

The Student Police Unity League and Intergroup Contact Theory

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the Student Police Unity League as an effective program at fostering more positive views of the police from black citizens operating by the core tenants provided by Intergroup Contact Theory. It was expected that black students who participated in the Student Police Unity League would report higher levels of trust, legitimacy, willingness to work with the police, outcome justice, and lower level of perceived racial profiling. While the majority of the findings did not reach statistical significance at the .05 level, participation in the Student Police Unity league did lead to better views of police in terms of outcome justice and legitimacy. However, trust, profiling, and willingness to work with the police unexpectedly had inverse results.

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## **General Audience Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the Student Police Unity League as an effective program at fostering more positive views of the police from black citizens operating by the core tenants provided by Intergroup Contact Theory. Intergroup Contact Theory suggested that positive effects of intergroup (between two or more distinguishable groups) contact occur in contact situations characterized by four key conditions: equal status, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support by social and institutional authorities. It was expected that black students who participated in the Student Police Unity League would report higher levels of trust, legitimacy (the idea of being treated fairly), willingness to work with the police, outcome justice (perceived police effectiveness), and lower level of perceived racial profiling. While the majority of the findings did not reach statistical significance at the .05 level, participation in the Student Police Unity league did lead to better views of police in terms of outcome justice and legitimacy. However, trust, profiling, and willingness to work with the police unexpectedly had inverse results.

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## **Tensions between Police and Communities of Color**

In 1991, the beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles Police officers was covertly video recorded and released to the public, thus exposing the brutality of policing to the general public that was largely unaware of this issue.<sup>1</sup> Fast forwarding to the year 2016, over the past three years there has been a surge of videos becoming public provide continues evidence of police brutality, especially towards communities of color. For example, one of the more frequently viewed videos was the death of Eric Garner who died from asphyxiation after being placed in a chokehold by a police officer for allegedly selling “loose” cigarettes on the street. Another video was of John Crawford III, a young black man who, as shown by surveillance footage, was shot dead by police officers while walking around inside of Wal-Mart with a toy gun he grabbed from the shelves. Similarly, Tamir Rice was a 12 year old boy that was shot dead within two seconds of officer Loehmann arrival at a park, after a 911 call concerning Tamir Rice and the BB gun in his waistband.

Scenarios like these have long been an issue when it comes to police and civilian interactions. Another issue that has come out of the heightened public awareness of police brutality is the seemingly lack of justice received on behalf of the victims when it comes to punishment for the officers. Over the last ten years, police have killed thousands of Americans and yet only 54 police officers have been criminally charged for any of these killings during that time.<sup>2</sup> Of those cases that have been resolved, less than one third of the officers have been convicted and, of those convicted, the sentences are on average only three years. Despite the

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<sup>1</sup> Brucato, Ben. 2015. "The New Transparency: Police Violence in the Context of Ubiquitous Surveillance." *Media and Communication* 3(3). Pg.47

<sup>2</sup> Kindy, Kimberly and Kimbriell Kelly. 2015. "Thousands Dead, Few Prosecuted." *The Washington Post*.

increased visibility of policing, increased officer safety, and declining crime rates, the rate of incidences where officers use force has not lessened and the police's use of violence does not appear to be changing in any substantial way.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to cases of police brutality, racial profiling also plays a role in the existing tensions between police officers and communities of color. Due to criminal "profiles" compiled by the police both formally and informally, race is one factor that is used to identify potential criminals.<sup>4</sup> Race appears to be a common decisive factor whenever a police stop is initiated or in how an encounter is handled as we have seen vividly illustrated in the study of police traffic stops on the New Jersey Turnpike and Maryland's I-95. On the New Jersey Turnpike 15 percent of all drivers were racial minorities at the time of the study, however, 42 percent of all stops and 73 percent of all arrests were of black motorists. Despite the fact that black and white motorists violate traffic laws at the same rate 77 percent of all police searches were conducted on minorities.<sup>5</sup> On Maryland's I-95, of the 21 percent of racial minorities on the highway blacks constituted 17 percent of drivers, yet 80 percent of those stopped and searched were minorities.<sup>6</sup> In both studies, whites who were searched were more likely to be carrying illegal drugs or contraband than were the minorities who were searched.

Generally, black people and black males in particular tend to have much worse experiences with police officers than white Americans do.<sup>7</sup> This discrepancy in experiences is one possible reason that whites and minorities express different opinions about the police. A number of surveys have found a systematic gap between the views of whites and those of

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<sup>3</sup> Brucato, Ben. 2015. "The New Transparency: Police Violence in the Context of Ubiquitous Surveillance." *Media and Communication* 3(3).

<sup>4</sup> Leitzel, Jim. 2001. "Race and Policing." *Society* 38(3):38-42.

<sup>5</sup> Lange, James E, Mark B Johnson and Robert B Voas. 2005. "Testing the Racial Profiling Hypothesis for Seemingly Disparate Traffic Stops on the New Jersey Turnpike." *Justice Quarterly* 22(2):193-223.

<sup>6</sup> Petrocelli, Matthew, Alex R Piquero and Michael R Smith. 2003. "Conflict Theory and Racial Profiling: An Empirical Analysis of Police Traffic Stop Data." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 31(1):1-11.

<sup>7</sup> Leitzel, Jim. 2001. "Race and Policing." *Society* 38(3):38-42.

minorities, specifically with communities of color expressing greater unhappiness and lower approval of police behavior.<sup>8</sup> A 1999 Gallup National Survey showed that only 58 percent of blacks compared to 85 percent of whites held favorable attitudes towards their local police.<sup>9</sup> The results from a 2011 study found that black men and women were more likely to negatively evaluate police behavior when stopped by a white police officer than when stopped by a black officer. In addition, racial minorities in general view police encounters with more skepticism than their white counterparts.<sup>10</sup> When it comes to communities of color, slow response times of police officers to crime scenes and incidents and the perception that police do not respect the rights of poor citizens also contributes to a general dissatisfaction with police services.<sup>11</sup> Police recognize that this racial gap is problematic, and programs such as the Student Police Unity League are designed to address it. It is with great hope, that programs like the Student Police Unity League will help to lessen these problems related to the black community and police officers.

## **Trust and Legitimacy**

Scholars studying adolescent development have suggested that during childhood, ethnic minority youth that belong to historically stigmatized groups often become “hypersensitive” to social messages about inferiority and stigmatization.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, many black youth come to

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<sup>8</sup> Howell, Susan E, Huey L Perry and Matthew Vile. 2004. "Black Cities/White Cities: Evaluating the Police." *Political Behavior* 26(1):45-68.

<sup>9</sup> Orr, Marion and Darrell M West. 2007. "Citizen Evaluations of Local Police Personal Experience or Symbolic Attitudes?". *Administration & Society* 38(6):649-68.

<sup>10</sup> Cochran, Joshua C and Patricia Y Warren. 2011. "Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Differences in Perceptions of the Police: The Salience of Officer Race within the Context of Racial Profiling." *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*:1043986211425726.

<sup>11</sup> Williams, Brian N. 1998. *Citizen Perspectives on Community Policing: A Case Study in Athens, Georgia*: SUNY Press.

<sup>12</sup> Cross, William E and T Binta Cross. 2008. "Theory, Research, and Models." *Handbook of race, racism, and the developing child*:154-81.

expect negative behavior from police officers because they recognize the “criminal” stigma that has been associated with their group.<sup>13</sup> In combination with race-based policing tactics, trust in officers is undermined. This erosion of trust leads to lessened deterrence of crime due to minorities becoming unwilling to report crime. Hostility between marginalized groups like African Americans and the police creates an unwillingness to testify at trials, and when serving on juries, an unwillingness to convict defendants.<sup>14</sup> One could expect for personal experiences to matter when it comes to citizen evaluations of their local police, especially because in many communities, police officers are the most visible representation of the government.<sup>15</sup>

Citizen’s perceptions of their local police are linked to behaviors and issues like one’s willingness to report crime or criminals to the police, one’s willingness to obey or cooperate with the police or serve in criminal justice procedures, attitudes such as maintaining one’s confidence in police agencies and actions, and in maintaining confidence in agents throughout the broader criminal justice system.<sup>16</sup> It is also highly correlated with one’s intentions to comply with the law. An important component of individuals’ beliefs about the police and legal system is captured by the concept of legitimacy, an individual’s perception that an authority figure is just or appropriate and entitled to be obeyed.<sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> Perceived legitimacy towards police, or what is referred to as procedural justice, (the idea of being treated fair), depends on critical factors including the perceived trustworthiness of the officer, if the officer respects the citizen, and the

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<sup>13</sup> Lee, Joanna M, Laurence Steinberg, Alex R Piquero and George P Knight. 2011. "Identity-Linked Perceptions of the Police among African American Juvenile Offenders: A Developmental Perspective." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 40(1):23-37.

<sup>14</sup> Leitzel, Jim. 2001. "Race and Policing." *Society* 38(3):38-42.

<sup>15</sup> Orr, Marion and Darrell M West. 2007. "Citizen Evaluations of Local Police Personal Experience or Symbolic Attitudes?." *Administration & Society* 38(6):649-68.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor, Ralph B, Brian R Wyant and Brian Lockwood. 2015. "Variable Links within Perceived Police Legitimacy?: Fairness and Effectiveness across Races and Places." *Social science research* 49:234-48.

<sup>17</sup> Sunshine, Jason and Tom R Tyler. 2003. "The Role of Procedural Justice and Legitimacy in Shaping Public Support for Policing." *Law & society review* 37(3):513-48.

<sup>18</sup> Tyler, Tom R. 1990. "Why People Obey the Law: Procedural Justice, Legitimacy, and Compliance." New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.



neutrality of the officer's decision-making.<sup>19</sup> On the individual level, age, race, sex, and socioeconomic status along with contextual variables such as crime rate, community beliefs regarding policing and the likelihood of victimization also contribute to citizens' attitudes towards the police.<sup>20</sup>

In an examination of police courtesy and fairness, personal crime experience was much more influential than symbolic attitudes when evaluating police officers. The more personal experience individuals had with crime the more likely they were to say that the police were not courteous or fair.<sup>21</sup> This finding supports the argument that personal experience affects views about police performance on local concrete issues more so than issues of national policy.<sup>22</sup> According to Orr (2007), personal experience trumped symbolic attitudes and political ideology in reference to local issues related to city police and attitudes about the political system and law enforcement. Positive personal experiences with the police can lead to more positive views about police officers and an increased likelihood of compliance with the law.<sup>23</sup>

Attitudes toward police are also patterned by issues of outcome justice, or police effectiveness, can be analyzed through two aspects, competency and dependability. In a 2003 study, it was found that being a victim of a crime or having a family member victimized in the neighborhood was inversely related to perceptions of police effectiveness and that being fearful of criminal victimization was also inversely related to favorable opinions about the police's ability to control crime effectively. While outcome justice is important, it should be noted that

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<sup>19</sup> Tyler, Tom R. 2006. "Psychological Perspectives on Legitimacy and Legitimation." *Annu. Rev. Psychol.* 57:375-400. Also see Tyler, Tom. 1990. *Why People Obey the Law*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

<sup>20</sup> Decker, Scott H. 1981. "Citizen Attitudes toward the Police: A Review of Past Findings and Suggestions for Future Policy." *Journal of Police Science and Administration* 9(1):80-87.

<sup>21</sup> Orr, Marion and Darrell M West. 2007. "Citizen Evaluations of Local Police Personal Experience or Symbolic Attitudes?". *Administration & Society* 38(6):649-68.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Fagan, Jeffrey and Tom R Tyler. 2005. "Legal Socialization of Children and Adolescents." *Social justice research* 18(3):217-41.

even in studies that control for outcome justice, ethnic minorities had, on average, less favorable attitudes toward the police and their ability to effectively control crime.<sup>24</sup>

## **Intergroup Contact Theory**

Now that we see the large role that personal experience plays when it comes to peoples' perceptions about the police, it would seem that if we want to help alleviate some of the tensions between police and members of marginalized groups, we could address this issue by providing opportunities for police and citizens to interact in more positive environments. This is why Intergroup Contact Theory was chosen as the theory underlying the research that will be conducted by this study. Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT) is best defined by Allport's (1954) *The Nature of Prejudice*, where it was suggested that positive effects of intergroup contact occur in contact situations characterized by four key conditions: equal status, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support by social and institutional authorities.<sup>25</sup> We have seen some support relating to this theory from social psychology that has repeatedly shown that greater exposure to targets can significantly enhance the liking for those targets.<sup>26</sup> Additional studies have also illustrated enhanced liking between groups that results from exposure can even be generalized to a greater liking for others related, yet previously unknown to the social targets.<sup>27</sup> In other words, through intergroup contact, more positive views towards the members of a different group will

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<sup>24</sup> Hawdon, James E, John Ryan and Sean P Griffin. 2003. "Policing Tactics and Perceptions of Police Legitimacy." *Police Quarterly* 6(4):469-91.

<sup>25</sup> Pettigrew, Thomas F and Linda R Tropp. 2006. "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 90(5):751.

<sup>26</sup> Bornstein, Robert F. 1989. "Exposure and Affect: Overview and Meta-Analysis of Research, 1968–1987." *Psychological bulletin* 106(2):265, Harmon-Jones, Eddie and John JB Allen. 2001. "The Role of Affect in the Mere Exposure Effect: Evidence from Psychophysiological and Individual Differences Approaches." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 27(7):889-98, Zajonc, Robert B. 1968. "Attitudinal Effects of Mere Exposure." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 9(2p2):1.

<sup>27</sup> Rhodes, Gillian, Jamin Halberstadt and Gemma Brajkovich. 2001. "Generalization of Mere Exposure Effects to Averaged Composite Faces." *Social Cognition* 19(1):57-70.

transcend the group's specific network and towards members extend to members of that group who the targets did not participate with.

Looking at some earlier studies concerning ICT, we can begin with Williams' (1947) classic study in *The Reduction of Intergroup Tensions*. Here 102 testable propositions on intergroup relations led to the formulation of ICT. Specifically, he mentioned that inter-group contact would maximally reduce prejudice when the two groups share similar status, interests, and tasks, and when the situation fosters personal, intimate intergroup contact.<sup>28</sup> A study conducted by Brody (1956), began after the U.S. Merchant Marines began to desegregate, found that as whites and black seamen took more voyages together, the more positive their racial attitudes toward one another became.<sup>29</sup> A study by Kephart (1957) found that white police officers who worked with black colleagues later objected less to having blacks join their police districts, teaming up with a black partner, and taking orders from black officers.<sup>30</sup>

A field study conducted of public housing in 1951 found that white women in desegregated housing projects had far more optimal contact with their black neighbors and this heightened contact resulted in them holding their black neighbors in higher esteem and expressing greater support for interracial housing.<sup>31</sup> The same evidence was noted in additional studies conducted in 1952 and in 1961.<sup>32</sup> More recently, a 2006 meta-analytic study conducted by Pettigrew and Tropp focusing on ICT found support for the theory. They synthesized the effects from 696 samples, and the data revealed that intergroup contact is generally associated

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<sup>28</sup> Williams Jr, Robin M. 1947. "The Reduction of Intergroup Tensions: A Survey of Research on Problems of Ethnic, Racial, and Religious Group Relations." *Social Science Research Council Bulletin*.

<sup>29</sup> Brodie, Bernard and Duncan S Ballantine. 1949. "The Service of Supply." JSTOR.

<sup>30</sup> Kephart, William M. 1957. "Racial Factors and Urban Law Enforcement."

<sup>31</sup> Deutsch, Morton and Mary Evans Collins. 1951. *Interracial Housing: A Psychological Evaluation of a Social Experiment*: U of Minnesota Press.

<sup>32</sup> Wilner, Daniel M, Rosabelle Price Walkley and Stuart W Cook. 1952. "Residential Proximity and Intergroup Relations in Public Housing Projects." *Journal of Social Issues* 8(1):45-69, Works, Ernest. 1961. "The Prejudice-Interaction Hypothesis from the Point of View of the Negro Minority Group." *American Journal of Sociology*:47-52.

with lower levels of prejudice.<sup>33</sup> According to this study, the magnitude of the contact-prejudice effect does not vary across different contexts, with the relationships between contact and prejudice remaining significant across samples involving different target groups, age groups, geographical areas, and contact settings. Their data provided substantial evidence that intergroup contact can contribute substantially to reductions in prejudices across a broad range of groups and contexts.<sup>34</sup> Specifically, the effects of intergroup contact generalize beyond participants in the immediate situation, so not only do attitudes towards the immediate participants usually become more positive, but so do the attitudes toward the entire outgroup, outgroup members in other situations, and even outgroup members not involved in the contact<sup>35</sup>

Some dissenting opinions voiced concerning ICT were that under optimal conditions, ICT reduces prejudice among participants, but that the reductions in prejudice may not generalize to entire groups and those unfavorable conditions can lead to an increase of prejudice and intergroup tension.<sup>36</sup> Another objection was that while intergroup contact often lowers prejudice at the individual level of analysis, it fails to do so at the group level of analysis. So, according to this logic, contact can address individual prejudice but not group-level prejudices.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Pettigrew, Thomas F and Linda R Tropp. 2006. "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 90(5):751.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Amir, Yehuda. 1969. "Contact Hypothesis in Ethnic Relations." *Psychological bulletin* 71(5):319.

<sup>37</sup> Forbes, Hugh Donald. 1997. *Ethnic Conflict: Commerce, Culture, and the Contact Hypothesis*: Yale University Press.

## The Student Police Unity League

Community Policing is a strong concept that is closely related to ICT. Essentially community policing is “a philosophy that focuses on crime and social disorder through the delivery of police services that includes aspects of traditional law enforcement, as well as a prevention, problem-solving, community engagement, and partnerships.<sup>38</sup>” it is essential to establish and maintain trust when attempting to implement community policing as it allows officers to become even more familiar with and form close ties to their communities and places them in the optimal position to create effective solutions.<sup>39</sup>

Sports are a good place to start when it comes to community policing. Sports are considered an “inherently” positive, prosocial force for youth and adults as that would not only keep young people out of trouble but also help to build character, provide proper socialization, cultivate self-discipline, and provide role models.<sup>40</sup> Building off this idea of community policing and sports, there has been the formation of Midnight Basketball programs, originally created by former town manager G. Van Standifer in Prince George County, MD in the 1980’s.<sup>41</sup> This program was run throughout the summer, no games started prior to 10:00pm, the participants were young men between 12 and 21 years old, and at least two uniformed police officers had to be present at each game. This program was based on Standifer’s belief that the keys to the problems of inner city poor black men was the absence of safe, constructive activities between the “high crime” hours of 10:00 pm - 2:00am.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Docobo, Jose Miguel. 2005. "Community Policing as the Primary Prevention Strategy for Homeland Security at the Local Law Enforcement Level." Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Hartmann, Douglas and Brooks Depro. 2006. "Rethinking Sports-Based Community Crime Prevention a Preliminary Analysis of the Relationship between Midnight Basketball and Urban Crime Rates." *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 30(2):180-96.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Similar to these types of programs, but with the focus on building trust instead of crime reduction, I created the Student Police Unity League, which is a program that follows the basic principles of Intergroup Contact Theory. SPUL consists of four different volleyball teams, with each team consisting of 8 to 10 members. Of those members, half were police officers from either Virginia Tech PD or Blacksburg PD. The other half of the members were black Virginia Tech Students. Each team was also co-ed, so there was a mixture of men and women representing both police officers and students. These teams competed in Blacksburg's adult co-ed volleyball leagues hosted by the city's Parks and Recreation division. Each team played on average two games a week on either a Tuesday or a Thursday night. The teams competed against themselves, as well as against the other teams that were signed up in the Recreation Center's volleyball league. The season lasted for 8 weeks beginning October 8 and ending on November 30. Each team played a total of 8 games. The role of this program was to create an environment using ITC as a means of fostering more positive views between police officers and black students towards one another.

Assuming that ICT and SPUL work in the way that I predict, the effects should carry over into personal lives of both black students and police officers. On the community side, I would expect to see lower levels of crime. As discussed earlier in the literature review, personal experience effects views about police performance on local issues and due to the lack of trust between police and their communities there is a lessened deterrence of crime because people are less willing to report it, unwilling to testify at trials, and unwilling to convict defendants when serving on juries. If the conditions for ICT are adequately met through SPUL, I would expect to see the opposite (willingness to report crime, testify at trials, etc.) occur within communities because of a renewed trust in police officers. While this effect is unlikely to be pronounced in

the current population of college students, it may be dramatic if SPUL is implemented in communities with higher rates of crime and lower rates of community engagement. On the police side of the issue, I would expect to see lower levels racial profiling and brutality in communities of color because the effects of ICT would in a sense “re-humanize” the populations in the eyes of the police, instead of being the often labeled “criminal” portion of society, where citizens will be seen as people instead of suspects.

## **Methodology**

The goal of this research is to determine whether or not more positive views towards police officers were fostered as a result of students participating in the Student Police Unity League compared to the views of students who did not participate. In order to do this, I constructed surveys with a series of questions designed to gauge the effectiveness of SPUL, the way the participant views police officers, and the type of interactions that the participants has had with police officers previously. At the conclusion of the first season of SPUL, I distributed a survey link to all SPUL student participants via email. The link would take them to the survey in Qualtrics. I also emailed the survey link to the Black Graduate Student Listserv, The NAACP at VT listserv, and the Black Organizations Council listserv, in order to reach as many black Virginia Tech Students as possible to ensure that black students that did not participate in the Student Police Unity League took the survey. The Survey was released on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016 and closed at the end of June 2016. Out of the 22 students that participated in SPUL, 10 participated in the survey (N=10). In response to the recruitment emails that I sent to the black student listservs, 52 (N=52) students took the survey who did not participate in SPUL. Thus, there were a total 62 participants in this study.

For this study, I chose to use the questions from my survey that focused on trust, legitimacy, outcome justice, profiling, and willingness to work with the police for my dependent variables. These variables were all ordinal level variables with a scale of 1 to 5 to measure the degree to which the respondents strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neither agree or disagree (3), agree (4), or strongly agree (5) with the listed statements. SPUL participation served as my independent variable. For control variables, I chose to use sex, political views, academic level, and the amount of positive contact with police.

First, legitimacy was measured using the questions, “Police treat people like me fairly,” “Police cooperate with people like me,” and “The police take advantage of people like me,” was measured with a three five-point Likert item. The one-factor solution accounted for 59.7 percent of the variance in the three questions. For outcome justice, the questions “I feel very confident in the police’s skill at controlling crime,” and “I feel like the police often escalate situations that could have been handled more effectively,” in accordance with the five point Likert item were used. The one-factor solution accounts for 64.2 percent of the variance in the two questions. Next, trust was measured with a single, five-point Likert item “I trust the police.” For perceptions of profiling, I used the single question, “Black people are more likely to be profiled by police than are white people.” This item also used a five-point Likert scale. Finally, willingness to work with the police was measured using the question, “I would be willing to work with the police to solve neighborhood problems.” Again, responses ranged from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree.” After constructing the above dependent variables, I ran a series of linear regressions on these dependent variables, while using SPUL participation as the Independent Variable and, sex, political views, academic level, and the amount of positive contact with police, as controls.



## Results

Unfortunately, when it came to analyzing the variable “Outcome Justice”, none of the results were statistically significant at the .05 level. Although none of the findings are statistically significant, the table shows that for this sample those who participated in SPUL fostered better views of Outcome Justice from police than did those who did not participate ( $B=.002$ ). Males were more likely to have better views of police Outcome Justice than females ( $B=.629$ ). As political views became more conservative, views of police Outcome Justice became more positive ( $B=.142$ ). As academic level increased, perceptions of Outcome Justice decreased ( $B= -.172$ ). Those who had mostly positive contact with police officers were more likely to have better views towards outcome justice as well ( $B=.084$ ). While interesting, it is again emphasized that none of these effects were statistically significant.

Table 1

Regression of Outcome Justice					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Significance
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
Participated in SPUL	0.002	0.429	0.001	0.004	0.997
Sex (Male)	0.629	0.362	0.333	1.737	0.095
Political Views	0.142	0.133	0.197	1.072	0.294
Academic Level at VT	-0.172	0.106	-0.323	-1.627	0.116
Positive Contact with the police	0.084	0.384	0.041	0.219	0.828

N= 31

In terms of “Legitimacy,” again none of the results were statistically significant at the .05 level. Those who participated in SPUL were more likely to report higher levels of police legitimacy ( $B=.334$ ) than those who did not participate. Males were more likely to have perceived higher levels of legitimacy in police than were females ( $B=.587$ ). As political views became more conservative, views of police legitimacy also increased ( $B=.196$ ). The same trend

was noted when respondents reported having more positive contact with the police (B=. 424). Academic level, however, showed that as education increased, levels of perceived police legitimacy decreased (B= -.072).

Table 2

Regression of Legitimacy					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Significance
Participated in SPUL	0.334	0.414	0.152	0.807	0.427
Sex (Male)	0.587	0.346	0.317	1.697	0.102
Political Views	0.196	0.127	0.276	1.546	0.134
Academic Level at VT	-0.072	0.102	-0.137	-0.71	0.484
Positive Contact with the police	0.424	0.362	0.216	1.172	0.252
N=32					

The variable “Trust” yielded an unexpected result. When it came to SPUL participation, those who participated in SPUL had lower levels of trust than did those who did not participate (B=-.705). This result however was not significant at the .05 level, but it did approach statistical significance (p= .075). Sex, political views, and academic level were all significant. Males were more likely to trust the police than females (b= .817; p = .017), as views became more conservative, so too did trust in the police increase (b= .270; p =.030), and as academic level increased trust in the police decreased (b= -.305; p = .003). Even though the value was not significant, it is interesting to note that there was an inverse relationship with positive police contact showing reduced trust in the police (B= -.355)

Table 3

Regression of Trust					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Significance
Participated in SPUL	-0.705	0.38	-0.291	-1.856	0.075
Sex (Male)	0.817	0.321	0.398	2.545	0.017
Political Views	0.27	0.117	0.344	2.297	0.03
Academic Level at VT	-0.305	0.094	-0.528	-3.255	0.003
Positive Contact with the police	-0.355	0.34	-0.159	-1.044	0.307
N= 31					

All of the results for the variable “Profile” were not significant. Of interesting note however, those who participated in SPUL were less likely to feel that the police profile black people more than white people (B= -.604). Males were less likely to believe that police profile black people more than white people (B= -.569). As political views became more conservative, respondents were less likely to believe that the police profile black people more than white people (B=-.078). The more educated respondents were, the more likely there were to believe that the police profile black people more than white people (B= .015). Lastly, respondents who reported having a majority of positive contacts with the police were less likely to believe that police profile black people more than white people.

Table 4

**Regression of Profiling**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Significance
Participated in SPUL	-0.604	0.417	-0.279	-1.449	0.16
Sex (Male)	-0.569	0.352	-0.311	-1.615	0.119
Political Views	-0.078	0.129	-0.112	-0.609	0.548
Academic Level at VT	0.015	0.103	0.029	0.145	0.886
Positive Contact with the police	-0.108	0.374	-0.054	-0.29	0.774

N= 31

The last variable I analyzed, willingness to work with the police, did not yield any statistically significant results at the .05 level. Interestingly, those who participated in SPUL were less likely to work with the police to solve neighborhood problems (B= -.344). Males are more likely to work with the police than females (B= .336). As political views become more conservative, willingness to work with the police increases (B= .183). As academic level increased, willingness to work with the police decreased (B= -.084). Those who reported more

positive contact with the police reported lower levels of willingness to work with the police (B=-.324).

Table 5

<b>Regression of Work With Police</b>					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Significance
Participated in SPUL	-0.344	0.453	-0.15	-0.76	0.455
Sex (Male)	0.336	0.383	0.173	0.878	0.388
Political Views	0.183	0.14	0.247	1.308	0.203
Academic Level at VT	-0.084	0.112	-0.153	-0.749	0.461
Positive Contact with the police	-0.324	0.406	-0.153	-0.797	0.433

N= 31

### **Discussion and Future Research**

As stated above, most of the results from this research were not statistically significant. Unfortunately, while there were a total of 62 submissions on the student survey, only 31 of the surveys were completely filled out, which probably had a drastic effect on the output of the regression analysis. Even though the results were not significant, we can see that from the responses that were obtained, participation in SPUL did lead to better views of police in terms of outcome justice and legitimacy. However, trust, profiling, and willingness to work with the police unexpectedly had inverse results. It may be the case that this was the result because people who already trust the police, are willing to work with them, and do not see racial profiling as an issue, did not see the need to participate in a program like SPUL. When we look at the control variable “sex,” we can see that women were less likely to want to work with the police to solve neighborhood problems, more likely to believe that the police profile black people more so than white people, less likely to trust the police, less likely to see the police at legitimate, and reported lower levels of perceived outcome justice from officers. This is an interesting phenomena and is opposite of what is typically found in the literature, and I am not sure why that is the case. It could be that the women who interacted with the officers faced some form of

implicit bias or microaggressions, even though as an observer I did not witness any such occurrences. After the first week of games, student participation dropped to such low levels that I do not think officers and female students would have had enough time to interact in order to form negative opinions toward officers in the SPUL environment.

Assuming that Intergroup Contact Theory is correct, it could very well be the case that in this study, SPUL's season did not last long enough for adequate relationships to build between students and the police. The season only lasted for 8 weeks in contrast to the studies used in the literature review where intergroup contact occurred over months and years. In addition to the short season, of the 10 respondents that participate in SPUL, only 1 respondent participated in all of the 10 season games, the majority of the respondents that participated in SPUL attended less than half of the season's games, which further limited the time that they were exposed to police officers in SPUL. Further complications have come from the fact that all of the SPUL teams had a losing record, which could have led to frustration within the groups. (Granted, none of the teams had weekly practices which put them at a severe disadvantage when playing against the other experienced teams at the recreation center.) This is especially true from those who may be of a competitive nature and have trouble coping with losses- This could be a serious detriment to the positive interaction aspect of ICT.

Status could have also been a detriment to this study. Unlike the studies given in the literature review, where the police and military integrated it forces (allowing different blacks to be on the same level as whites) or as seen in the housing projects integration, the participants in SPUL were still on vastly unequal power levels of being police officers versus being students. As research suggests in Allport's (1954) "*The Nature of Prejudice*," ICT is most effective when the groups involved are of equal—or at least near equal—status. This could be a problem that

programs such as SPUL will not be able to overcome given the relative status positions of police and students. However, it is possible that if the police and students are teamed for a longer period, their status as teammates may assume greater primacy than their status as officers and students, at least for the time they are on the court. This is a possibility that future research should consider.

Another point is that it could be the case that ITC did not have as strong effects on SPUL as I expected because the sample was skewed by the possibility that those students who did participate in SPUL already held police officers in relatively high esteem. If that was the case, it would be hard to tell whether or not ICT increased perceptions of trust, legitimacy, outcome justice, views of profiling, and willingness to work with the police, because those perceptions would have already been at higher levels in the first place.

However, I do not think that this is the case for this particular study. In the beginning, when I first formed SPUL, the hardest part was getting black students to sign up and participate. Ten days prior to the registration deadline for the volleyball league, only two students had actually signed up to participate. I believe this is because of all of the turmoil that has been in the news recently concerning the Black Lives Matter Movement and police killings of black citizens. As a result, a lot of the black students were already upset and wanted nothing to do with the police. It was not until I presented SPUL at an NAACP meeting that I was able to recruit enough students to make the league actually happen. At this meeting, I presented SPUL as an avenue to create change outside of the traditional means of protesting that the organization was already used to. By participating in the Student Police Unity League, members would be able to take an active approach to addressing the issue of police brutality in black communities, instead of simply protesting and making “soap box” speeches on Facebook (which I argued is an

ineffective way to try to combat something and more so serves as a way to clear your own conscious by which you can say “I did my part” even the effort was simply posting on Facebook or chanting outside on the street). By pitching SPUL as an active approach to addressing police brutality, I was able to influence 18 students to sign up that day. This may also add to why student participation later had such a steep drop off, because feelings of “duty to participate” dwindled after the first week of the season. As a result of all of this combined, I think it is more likely that the SPUL participants could have been negatively skewed than positively skewed.

The survey questions themselves could have also undermined this study in that they focused more on evaluating students’ views towards officers job performance instead of the concept referred to as “Social Distance/Closeness.” Social Closeness focuses more on the degree of acceptance we feel toward other groups.<sup>43</sup> So it could be the case SPUL result in black students being alright with playing sports with police officers, but they still may think they are incompetent at their jobs. So in redesigning this survey, I would have to change the questions to make sure that they are more closely evaluating aspects of Social Distance and not solely whether SPUL changed students perceptions on the competency in which police do their jobs. It is possible that SPUL could result in bringing the two groups socially closer without influencing how the groups perceive how the other enacts their social roles.

## **Limitations**

One of the main limitations of this study was the sample size. A total of 20 students participated in the Student Police Unity League, but only half of them took the survey. Out of the total 62 survey respondents, only 31 completely filled out the survey. Since all of the student participants were college students, weekly participation seemed to be too much of a demand,

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<sup>43</sup> Sociologyguide.com 2016. <http://www.sociologyguide.com/basic-concepts/Social-Distance.php>

resulting in low attendance rates at SPUL games. Also, college obligations severely limited the amount of students that were willing to participate because it required them to show up twice a week in the late evenings. SPUL's final games were in December, which could have led to clashes with the college student's final exam study times and exam dates. A larger sample size and higher rates of attendance would have likely produced more significant findings.

This research would be improved upon by issuing surveys to SPUL participants at the beginning of the season, the middle of the season, and then the end of the season, to see whether or not there was any noticeable effect among participants over time. This procedure would be used in conjunction with looking for difference between those who chose to participate and those who did not. With the budget to redesign and re-implement this program, I would conduct it on the high school level instead of the college level. With the cooperation of the public school system and a larger budget, I would be able to host meals after each game which would allow the students and police a chance to interact in an environment outside of a volleyball game. The aspect of two free dinners a week would also serve as an incentive to ensure prolonged student participation. With the schools cooperation, activity buses could also be supplied that would be able to drive the students home after the weekly games. Due to the lack of police responses (n=9), I was not able to examine whether or not SPUL had any impact on the way in which Police officers view black students, and had to remove that portion completely from my thesis.

## **Conclusion**

One aspect of SPUL that I have not discussed is the possibility that the SPUL program could actually make things worse in terms of trust, outcome justice, profiling, legitimacy and willingness to work with the police. In a worst case scenario, it could be the case that through



exposure in this type of environment, students could come to the realization police cannot be trusted, are incompetent, or are simply racist. Through means of implicit bias and macroaggressions, police officers could offend or make black students uncomfortable through their actions or even conversation. From my personal observations, I do not think there was enough sustained personal interaction outside of playing volleyball to allow for implicit bias or macroaggressions to have been a factor. Also, it seemed that the participants and police officers did begin to form stronger bonds, but again due to low attendance and the relatively short duration of SPUL's season, there was not enough data to verify this claim. With a longer SPUL season, I would expect for ITC to be fully supported. During the SPUL season, I was present at almost all of the volleyball games that took place. At games where students were present, they all seemed to be having a good time. As the season went on most of the teams consisted of mainly police officers only due to the students not coming to games. Since SPUL has ended, there have been multiple occurrences where students who participated would tell me in passing that when they see officers from SPUL in public, they usually have a friendly brief conversation before going about their business. Overall, I believe that this research does support the viability of Intergroup Contact Theory and through sustained participation; programs like SPUL will be of great importance in mending the relationships between police and black citizens in the US.

## **Student Survey**

Q33 Hello,

My name is Joseph Frazier and I am a Masters student of Sociology at Virginia Tech. The following survey's purpose is to build an understanding of the relationship between Black Students and Police officers, as well as to gauge the effectiveness of the Student Police Unity League (SPUL) program; its results will be used in my Master's Thesis. Please partake in this survey even if you were not a part of SPUL. The information gathered in this survey is confidential and will be released only as summaries in which no individual's answers can be identified. Your identity will remain confidential at all times. Your survey data will not be linked to any identifying information. Please answer each question truthfully and to the best of your ability. The survey should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

The Survey will be voluntary and anonymous. Participation will not have any effects of student's grades or relationships with Virginia Tech. In the same manner, police participation will not have any effect on participating officer's employment with their respective agency. Consent will be indicated with the submission of the survey.

The data from this survey will be used to help determine the future of the SPUL program and will be published as part of my Master's Thesis.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu) or (540) 231-4991. Thank you for your participation.

Researcher Contact Information:

Joseph Frazier

Email: [Josephf8@vt.edu](mailto:Josephf8@vt.edu)

Phone: (757)805-4001

Q1 Are you 18 years or older?

Yes (1)

No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q3 Are you a current VT Student?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q4 Did you participate in the Student Police Unity League (SPUL)?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Answer If Did you participate in the Student Police Unity League (SPUL)? Yes Is Selected

Q5 Why did you participate in SPUL? (Select all that apply)

a. SPUL sounded like a good idea (1)

b. I believe SPUL can help create better relationships between the Police and the Black community (2)

c. I like to play Volleyball (3)

d. I was pressured into playing (4)

e. To spend time with fellow officers outside of work (5)

f. To spend time with fellow students outside of school (6)

For exercise (7)

- h. To meet and interact with other members of the community (8)
- i. To encourage others to become a part of a community program (9)
- j. Other (10)

Answer If Why did you participate in SPUL? (Select all that apply) j. Other Is Selected

Q6 The survey indicated that you selected "other," please explain your reason below.

Answer If Did you participate in the Student Police Unity League (SPUL)? Yes Is Selected

Q7 How many games were you able to attend? Please include games in which you played for a team other than the team that you were assigned to.

1-2 (1)

3-4 (2)

5-6 (3)

7-8 (4)

9-10 (5)

11+ (6)

Answer If Did you participate in the Student Police Unity League (SPUL)?&nbsp;<o:p></o:p>

No Is Selected

Q8 Below are a number of reasons for not participating in SPUL. Please indicate on a scale how much each of these factors influenced your decision not to participate in SPUL.

	No influence at all (1)	A little influence (2)	A moderate amount of	Highly Influenced (4)	Completely influenced (5)
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			Influence (3)		
a. I was not invited to participate (1)					
b. I wasn't aware of the program (2)					
c. Scheduling/work conflict (3)					
d. I do not see SPUL as a worthwhile endeavor (4)					
e. I do not want to interact with students from underrepresented groups (5)					
f. I do not want to interact with police officers (6)					

g. I do not think there is tension between police and black students (7)					
h. I do not like Volleyball (8)					
i. Too much of a time commitment (9)					
j. Injury (10)					
k. Other (11)					

Answer If Below are a number of reasons for not participating in SPUL. Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 how much each of these factors influenced your decision not to participate in ... k. Other Is Not Empty

Q9 The survey indicated that you selected the answer choice "other," please specify your reason below

Q10 If SPUL offers the opportunity to play again next year, how likely is it that you would participate?

Not at all likely (1)

Somewhat unlikely (2)

Neither likely or unlikely (3)

Likely (4)

Very Likely (5)

Q11 Please indicate whether or not you: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither Agree or Disagree (3), Agree (4), or Strongly Agree (5) with the following statements as of December 2015:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree or Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. Police treat people like me fairly and justly (1)					
2. I feel very confident in the Police's skill at controlling crime (2)					
3. The police take advantage of					



people like me					
(3)					
4. Police					
cooperate with					
people like me					
(4)					
5. Police want					
to maintain a					
positive					
relationship					
with people					
like me (5)					
6. I would be					
willing to work					
with the police					
to solve					
neighborhood					
problems (6)					
7. I have no					
desire to					
socialize with					
the police (7)					
8. I could care					

<p>less about the police (8)</p> <p>9. I am happy with the police (9)</p> <p>10. I feel safe around the police (10)</p> <p>11. I feel like the police often escalate situations that could have been handled more effectively (11)</p> <p>12. Black people are more likely to be profiled by police than are white people (12)</p>					
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13. I trust the police (13)					
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Q12 If you witnessed the following instances of crime being committed, how likely would you be to call the police?

	Not at all Likely (1)	Unlikely (2)	Likely (3)	Very Likely (4)
14. Breaking and entering (1)				
15. Armed Robbery (2)				
16. Murder (3)				
17. Destruction of property (4)				
18. Theft (5)				
19. Trespassing (6)				
20. Drug possession (7)				
21. Shoplifting (8)				
22. Illegal gun sale (9)				
23. Vandalism (10)				

Q13 Approximately how many face-to-face interactions did you have with the police in the last 12 months outside of SPUL?

0 (1)

1 (2)

2-5 (3)

6-10 (4)

11-20 (5)

20+ (6)

If 0 Is Selected, Then Skip To Have you ever been a victim of crime?

Q14 Would you say the majority of these contacts were positive or negative?

Positive (1)

Negative (2)

If Positive Is Selected, Then Skip To Have you ever been a victim of crime?

Q15 During negative contact did the police harass, use, or threaten to use force against you?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Answer If During negative contact did the police harass, use, or threaten to use force against you? Yes Is Selected

Q16 If yes, what did they do to you?

Use hostile language (1)

Call you names (2)

Push you (3)

Put you on the ground (4)

Hit you with their fists (5)

Hit you with their baton (6)

Pepper spray you (7)

Taser you (8)

Shoot you (9)

Follow you (10)

Q17 Were you arrested?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q18 Have you ever been a victim of crime?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Answer If Have you ever been a victim of crime?<o:p></o:p> Yes Is Selected

Q19 Did you call the police?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Answer If Did you call the police? No Is Selected

Q31 If no, why didn't you contact the police?

Answer If Did you call the police? Yes Is Selected

Q20 Did they help?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q21 Have you ever observed negative interactions with the police...

	Yes (1)	No (2)
In your neighborhood (1)		
Between Friends (2)		
With family (3)		
At a store (4)		
A School (5)		

Q22 Have you ever been arrested?

Yes (1)

No (2)



Q23 Do you identify as male, female, or other?

Male (1)

Female (2)

Other (3)

Q24 Age

18-21 (1)

22-25 (2)

26-28 (3)

29-32 (4)

33-36 (5)

37-40 (6)

41+ (7)

Q25 Race/Ethnicity

Black (1)

White (2)

Asian (3)

Hispanic/Latino (4)

Other (5)

Q26 Academic Level at VT

Freshman (1)



Sophomore (2)

Junior (3)

Senior (4)

Graduate Student (5)

Faculty (6)

VT Alumni (7)

Q30 How would you describe your political views?

Extremely Liberal (1)

Liberal (2)

Slightly Liberal (3)

Moderate (4)

Slightly Conservative (5)

Conservative (6)

Extremely Conservative (7)

Q27 Would you like to see SPUL continued?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q28 Would you be interested in seeing SPUL implemented at the High School level if the opportunity presented itself?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q29 How effective do you think SPUL was as fostering higher levels of trust between police and students? (Not at all effective, Not very effective, Neutral, Effective, Very Effective)

Not effective at all (1)

Not very effective (2)

Neutral (3)

Effective (4)

Very effective (5)

Not Applicable (6)

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