

# **Balling with the Boys in Blue: How Police Athletic Leagues Affect Attitudes Toward Police**

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May 2, 2017

## **Abstract**

Attitudes toward police officers have become increasingly important to police forces in recent years. Community based policing (CBP) is one system of operations that a police force may use to build communal bonds between citizens and officers, thus, potentially fostering better attitudes and relationships between the two groups. Police athletic leagues (PALs) are one form of CBP that attempt to build positive relationships between officers and citizens through non-confrontational and enjoyable activities. The research in this paper examines an established PAL in Albany, NY and compares attitudes toward police officers among both people who engage with the PAL and those who do not. The study utilized surveying and analysis of results to determine if engagement with a PAL leads to a person holding a more positive attitude toward police officers.

# Introduction

In recent months and years, increased attention has been paid to public attitudes toward police forces and police officers in the United States. The rise of social media and cell phones has made it easier than ever to record and share one's experiences with law enforcement officers. With growing attention to negative interactions such as arrests and personal searches, it may be to the advantage of police forces and police officers to engage in positive contact with citizens. Positive contact may help to increase respect and tolerance of a police force and, furthermore, enhance the legitimacy of the police force. On the other hand, negative contact may create feelings of oppression and ideas of "us versus them" between law enforcement and citizens, potentially decreasing the sense of legitimacy that people feel toward a police force (Hill 2016; Shafer, Huebner, and Bynum 2003).

Therefore, it is important to consider in what ways a police force may actively seek to engage positively with the citizens that they serve. One way that a police force may seek to initiate positive contact with citizens is through community-based policing (CBP). CBP may allow officers to regularly and predictably engage with a local population and community. CBP seeks to place officers in communities and have them provide positive services and programs to the people of that community (Shafer, Huebner, and Bynum 2003). One service that CBP programs may offer a community is police-sponsored athletic leagues. These leagues mingle officers and citizens via sports and seek to increase positive contact between citizens and police officers in a non-confrontational setting. However, it is important to ask, does engagement with a police athletic league (PAL) lead someone to hold a more positive attitude toward police?

Though PALs are a relatively new institution in many cities, the first one being founded in New York City in 1936, many cities in the United States and globally have sought to implement similar programs (PAL of NYC 2015; Subhas and Chandra 2004). As a result, a fairly in-depth body of literature exists that explores how PALs influence the actions of individuals who engage or participate in them. Studies have found that CBP and PAL

programs may help to prevent an individual from committing crimes or engaging in socially unacceptable behavior (Hartmann 2006; Hartmann 2007; Kelly 2012; Putnam 2000). Likewise, the literature on CBP has explored how individuals perceive police forces that utilize CBP. However, little research exists that explores how engagement in PAL programs influences an individual's attitudes toward police.

The following research will attempt to uncover what link exists between participation in a PAL and an individual's attitude toward police. The paper will, first, review the existing literature in the field and establish known relationships that have been found regarding citizens, police, PALs, and CBP. My research will then examine public attitudes toward police in the Albany, New York area. Using a survey developed to determine one's attitudes toward police, as well as amount and quality of contact with police, I will examine if an individual who engages with a PAL holds a more positive attitude toward police than those who do not participate in such programming.

## **Literature Review**

A fairly expansive body of research has been compiled regarding police interactions with citizens, community-based policing (CBP), and the role police-sponsored athletic leagues may play in facilitating these interactions. At the root of many of these studies are questions of the effects of social interactions between citizens and police. The previous literature on PALs, including their effect on preventing crime, influencing youth development, and promoting contact with police, all suggest that these types of social interactions should have a myriad of positive impacts on a community.

CBP is a practice in policing that places police officers in communities and neighborhoods with the idea of increasing contact between officers and citizens. Due to increased police visibility and engagement in neighborhoods, it is believed that casual, positive contact between citizens and police will increase. CBP may help to increase positive contact between

police officers and citizens which may, in turn, lead to citizens perceiving a police force more favorably or more legitimately (Allport 1954; Hill 2016; Shafer, Huebner, and Bynum 2003). This theory derives from Gordon Allport's (1954) Contact Theory which proposes that an individual's perceptions of a person or group of people are formed by the frequency and quality of contact that an individual has with another person.

The increased presence of police officers on the streets and sidewalks of a community may lead to the officers interacting with the people they serve more often and in less traumatic and confrontational ways, fitting themselves into each others' social networks (Weisburd and Eck 2004). Jane Jacobs (1992) suggested that the sidewalks of a city are the core of a city's social life. On them, individuals engage in constructive, casual contact that increases feelings of community in a neighborhood. A greater level of presence of police officers and citizens in a community may allow for more contact between police officers and citizens, which can be good, as long as the contact and presence is positive. On the other hand, if the contact and presence is negative, the greater presence of police may not be a good thing.

## **Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory in CBP**

Digging deeper into this notion of the community connectedness that CBP offers, we can see the potential role that Social Capital Theory may play in citizen-police relationships. At the heart of Putnam's (2000) Social Capital Theory is the idea of maintaining and creating interpersonal relationships in order to get services from another person. Through CBP, officers and citizens may begin to fit into each other's social networks and, as a result, seek to maintain good relationships with one another so as to tap into the services they can offer one another. Both officers and citizens have a stake in maintaining these relationships because each can provide valuable services to the other. On one hand, officers can benefit from good relationships with citizens by the citizens being more willing to cooperate with police. Likewise, citizens benefit from relationships with police because, if a citizen has a good relationship with the local police officers, he or she may be charged more lightly,

should that person commit a crime, or be able to receive additional services from the police department.

Allport's Contact Theory likely plays a major role in the idea of contact with officers through CBP, leading to more positive and legitimate perceptions of police. The idea that CBP may lead to increased positive contact with police, and thus, to more positive perceptions of a police force has been examined in the existing literature. A 2003 study found that individuals generally have a favorable opinion of their local police force (Shafer, Huebner, and Bynum 2003). These feelings of favorability may be improved if a person has frequent, positive contact with police. Additionally, people that live in neighborhoods with low police presence may have more negative perceptions of police, possibly a result of lower levels of contact between police and citizens (Shafer, Huebner, and Bynum 2003). CBP may help to increase positive and voluntary contact that people have with police officers. As an outcome of this more frequent, voluntary contact, a person may gain a more favorable opinion of a local police force (Shafer, Huebner, and Bynum 2003; Weisburd and Eck 2004).

Furthermore, Putnam (2000) also states that public perceptions of a strong community and civic bonds may help to deter crime. In a connected community, an individual may be less willing to commit crime due to fears of negative social repercussions. By including police officers in the social networks of a community, individuals may see additional social drawbacks to committing crime. If individuals feel that police officers are a part of their community and social network, they may feel an obligation to not wrong them by committing crime (Putnam 2000).

Quantity (the amount and frequency) and quality (positive, negative, or neither) of contact are very important to a person when determining a perception of something, as theorized by Allport 1954. Viki et al. (2006), in a study assessing willingness to cooperate with police among people of different races, found that black citizens tend to be more wary of police and less willing to cooperate with them than white citizens. This wariness and lack of willingness to cooperate may stem from higher rates of negative, involuntary contact

with police officers (Hinds 2007; Viki et al. 2006). Clearly, the relationship between level of contact and perceptions goes both ways. Similar to the effect of positive contact and positive perceptions, if a person has frequent, involuntary and/or negative contact with police, that persons perception of a police force will tend to be more negative (Shafer, Huebner, and Bynum 2003; Viki et al. 2006).

Contact with diverse demographics has been shown to influence a person's perceptions of outgroups in areas outside of citizen and police interaction, as well. Islam and Hewstone (1993) found that negative contact between a Hindu person and Muslim person in Bangladesh may cause the individuals who engaged in the negative contact to avoid people of the group that they had negative contact with. A person may act this way in order to reduce their personal feelings of anxiety, due to the possibility that past negative contact with a person of a group caused them anxiety. Islam and Hewstone (1993) developed a useful scale to measure quality and quantity of contact which was adapted by Keith, Bennetto, and Rogge (2015). Using the same scale, the researchers obtained similar findings to Islam and Hewstones in a study regarding contact with mentally or developmentally disabled individuals. The researchers found that people who have less contact with people who have mental or developmental disabilities may have more prejudice against such people than a person who has more frequent, positive contact with these individuals (Keith, Bennetto, and Rogge 2015). The link between contact and perception is one that has been consistently substantiated and certainly appears to apply to police-citizen interactions.

## **Community-Based Policing**

It is plausible that CBP may help to increase voluntary, positive contact with police through casual social contact, which may help to improve a persons perceptions of police (Shafer, Huebner, and Bynum 2003; Weisburd and Eck 2004). Though contact with the members of a community is a cornerstone piece of CBP, it is equally as important to consider CBPs ability to deter crime. A greater positive presence of police in a community may help individuals

to perceive police more favorably and encourage positive, voluntary contact, but, CBP also seeks to deter crime by having a greater police presence in an area (Weisburd and Eck 2004).

Past research has established that nonwhite individuals tend to have a greater distrust of police forces and a different view of police, from a social standpoint, than white people hold. This may be the result of the different places that police officers occupy within the social contexts of different races (Cao, Frank, and Cullen 1996). CBP may help to improve some of these racial differences in attitudes toward police by placing police officers in different social settings and positions than they stereotypically are in for an individual of a particular race. This may encourage positive contact between police officers and diverse groups of people, thus, potentially leading to better attitudes toward both police officers from these groups of people, as well as toward these groups of people from police officers (Allport 1954; Putnam 2000)

Unfortunately, past studies have found that CBP alone may not actually help to deter crime in a community. Interestingly though, CBP may increase a persons sense of security in a community, despite not actually living in a more secure community. This may be because an individual forges informal social bonds with officers and because a person may see officers in their community more often, leading them to believe that they are more safe than they may actually be. Therefore, though CBP may not actually decrease crime, it may increase an individuals feeling of security, which may cause them to perceive a police force more favorably and view a police force as more legitimate (Ren, Lovrich, and Gaffney 2005; Shafer, Huebner, and Bynum 2003).

## **Police Athletic Leagues and Youth Development**

A particular practice within CBP, the one that this paper examines, is the sponsorship of police athletic leagues (PALs). The model for PALs was originally formulated in New York City as early as 1936. New York City PAL sought to engage citizens and youth with police officers through a common interest that many people share: sports. PALs also had the

goal of providing youth and citizens with a fun, socially-acceptable, well-supervised activity to prevent them from participating in undesirable behaviors (Hartmann 2007; Subhas and Chandra 2004). These programs have proved to be successful in some cities and have seen adoption in other cities throughout the United States.

As would be expected, based on past research, young people respond to negative contact with police in a predictable way. Hinds (2007) found, through surveys, that 14 through 16 year-olds who have negative contact with police tend to view police less favorably than those who have more positive contact. PALs may help to encourage positive contact between police and young people. Furthermore, PALs may lead to positive, voluntary contact between parents of youths participating in these leagues and police. PALs also may help parents in a community and police officers to engage in constructive projects together, since PALs may seek adult volunteers to help in running and supporting the league. Collaboration between officers and members of the community may very well allow for constructive, positive contact between citizens and police. This may be among the best forms of contact in creating positive perceptions of police officers and a police force among citizens because it allows citizens and police to work toward a shared interest (Allport 1954; Lutz 1981; Putnam 2000).

Whereas PALs and CBP may help people to perceive police more positively due to increased contact, PALs may also help to establish strong bonds of belonging in a community. PAL programs allow youth the opportunity to engage regularly with positive role models. This engagement with positive role models and feelings of communal bonds may make a young person less likely to commit a crime. This is due to both the young person feeling that the crime is not something that their positive role model would do, and because committing a crime may oppose community values (Andersen, Sabatelli, and Trachtenberg 2007; Putnam 2000).

An important cornerstone to community sports leagues supported by a local police department is the positive socialization and entertainment that these leagues allow. In many cities, PALs and midnight basketball leagues, a similar type of program, are implemented

to provide young people with constructive, safe activities during a time when they may be likely to engage in unacceptable behaviors (Hartmann 2007). Hartmann and Depro (2006) found that, in areas of cities with local midnight basketball leagues, supported by a local police force, property crime rates tend to be slightly lower. After implementation of a mid-night basketball league, some cities have seen a drop of over 300 property crimes per 100,000 people. This may be due to the fact that young people who may have engaged in undesirable behavior are drawn to participate in the local community sports league for entertainment and socialization (Hartmann and Depro 2006).

Casting the presence and support that police may provide aside, on their own, sports may provide a valuable means of socialization for young people. The literature on sports engagement and positive youth development has been unable to definitively establish a link between participation in athletics and positive social development. Though results of studies are mixed, there is no evidence to suggest that a relationship definitely does not exist (Coakley 2011). Evidence does exist that participation in sports may lead a person to engage in socially or communally undesirable behavior, however. In a study of high school youth in New York State, Miller et al. (2006) found that students who self-reported in surveys as being “jocks” were more likely to engage in undesirable behaviors, including crime. This relationship may be caused by negative peer pressure placed on an individual who participates in a sports team. Similarly, Hartmann and Kwauk (2011) asserted that PALs may offer young people a means of socialization but, similar to Miller et al. (2006), held that sports participation alone may not contribute to a youths positive development, in fact, the opposite may be true.

PALs that take a more all-encompassing approach to individual development, offering participants additional services beyond athletic participation, may be more successful in helping youths to develop into civil members of society (Hartmann and Kwauk 2011). In a sense, PALs and community sports leagues that do not include some kind of additional services for participants may be simply ineffective. This is because they allow participants

a means of entertainment and socialization, but do nothing to facilitate the participants seeking personal moral, ethical, or civil improvement (Hartmann 2016).

## **Improving Police Athletic League Impacts**

Considering the conclusion that sports leagues may not, on their own, lead to the positive development of young people into proper citizens, it is important to consider what practices may help young people to develop into civil, law-abiding citizens and remain as such. Social inclusion and social capital may be good social psychological incentive for pro-social action, however, they are not magic bullets for solving the problem of youth delinquency and ensuring positive development (Putnam 2000; Kelly 2012). The provision of additional support beyond the social inclusion and entertainment that PALs offer by a program may fortify the efforts of a community, neighborhood, or city to raise productive, wholesome citizens.

Kelly (2012), researching PALs in England using interviews of people affiliated with PAL programs, found that many PALs achieve greatest success in the positive development of youth when a PAL offers additional services. Additional services, such as mentoring, afterschool programs, and other paths for young people to stay out of trouble and form positive communal bonds, are, very possibly, more important than the entertainment and engagement that sports leagues offer. Whereas sports offer inclusion and entertainment, mentoring and afterschool programs that are linked to the sports programs help youth to develop in other pro-social ways, including academics, which may allow the young person a bright future (Kelly 2012).

This finding by Kelly (2012) is not an isolated observation. It has been found, in other cases, that programs that allow young people additional services may help them to develop more positively as individuals. Afterschool and mentoring programs, in particular, help to grow students socially and academically. In this growth, youths are able to gain transferable skills, beyond those which athletics can teach, that can be helpful later in life. If young people are able to obtain good civic and social skills and academic success, they may be less

likely to engage in a life of deviant behavior and, instead, lead a socially acceptable lifestyle (Reglin 1997).

Reviewing the past literature reveals several things. First, frequent, voluntary, positive contact may cause a person to have a more positive perception of police. Likewise, an individual who has reasonably often, negative, involuntary contact with police may perceive police more negatively. CBP, and PALs specifically, may increase voluntary, positive contact between citizens and police officers and allow for constructive relationships to be formed between officers and the people that they serve. These relationships may extend beyond participants and to volunteers and the family of participants, as well. Additionally, it has been established that PALs may help to reduce crime and deviant behavior of youth in a couple of different ways.

One way PALs may reduce crime is by allowing young people safe and acceptable forms of entertainment so that they do not engage in deviant behavior. PALs may also reduce crime by helping youths to develop meaningful and useful social skills that they can in their lives. Furthermore, linking PALs with some form of mentoring, life skills-building program, or academic success program may help to increase the benefits that a young person gets out of their participation in a PAL. Past literature has established that PALs may be a viable form of CBP for reducing crime and antisocial behavior among the young people of a community, when implemented and administered properly.

## **Theories**

Based on the findings of past research, there is evidence to suggest some link may exist between quantity and quality of contact and perceptions of a person or group of people (Allport 1954; Islam and Hewstone 1993; Keith, Bennetto, and Rogge 2015). Therefore, it is apparent that quality and quantity of contact between police and citizens may have a great influence on how a person perceives police. PALs and CBP may offer citizens the

opportunity to engage with police officers in positive ways. This hypothesized relationship is largely rooted in Allport's (1954) assertions regarding contact leading to the development of perceptions.

The main hypothesis of this paper is derived from Allport's (1954) Contact Theory. Allport suggests that quality and quantity of contact affect a person's perceptions of someone or a group of people. Past research (Hinds 2007; Schafer, Huebner, and Bynum 2003; Viki et al. 2006; Weisburd and Eck 2004) has substantiated this Theory with findings that support it, including the application of the Theory to police-citizen interactions. Since PALs provide citizens constructive and positive contact with police, it is possible that people who engage with PALs will perceive police more favorably than those who do not. Herein lies the first hypothesis of this paper:

***H1:*** *People who engage with a PAL will have a more favorable opinion of police than people who do not.*

It is important to note, however, that the first hypothesis assumes that people who engage with a PAL will have more positive and frequent interactions with police. Therefore, it is important to examine the nature of the relationship between participation in a PAL and quality and quantity of contact that a person has with police. Though past literature has established the relationship between quality and quantity of contact helping a person to develop perceptions of a person or group of people, little research has been conducted specifically on PALs in regard to this phenomenon. It is important to understand if PALs make contact with police more frequent and more positive for people who engage with them in order to determine if a PAL is serving one of its core purposes. Based on this idea, two more hypotheses can be formulated:

***H2:*** *People who engage with a PAL will have a greater amount of contact with police.*

***H3:*** *People who engage with a PAL will have more positive contact with police.*

H2 and H3 are vital to beginning to understand H1 because Contact Theory states that quality and quantity of contact affect perceptions of a person or group. If it is established that people who engage with a PAL have more frequent and more positive contact with police, resulting in more positive perceptions, it can be inferred that a typical relationship between contact and perceptions that Allport theorized may exist. However, if contact does not behave as expected, there may be other factors that impact a person's perceptions of police. This is also a possibility as many other factors may contribute to a person's perceptions of police.

## **Research Design**

To study the effect of participation in a PAL on perceptions of police, I researched people in the Albany, New York area. I surveyed two groups of people, those who engage with Albany PAL and those who do not. Those who engage with Albany PAL represent my test group, while those who do not act as the control group. The responses of those who engage with Albany PAL will be compared against those who do not in a regression analysis in order to determine if engagement with a PAL increases a person's positive contact and positive perceptions of police.

Albany, New York was selected as the location of the study partially out of convenience and access to the population, but also due to the presence of an established PAL. Besides that, Albany is also a fairly typical Northeast city. The demographics of Albany are displayed in Table 1, compared to other Northeast cities of similar size, based on the 2010 United States Census. Albany PAL provides not only the opportunity for youths and families to engage with police through athletics. This PAL offers several additional services including afterschool programs, academic support, a Boy Scouts of America chapter, and a Girl Scouts of the USA chapter for young students.

Table 1: Population Demographics of Selected Northeast Cities

City	Total Population	% White	% Non-white	% Male	% Female
Albany, NY	97,469	57.0%	43.0%	48.4%	51.6%
Rochester, NY	210,565	43.7%	52.3%	48.3%	51.7%
Buffalo, NY	261,325	50.4%	49.6%	47.9%	52.1%
Syracuse, NY	145,170	56.0%	44.0%	47.7%	52.3%
Springfield, MA	153,060	51.8%	48.2%	47.4%	52.6%
New Haven, CT	129,799	42.6%	57.4%	48.2%	51.8%
Providence, RI	178,042	49.8%	50.2%	49.2%	51.8%

To populate my test group, I partnered with Albany PAL and conducted both convenience sample electronic surveys at PAL events, as well as asked Albany PAL to circulate sign-up sheets for those who may be interested to leave their email addresses and receive the survey via email. Albany PAL is a fairly well established PAL, situated in Albany, NY, a city that has an existing dedication to CBP. Founded in 1988, Albany PAL serves the Albany area and provides sports and after school programming services to families and individuals the area. In 2016, Albany PAL served 1,533 participants, ranging in age from 1 through 19. Albany PAL participants represent a vast array of ethnicities, both male and female. These demographic allowed for the gathering of a diverse sample from a fairly large body of people.

The control group was populated through several methods. One method was snowball sampling, a question on the survey given to PAL participants asked them to provide the email addresses of up to three other people who they think may have been interested in taking the survey. The survey was then sent to those people electronically via email and completed online. Another method utilized was distributing a link to the survey via social media. The third method that was used was convenience sampling of people in the Albany area. The combined responses from these three forms of dissemination constituted the control sample for the study.

Respondents were asked typical demographic questions including age, race, level of education, and political ideology. These questions were included to create control variables for the regression analysis that was used. To observe the independent variable, engagement with a PAL, respondents were simply asked if they had a child or children who participate in Albany PAL. The surveying for this study was conducted from January 2017 through March 2017.

In order to study the key dependent variables in my study: amount of contact with police, quality of contact with police, and attitudes toward police, three batteries of questions were developed. The four quality and six quantity of contact questions were asked and derived from Islam and Hewstone's (1993) study on perceptions of people of conflicting religious groups. Additionally, five questions were asked in a battery designed to determine a respondents attitudes toward police, developed from Brick, Taylor, and Esbensen's (2009) study of juvenile attitudes toward police. With the answers to each battery of questions coded and summed, each respondent was given a score three different categories: quantity of contact, quality of contact, and attitude toward police. The full slate of questions can be found in Appendix A.

Quality of contact responses were coded 1-4 with 1 being indicative of responses showing more negative contact and 4 of more positive contact. These questions asked respondents to rate "When you interact with a police officer, do you feel like you are equal?," "When you interact with a police officer, is the interaction voluntary or involuntary?," "In general, how would you describe your typical interaction with a police officer?," "How often are your interactions with police officers pleasant in nature?," and "Do your interactions with police officers tend to be [competitive or cooperative]?" The coded results were then summed with higher values indicating more positive contact, and lower values indicating more negative contact. This summation created a quality of contact score for each respondent which became a key independent variable in the regression.

Likewise, quantity of contact responses were coded 1-5, with 1 being "never" or "none at

all” and 5 being “very often” or “a great deal.” The coded responses were then summed to generate a quantity of contact score, with a lower score indicating less contact and a higher score indicating more contact. This variable was used as a main independent variable in the regression. The quantity of contact questions asked respondents to rate, “How much contact do you have with police officers as acquaintances?,” “How much contact do you have with police officers as close friends?,” “How often do you interact with police officers?,” and “How often do you have voluntary, informal conversations with police officers?”

Finally, attitude questions were given in a series of statements that a respondent could either agree or disagree with. The answers were coded 1-5 with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree” with the statement. These values were then summed to create an attitude toward police score for a respondent. The questions in this battery asked respondents to rate agreement with the statements that “Police officers are honest,” “Police officers are hardworking,” “Police officers are usually friendly,” “Police officers are usually courteous,” and “Police officers are respectful of people like me.” The attitude score was used as the dependent variable in the regression analysis.

Once all variables were coded and scored appropriately, a regression analysis was run in order to test my previously stated hypotheses. I expected to see parents who engage with Albany PAL to have more contact with police, greater positive contact with police, and more positive perceptions of police than those who do not engage with Albany PAL.

## **Analysis**

The sampling that was conducted yielded a total of 106 total responses. Twenty-seven respondents identified that they have a child who participates in Albany PAL programming, making up the test group. The other 79 respondents did not indicate having a child who participates in Albany PAL programming, which populated the control group. Demographics of the respondents can be found in Table 2. It is important to note that the data is skewed

by a large number of responses by respondents under the age 35. Also, the groups are quite different in racial make-up, with the test group being much more diverse than the control group. Both variables were control variables in the analysis, and not main independent variables of the study. These major differences between the two groups are very likely a result of the selection bias incurred by distributing the survey via social media to gain control group responses.

Factor analysis was run on the three scales that were adapted from scales in past research on the topics of this paper. This was done to confirm that the adapted scales were loading fairly highly and demonstrating acceptable Cronbach's Alpha scores, like they were in past research that they were used in. The factor analysis showed that all three scales were functioning reliably. The factor analysis for each scale can be found in Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5.

Table 2: Demographic Information of Sample

Demographic Item	Test Group	Control Group
Male <sup>a</sup>	37.04% (10)	44.30% (35)
Female <sup>a</sup>	62.96% (17)	55.70% (44)
White <sup>b</sup>	44.44% (12)	89.87% (71)
Nonwhite <sup>b</sup>	55.55% (15)	10.13% (8)
Conservative <sup>c</sup>	11.11% (3)	18.99% (15)
Liberal <sup>c</sup>	33.33% (9)	55.70% (44)
Moderate/Independent <sup>c</sup>	25.93% (7)	22.78% (18)
Age (Under 35)	25.93% (7)	82.78% (65)
Age (35 and Over)	74.07% (20)	21.51% (14)
Total Number of Respondents	25.47% (27)	74.83% (79)

Note: Raw totals of responses show in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup>: Male and female based on Gender variable.

<sup>b</sup>: Race of respondents were collapsed to a binary variable with 0 being coded for any respondent identifying as white and 1 for any respondent identifying as nonwhite.

<sup>c</sup>: Political ideology of respondents was collapsed into a three value variable.

Table 3: Attitude Toward Police Scale Factor Analysis

Variable	Correlation Coefficient
Honest	.674
Hardwork	.732
Friendly	.881
Courteous	.855
Respectful	.796
Cronbach's Alpha	.849

Table 4: Quality of Contact with Police Scale Factor Analysis

Variable	Correlation Coefficient
Feel Equal	.614
Voluntary/Involuntary	.654
Describe Interaction	.445
Pleasant	.769
Competitive/Cooperative	.640
Cronbach's Alpha	.613

Table 5: Quantity of Contact with Police Scale Factor Analysis

Variable	Correlation Coefficient
Contact with Police as Acquaintances	.828
Contact with Police as Close Friends	.795
Voluntary Conversation Frequency	.809
Frequency of Interactions	.849
Cronbach's Alpha	.821

In order to visualize the skews in the overall data collected, and thus gain a greater understanding of the data that was used to run the regression analyses to test my three hypotheses, I have included descriptive statistics of all variables in my regressions in Table 6. The table shows that the sample was not necessarily the most representative of a larger populations as a whole, likely as a result of the sampling methods used in this study. A complete description of the coding can be found in Appendix B, which features a full codebook for all variables that were generated in this study.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Regression Variables<sup>a</sup>

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean
Gender	0	1	1	0.576
Age	1	5	1	1.991
Education	1	6	4	4.057
Nonwhite <sup>b</sup>	0	1	1	0.217
Quantity of Contact	4	14	6	6.861
Quality of Contact	7	22	17	16.090
Attitude Toward Police	6	25	20	19.020
Engagement with Albany PAL	0	1	0	0.255

<sup>a</sup>: Description of coding can be found in the codebook in Appendix B

<sup>b</sup>: Race of respondents were collapsed to a binary variable with 0 being coded for any respondent identifying as white and 1 for any respondent identifying as nonwhite.

Three regression analyses were run to test the three hypotheses of this paper. First, to test H1, Attitude Toward Police was used as the dependent variable, with Participation in Albany PAL as the main independent variable. Several variables were included as control variables to isolate that relationship (see Table 7). Likewise, two other regressions were run to test H2 and H3. For H2, quantity of contact with police was the dependent variable with Participation in Albany PAL as the main independent variable, plus several control variables (see Table 8). Finally, to test H3, a regression was completed with Quality of Contact as the dependent variable and Participation in Albany PAL as the main independent variable, with several control variables included (see Table 9).

Table 7: Attitude Toward Police Regression

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
Intercept	7.774*	2.459
Engagement with Albany PAL <sup>a</sup>	0.446	1.186
Age	-0.316	0.410
Quantity of Contact Score	0.166	0.195
Quality of Contact Score	0.758*	0.143
Education	0.0004	0.337
Gender	0.055	0.764
Nonwhite	-3.789*	1.126
Political Ideology	0.090	0.301
R <sup>2</sup>	0.518	
N	106	

\*:  $p \leq 0.05$

<sup>a</sup>: Main IV

Note: DV based on Attitude Toward Police Score variable

The regression in Table 7 serves as a test of H1. The main independent variable of the regression is Participation in Albany PAL and the dependent variable is Attitude Toward Police Officers Score. The model shows that only two of the variables in the model are significant in predicting a person's attitude toward police: Quality of Contact Score and Nonwhite. Nonwhite has the greatest magnitude with a coefficient of -3.789, indicating that a nonwhite person will tend to have a 3.789 point, or 19.921% lower Attitude Toward Police Score in this model than a white person, all else held equal. Likewise, Quality of Contact also returned as significant with a coefficient of 0.758. This indicates that as a person's Quality of Contact Score increases by one unit, their Attitude Toward Police Score will increase by 0.758 units, or 3.985%. This indicates that people who have greater positive contact with

police officers have a more positive attitude toward police. Figure 1 shows this relationship between Quality of Contact and Attitude Toward Police Score in a scatterplot. Though evidence exists that supports a potential link between quality of contact and attitude toward police, H1 cannot be supported because Participation in Albany PAL was not significant in the regression. Therefore, the null hypothesis of H1 cannot be rejected, and H1 is not supported. It is very important to remember, however, that the Quality of Contact Scale was found to not be functioning very reliably in the survey. Therefore, the findings surrounding this variable should be considered with due caution.

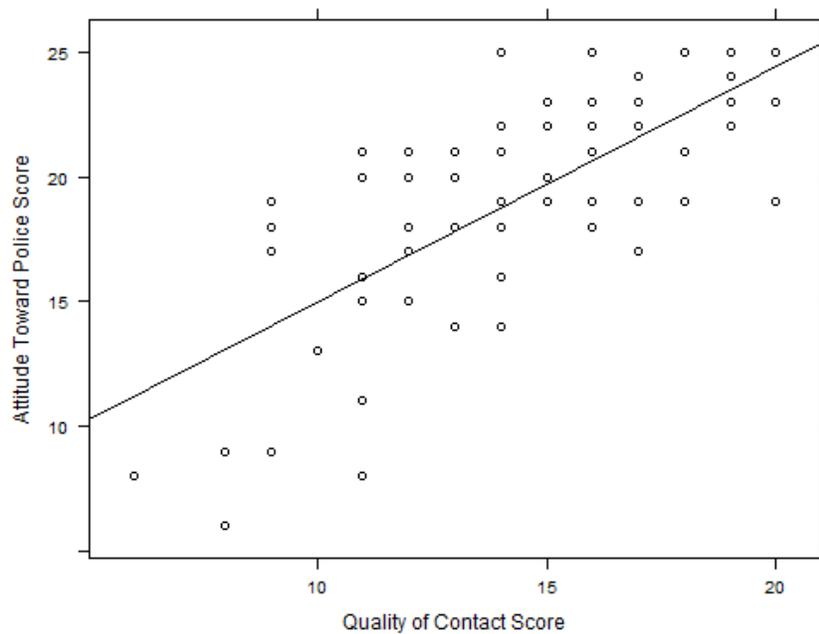


Figure 1: The Effect of Quality of Contact on Attitude Toward Police

Table 8: Quantity of Contact with Police Regression

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
Intercept	5.852*	0.963
Engagement with Albany PAL <sup>a</sup>	-0.508	0.703
Age	0.731*	0.233
Education	0.121	0.200
Nonwhite	0.961	0.638
Political Ideology	-0.245	0.188
Gender	-0.073	0.474
R <sup>2</sup>	0.158	
N	106	

\*:  $p \leq 0.05$ <sup>a</sup>: Main IV

Note: DV based on Quantity of Contact Score variable

Similar to the regression in Table 7, the main independent variable of the regression in Table 8, Participation in Albany PAL, did not return as significant. This finding does not support H2, as the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. In fact, the only variable that showed up as significant in the regression was age of the respondent, indicating that as a person's age increases by one unit, their quantity of contact with police increases by 0.731 units, or 10.654% all else held constant. The Age variable groups respondents by 10 year increments, except for the 18 – 24 age group, showing that people tend to have more contact with police as they get older. This may occur because of people making friends or having family members who become officers as they get older, or simply having a greater amount of lifetime contact with police officers to draw from when answering the survey questions.

Table 9: Quality of Contact with Police Regression

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
Intercept	14.807*	1.506
Engagement with Albany PAL <sup>a</sup>	1.888	1.150
Age	0.590	0.399
Education	-0.025	0.324
Nonwhite	-2.804*	1.025
Political Ideology	-0.588*	0.287
Gender	1.811*	0.724
R <sup>2</sup>	0.226	
N	106	

\*:  $p \leq 0.05$

<sup>a</sup>: Main IV

Note: DV based on Quality of Contact Score variable

Examining Table 9, it is evident that the main independent variable of this regression, Participation in Albany PAL, did not return as significant at the  $p \leq 0.05$  threshold of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis of H3 cannot be rejected, meaning that H3 cannot be supported. Interestingly, the White/Nonwhite variable showed up in the quality of contact regression, shown in Table 9, as significant in predicting a person's quality of contact with police officers. The coefficient for the White/Nonwhite variable had a coefficient of -2.804, indicating that a nonwhite person has a 2.804 unit, 17.427%, lower Quality of Contact Score, all else held equal, than a white person. Also, the Gender variable was significant with a coefficient of 1.811, indicating that women, all else held equal, have a 1.811 unit, 11.255%, higher Quality of Contact Score than males. To speculate, this may be a result of male having a greater resistance to authority or seeing interactions with police officers as more competitive than women perceive them. It is important, again, to remember that

the dependent variable of this regression, Quality of Contact Score, was found to not be functioning reliably, so these results should be reviewed and considered cautiously.

## Conclusion

Evidence to suggest that participation in a PAL positively affects a person's attitude toward police and quantity of contact with police officers was not found. Thus, H1, H2, and H3 are not supported. This lack of support for my hypotheses, however, should not be inherently interpreted as an inability of PALs to have an impact on people. There are variables in this paper that were shown to be closely linked with PALs, contact with police, and attitudes toward police that demonstrate possible usefulness and impact of PALs.

Race was a factor that was found to be highly influential in determining a person's attitude toward police and quality of contact with police. Nonwhite individuals indicated significantly less favorable attitudes toward police and less positive contact. Racial perceptions of police is a complex matter and one that is not necessarily at the core of this study. Future research may explore this topic in more depth and specificity, having determined that there may be evidence to support a relationship between race, attitude toward police, and quality of contact with police.

Though the three central hypotheses of this paper were not supported, the data that was found related to race, attitudes toward police, and quality of contact with police ought to be taken into consideration by police departments and police forces. The data shows that there is a clear and rather large discrepancy between how white and nonwhite people feel about police and the quality of contact they report having with officers. In a system where a group has more negative attitudes of police and quality of contact with police, the possibility for feelings of oppression and resistance may begin to take root (Hill 2016). In order to begin to change these attitudes, police forces should take steps to engage in more positive contact with nonwhite groups of citizens. This may lead to better cooperation with officers, lower

crime, and greater respect for the police force than by utilizing practices that create negative sentiments between officers and citizens.

The research in this paper suffered from several key limitations. First, the data collection and analysis was heavily constrained by time. The collection and analysis of data was limited to only about two or three months. If this time constraint had not existed, a much better sample could have been collected from a much larger body of people. The sample that was used was a major limitation in this study, being only 106 total respondents, and heavily skewed by several demographic factors. This less-than-ideal sample was the result of data collection methods, such as social media distribution and convenience sampling, that are known to induce selection bias. Additionally, the survey was assessing the attitudes of the parents of the children who engaged with Albany PAL, and not the people who were directly involved in the PAL. This may have effected rsponses since having a child who attends Albany PAL programs does not necessarily mean the parent will have a great deal of contact with the officers and other individuals who work with the PAL.

For future research, I would like to take a longer period of time to collect data and run the regressions again. This would potentially allow for the collection of a larger sample. Additionally, I would like to use better survey distribution techniques in order to gather a more representative group of respondents. These techniques may include increasing the use of snowball sampling, contacting PALs from different cities so test group data from outside of Albany, NY can be gathered, nationalizing the data collection more, and distributing the survey more randomly to the control group. Many of the flaws of this research stem from a poor sample and poor sampling techniques. Having a more random and representative sample would help to correct some of these flaws and lead to better, more generalizable results.

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