Contacts with the Police: Patterns and Meanings in a Multicultural Realm[1]

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The meaning of policing a multicultural society is addressed through a consideration of how residents in two urban neighborhoods - one more socially differentiated, the other less so - make contact with the police. Description and analysis are based on data collected in the course of a 3 year long ethnographic project in the Hollywood section of Los Angeles. Employing interviewing and participant observation techniques, the research investigated residents' definitions of and responses to crime and disorder as well as residents' perceptions and use of the local police. Variations in how police contacts are made in the two neighborhoods are reported, and the implications of these patterns are considered. Contacting the police is a social process as much as an individual one, hence will vary depending on social and personal contexts. Community policing strategies that are cognizant of the variety of preexisting social structures and relations that are to be found in a multicultural city's neighborhoods promise to more effectively service the communities residing in them.

Key Words: Police, community policing, ethnography, multiculturalism, disorder, immigrants, calls for service, social control, policing minorities

Introduction

A hallmark of "reform era policing" (Kelling and Moore, 1988) is the successful promotion of the idea of "calling the cops" to request assistance in dealing with various sorts of "troubles" (Bittner, 1970). Indeed, the 9-1-1 system had by the 1990s grown so popular,[2] and the demands placed on it so great, that many observers of policing were now proposing "demarketing" (Kelling and Moore, 1988) 9-1-1; funding new, nonemergency telephone numbers, such as 3-1-1; and

promoting the idea that citizens contact their local police stations through other
means, such as by dialing the local station's seven-digit number or more specialized
numbers like "graffiti hotlines." Although 9-1-1 and seven-digit calls are the main
avenues through which the police are contacted in the cities of the United States
(Reiss, 1971, p. 11),[3] the mere popularity of these telephone systems can lead us to
fail to consider the significance of variations in contacting the police, casting into
relief issues important to understanding policing in multicultural societies. People
make contact with the police through means other than by placing calls to
emergency and nonemergency phone numbers, and they utilize these alternatives in
varying ways in different neighborhoods. Variations in contacting patterns express
shifting social dynamics at work in the multicultural metropolises of the United
States.

Popular, academic, and political discussions about the United States as a
multicultural society tend to emphasize the first part of the two-part term: attention
is drawn to the mix of different cultures[4] within the United States, and emphasis is
placed on historical and contemporary problems related to racial and ethnic
dominance and subordination, the ability of U.S. institutions to absorb or reach out
to minorities or recent immigrants, and the possibility of achieving societal
integration and a unitary national identity (e.g., Gitlin, 1995; Glazer, 1997;
Schlesinger, 1998). Such discussions generally take for granted the meaning of the
second part of the term - "society" - so that observations drawn from all over the
nation are interpreted as symptomatic of the challenges the problem of
"multiculturalism" poses for the United States or American society. In relating the
issue of multiculturalism to the problems of policing, this chapter departs from the
national-level approach by considering multicultural society from a
microsociological perspective.

I begin with the observation that inhabitants of multicultural societies reside in
neighborhoods, arrayed along important sociological continua: Some will have more
social and cultural differentiation, and others will have less; some will be more
socially and culturally isolated (or segregated), and others will be less so; and some
will be highly and formally organized with clearly identified structures of authority
and leadership, and others will be weakly organized with competing centers of
authority. Neighborhood dynamics and social relations will reflect these varying
degrees of differentiation, isolation, and centralization through the kinds of social
interactions that occur among neighbors and users of the "parochial realm" (Lofland,
1998, p. 14). These dynamics, in turn, will shape the process and meaning of making
requests for police services; indeed, they will shape the meaning of what is a "police
relevant" matter. In short, neighborhood social organization contextualizes the idea

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of multicultural policing by virtue of how it patterns social interactions, including those among residents and between residents and the police.

Discussions of policing in socioculturally diverse realms are enhanced when neighborhood specificity is given proper consideration (Alpert and Dunham, 1988; Smith, 1986; Sherman, 1986; Alpert, Dunham, and Piquero, 2000). Reiss long ago observed that "the social settings or stages where officers ... work vary... according to the social composition of the beat" (1971, p. 7), the latter usually being a collection of neighborhoods. Qualitative researchers who have used the "ride along" method in their studies of police patrols have sensitized us to the importance that the police attribute to locality in making sense of the residents who have requested their services, or whom they encounter in proactive situations, and the standards that are "appropriate" to apply, given the neighborhood they are in (Werthman and Piliavin, 1967). Ferraro (1989), for example, found that police officers in Phoenix made distinctions between the moral character of residents from the projects and residents from "normal" middle-class neighborhoods, distinctions that were consequential for how officers handled complaints of spousal abuse. Herbert (1995) found that police officers in the Wilshire division of Los Angeles distinguished between pro-police and anti-police neighborhoods, again to consequential effect—traffic stops took on a more menacing character in the latter than in the former.

Alpert and Dunham (1988) found that place of residence is more influential in explaining variations in attitudes toward the police than either race or gender. The issue transcends attitudinal concerns, however, for the question pertains to how varying social dynamics in different neighborhoods account for and situate patterns of police-resident interaction. Residents of a multicultural city's ethnically isolated enclaves are likely to have patterns of social interaction and experience that lead them to learn about crime, and perceive and make contact with the police, in ways at least partially different from residents of neighborhoods that contain, for example, mixtures of second-generation Korean-Americans, middle-class whites, and first-generation Latino immigrants. How does it matter whether one lives in a neighborhood where most of the other residents do or do not share your language, social class background and aspirations, lifestyle, or race and ethnicity? Reviewing research on neighborhoods, Alpert and Dunham observed:

> Residents of low-income heterogeneous neighborhoods tend to be more suspicious of each other, to perceive less commonality with other residents, and tend to feel less control over their neighborhood than do the residents of more homogeneous neighborhoods.
>
> (1988, p. 13)

Given such a generalization, we can expect relations among neighbors to vary as one moves from socially heterogeneous neighborhoods to socially homogeneous ones.

Homogeneity and heterogeneity generate different possibilities for social interaction and networks of communication; these, in turn, stand to shape collective interpretations of, and reactions to, local events. Hence, the sociological underpinnings of a given neighborhood may inform inhabitants' views of the police, and the act of contacting the police, in ways distinct from those that emerge in a neighborhood four or five city blocks away. Questions about who contacts the cops, for what, and how, are better addressed when the meaning and process of contacting the police is tied to these interpretive habitats, for it is there (and not in "American society") that one will encounter the situated understandings and "local knowledge" (Geertz, 1983) that shape how residents filter observations made or heard about on local streets, including those related to "crime," "disorder," and the police themselves.

Research Methods

The findings reported here are based in research done over a 3-year period as part of a team ethnography.[5] Each member of the research team pursued similar data collection goals and strategies in socially distinct areas in the Hollywood section of Los Angeles (for a total of five neighborhoods). The data that resulted from the methods we used were often quite rich and instructive on how people in the study neighborhoods live, think about crime and disorder, and utilize the police as a resource in their efforts to live amid distinctive local "troubles" (Emerson and Messinger, 1977) and "problems" (Spector and Kitsuse, 2001).

My role on the team entailed collecting data in two of the five study neighborhoods, La Adelita and De Mille[6]; both are on the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum represented by the five neighborhoods, and each has a sizable or predominant population of immigrants from Central America. I moved into one neighborhood, De Mille, and visited the other, La Adelita, five blocks away, regularly. In classic participant-observer fashion, I spent time with residents and people who worked there in various kinds of settings and situations, seeking out perches from which to observe how they reacted to events and people on and off the street. I accompanied them as they moved about the area and interviewed them during or soon after these trips, probing their in situ understandings of the streets and local events. Observations were also made at community meetings, block parties, antidevelopment organizing efforts, community forums at the local police station, Neighborhood Watch meetings, and the local school's daily parenting classes.

Interview data were collected through formal, in-depth interviews with 54 residents from the two study neighborhoods. Residents were prompted to describe the evolution of their understanding of the area's crimes, problems, risks, and dangers;

their perceptions of what their neighbors do and think about these issues; their contacts with and views on the police; and their routine uses of the immediate and surrounding areas. These interviews with residents were supplemented with interviews with nonresidents, including people who worked in local businesses and institutions, community policing officers, and field staff working for city council representatives.

Generally speaking, ethnographic research is useful in describing processes that underlie activities like calls for service, the outcomes of processes that are ordinarily hidden from the instruments of conventional research approaches.[7] Police department-gathered data on calls for service will not reveal much about the meaning of calling the police from this address in this neighborhood as opposed to that address in that neighborhood; they will not tell the story behind calling the councilwoman's field representative this time as opposed to telling the bilingual teacher's aide at the local school last time. These stories are tied to the social environments in which people live. Calls for service cannot be viewed in isolation of these milieus, for the latter define the ambits from which actions are viewed as tenable or pointless, sensible or foolish, responsible or intrusive. Ethnographers, by immersing themselves in people's social worlds, are in a position to comprehend such distinctions by locating them within the contexts from which they emerge (cf. Merry, 1981).

Setting: Two Neighborhoods, La Adelita and De Mille

La Adelita

La Adelita is a high-density, predominantly Latino neighborhood in Hollywood; according to the 1990 U.S. Census, a representative block in the 8-block study area has 903 people living in 227 housing units. The vast majority (more than 90 percent) of the units are rented, and most of the apartments are in multiunit structures containing 10 or more separate dwellings.[8] Of the 903 counted residents, 734 are classified as "Hispanic" (81 percent).[9] As recently as the 1970s, the area was considered an Armenian neighborhood, but with the eruption of guerilla-state conflicts in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador throughout the 1970s and 1980s, there was heavy migration to Los Angeles (Lopez et al., 1996, p. 285) and to this neighborhood, transforming it into a "Little Central America" replete with Guatemalan grocery stores, Salvadorean restaurants, and record stores specializing in imports of "música tropical." Although English is the dominant language of commerce and formal institutions beyond this and similar neighborhoods, La Adelita's lingua franca is Spanish. Area residents would generally be classified as members of the working poor. They have limited formal

education, rarely having completed high school, and work in low-paying jobs, often "under the table." The division of labor is gendered: The men tend to work in warehouses and garages, on assembly lines, as *jornaleros* ("day laborers"), valets, or janitors, and the women tend to work as maids, cleaning ladies, and seamstresses (usually as "piece workers").

Residents of La Adelita migrate to the United States not in families, but in chains. Each successive arrival is assisted in settling by predecessors (parents, parents' *compadres*, siblings, friends, former fellow townsfolk, etc.), creating relationships of sponsorship and reciprocity. The residents rely upon one another in many respects: to find housing, employment, schools, child care, leisure spots, and general orientation to the often bewildering people and scenes of Los Angeles. A sponsor vouches for a newcomer's character in many of these situations, such as the woman who tells her friend that her cousin can be trusted to take care of her friend's children or the laborer who tells the contractor that his friend is honest and will not steal from a client, hence is a safe hire. Because residents tend to get their jobs through neighborhood and family contacts (Kusenbach and Ibarra, 2001), there is widespread use of this vouching system, and assessments of moral character circulate in the neighborhood fairly readily. Residents thereby form impressions of who is *gente buena* and who is *gente mala* (good and bad people), or *gente de respeto* and *gente sin respeto* (reputable and disreputable persons), that is, who one can associate with and who one should avoid (albeit in a gracious way), lest trouble (i.e., the state) intrude into one's life.

The neighborhood's social relations rest on wide-ranging and overlapping networks of communication, constantly being created, revitalized, and extended, allowing area news to travel quickly. This dynamic attests to the importance and role La Adelita's rich street life has in residents' daily routines. Through most of the day, people of all ages and in diverse kinds of groupings are walking, hanging out, and parading about the neighborhood. In fact, locals have many reasons to be out on the streets. They walk to and from the nearby *tienditas*, *mercados*, and *panaderías* that cater to their needs, tastes, and economic means and are staffed by deferential clerks who address them in Spanish, using the traditional honorifics that go unused in non-Latino stores. They may take advantage of the many black- or gray-market street vendors selling produce and various wares at market-beating prices; accompany their children or their neighbors' children to and from school; or merely sit and wait for buses that will take them (the women especially) to work. Area residents also have a preference for using their porches, front stoops, and driveways as means to beat the heat and congestion inside their small and overcrowded apartments; to watch their children playing on the sidewalks and parkways in their front yardless dwellings; to learn about job openings at a warehouse where a neighbor may be employed or

about a vacancy at a less expensive apartment around the block[10]; or to receive updates about who is cheating on whom or who has given up on Los Angeles and moved back to the homeland. The streets are the central mechanism for staying in touch with recent developments, local opportunities, issues, and problems, and the street provides residents with updated relationships as much as updated news.

La Adelita residents share many experiences and circumstances that color their views on local crime and the police. For instance, heads of area households tend to be of marrying and reproducing age,[11] in their twenties, thirties, and forties. They share the experience of rearing children in a nonnative land that holds attractions to delinquent activities and styles that did not exist back home. And yet, although the youth may speak and dress in alien idioms, the children are not "othered" or perceived as personally dangerous, and this is true of both their own children and the children of their neighbors. Typically, adolescents will have been reared in the neighborhood and have personal ties to the adults in the area, through the youths' parents or through their own children. Long-term residents often say that youth in the local street gang harass only those who are from outside, visitors to a local night club or restaurant, or those who commit some kind of affront, such as walking between the young men when they are in a huddle. This innocuous perception contrasts sharply with how the police view the young men—as gang bangers, taggers, drug dealers, or people on their way to becoming the same. As a consequence, the treatment that area youth (and not just gang bangers) receive at the hands of the police is seen as especially harsh, even discriminatory. Discrimination is another common experience for these people—they have encountered it in various settings since arriving in the United States, at nonlocal stores whose clerks look down on them because they do not speak English, from the people who have denied them housing for having too many children, and from the police whom they alternately consider hypervigilant and unresponsive.

Most La Adelita informants cite at least one victimization in their family since arriving in Los Angeles, yet they are apt to put such victimization into perspective. To be sure, they reason, it is not such a good thing to be mugged on the street, but Los Angeles cannot compare to life in a war zone, where you have to hide your father or brothers in ditches so that the guerillas or the militia will not find them, and it is unclear whether the police are or are not staging attacks on civilians so that they will be blamed on the rebels. And although residents typically know who in the immediate area is involved in criminal activities, especially drug dealing, it is rare for them to notify the police about it. They say that this is in part because they fear retribution and in part because they can empathize with the down-on-his-luck neighbor who would stoop to dealing drugs (which in any case are typically dealt to outsiders - both in terms of residence and nationality) in order to make ends meet in

a poor-paying labor market. Over and above this, the police from La Adelita
residents' homelands do not have the best reputation for trustworthiness and
professionalism, as indicated by the informant who said that "in Guatemala the
police kill people and no one ever finds out." Finally, and perhaps most important,
these residents either secured legal residence in the United States only after
prolonged effort, are in the country illegally outright, or are living with someone
who is in the country illegally.[12] Because they assume the police inquire about
immigration status (city law prohibits these practices by the police), they are loath to
pursue inessential contacts with police. (I never heard stories of La Adelita residents
calling the police about noisy neighbors, for example.)

Given the ever-present background issues—among them, linguistic isolation, mutual
reliance and interdependence, problematic immigration status, stigmatization of area
youth, prejudice and discrimination, a relatively thick skin regarding what is truly
dangerous or police relevant - residents are reticent to make direct contact with the
police and are motivated to pursue alternatives to such contacts as a way of
addressing local troubles. In fact, concerns about crime and disorder are rarely an
impetus for La Adelita residents to talk with each other or to organize themselves
collectively. Mutual self-protection and crime prevention, and the solidarity that
result from them, are more a consequence of their frequent interaction, shared
experiences, and social situation than a pretext for their interaction, despite the high
levels of police activity in the area. The criminal events that occur in the
neighborhood largely do not appear mysterious to locals - they are ultimately
understandable without the necessity of police intermediaries or translators. Thus,
one resident notes, locals see drug dealers on the street where cops on patrol do not:

> One woman wears her hair up in a hat, to kind of look like a guy, a big sweater. The dealers sit at
> the bus stop, walk up the street. They will be on the phone, then walk back up, go around the
> block. Police will ride by. "It's just somebody on the street, right? Normal." They're expecting to
> see gang members out here, that's what they're looking for. They don't see that.[13]

Although the police consider the neighborhood a high-crime area (mostly because of
the drug dealing, gang activity, and prostitution that occurs there daily), residents
and the police have rarely collaborated on addressing the neighborhood's problems.
From a community policing perspective, residents constitute an untapped resource,
for they know who among them is involved in activities of interest to the police,
even if they are disinclined to share that information. On the other hand, La Adelita
residents typically report having little fear of personal victimization - "use your
common sense and you will be fine" seems to be the prevailing sentiment; bad
things mostly befall bad people, or people who are careless, or people who do not
actually reside in the neighborhood. Local thugs won't harm you if you are local,
since it is likely you will know them or their family.[14] This sense of safety that

residents have seems to rest on a conception of the area as village-like: small and peopled by like-minded and known or easily known consociates. Moving frequently but staying within the area, La Adelita residents do indeed know many people living on nearby streets, creating an often remarked upon resemblance between the area and their pueblos and *colonias*. Their wide-ranging immersion in the street life means that residents are knowledgeable about "crime and disorder" phenomena of interest to the police; and yet it is precisely this immersion that leads them to dismiss a reading of these phenomena as matters for which the police merit being contacted. Familiarity works to normalize, or encourage personal accommodations to, such putative problems, rather than to seek their remedy.

De Mille

Five blocks away from La Adelita is the less densely populated De Mille neighborhood. According to the 1990 U.S. Census, a representative block has 263 inhabitants. Despite the smaller number of people who live in De Mille, however, the area's collective character is more complex. Where the outlook and residents of La Adelita are readily characterized because of the homogeneity that follows from their shared backgrounds, marginality, and frequent social interaction, De Mille is not susceptible to easy characterization. Its population is highly differentiated, its community dynamic the obverse of La Adelita's, with race and ethnicity figuring prominently among its sources. De Mille consists of a mix of Caucasians, Asian-Americans, African-Americans, and Central American and Korean immigrants. No single group constitutes a numerical majority on most of the neighborhood's blocks, although Latinos constitute the largest presence overall (40 percent of the population), while persons of Asian/Pacific Islander descent constitute 31 percent, (non-Hispanic) whites 23 percent, and blacks 6 percent.

Overlying these racial and ethnic differences is the monolingualism of the residents. Whites and blacks are typically fluent in English alone, Latinos in Spanish, and Asians/Pacific Islanders in either Korean or Tagalog; the few local Chinese and Japanese have been in the country for a longer period of time and are fully bilingual. The children of the residents are usually bilingual, but most of the families with school-age children are Latino. Thus, *where residents of La Adelita are linguistically isolated from the broader society, the residents of De Mille are linguistically isolated from a majority of their neighbors.*

De Mille is an interstice, a place where different neighborhoods with different social profiles meet, forming a zone of overlapping, multiple social worlds. When asked to name where they live, members of the different groups often give instructively contrasting replies. Many of the younger whites answer "Larchmont" or "Larchmont

Adjacent." Koreans say "Korea Town." African-Americans say "Mid Wilshire." Latinos answer "Hollywood." These are not misidentifications. The neighborhood is situated close enough to these areas to be viewed as an extension of each by the various groups. In this sense, residents resemble settlers, extending the territory covered by their term for the area. Further, the groups' divergent identifications of De Mille express understandings and expectations of what the neighborhood is about, as a repository of lifestyles, aesthetic sensibilities, class affiliations, and risks and opportunities. Thus, each group's spatial orientation tends to differ as well. Accompanying them on foot, it is striking that the whites prefer to walk in one direction (toward Larchmont), while the Latinos tend to walk in another (into Hollywood), preferences often explained by reference to the dangers that exist in the other direction. In short, a potent mix of elements—linguistic isolation, racial and ethnic diversity, different underlying mappings about the literal and social location of the neighborhood—yields mutually exclusive in-group orientations in an area consisting of multiple groups, portending conflict and misunderstanding.

The neighborhood-based lifestyles of the groups contrast sharply. There are two sets of whites; the first is an older group of retired or nearly retired, home-owning empty-nesters who have resided in the neighborhood for 20 to 50 years. Most migrated to Los Angeles from states like Missouri and Illinois and can recall when people like themselves largely populated De Mille. In a sense "left behind," they share the experience of watching many of their former friends and neighbors move out because the neighborhood had "gotten so bad." The core anticrime activists are in this group: they stayed and fought while the others left for greener and safer pastures. The second group of whites consists of childless singles and couples, both heterosexual and homosexual, in their twenties, thirties, and forties, with middle-class backgrounds, tastes, and aspirations. This group has been moving into De Mille in recent years, as the entertainment industry has been experiencing prosperous times. They are attracted to the area because of its proximity to the movie studios and their offshoots as well as its proximity to Larchmont Village, an area where people who have "made it" in the movie business live in elegant homes and condominiums. This group probably represents a first wave of gentrifiers to De Mille: they are artists, writers, actors, and sundry studio workers who see the area as less glamorous than adjacent areas to the west, a "fixer-upper" whose dangers keep their peers from moving in and discovering the area's attractions, among which many name the multicultural composition of the local community.

The Latinos live in families, unlike the whites (the average Latino household contains about four people; the average white household consists of between one and two persons), and they are more likely to be employed in blue-collar and service occupations than are the whites. Unlike the older whites who view the area as

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having deteriorated from 25 years ago and as having improved from 10 years ago, and unlike the younger whites who view the area as a potentially hip place into which to relocate but also as containing dangers relative to the more exclusive areas adjacent to the west, the Latinos view the neighborhood, vis-à-vis crime, as an absolute improvement on where they lived before (e.g., areas like La Adelita). Consequently, De Mille Latinos consider this to be a quiet, fairly risk-free neighborhood compared with what they have seen at previous addresses. Thus, they do not think the area's putative problems require urgent, coordinated attention, leading activist-types to infer they are less interested in improving the neighborhood's quality of life.

People of Asian/Pacific Islander descent are the third major group residing in the area; generally they are either Filipino or Korean, although some are Chinese and Japanese. Members of this group usually live in multiunit structures, which are typically ethnically homogeneous. For example, a Filipino purchased a four-unit apartment building and housed his mother, his sister's family, his aunt, and his own family in the various units. Down the block, Koreans almost exclusively inhabit a large apartment complex of about 40 units. As a result of such housing arrangements, few Asians have much social interaction with members of the other groups. The result is a lack of relations between Asians and the others and a perception among the non-Asians that the Asians are either unsociable or indifferent to the neighborhood. Asian homeowners are often quite active in the neighborhood, but their limited English can restrict the communication they have with members of the other groups; the few Chinese- and Japanese-Americans are, as stated, fully bilingual, but their bilingualism does not serve them in efforts at communicating with Korean and Filipino immigrants, or Spanish-speaking immigrants for that matter.

An absence of common lifestyles in De Mille means that the kinds of social interactions that are encouraged in La Adelita are precluded in De Mille. De Mille's Latinos are rearing children, unlike most other De Mille residents. Hence, adult neighbors of diverse backgrounds do not interact under the guise of impromptu babysitting, coordination of after-school childcare, or attendance at each other's children's parties. Further, the absence of youngsters in the non-Latino households means that non-Latinos do not have children around to provide non-Latino adults with nondeviant interpretations of teenage fashions, activities, and other cultural practices; nor are there opportunities to introduce such adults to these youngsters as the friends of their own children. There is a paucity of "inside translation" of Latino youth for non-Latino adults, a vacuum likely to be filled by stereotypes of them as inclined toward delinquent acts. When a new Latino family with teenage boys moves into the neighborhood, non-Latinos will sometimes speculate about whether

the boys are in a gang, for example, and in some cases will notify the police to that effect with little proof but the hearsay that circulates within their communication network.

The latter is key, for language and barriers to communication underpin this neighborhood's social relations and dynamics. Channels of communication in De Mille operate along group lines: Whites talk to whites. Koreans talk to Koreans. Latinos talk to Latinos. Because information sharing largely occurs within groups, and because these groups have such different outlooks on the nature of the area's dangers and the neighbors' character (e.g., are the teenagers with shaved heads and baggy clothing a threat?), perceptions often develop without reaction from sources that might contradict or put to rest the rumors and concerns. The consequences of these networks of communication vis-à-vis neighborhood disorder and crime are diverse. It is not as if the rumors and in-group perceptions have the same effect regardless of who engages in these communications, for three reasons: first, because crime is not equally important to the various groups' sense of shared purpose; second, because the various groups perceive the relevance of the police in different ways; and, third, because the groups comprehend sources of local crime and disorder in different ways.

With respect to the first point, De Mille whites are more apt to organize their interactions and social relations around crime concerns than are the nonwhites. Although members of the Neighborhood Watch group have developed ties that transcend the auspices of their meeting, socializing with one another quite extensively, they have come to know one another through their participation in the anticrime group, and their identity as a group is reiterated through their activities in that regard. Thus, they are apt to incorporate crime and disorder topics into their conversations and activities, in a way that is not true for other groups, getting enthused and curious when hearing about a local spotting of a patrol car and taking pride in their abilities to ferret out signs of criminality. Crime does not hold the same importance to the interaction that occurs among Latinos, who are more apt to talk about matters grounded in material concerns, such as the search for better jobs, coordination of child care, and the logistics of commuting together (by bus or by car). Crime is a kind of white noise hovering in the background of Latinos' awareness, occasionally becoming a subject of chat but rarely a call for arms or action.[15]

De Mille's whites are far more apt than the other groups to think of the police as their public servants, there to help them deal with the neighborhood's problems; hence, they are more likely to become indignant when the police are nowhere to be found. Meanwhile, the nonwhites take a more hands-off attitude toward local

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troubles and see little reason to call the police. This contrast is based both in what the groups consider to be the sources of the neighborhood's problems and in different thresholds for considering something a problem. When asked to identify those they consider responsible for area crime of which they are aware, whites are more likely to point to their (out-group) neighbors, and the Latinos vaguely speak about people who live beyond the neighborhood, opportunistic passers-by, or outsiders who might see the area as prime territory for crime because there is no street gang that controls the area (the assumption being that areas uncontrolled by gangs lack a vigilant policing mechanism). Crime is not something that they feel they can really control in a proactive sense, in contrast to the whites, who often speculate about what their (out-group) neighbors are up to and who are concerned to spot any possible sources of trouble emanating from them, especially when the family is new to the neighborhood and there are teenage males in the household. Varying tolerance levels can also be found between the groups: The nonwhites do not take things like abandoned furniture and graffiti seriously at all, to the consternation of the whites, some of whom quite actively monitor these things, call the police and/or city about them, and, in some cases, keep logs (and photographs) carefully noting the dates of the appearance and resolution of such incidents.

In sum, La Adelita residents are more isolated from mainstream institutions like the police, have extensive and overlapping ties with each other, and thus share understandings on neighborhood problems; they are usually well informed about who is doing what but rarely contact the police. De Mille residents are variously integrated into or isolated from mainstream institutions. Some De Mille residents are more likely to invoke the police and are more likely to think that some among them are up to no good and merit surveillance, control, and or eviction from the neighborhood; others do not reflexively invoke the police, think that the neighborhood is safe compared with other previous residences, and believe that, in any case, the serious crime problems are apt to be instigated by nonlocals, resulting in lesser concern with the neighbors' doings. La Adelita and De Mille are two neighborhoods worlds apart in their social dynamics, even though they are but five blocks removed.

Patterns of Contact

How, and in response to what kinds of situations, do people in these neighborhoods go about contacting the police? The answers to these questions are instructively different for the two areas under discussion. Although contacting the police via the telephone is the most widely adopted practice in both neighborhoods, such a generalization conceals underlying differences in meaning and practice related to the collective character of the two areas. In addition, several other contacting strategies

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are either unique or unevenly practiced in each area, and these patterns of prevalence and emphasis are also worthy of comment.

Placing calls to the police is much more problematic in La Adelita, where the prevailing attitude is that it is important to *"evitar problemas,"* or "avoid problems," and involvement in a situation where the police are present is a quintessential *problema*. When an ordinary La Adelita resident *does* place a call to the police via 9-1-1, it is typically in response to a nonroutine, dramatic event, and the resident calls with much trepidation, as a last-ditch measure to introduce the *deux ex machina* of the state into a situation over which they lack control (cf. Bittner, 1970). Chela, for example, placed a call to the cops after seeing a man beating a pregnant woman outside her building, but only after the abuse became especially vicious:

> The first time Chela called the cops was after witnessing a man and woman, both Latino and across the street neighbors, fighting out front. Chela happened to be dusting her furniture in her bedroom when she noticed that he was striking the woman, who was also pregnant. Chela didn't think about calling the police at first but when she saw the man drag the woman by the hair down the street in her pregnant condition, it was too much to bear. Chela called 9-1-1 and told the dispatcher that it was a serious matter in that the man might be doing irreparable harm to the baby. Within ten minutes the police showed up with the couple still out front. They separated and interviewed the two, finally arresting the man and arranging for the woman's ambulance transport to the hospital.

> Soon an officer showed up at Chela's door to thank her for notifying the police of what was happening. She remembers him commenting to her that it was nice to know that there is someone in the neighborhood who takes care to watch out for what happens. Chela responded that she didn't do much, just thought that she should call in because the woman was pregnant and might suffer great injury. He asked her if she would testify in court about what she saw. Chela declined, saying that it wasn't really her problem, and besides a lot of other people had also witnessed the incident. All Chela wanted was for the cops to make the man stop beating the woman. "No quería compromiso." ("I didn't want to commit myself to this matter."). Her reluctance was owing to the possibility that when he was eventually released from prison, he might seek retribution against Chela for giving witness.

Chela is representative of La Adelita residents in that they generally set a high threshold of violence that must be exceeded before they will place a call to the police; however, surpassing such a threshold by no means proves a sufficient condition for making such a call. Consider the following example, drawn from an interview with Gaston, who is explaining his and his wife's reaction to a killing that occurred outside their apartment:

> Gaston had been watching television with his wife in their bedroom, overlooking the parking area, when they heard the gunfire. At the entrance of Gaston's backyard/parking area, a young man was killed, his head blasted by a shot gun. The contents of his skull were emptied on the driveway. Gaston went out to the landing at the back door and looked down toward the area where the boy's body continued to spasm. The paramedics and police came shortly afterward, and still the boy wouldn't completely die, the body continued to twitch. Does Gaston know who

called the police or paramedics? Gaston doesn't know. What was Gaston's initial reaction to the shooting, if not to call 9-1-1? Gaston says that his philosophy whenever a dead body is involved, is to stay out of it, because if you intervene to assist, you expose yourself to the arm of the law. The police want to question you, accuse you of having had something to do with the killing. "They take you to jail. You are screwed," he says. Thus, Gaston and his wife only watched from upstairs until the police showed up, at which point they walked downstairs to take a closer look. Did the police ever try to interview Gaston or his wife? No, they never asked us questions, he says.

There are many underlying issues that animate locals' reluctance about making direct contact with the police: their limited English-speaking abilities; their own or a household member's legally problematic status; fear of retribution; concerns about police prejudice, discrimination, and entrapment; and a desire to keep the home and family below the radar of the law and courts.[16] Further, the police - whose actions are often seen at a distance and can appear arbitrary and bewildering - are often speculated about in La Adelita, made into objects of mystery and local urban legend. Some residents express views about the police in which they are posited as menacing figures: as potential stalkers, conspirators in frameups, and power-mad brutes.[17] Others speak about criminals impersonating police officers. In such cases, it does not matter if the man at your door is wearing a uniform, carrying a badge, or flashing an official- looking ID: These just go to show you how cleverly the would-be offender is disguised. Such concerns are not expressed by De Mille residents, at least not by the non-Latino inhabitants.

But there is another, more surprising reason for the lack of direct-contacting efforts: Some of La Adelita's residents are not versed in the practice of making contact with the police by phone - it is an institutionally alien practice to them. Residents who are from the more rural areas of Central America report not having had telephones or local police to whom they could make a complaint about a crime or dispute. Making a complaint to the police might have entailed undertaking a 2 hour bus trip across mountainous terrain into the nearest city, where a report could be filed with an indifferent officer at a kiosk or in a police station. Now in Los Angeles, these residents with rural origins may walk or drive to the police station to file a complaint or to give witness to a crime or police matter, to the extent they make contact with the police at all. Experiences are not uniformly pleasant or positive in this regard. For instance, one resident spoke of having to sit for 2 hours in the police station's lobby before a Spanish translator appeared, only to be told that he would have to go to another station some 5 miles away to share his information with the appropriate officers. Especially galling was that he had made the 1-mile walk to the station in order to *assist* the police, having witnessed where a suspect had fled after eluding a police raid. Needless to say, this man says he has never returned to the police station to offer this kind of assistance again.

The physical dimensions of La Adelita's residential dwellings reinforce residents' reluctance to call the police. The apartment buildings in which they live typically require that a visitor be buzzed onto the premises. However it is also the case that it is rare that the apartment units themselves are equipped with remote buzzers. Because the police are unable to enter the buildings without being let in, residents understand that if they are viewed allowing cops into the building, they will be considered the source of the call to the police.

> Zilda tells me that one of the reasons she is not inclined to call the police as often as she could is because people would know that it was she who called. Why? Because she would be the one waiting out front to let the police enter the premises. Not a wise action, she says, because there are so many drug dealers in the building that it is not a good thing to be considered "una rata" (a rat).

La Adelita residents are renters, and they usually put the burden for contacting the police on their building's managers and landlords, especially where the criminal event involves people other than those from one's own household, i.e., with respect to street crime and disorder. Hence, when they encounter a matter for which a police response is sought, residents tend to take their complaint to the apartment manager. Rogelio's account is representative:

> People who live in the building are always keeping an eye out on each other's apartment, explain Rogelio. Someone - the manager, other tenants - is always around, using or milling about the courtyard. I ask him to tell me about where he sits when he is indoors and how he uses the living room windows. He says he sits at the kitchen table, near a window looking out onto the courtyard, and he will note when a stranger comes into the complex, in which case he will follow him with his eyes and see what he is doing, where he goes, what he seems to be up to. "Le tiro un ojo." ("I keep an eye on him.") He says that if anything happens that is suspicious he won't call the police. Instead, what he and other tenants do is call the manager, who is in charge of calling the police. The manager is Latina and lives at the front of the building, facing out onto the street. "Ella mira todo" ("she sees everything"), he says, noting that she is always looking over the street, including at his car when it is parked in front. He thinks that she does good work, keeping an eye out for everyone.

Residents do not think of this as "passing the buck"; rather, the manager is viewed as a someone whose responsibilities include maintaining local order, entrusted with using whatever means are at his or her disposal for achieving it, including calling the cops. (Such delegating also undoubtedly is rooted in recognition of the manager's stronger English skills.) The manager thus becomes an intermediary between civilians and officers, but the idea that managers should mediate complaints to the police can be a double-edged sword, for not all managers are as vigilant as Rogelio's. Some managers, like some residents, also fear retribution, others are simply rarely around, and some make their own accommodation to local crime and disorder. Consider Joveta's complaint about her manager:

One thing Joveta and her husband don't like about living in Los Angeles is "La gente," or "the people." For example, the parking area to the back of the apartment building is open, accessible to hanger-outers, and the manager doesn't do anything to discourage the men who gravitate back there to drink. Her husband complains that whoever is so inclined enters freely, does whatever they feel like doing, including taking drugs, and basically treat the area like their hotel. Some of these men have broken the wing window on his car - three times already. The first time they stole the speakers and equalizer. Recently they broke in again and they stole the car stereo. A week ago it happened yet again and he talked to the manager. She responded, "no se puede hacer nada, el dueño no hace nada" ("nothing can be done, the landlord won't do anything").

Joveta believes that the manager is simply scared of the parking lot users, and the end result is that no one - not Joveta, her husband, or the manager - calls the police regarding the persistent crime and disorder concerns that they are living with. This reliance on a residential intermediary to make a complaint to the police is another practice that was not found in the De Mille area.

Notwithstanding the institutionalized pervasiveness of 9-1-1 and calls to the police, the assumption that punching a few telephone digits will result in a police officer at one's door is routinely made problematic in the densely populated urban areas of the United States, such as Los Angeles, and this is no less true in the neighborhoods I studied. Residents rightly conclude that the Los Angeles Police Department is often overextended, judging by their experiences with the failure of police to appear or to appear with the punctuality that the complainants feel their matters merit. Another La Adelita resident, Salma, told a story in this vein:

Salma says she has never seen the police patrol on her street, unless someone has been killed. Salma remembers the night she called the police because a man was beating a woman, both of whom were neighbors. The operator asked her if anyone was bleeding. There wasn't. The operator replied, "sabes que señora, como esta en su apartamento no se ande metiendo, y si hay sangre, llamanos, no por su gusto. Aquí hay muchas problemas mas serios que esos." ("Ma'am, as you are in your apartment, you are best off not intruding in other people's affairs. If there is blood, call us, and not out of your own desires. We have many other problems more serious than this.") Salma says that the dispatcher didn't let her talk very much, and left her feeling scared, doubting why she had bothered to call in the first place - after all, it is not Salma's business. And then later, she sees the couple back together.

Faced with such nonresponsive police units, many La Adelita residents come to think of the police as largely ineffectual at best - not around when needed, yet ready to harass you for no apparent reason. Gaston, quoted earlier, thinks of the police this way. In this excerpt, I am asking him about whether members of the local gang ever bother him:

The only people who come around the neighborhood to "molestar por gusto" (harass for fun) are the police, says Gaston. He describes two recent incidents in which the police showed up at his backyard, where he and his friends were sitting out under the car port, making carne asada and drinking beer. He points out the area to me: it is about 30 feet from the sidewalk and clearly

within private property. 'The police showed up asking questions: what are you doing? What's
going on here?" Recalling these incidents, Gaston becomes indignant. 'What business is it of
theirs? This is not government property! This is private property!'

One of Gaston's favorite pastimes is to grill fish out back and drink beer on
weekends with friends and neighbors, a custom that he imported from his native
Guatemala. A very hard laboring man, such activities are central to his quality of
life, respites from work, forms of socializing that are deeply enjoyable to him.
Hence, police visits in such circumstances are perceived as nothing other than
harassment. Other residents told similar stories of intrusiveness by the police, in the
context of both police-initiated stops and calls for service.[18] The general tenor of La
Adelita residents' remarks, then, is that interactions with the police have a very
unpredictable quality to them in their neighborhood. If you call the police, you
cannot be sure that the police will respond; if they do respond, you cannot be sure
that they will treat you courteously; and, even if you are treated courteously, you
cannot be sure that you will not be considered a "rat" by neighbors who note the
officers leaving your dwelling without an arrestee in tow. A commonly voiced
suspicion is that if the police, on their own initiative, stop and question you, it will
usually not be out of a concern with the community's safety or well-being, much
less your own, but out of sheer discrimination or sadism.

La Adelita residents rarely call the police on their neighbors. Where a neighbor is
persistently a source of concern or irritation, residents are as likely to simply move
elsewhere in the neighborhood (there are abundant vacancies) as learn to ignore the
unpleasant person or group in their midst.[19] Such a generalization does not hold in
De Mille. The people most inclined to request a police unit at the address of a
neighbor are members of the local Neighborhood Watch. Participants in this group
are mobilized by a collective memory of the neighborhood. As long-term residents,
they have seen De Mille through its ups and downs: They can recall when the
neighborhood was in what they consider much better condition than at present, and
yet they also recall when the neighborhood was in much worse condition as well.
Consequently, members of the Neighborhood Watch keep an eye on the physical
conditions of the area's streets, sidewalks, and buildings, and on the presumed moral
character of the people who are to be found on or in them. For these residents, the
slightest signs of disorder can be ominous, a harbinger of slippery slopes and
"spirals of decay" (Skogan, 1990). As a safeguard against such portents, the
members believe it is important to call the police—a lot. The problem, from the
point of view of these residents, is that the police do not take their neighborhood and
its problems seriously enough. In fact, the police do view De Mille as an "iffy" area.
As one police officer described it at a community meeting, De Mille is neither safe
nor dangerous but "in between, sort of between a rough area and a good area." Yet
this is not a neighborhood that is high on the list for routine police passings, despite

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its apparent fit with Wilson and Kelling's (1982) neighborhood "at the tipping point."

De Mille residents who are inclined to request police units at a neighbor's address realize that the police do not always come in response to a routine call to 9-1-1 or the station's seven-digit number. Hence, these police-invoking residents of De Mille are more persistent and strategic about invoking a police presence than their proximate neighbors or the residents of La Adelita. This might take the form of calling special telephone numbers that bring them into direct contact with the neighborhood's community policing officer, known as the Senior Lead Officer (SLO),[20] a practice not found in La Adelita.[21] In addition, some of the residents of De Mille have developed the practice of coordinating their calls to the police, usually in response to an incident of disorder, and typically only when it is felt that the police have been an unresponsive presence in recent days. Upon seeing some form of disorder, a member of the calling group might call the numbers of a few neighbors whose names and phone numbers are listed on a "phone tree." Each called member will have two responsibilities, to call another member on the tree and to call the police station. The thinking of the group is that by calling frequently and in coordination with others in the area in response to single incidents, the chance that a unit will arrive at the scene will be increased—six complaints in response to one prostitute walking down a residential street being a clearer expression of citizen alarm than the one complaint of a citizen with too much time on her hands. Very rarely, an overzealous member of the collective calling group might exaggerate by falsely claiming to have seen a gun in the belief that police will more promptly respond. Whether the police arrive or not, members reason, the logging of the calls is effective in the long term, because the higher frequency of calls will eventually result in more frequent deployments of patrol units to De Mille. Thus, calls to the police are understood in De Mille as having a long-term significance, rather than simply being an immediate effort to deal with an emergency situation, as in La Adelita.

Members of De Mille's Neighborhood Watch tend to be white homeowners with long tenures on the block. People are informed of Neighborhood Watch meetings by flyers that advertise upcoming events, and these flyers tend to be given to people who have regularly attended prior meetings, resulting in underrepresentation of those members of the neighborhood who are not homeowners and, typically, not white. For instance, while accompanying organizers distributing these flyers I noted that apartment buildings (where the vast majority of Latinos live) were avoided as targets for flyer distribution, except for the occasional apartment manager who had "cleaned up" a previously unruly building of its "undesirable" tenants by no longer renting units to them. People who didn't speak English were studiously avoided:

When we get to the corner, I notice that there is a group of Spanish-speaking Latinos sitting around the kitchen table of a peach-colored house. I ask whether we should give them a flyer announcing the upcoming meeting. One of the women wrinkles her nose and shakes her head, saying "no." Continuing on our walk, I point to an elderly Asian man, with a long white beard, clad in loose robes, watering his lawn. Should we cross the street and give him a flyer, I ask? No, I am told, he probably doesn't speak English, he won't know what it says, says one of the women. As we move down to the next block, the women talk about how most of the people who live in this specific area don't speak English. An apparent exception is the occupant of a large house, partitioned into two units. The women go through a lot of trouble to leave a flyer with the resident. When no one answers the doorbell, they debate different places where it would most likely be seen by the man: on the front gate off the sidewalk, under the door, in the mailbox, and so forth. Finally, after a long period, someone answers the door, a child, and the women give the flyer to her, asking her to be sure to hand it over to their friend.[22]

Calls to the police from this neighborhood about "quality of life issues" overrepresent the homeowners' complaints in police dispatcher logs, and because of their dominance at local Neighborhood Watch meetings, the community policing officer is likely to have members of this group as his points of contact in the neighborhood. Hence, and although there are exceptions, police are much more likely to encounter renters, Latinos, and other minorities as the objects of complaints than as the makers of complaints. In fact, the community policing officer routinely encourages or advises people during his Neighborhood Watch visits to phone in their complaints, especially when it is apparent to the officer that the complainant and the complained about come from different social worlds.

Kelley, talking to the Senior Lead Officer at a police-community meeting, launches into a litany of complaints, beginning with a story about her neighbors. "There are these guys who live next door, in this apartment building to the west, and they play their music so loud. Sometimes its Led Zeppelin, sometimes its country, sometimes its Latin, you get the idea. My floor vibrates, the walls shake, it really disturbs my space, right?" The SLO nods in sympathy. "They do this all the time, and when I've gone over there they laugh at me and turn the music up. The women who used to live there had bottles and rocks thrown at them when they went over there to complain. Woah!" She laughs nervously. "These are people I do not want to deal with, you know? I mean they look dangerous, like serious heavy duty gang members." The SLO thinks about what she says and gives her a serious expression. He asks her for the address and she readily gives it to him. "Then, this past Sunday, these other people across the street were playing their music full blast. I stood across the street and yelled at them, 'TURN IT DOWN!' They looked at me and smiled and did nothing. So I went to the middle of the street and I told them again (here she adopts the bodily posture that she presumably adopted on Sunday, one hand on hip, lurched over, head tilted, scowl on face, thumb up and waggling downward),"TURN IT DOWN POR FAVOR!"

The SLO interjects. "Wait a minute, you don't want to do that. You can get hurt. You don't know what these people are capable of." She nods her head and appears to get uncharacteristically flushed, as she agrees with his remonstration; it almost seems she didn't realize at the time that she was putting herself in such danger. "You need to let us deal with this, we can send someone out to tell them to turn it down." "You will come out?" she asks, surprised. "Yes. A marked car will show up, it might take us some time depending on the day, but we will

send someone out there. We just need you to show us which is the house that is making the noise, we can't show up at their door without a specific complaint." "No way!" she says, visibly upset. "I don't want to be seen by these guys, I don't want them to know I am the one who called the cops. Some of these guys look really hard core!" He clarifies that all that is needed is the exact address of the noisemakers. "We can just say that 'some of the neighbors have complained about their being too much noise'." He explains how police respond to the calls: "on the first call we issue a written warning telling them to cease and desist. On the second call we issue them a citation, which requires them to appear in court. On the third visit we impound their stereo equipment." Kelley appears impressed by this itemization and says, "I don't want them to get into trouble or have their stereo taken away, I just want them to be good neighbors, act civilly."

Such conversations between the SLO and a first-time attendee of these meetings are not unusual, where someone reports making an effort to communicate a concern directly to a neighbor of a different background, and the officer alarms him or her into realizing that such efforts are risky. Presumably the officer believes that he is keeping the peace by giving this advice, preventing further conflict. As a result, visitors to these meetings come to understand that it is better to allow the police to intervene rather than deal with their neighbors in alternative ways. Because the resulting calls to the police tend to involve people of different racial/ethnic and class backgrounds, usually the white calling in regard to a Latino, the police come to play a role in the neighborhood that unwittingly feeds into its underlying social tensions. Residents who find themselves suddenly faced with a police visit are likely to interpret the incident in racial or otherwise socially conflicted terms:

> Some Latino apartment dwellers (Ernesto and Gladiola) are holding a yard sale in front of their building. At one point they mention that some of the people in the neighborhood are racists, and I ask them what they have seen that leads them to that conclusion. Some of the buildings will not rent out to people with children, they say, and these buildings tend to house few if any Latinos. Anything else, I ask. They both immediately talk about the white woman who lives next door who is always calling the police on them for playing loud music. It turns out that they are talking about Kelley. Not only has she come by and made sour-looking faces as she walked by, she has come over, asking them to turn down the music, and, they suspect, called the police on them as well. In fact, Ernesto is facing a $100 fine because of the most recent call by Kelley to the police. The police came by on a noise complaint, and Ernesto was in the driveway drinking a beer. The police told him that that was a violation of the law. Ernesto said that he was at home. The police pointed at his apartment and said that that was his home, that the drive way was something else. Ernaesto has a court date pending on the matter. As Gladiola hears Ernesto talk about the woman who calls the cops, she recalls times that she too was reported. She mentions that she was told that after a certain number of calls her stereo would be impounded.

The understanding that some of their neighbors are prejudiced preceded the involvement of the police, of course, but notice that the manner in which the police intervened in the situation reinforced that impression. As stated earlier, Latino residents in De Mille tend to think that the problems of crime that residents confront tend to come from outside the neighborhood, whereas white residents are more apt to think that they come from within the neighborhood. Thus, the Latinos tend to take

disorder much less seriously than the whites because the forms of "human disorder" in the neighborhood are precisely not disorder: yard sales, grown men drinking in view of the street, youth running around or hanging out on the corner, loud parties, unlicensed fruit truck drivers and tamale vendors - these are not forms of disorder, these are people who are either family, friends, or friends of someone in the family. It makes no sense to have police show up in these circumstances. The long-term residents and the gentrifiers, however, are more likely to view such people with varying degrees of alarm and feel that such an interpretation is validated by the broken windows-style theorizing that is the prevailing discourse at Neighborhood Watch meetings (and in informal conversations among them outside such meetings). There is a fundamental interpretive gulf here then, a gulf at risk of being filled with views of your neighbor in a most unflattering light: He is a criminal; she is a racist.

Ultimately, the concern seems to be with the future of the neighborhood's streets. Will De Mille's street life come to more and more resemble La Adelita's? The vibrant street scene of La Adelita is both model and nightmare, depending on whom you talk to. Indeed, at the most extreme, residents of one neighborhood may begin to place calls for service that involve neighborhoods other than those in which they live precisely for this reason. This occurred when the residents of De Mille started to call for a police crackdown on street vendors in La Adelita, even though La Adelita is five blocks away and generally beyond the ambit of De Mille's residents.

> The Senior Lead Officer is explaining to unsatisfied De Mille residents at a police-community meeting why patrol officers will drive right by illegal street vendors in La Adelita (because they are from another beat, thus don't know of the problem, or they are on another call). I point out that it is unlikely that the police will address the problem unless they receive complaints about the vendors. The SLO says that they do get such complaints. I ask from whom. Two of the women say that another woman in the group, Marilyn, calls all the time, whenever she drives by and sees them out there. But do the local residents or businesses call about them? I ask. The SLO says that many of the local businesses don't like them because they undercut their businesses, but he doesn't get a lot of calls from the businesses regarding the vendors. It really is up to people like Marilyn to call, he says. I don't point out that Marilyn doesn't live in the area, so I am not sure why it bothers her, but she tells me anyway: it's the food that they dump on the street - that creates a health hazard.

At this point, the issue comes full circle. La Adelita residents consider such crackdowns wholly unjust attacks on poor people like themselves trying to make an honest living, hence would probably never complain about such vendors. La Adelita residents spoke of how shocked they were watching the police force compatriots to dump their *tamales* and chopped fruits into trash cans that were then carted away by the city, a waste of both money (for the vendors) and food (for the poor and homeless). From their point of view, the police did this not because De Mille's homeowner-activists called the cops, or even because local businesses objected to the competition. No, they are apt to say, this just goes to show you that the police are

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more interested in harassing than in helping people like them. To be sure, in this case community policing has resulted in empowering some, in decreasing the fear of some, in addressing the underlying sources of local problems as they see them.[23] And yet this has been done despite the fact that local residents' own standards of disorder and justice would not have recommended such action.

Discussion

Multicultural societies pose particular challenges for liberal democratic nations, challenges especially encountered by their police departments. Community policing is attractive in such circumstances because of its mandate to "build bridges" between the police and the sociocultural variety to be found in such nations. The importance of building such bridges represents recognition that effective and productive police work is contingent on the "input" of residents "concerning both the needs of the community and the best way in which the police can meet these needs" (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997, p. 8).

According to its proponents, community policing represents an advance on the professional model of policing in addressing the problems of our major cities' neighborhoods (e.g., Kelling and Cole, 1998). This increased effectiveness of community policing is intertwined with the enhanced "legitimacy and authorization" (Kelling and Moore, 1988) that police departments gain by virtue of their officers' adoption of practices that yield non-adversarial contacts with residents, transforming "the police from what has been described as 'an army of occupation' into an accepted, unremarkable, and institutionalized part of the community" (Skolnick and Bayley, 1988, p. 82). Of key import is the insight that police departments gain into neighborhoods' "problems" because their officers consult with the residents and businesses on their beats. The idea is that by addressing locals' definitions of neighborhood problems, police can re-specify the tactics and aims of their policing street by street and thus be viewed as responsive to local concerns and worthy of the community's confidence and trust. Consequently, many observers, including Skolnick and Bayley, have noted the importance of attending to neighborhood and community specificity:

> Communities cannot be mobilized for crime prevention from the top down. Members of the community have to become motivated to work with and alongside professional law enforcement agents. Each area, neighborhood, or block may have its own set of problems. More affluent neighborhoods may care mostly about daytime burglars... Poorer neighborhoods have different problems, usually centering on the quality of life.... To prove successful, crime prevention should focus on the particular needs of particular communities.
>
> (1986, p. 213)

The deference to local standards and sensitivities that multiculturalism urges upon societal institutions, including the police, dovetails with the community policing principle that "how it looks in practice *should* vary considerably from place to place, in response to unique local situations and circumstances" (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997, p. 8), taking "seriously the public's definition of its own problems" (Ibid.). This bedrock principle will work, however, only assuming the police can find a consensus in the neighborhood that can be the basis for their re-specification or customization of policing. This article has presented two kinds of especially challenging neighborhoods for this conception of policing: One, a neighborhood in which consensus, while it does exist, is unlikely to be communicated to the police and is in any case quite tolerant of what nonlocals consider disorder. Two, a neighborhood in which social differences among the residents are so great that the police are often in effect acting on behalf of one group's conception of disorder at the expense of another group's. In neither of these cases is community policing easily realized.

There is some risk in using the term "community" without some appreciation for the diversity of social dynamics in neighborhoods (Alpert and Dunham, 1998). The imagery "community" evokes is that of a collective with shared interests and values, but such collective interests and values need not be present or be easily represented in actual neighborhoods. As Reiss put it:

> Conceptions of community and of community standards all too often assume homogeneity and stability of the population that does not exist in most local areas of the metropolis. Many police precincts are characterized by a diversity of peoples. Differences in age, race, class, and other interests within a population often means differences in expectations about what standards of behavior and law enforcement should prevail in the community.
>
> (Reiss, 1971, p. 209)

Similarly, Skolnick and Bayley (1986, p. 214) write that many urban "neighborhoods" and "communities" may in actuality be weakly organized, where "neighbors may be the very people" whom residents fear (Conklin, 1975); meanwhile, Skogan and Hartnett propose that "community policing is difficult in areas where the community is fragmented by race, class, and lifestyle. Groups will be quick to point to each other as the source of local problems" (1997, p. 14).

In areas like La Adelita, characterized by social homogeneity and consensus, social order-relevant commonalities are likely to be substantial. Therefore, no requirements are imposed on community policing officers that they thoroughly sample the local population, since locals' collective interests and values will be readily conveyed once initial contacts are made and rapport is established. There are two caveats, however. First, making such contacts and establishing such rapport may be the most difficult task in getting community policing off the ground in these neighborhoods

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when residents are collectively mistrustful of the police. Community policing officers in such neighborhoods may have to confine themselves to making contact through intermediaries who have the confidence of residents as capable of fully and carefully listening to their concerns and conveying them to officials.[24] These intermediaries are likely to have long-term ties to residents and be viewed as interested in "helping the community." They will probably possess detailed and empathetic knowledge of representative residents' family and living situations. Landlords already perform something of this role in La Adelita, although it is done in an unsystematic and non-programmatic way.

Second, La Adelita residents' mistrust of the police stems in part from the latter's acting upon received ideas about what represents a sign of crime and disorder in need of being "nipped in the bud," ideas which are not shared by residents themselves. The stream of research and theorizing that was heralded by Wilson and Kelling (1982) called much attention to indicators of disorder rooted in the scenes on and aesthetics of neighborhood streets. And yet, neighborhood cultures that not only celebrate a vibrant, even chaotic street life but also thrive on it encourage disorder without finding it threatening, precisely because of the extensive involvement that respectable members of the neighborhood may have with it. In such cases, dangers and fears are less likely to be rooted in an aesthetic of what the streets should look like than in more affluent areas because the look of the neighborhood will take a backseat to other, more pressing issues, such as finding a job or getting paid a living wage; i.e., the look of the neighborhood is registered through the prism of such needs. Walking the streets with La Adelita residents, we sometimes encountered abandoned couches on the parkway. In one case, the entire contents of an apartment were emptied out on the sidewalk, the tenant having been evicted. Responses to these sights were instructive: These were items that had been left behind for others to use, I was told. In other words, these were not signs of a community coming undone, but acts of generosity, signs of a community engaged in self-help. Multicultural societies challenge absolute and uniform understandings of (street) disorder, and the police can undermine their position in neighborhoods like La Adelita to the extent that received conceptions of disorder are not locally validated.

In socially heterogeneous areas, where "'community' frequently means conflicting rather than common interests," (Reiss, 1971, p. 209) and where "some residents can easily become the *targets*" of community policing (Skogan, 1990, p. 109), discerning the local consensus will require diligence, will be provisional, and always will be in danger of dissolution. Officers here will have to work against the understandable inclination to develop rapport primarily with members of the community who share their "values," i.e., those who are "pro-police" or who

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actively seek out officers at neighborhood events. In places like De Mille, it may make more sense for community-policing officers to take a "go slow" approach, after carefully considering the nature of the area's diversity, and making substantial and various kinds of contacts among the inhabitants, being careful to note whose views have yet to be represented. The officer may have to start by taking on relatively innocuous and shared types of concerns - in De Mille, outsider vehicles that sped through the neighborhood at rush hour were an across-group source of irritation - both because these may be easily addressed and because they show mutually mistrustful residents that they can work together. Officers will have to be mindful that complaints about particular practices may target specific resident groups (complaints in De Mille police-community meetings about dogs without leashes almost always directed officers to the addresses of Korean residents, for example). In such neighborhoods, officers should be wary of deputizing locals to recruit attendees for community meetings, and they should not assume that everyone who might be interested in such meetings would necessarily be invited to them. It is not simply that some may want to exclude those whom they view as their adversaries.[25] There can be a host of underlying agendas influencing the ultimate composition of participants at these meetings, and officers should be prepared to go around local neighborhood organizers who would be sufficient elsewhere and pursue other alternatives.

Based upon her ethnographic fieldwork in a heterogeneous urban neighborhood, Merry observed "the social order in a neighborhood depends on the presence of a dominant group that perceives itself as responsible for public order" (1981, pp. 230–231). Concerns over specific objects of "disorder" are likely to become associated with (or tainted by) the groups prone to complain about them. As a result, policing disorder can make problematic the very idea of police neutrality (Riechers and Rohberg, 1990). Police reliance on specific (typically dominant) groups in heterogeneous neighborhoods endangers the idea that the police can be even-handed to the extent that the community police officer is pressured to keep his narrow constituency happy, lest it become demoralized, by validating its definitions of disorder. Otherwise, demoralized residents may stop turning up at local meetings, cease providing officers with "intelligence," hence not be around when the officer wishes to ask, as the SLOs of the LAPD often ask of their contacts, "what information do you have for me?" Community policing officers are in relations of reciprocity with their contacts, and such reciprocity may have its own, long-term costs.

A well-meaning critic might reply that the police are not sociologists and thus cannot be expected to understand the backstage machinations of their beats' social histories. And yet, it is very important whether a police action is viewed as an effort to keep a neighborhood from descending down a spiral of decline or viewed as

harassment done on behalf of someone who would rather that you and your kind did not live here. A police officer in such a situation will restore order, communicate his message, write a ticket, and so forth. What he may leave behind, however, is resentment at apparent police partisanship and/or harassment. The neighborhood will have been policed, but the sense of community may well have been undermined, for definitions of disorder can be a cover for a neighborhood's micropolitics as much as an expression of resident fears. Indeed, these are probably inseparable in certain neighborhoods. As Reiss observed, "when citizens call the police they often are seeking personal gain" (1971, p. 69), and skewed calling patterns in heterogeneous neighborhoods can reflect small-scale "symbolic crusades" (Gusfield, 1966) by "moral entrepreneurs" (Becker, 1963) against particular groups by people threatened by their presence or values.

Alpert et al. propose that "an understanding of neighborhood characteristics and the infrastructure of social control networks are necessary prior to the establishment of tailored policing strategies, particularly those centered around community policing" (Alpert et al., 2000, p. 408). Strategies that represent solutions in one neighborhood will not work in another, and vice versa. In neighborhoods like De Mille, the police are in need of broadened contacts, while in places like La Adelita they are in need of simple contacts. In either case, community policing officers need to take care to follow up with people from traditionally reluctant, or police-averse, groups. These are potentially breakthrough contacts, not run-of-the mill complainants. Police mechanisms need to be implemented to screen for such contacts, for these are more than complainants whose problems are either dealt with, set aside, or not followed through on; they constitute entree into otherwise inaccessible social worlds. Much is to be gained by police departments where police officers are trained to approach their beats as ethnographers approach their field sites when trying to "get in."

Notes

Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

[2]   According to the 1999 Law Enforcement Management Administrative Statistics survey (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999: 16), 99 percent of the 487 municipal police departments that responded participate in a 9-1-1 emergency system.

[3]   Nevertheless, in multicultural cities like Los Angeles it cannot be assumed that calling the police will result in being able to communicate with someone, if you do not happen to speak English. One small-scale, "spot check" study conducted there found that "non-English-speaking callers to the Los Angeles Police Department often receive no language translation, incomplete information and rude responses from police employees... Some LAPD employees hung up on the callers when they failed to speak English... 'Only English spoken here,' one employee repeatedly told a caller" (Texeira, 2001). In Los Angeles in 1999, a total of 2,976,559 calls were placed to the LAPD, the majority of which were 9-1-1 calls (Los Angeles Police Department, 2001). Of these (almost 3 million calls), only 220,209 were calls placed in Spanish. Considering the very large percentage of residents in Los Angeles who are Spanish speaking or of Latin American heritage (almost half the total in 2000), it would appear that the problem of demarketing 9-1-1 is not one that has to be undertaken with the Spanish-speaking population in mind.

[4]   The extent to which different "cultures" are at issue in such discussions is addressed by Gitlin (1995).

[5]   Jack Katz and Maggie Kusenbach were the other members of the research team.

[6]   Both "De Mille" and "La Adelita" are pseudonyms.

[7]   Klinger and Bridges (1997) provide an overview of the limitations in using calls for service as an indicator of crime.

[8]   Additionally, many renters subrent their units, subdividing them and letting out such spaces as laundry rooms, closets, and garages.

[9]   Block group census data show fewer Latinos living in the area (61 percent), but this is a misleading number because some of the blocks included in the block group are not in the La Adelita study area. Thus, figures for a "representative block" are provided. The remainder of the census breakdown for the representative La Adelita block is as follows: white 15 percent, Asian 3 percent, and black less than 1 percent. Included among the whites are Armeninans (renters) and elderly Jews (single-family home dwellers), both of which groups had much diminished by the time of the study.

[10] Their tendency is to move frequently, changing addresses (but staying within the neighborhood because of its proximity to the Central American community, connecting bus routes, and nearby schools) as they seek out smaller or larger or cheaper apartments in response to the changing composition of household members and income streams.

[11] La Adelita is a truly a family neighborhood. According to the 1990 census, only 7 percent of residents in the area live alone in a household. By contrast, 87 percent of area residents live in what are classified as "family households."

[12] Of block group adults, 77 percent are classified by the 1990 U.S. Census as "not yet citizens."

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[13] Centered blocks of text are excerpted from the author's fieldnotes and interviews. Interviews conducted with Spanish-speaking informants have been translated into English for this article.

[14] A commonly cited "object of alarm" (Goffman, 1971) are the "crack heads" who come into the neighborhood "looking to buy." However, such people are viewed as outsiders, people who happen to be around only because of the drug market, but who are otherwise not part of the community itself. Thus, there is little that can be done about such folks, since they are not part of the neighborhood's intergenerational system of informal social control.

[15] Crime-related concerns are expressed in Latino parent-child conversations, typically couched in terms of the importance of taking proper precautions and being mindful of whom one associates with, but this paper is restricted to neighbor relations rather than to household relations.

[16] This desire has many sources, among them the participation of household members in the black or gray market that flourishes in the area, and concerns that police are apt to judge people's parenting (especially disciplinary) practices and thus threaten the integrity of their families.

[17] To say that the police are speculated about as menacing or malevolent figures in La Adelita does not mean that these speculations are groundless; quite the contrary. Perhaps not coincidentally, these themes emerged from informants in a Central American immigrant neighborhood similar to those found in the Rampart area of Los Angeles. The police misconduct that triggered the scandal at Rampart occurred during the period of data collection for the present study, but the emergence of the scandal in the press occurred just after data collection was completed. See the *Report of the Rampart Independent Review Panel* (Drooyan, 2000).

[18] Unsought contacts with the police are much more the norm in La Adelita than in any of the other neighborhoods we studied, consistent with one survey's finding that Hispanics are less likely to initiate contact with the police than non-Hispanics, and are more likely to be stopped by the police (Walker et al., 2000: 92–93, citing U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997).

[19] Thus the parents in one household talked about moving the family out of an apartment that they had lived in for several years, in favor of one a street over, after some gay men moved into the building and began initiating conversations with their teenage sons.

[20] The Senior Lead Officer's responsibilities (during most of the data collection period) included (1) meeting with members of the residential and business community, (2) providing information to the crime analysis unit developed through contacts in the community, and (3) coordinating problem-solving strategies with other city agencies and offices. Greene (2000) provides a helpful discussion of the origins and development of the LAPD's community policing initiatives.

[21] It was not unusual to come across De Mille residents who could identify the name of the SLO; by contrast, not once in 3 years did I encounter any La Adelita residents who could name the SLO whose assigned beat included their neighborhood.

[22] When the new SLO addressed his first local Neighborhood Watch meeting, he very quickly stated, in Spanish, that he was bilingual and happy to be working in De Mille. Looking around the room of 20 or so, I noted that I was the only Spanish-speaking member in attendance to receive his welcome.

[23] La Adelita was a neighborhood of interest to De Mille activists, perhaps because many of them considered the decline of De Mille to be intimately tied to the "Latinization" of La Adelita in the

1970s. At a Neighborhood Watch meeting, I asked attendees when De Mille's problems began. Some said after the Vietnam War, when "a lot of Hispanics started moving in," especially to the La Adelita neighborhood, "and long-term residents fled." People nodded in agreement and no one disputed this claim.

[24] The major community policing initiative undertaken in La Adelita during the data collection period (establishment of a day laborer center that led residents to cooperate with the police on a crackdown of the local drug market) was possible only because of the intermediary role played by a highly trusted (though nonresident) field deputy of the local councilwoman.

[25] For instance, a De Mille manager of a large apartment building housing younger whites hid information about upcoming police-community meetings from them because she feared they would learn about the area's problems and become motivated to move out if they attended.

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