 1,721 and White rate of 476, both per 100,000 residents of each race; Human Rights Watch, 2009).

The current study examines drug arrest counts rather than drug arrest rates because St. Louis neighborhoods are highly racially segregated, producing

inflated race-specific rates.⁴ Although researchers in such instances usually log transform rate outcomes to help normalize the distribution before estimating least squares regression models, this approach is inappropriate as it violates the assumptions that underlie least squares regression (i.e., homogeneity of error variance, normality of error distributions) and can lead to biased results. As such, this study instead examines arrest counts and employs Poisson-based models that adjust for the exposure risk, a more appropriate analytic technique (Osgood, 2000).

Independent Variables

Differential Police Scrutiny Indicators

As differential police scrutiny theory contends, law enforcement activity often concentrates in communities with high crime rates, numerous calls for service, and high socioeconomic disadvantage. Because Black Americans are more likely than White Americans to reside in such neighborhoods, they are exposed to greater police scrutiny, increasing their risk for and possibly explaining their overrepresentation in drug arrests. To examine the explanatory benefit of the differential scrutiny hypothesis, the current analysis includes measures of neighborhood-level crime, drug-related calls for service, and socioeconomic disadvantage. The differential scrutiny hypothesis will be supported if these factors are significantly associated with Black drug arrests in a way that is stronger than for White drug arrests. It should be noted, however, that these variables are proxies for and not direct measures of police deployment.

Violent and property crime. SLMPD provided neighborhood-level crime data. Violent and property crime rates per 1,000 residents were computed for each neighborhood during the 5-year study period, that is, $(5\text{-year summed crime counts} / 5\text{-year average annual population size}) \times 1,000$. Violent crime includes aggravated assaults, robberies, rapes, and murders. Property crime includes larcenies, burglaries, auto thefts, and arsons. These crimes are known to the police regardless of arrest and are included in the same data SLMPD reports to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting program.

Citizen calls for service. Police agencies rely on citizen calls for service just as they rely on crime rates to determine where and how to deploy officers and resources. High-crime neighborhoods where Blacks are more likely to frequent have numerous citizen calls for service, another factor that increases

police presence in those areas. Thus, citizen calls for service gauge the geographic distribution of officers' mandatory responses to citizens' calls to the 911 dispatch.

Citizen calls for service comprise the calls citizens made to the 911 center reporting a suspicious person possibly using, selling, or manufacturing drugs. This variable is a conventional indicator of citizen calls for service in criminological research and arguably the best measure of citizen complaints about drug activity (Engel et al., 2012; Klinger & Bridges, 1997). During 2009-2013, SLMPD received 22,687 drug-related calls across St. Louis. The measure is computed as a rate per 1,000 residents for each neighborhood, that is, (5-year summed calls for service/5-year average annual population size) \times 1,000. Unfortunately, callers did not always report the race of the suspect and when they did, dispatchers did not systematically report it in the calls for service data. Therefore, suspect's race is unavailable, and race-specific calls for service rates cannot be computed.

It is important to note that calls for service represent citizen complaints about drug activity and are not valid estimates of the distribution of drug crime. Calls for service capture only a subset of drug crimes and are biased by many factors, such as citizens' willingness to call the police, the possible inaccuracy of the callers' information about the legal nature of events, and discrepancies between what callers report versus what call-takers record based on their interpretation of the information (Klinger & Bridges, 1997). Moreover, civilians hold racial stereotypes that influence their perceptions of neighborhood problems (Quillian & Pager, 2001; Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004) and likely shape their requests for police services. In racially segregated places like St. Louis, the effect of race on the reporting of crimes to the police is likely strong (Xie & Lauritsen, 2012). In addition, citizen calls might mostly capture visible drug activity and miss hidden drug crimes. To this end, this study includes drug-related calls for service not as proxies for drug involvement but as measures of citizens' requests for police services that shape police deployment patterns.

Socioeconomic disadvantage. It is well known that neighborhood socioeconomic conditions are related to neighborhood crime (Baumer, 1994; Martínez, Rosenfeld, & Mares, 2008; McCarthy, 1991; Sampson & Wilson, 1995) and influences policing practices (Klinger, 1997; Quillian & Pager, 2001; Smith, 1986). As such, this study draws from the American Community Survey (hereafter ACS) and includes several neighborhood-level indicators of social disorganization, which are averaged over years 2008-2012. Population size is included to account for the number of residents in each neighborhood, which can influence neighborhood conditions, neighborhood

crime, and enforcement practices (e.g., beat size). Average annual counts of each neighborhood's total population and race-specific population sizes are computed. Finally, I conducted a factor analysis of several socioeconomic indicators (e.g., poverty, unemployment, low education, single mother households, population below age 18, and vacant units) to compute a socioeconomic disadvantage index. The variables loaded well onto a single factor, and the index has an alpha of .89.

Racially Discriminatory Policing Indicator

According to the racially discriminatory policing perspective, Black American's overrepresentation in drug arrests reflects racially discriminatory policing. In particular, scholars suggest that neighborhood racial composition influences how police respond to Black versus White civilians and that Blacks may be especially susceptible to discriminatory treatment in neighborhoods with a sizable White population. Equitable policing should not be a function of extralegal variables such as citizen race or neighborhood racial context. Thus, racially discriminatory policing will be evidenced if neighborhood racial composition is associated with drug arrests when controlling for the aforementioned differential scrutiny indicators.

Racial composition. Using data from the ACS, racial composition is expressed as the average annual percentage of Black residents and White residents in each neighborhood between 2008 and 2012. For the descriptive analyses, the neighborhoods were categorized as either predominantly Black (>75% of population is Black), predominantly White (>75% of population is White), or racially mixed (<76% Black and <76% White). For the multivariate analyses, racial composition is expressed as a continuous measure of percent Black.

Analytic Strategy

The analyses began with an examination of descriptive data for St. Louis neighborhoods. During this stage, I compared the descriptive parameters between predominantly Black, predominantly White, and racially mixed neighborhoods and performed one-way ANOVA tests with Tukey's post hoc tests to assess whether the means varied significantly across neighborhood types. Then, to assess the relationship between the predictors and race-specific drug arrests, multivariate analyses were conducted by employing count-based regression models. Similar to prior studies that used count outcomes to explain racial differences in arrests or crime (Ousey, 1999; Parker & Maggard,

2005), I estimated separate models for Black drug arrests and White drug arrests and then tested the equality of the coefficients across models. Each outcome was regressed onto the theoretically relevant predictors. To account for the population at risk for arrest as well as for variations in population size across neighborhoods, race-specific population size was included as the exposure variable, thus transforming the count models into the equivalent of an analysis of race-specific drug arrest rates (Osgood, 2000). In addition, the negative binomial models used robust standard errors (RSE) for the clustering of observations within neighborhoods. Then the analyses tested the equality of the coefficients between White and Black drug arrests using seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) post estimation in STATA. Because White and Black drug arrests come from the same neighborhoods, it is possible that the error terms in the regression equations are correlated. SUR post estimation is a technique that can account for cross-equation correlations in error terms, allowing for comparisons of coefficients across models that stem from the same units (Greene, 2011; Ousey, 1999; Parker et al., 2005).

Descriptive Parameters

The theories and research that guide the current analyses suggest the need to understand neighborhood conditions across racial contexts. Accordingly, Table 2 presents means of the study variables for White neighborhoods ($n = 18$), Black neighborhoods ($n = 31$), and mixed neighborhoods ($n = 29$)⁵ along with results from one-way ANOVA and Tukey's post hoc tests. Some of the differences across neighborhood types are noteworthy.

To start, Black drug arrests are significantly higher in Black neighborhoods ($M = 199.87$) and mixed neighborhoods ($M = 141.83$) than in White neighborhoods ($M = 19.06$). This is partly a function of the race-specific population size. For example, Black arrests are expected to be higher in Black neighborhoods because most of the residents are Black. However, this pattern does not hold for Whites as White arrests are similarly low across Black, White, and mixed neighborhoods. This could be indicative of police under-enforcing drug laws in White neighborhoods and among White persons. Moreover, in mixed neighborhoods where the White and Black population sizes are split nearly even, it is notable that Blacks face a significantly higher risk for drug arrest than Whites.

In line with differential scrutiny theory, Black neighborhoods, followed by mixed neighborhoods, produce significantly higher crime, drug-related calls for service, and socioeconomic disadvantage than White neighborhoods. Notably, violent crime rates in Black neighborhoods ($M = 162.89$) quintuple the rates in White neighborhoods ($M = 30.94$) and nearly double the rates in

Table 2. Mean Differences of Characteristics Across Neighborhood Racial Contexts ($N = 78$).

Variables	White neighborhoods ($n = 18$)	Black neighborhoods ($n = 31$)	Mixed neighborhoods ($n = 29$)
Dependent Variables (5-year sums)			
Black total arrest count	19.06 ^{a,b}	199.87 ^c	141.83 ^c
White total arrest count	34.28	42.71	60.83
Independent Variables			
Violent crime rate (5-year sum)	30.94 ^{a,b}	162.89 ^{c,b}	96.60 ^{c,a}
Property crime rate (5-year sum)	274.57 ^{a,b}	468.39 ^c	506.48 ^c
Citizen calls for service rate (5-year sum) ^d	15.39 ^{a,b}	130.66 ^{c,b}	69.23 ^{c,a}
Population size (5-year average)	4,991.39	3,158.71	4,509.00
% Black population (5-year average)	9% ^{a,b}	92% ^{c,b}	46% ^{c,a}
% White population (5-year average)	87% ^{a,b}	6% ^{c,b}	47% ^{c,a}
Socioeconomic Disadvantage Index (5-year averages)			
% homes below median income	37% ^{a,b}	67% ^{c,b}	51% ^{c,a}
% unemployed	8% ^{a,b}	23% ^{c,b}	17% ^{c,a}
% low education (<high school)	12% ^a	25% ^{c,b}	16% ^a
% single mom homes	4% ^{a,b}	18% ^{c,b}	11% ^{c,a}
% youthful population	16% ^{a,b}	26% ^{c,b}	21% ^{c,a}
% vacant units	12% ^{a,b}	27% ^{c,b}	22% ^{c,a}

Note. One-way ANOVA tests with Tukey's post hoc tests $p \leq .05$ two-tailed tests.

^aSignificantly different from Black neighborhoods.

^bSignificantly different from mixed neighborhoods.

^cSignificantly different from White neighborhoods.

^dDescriptive parameters for the variable are in the original metric; variable is log transformed in the multivariate analysis.

mixed neighborhoods ($M = 96.60$). The citizen calls for service rate is significantly higher in Black neighborhoods ($M = 130.66$) and in mixed neighborhoods ($M = 69.23$) than in White neighborhoods ($M = 15.39$).

Multivariate Results

Table 3 presents the negative binomial regression results for White drug arrests and Black drug arrests, separately. Coefficients are expressed as incidence rate ratios (IRR), which are interpreted as such: A one-unit change in the selected independent variable is associated with a change in the rate of the dependent variable, holding the other independent variables constant. IRRs greater than 1.00 denote a positive association while those less than 1.00 represent a negative association. RSE and statistical significance levels

Table 3. Negative Binomial Regression Results for Race-Specific Drug Arrest Counts ($N = 78$).

	White arrests	Black arrests	SUR χ^2
	IRR (RSE)	IRR (RSE)	
Violent crime rate	1.01 (0.00) [†]	1.01 (0.00) ^{***}	0.76
Property crime rate	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.00)	0.00
Socioeconomic disadvantage	1.25 (0.26)	0.98 (0.11)	1.38
Citizen Calls for Service Rate (Ln)	1.28 (0.29)	1.25(0.10) ^{**}	0.01
Racial composition (% Black)	6.70 (2.85) ^{***}	0.37 (0.07) ^{***}	55.53 ^{***}
Constant	0.00 (0.00) ^{***}	0.02 (0.01) ^{***}	
Race-specific population size (exposure)	1	1	
Wald χ^2	297.57 ^{***}	115.85 ^{***}	

Note. IRR = incidence rate ratio; RSE = robust standard error; SUR = seemingly unrelated regression.

[†] $p \leq .10$. ^{*} $p \leq .05$. ^{**} $p \leq .01$. ^{***} $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed tests).

accompany the IRRs in the table. In addition to the regression results, χ^2 results from the SUR post estimation are presented, which tests whether coefficients in the White and Black models differ significantly.

Results show that neighborhood-level factors are related to White and Black drug arrests, although different factors predict arrests for each group. Indicators of differential scrutiny have a moderate to null impact on drug law enforcement, in general, and on the Black–White difference, in particular. The models show that the violent crime rate has a modest, significant effect on Black drug arrests and a modest, marginally significant effect on White drug arrests. For instance, holding the other variables constant, a one-unit increase in the violent crime rate is related to a 1% increase in Black drug arrest rates ($IRR = 1.01$, $RSE = 0.00$, $p \leq .001$) and White drug arrest rates ($IRR = 1.01$, $RSE = 0.00$, $p \leq .10$), an effect that is statistically similar between both groups ($\chi^2 = 0.76$, $p > .10$). Differential scrutiny theory also posits that drug-related calls for service shape drug law enforcement. The results lend some support for this claim, specifically when officers arrest Black suspects. A one-unit increase in the citizen calls for service rate is associated with a 25% increase in Black drug arrest rates ($IRR = 1.25$, $RSE = 0.10$, $p \leq .01$), although the citizen calls for service rate is not significantly related to White drug arrests ($IRR = 1.28$, $RSE = 0.29$, $p > .10$). Nevertheless, the effect of the citizen calls for service rate is statistically similar between Whites and Blacks ($\chi^2 = 0.01$, $p > .10$). Socioeconomic disadvantage and

the property crime rate have no significant effect on drug arrests for either group. Thus, the similar effects of violent crime, drug-related calls for service, and socioeconomic disadvantage on arrests for Whites and Blacks provide limited support for the differential scrutiny hypothesis.

Consistent with racially discriminatory policing theory, the models show that neighborhood racial composition has a significant effect on drug law enforcement. The percentage of Black residents significantly predicts White and Black drug arrests; however, the direction and magnitude of these relationships differ between groups. Specifically, when holding the other variables constant, a one-unit increase in the Black population significantly increases White drug arrest rates by a factor of 6.70 ($IRR = 6.70$, $RSE = 2.85$, $p \leq .001$) and significantly decreases Black drug arrest rates by 63% ($IRR = 0.37$, $RSE = 0.07$, $p \leq .001$). Stated differently, when accounting for violent and property crime, citizen calls for service, and relevant covariates, officers are more likely to arrest White suspects in neighborhoods with a higher percentage of Black residents and are more likely to arrest Black suspects in neighborhoods with a higher percentage of White residents.⁶ Racial composition is the strongest predictor in the models, and it has a significantly stronger effect on White drug arrests than Black drug arrests ($\chi^2 = 55.53$, $p \leq .001$). The strong and significant effect of neighborhood racial composition—net of other theoretically relevant factors—provides evidence of racially discriminatory drug law enforcement.

Discussion

The current study advances research by investigating the source of one of the most salient issues in criminology and criminal justice: racial inequity in drug arrests. Despite its long standing existence and relevance to research and policy, only a small body of empirical studies has attempted to elucidate this social problem. Such studies have examined racial differences in drug arrests at the individual level (Mitchell & Caudy, 2015, 2017), census tract level (Beckett et al., 2006), and city level (Beckett et al., 2006; Parker & Maggard, 2005), leaving more to be learned about how neighborhood context shapes drug law enforcement and helps to explain racial differences. To this end, the current study offers criminology a multivariate neighborhood-level explanation of racially disparate drug law enforcement by drawing on unique data to test the two leading hypotheses of this problem.

The findings showed some evidence of differential scrutiny, although differential scrutiny appears inadequate to explain Blacks' and Whites' differential drug arrest risks. Indeed, both Blacks and Whites faced a greater risk for drug arrests in neighborhoods with high violent crime and calls for service. Instead, the analyses found the strongest support for racially discriminatory

policing theory, a finding that comports with prior studies (Beckett et al., 2006; Mitchell & Caudy, 2015, 2017). When controlling for legal factors, such as violent and property crime and drug-related calls for service, officers are more likely to arrest White suspects in Black neighborhoods and arrest Black suspects in White neighborhoods. In other words, when enforcing drug laws, officers tend to arrest individuals when their race does not match the neighborhood racial context, a type of racial profiling referred to as “out-of-placeness,” “out-of-place policing,” or “racial incongruity” (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009; Fagan & Davies, 2000; Novak & Chamlin, 2012; Stewart et al., 2009). Studies on traffic enforcement have found a similar pattern (Novak & Chamlin, 2012; Rojek, Rosenfeld, & Decker, 2012). For example, Rojek et al. (2012) examined the racial composition of traffic stops in St. Louis and found that Black drivers were more likely to be searched after a stop in White communities, and White drivers were more likely to be searched after a stop in Black communities, controlling for characteristics of officers, drivers, and stops. Echoing this pattern, the current study shows that when officers enforce drug laws, “race serves as a marker of where people ‘belong,’ and racial incongruity as a marker of suspicion” (Fagan & Davies, 2000, pp. 477-478).

The significantly larger effect of racial composition on White drug arrests suggests that additional processes might be at play, especially given that Blacks but not Whites are overrepresented in drug arrests. It is likely that low drug law enforcement in White neighborhoods exacerbates the strong race effect for Whites. For example, of the 14,395 drug arrests during the study period, only 964 (7%) occurred in White neighborhoods compared to 7,531 (52%) in Black neighborhoods and 5,900 (41%) in mixed neighborhoods. Stated differently, nearly all—93%—of drug arrests occurred outside of White neighborhoods. Relatedly, Whites made up only 26% of drug arrestees although they account for 46% of the resident population. Thus, it appears that in addition to racial incongruity, the underrepresentation of Whites contributes to the effect of racial composition on White arrests and ultimately the racial difference in drug arrest risks. Another factor is the possibility that Whites are more likely to engage in public drug activity in Black neighborhoods than elsewhere. During my interview with the high-ranking SLMPD official, I asked why Whites faced a greater risk for drug arrests in Black neighborhoods. He stated that it is common for White citizens from south St. Louis, St. Louis County, and Illinois (nearby mostly White areas) to travel to Black neighborhoods in St. Louis City to buy and use drugs because they can easily hide among the disorder in those communities. If this pattern holds true, Whites’ higher drug involvement in Black neighborhoods likely contributes to the substantial race effect. It should be noted that the race effect for

Whites is only evident for drug possession arrests and not drug sale/manufacturing arrests, as shown in Appendix B. In other words, White arrestees in Black neighborhoods are only racially profiled in arrests for drug possession, and neighborhood racial composition has no significant effect on their risk for drug sale/manufacturing arrests.

On the contrary, Black drug arrests are likelier in predominantly White *and* racially mixed neighborhoods.⁶ Unlike their White counterparts, there is no evidence that Black drug offenders travel to White neighborhoods to engage in drug offending. In light of St. Louis's legacy of explicit, concerted efforts to restrict Blacks from White places (Gordon, 2009), the race effect for Blacks can be interpreted as officers' raised suspicion of Blacks in White areas (racial incongruity) *and* greater social control in an effort to maintain the racial hierarchy, as racial conflict theories predict (Green et al., 1998; Lyons, 2007; Stewart et al., 2009). Further supporting the notion that racial conflict—and not solely racial incongruity—is at play for Black arrestees is the sustained race effect for Blacks across drug charges. As shown in Appendix B, whereas Whites are only racially profiled for drug possession, Blacks are racially profiled in arrests for both drug possession and drug sale/manufacturing. Regardless of the processes at play or if racial biases are implicit or explicit, drug law enforcement in St. Louis is racially discriminatory of both Whites and Blacks and appears to explain racial differences in drug arrests.

Evidence of racially discriminatory policing of Whites was an unexpected finding in light of theoretical predictions. This was because racial conflict perspectives focus exclusively on the social control of persons of color and are silent about the social control of Whites, whether it is more lenient or stringent under certain conditions. Criminologists have used these perspectives almost exclusively to explain how racial animus contributes to the hypercriminalization of Black Americans with little guidance on the role it might play in the punishment—or the impunity—of Whites. Specifically, the racial conflict perspectives fail to address how White underrepresentation and White privilege add to the racial gap in drug arrests as much as, if not more than, Black overrepresentation or why Whites might be profiled in Black spaces. As findings from the current study suggest, racial conflict theories need expansion to account for the multifaceted and complex ways in which race can affect formal social control, the various ways racial profiling manifests, and the conditions under which such processes occur. Such theoretical elaboration would go a long way toward filling important empirical and theoretical gaps in knowledge about the relationship between race, neighborhoods, and social control.

Appendix A

Descriptive Parameters for Population of Neighborhoods ($N = 78$).

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Dependent variables (5-year sums)				
Black total arrest count	136.56	171.61	1	866
White total arrest count	47.50	56.81	0	296
Black–White arrests	3.78	3.69	0.14	15.6
Black possession arrest count	117.54	147.99	1	751
White possession arrest count	45.87	54.97	0	285
Black–White arrests	3.39	3.30	0.13	13.8
Black sale/manufacturing arrest count	19.03	24.41	0	115
White sale/manufacturing arrest count	1.63	2.52	0	14
Black–White arrests	10.27	12.01	0	56
Independent variables				
Violent crime rate, per 1,000 population (5-year sum)	107.80	71.01	11.83	277.30
Property crime rate, per 1,000 population (5-year sum)	437.82	246.77	147.41	1,667.17
Population size (5-year average)	4,083.67	3,233.58	323	16,249
Black population size	1,998.95	1,829.05	46	8,753
White population size	1,815.32	2,452.88	1	9,425
Racial composition (5-year average)				
% Black population	56%	0.34	0.02	1.00
% White population	40%	0.33	0	0.96
Socioeconomic disadvantage index ($\alpha = .89$; 5-year averages)				
% homes under city's median income	54%	0.15	0.26	0.76
% unemployed	16%	0.09	0.03	0.43
% low education (<high school)	19%	0.09	0.01	0.43
% single mom homes	12%	0.09	0.01	0.43
% youthful population	22%	0.08	0.06	0.42
% vacant units	22%	0.10	0.05	0.43
Citizen Calls for Service Rate, per 1,000 population (5-year sum) ^a	81.22	75.93	0	385.66

^aDescriptive parameters for variable are in the original metric; variable is log transformed in the multivariate analysis.

One case is omitted from the calculation of mean due to an inflated White drug death rate of 1,000 per 1,000 Whites.

Appendix B

Negative Binomial Regression Results for Race-Specific Drug Arrest Counts ($N = 78$).

	Possession arrests			Sale/manufacturing arrests		
	White arrests	Black arrests	SUR χ^2	White arrests	Black arrests	SUR χ^2
	IRR (RSE)	IRR (RSE)		IRR (RSE)	IRR (RSE)	
Violent crime rate	1.01 (0.01)	1.01 (0.00)***	1.18	1.01(0.01)**	1.01 (0.00)***	1.38
Property crime rate	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.00)	0.09	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.00)	2.28
Socioeconomic disadvantage	1.25 (0.26)	0.97 (0.10)	1.38	1.28 (0.30)	0.91 (0.12)	2.46
Racial composition (% Black)	7.00 (2.98)***	0.37 (0.07)***	55.53***	1.02 (0.49)	0.45 (0.07)***	3.38†
Citizen Calls for Service Rate (Ln)	1.29 (0.29)	1.20 (0.10)*	0.12	1.20 (0.20)	1.62 (0.15)***	3.60†
Constant	0.02 (0.00)***	0.02 (0.01)***		0.00(0.00)***	0.00 (0.00)***	
Race-specific population size (exposure)	1	1		1	1	
Wald χ^2	305.45***	112.43***		71.48***	163.13***	

Note. SUR = seemingly unrelated regression; IRR = incidence rate ratio; RSE = robust standard error.
 † $p \leq .10$. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed tests).

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Notes

1. This study examines 78 neighborhoods due to one neighborhood being an industrial area with no resident population and consequently no data.
2. Census data retrieved from <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>.
3. The data cannot be portioned by drug type (e.g., marijuana, cocaine, crack, heroin, and methamphetamine) because this information is not systematically recorded in the arrest data and is missing from roughly half of these arrest incidents.
4. To demonstrate this distortion, neighborhood #69 has 18 White residents (White resident population = 0%), but 144 White drug arrests occurred during the 5-year period, translating to a White drug arrest rate of 8,000 per 1,000 White residents. Similar distortions exist across many St. Louis neighborhoods.
5. See Appendix A for descriptive information for the entire population of neighborhoods.
6. In supplemental analyses not shown, I included a squared term for percent Black in the models to determine the point at which the risk for drug arrest changes. The results revealed a curvilinear relationship between neighborhood racial composition and drug arrest risk. The risk for White drug arrests was low and remained flat when percent Black was between 0% and 70%, a range that includes White neighborhoods and racially mixed neighborhoods. The risk for White drug arrests began to increase exponentially when the Black population exceeded 70%, and this increase was steepest when the Black population surpassed 90%. The effect of racial composition on White drug arrests confirms that officers are more likely to arrest White suspects in Black neighborhoods than elsewhere. In addition, the risk for Black drug arrests was highest when the Black population was near 0%. Black drug arrests declined rapidly as the Black population increased and began leveling when the Black population was near 80%. Thus, the effect of racial composition on Black drug arrests confirms that officers are more likely to arrest Black suspects in White *and* racially mixed neighborhoods than in Black neighborhoods. Though the Black and White population sizes are comparable in racially mixed neighborhoods, it is noteworthy that Blacks face an elevated risk for drug arrests while Whites are immune from such differential risk.

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