

Officer and Suspect Demeanor

A Qualitative Analysis of Change

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This study explores police–citizen encounters and the reaction of each actor to the demeanor of the other throughout the interaction. Police–citizen interactions can be understood as a sequence of events, often changing rapidly and making transitions from being trivial to serious exchanges. The sequence of actions and reactions is designed to support the expectations of both actors. Although we understand that these interactions are guided or driven by the actor’s needs and abilities to influence, and even coerce, each other, we are not clear on the precise definition or role of the actors’ demeanor. Most previous research has been limited to a measure of demeanor at one point in time. Our design allowed for measurement of changes in demeanor as the police–citizen interaction developed, and our examination revealed that the demeanor of both officers and suspects changed during the encounters in a substantial number of cases.

Keywords: *police; decision making; demeanor; police–citizen interactions; behavioral change*

Police officers and citizens proceed through their frequent encounters by trying to negotiate what they want or need out of a given situation. Each of the actors has a stake in the outcome and frequently attempts to influence the decisions or actions of the others. One aspect of these encounters that has not been resolved is the influence of officer and citizen demeanor. Often, the nature, type, seriousness, or reason for the interaction can influence decisions made by the actors, but the way each responds to the other can define the success of the encounter. In any case, the individuals drawn into the encounters are put in positions of proportional control and power, which are often asymmetrical (Alpert & Dunham, 2004; Skogan, 2006). The more serious the potential outcome, the more likely the encounter is to be charged with emotions.

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Police–citizen interactions can be understood as a sequence of events, often changing rapidly and making transitions from being trivial to serious exchanges. The sequence of actions and reactions is designed to support the expectations of both actors. This is known as the principle of reciprocity. Although we understand that these interactions are guided or driven by the actor’s needs and abilities to influence, and even coerce, each other, we are not clear on the precise definition or role of the actors’ demeanor. In general, demeanor is a form of action, a behavioral means of expressing or transmitting a message, including verbal and nonverbal clues. A specific aspect of demeanor is deference, or giving the other person leeway in a show of respect, approval, or admiration.

It is the purpose of this article to explore qualitatively police encounters with citizens and the reaction of each actor to the demeanor of the other throughout the police–citizen interaction process. After a review of research on demeanor, we will present findings from a study in Savannah, Georgia, where officer and suspect demeanor were measured during encounters. We will conclude the article with suggestions for police training.

Prior Research on Demeanor

An interest in demeanor which stimulated significant research began in the early 1960s as a response to the claims of conflict and labeling theorists regarding the influence of extralegal factors in the operation of the criminal justice system. In his classic book titled *Outsiders*, Howard Becker (1963) reported that citizens who display a lack of respect for authority receive harsher sanctioning from street officers than those who do not. Piliavin and Briar (1964) conducted one of the earliest empirical studies on police and demeanor and found support for Becker’s claim. They found that delinquents whose demeanor was perceived by the officer as “uncooperative” were more likely to be arrested than “cooperative” delinquents. Most research on demeanor has focused on examining the single question of how suspect demeanor affects the outcome of the event. Further, these studies have relied on the assumption that demeanor is constant throughout police–citizen encounters and can be characterized adequately at one point in time (generally at the beginning of the encounter) or as a single overall measure.

Several studies in the 1970s and 1980s addressed directly the role of demeanor in arrest decisions and offered further support for what was becoming known as the hostility or demeanor hypothesis. Overall, research has shown that suspects who have an “attitude,” a negative demeanor, exhibit disrespectful or hostile behavior toward an officer during an interaction, increase the likelihood of an arrest or other negative response in all but the most serious cases (in which demeanor is unlikely to affect the outcome). These studies employed various design strategies

and analytic methods for examining the influence of demeanor in police encounters with both adult and juvenile citizens. There was general consensus among the research findings: Police officers were more likely to arrest citizens who were perceived as hostile or disrespectful than the citizens who deferred to the officer's authority (Bittner, 1974; Black, 1971, 1976, 1980; Black & Reiss, 1970; Lundman, 1974, 1994, 1996; Lundman, Sykes, & Clark, 1978; Reiss, 1971; Skolnick, 1966; Smith, 1984; Smith & Klein, 1983; Smith & Visher, 1981; Sykes & Clark, 1975; Westley, 1953, 1970; Worden, 1989, 1995).

The research on demeanor in police-citizen interactions remained virtually unchallenged until Klinger (1994, 1996) conducted an observational study of police behavior in Metro-Dade Police Department in Dade County, Florida. Klinger was not able to replicate the findings from the earlier studies in two distinct areas. First, he argued against a direct causal effect between demeanor and arrest because of the failure of previous research to account for the legality of the behaviors in the interactive process. The previous studies had conceptually defined demeanor to include illegal as well as legal behaviors. These measures of demeanor often included factors such as criminal conduct, thus confounding the conclusion that citizen hostility alone accounted for the officer's decision to arrest. Second, he also argued that the prior researchers did not adequately control for criminal behaviors when they estimated the effects of extralegal variables including demeanor on arrest.

The results of Klinger's analysis of decisions to arrest in 245 interactions failed to support what he has described as part of the "criminological canon" (Klinger, 1994, p. 477). His results indicated that demeanor, when operationalized as negative, but legal behavior, did not have a significant influence on officer's decisions to arrest. He found that hostile citizens were more likely to be arrested because they were more likely to commit crimes against the officer or a crime in his or her presence. Klinger concluded that it is not the citizen's demeanor that affects the officer's response as much as the citizen's observable criminal behavior. In other words, illegal factors, rather than legal factors explained the officer's actions.

Contrary to Klinger's findings, Terrill and Paoline (2007) found that disrespect, defined by suspect's statements or actions (but not ignoring officer's commands or questions), contributed to the likelihood of being arrested. They concluded, "Suspects who treated officers with respect were more likely not to be arrested, compared to those who displayed some form of disrespectful demeanor" (Terrill & Paoline, 2007, p. 319). However, in spite of this finding, the major conclusion of their study was that the strength of the evidence of the suspect's criminal behaviors was the most powerful predictor of arrest.

Klinger did identify a potential limitation in his and other data that might have led to an underestimation of the effects of citizen hostility. The measure of demeanor used in his and most other studies was determined only at the onset of the police-citizen encounter, or as an overall perception of the encounter, and thus any escalation

in the citizen's hostility during the course of the encounter would not have been detected in the analysis. However, research suggests that demeanor is relatively stable throughout an encounter between citizens and the police (see Sykes & Clark, 1975).

Sykes and Clark (1975) conducted an observational study where they measured citizen demeanor at the beginning and during the police encounter. They constructed an Absolute Deference Level (ADL) index of citizen demeanor. The index indicated that in 87% of the observed encounters, citizens exhibited a high degree of deference from the beginning to the end of the encounter. They conclude that citizen demeanor is extremely stable over the course of encounters. In addition, in the relatively few encounters where the citizen's demeanor did change, the change was favorable (i.e., toward more respectful and civil behavior).

Klinger called for future research to reinvestigate and reanalyze the data sets used in previous demeanor research to determine if the hostility hypothesis held true when using only the original conceptual definition of demeanor (i.e., legal conduct) and more adequately controlling for the effect of crime.

Beyond Klinger's Contribution

Several studies have since been conducted in response to Klinger's (1994) initial findings and criticisms (Engel, Sobol, & Worden, 2000; Lundman, 1994; Worden & Sheppard, 1996; Worden, Sheppard, & Mastrofski, 1996). Lundman (1994) reanalyzed the data from three previous research papers based on the Midwest City Police–Citizen Encounters Study, which focused on the effect of demeanor in police decisions to arrest during encounters involving public drunkenness (Lundman, 1974), juvenile offenders (Black & Reiss, 1970), and traffic law violators (Lundman et al., 1978). Lundman's reanalysis attempted to address the criticisms offered by Klinger by (a) distinguishing between felony and nonfelony offenses; (b) reporting additional crimes that occurred during the police–citizen encounter; and (c) limiting his measures of demeanor to include only verbal behaviors.

Lundman's findings were consistent with prior research indicating the relationship between suspect hostility and an officer's decision to arrest. All three analyses revealed that some extralegal and demographic factors, including demeanor, influence police arrest-making decisions when the effects of crime is controlled. However, the impact of demeanor depends primarily on how demeanor was operationalized and the specification of the models. Lundman also cautioned that his study involved relatively weak controls for crime and an inferred association between suspect demeanor and police decisions.

Lundman (1994) offered three justifications of why the initial and subsequent reanalysis of the Midwest City data provided some support for the hostility hypothesis and why the Metro-Dade data did not. The first explanation was the observable

geographic, demographic, and time differences between the two study sites. The Midwest City data were collected in the early 1970s in a rather large city with a relatively small minority population. All of the officers at the time were male and only one African American officer was on the patrol force. Comparatively, the Metro-Dade data were collected in the mid-1980s in a major metropolitan area with significant minority representation. Metro-Dade Police Department also had a significant number of female, African American, and Hispanic police officers on patrol. This difference is important because it was thought that departments with officers who mirrored the sociodemographic characteristics of the community would be less likely to respond negatively to citizens' behaviors.

The types of encounters that were measured in the two studies also differed, perhaps explaining the inconsistent findings. Lundman's reanalysis of the Midwest City data included police-citizen encounters resulting from public drunkenness and traffic law violations, as well as encounters with juvenile suspects. The Metro-Dade data were limited to citizen dispute-initiated encounters. The difference is noteworthy because an officer's intervention in a dispute between citizens is perhaps more likely to be handled informally as opposed to a written citation for a traffic violation-initiated encounter.

In addition to the time, location, and crime-type differences, the two studies also used different multivariate models. The model employed in Metro-Dade study included the crime that initiated the police-citizen encounter, any subsequent crime that occurred during the course of the encounter, and any specific officer training and used only a single representation of demeanor.

Although Lundman attempted to address individually and adequately each of the concerns put forth by Klinger (1994), he cautioned researchers to maintain a minimal degree of skepticism for the effects of demeanor on arrest decisions. He challenged future researchers, in agreement with Klinger, to employ more rigorous methods to control for effects of crime, limit the operationalization of demeanor to "legally permissible spoken words," and use multiple representations of demeanor and more specified models (Lundman, 1996, p. 319).

Worden and Sheppard (1996) conducted additional research to test further the validity of Klinger's (1994) criticisms. They reexamined four previous studies of police behavior (Smith & Visher, 1981; Worden, 1989; Worden & Pollitz, 1984) that used data from the Police Services Study (PSS). The PSS included 24 police departments ranging from 13 to more than 2,000 sworn officers in three metropolitan areas. The three sites (Rochester, New York; St. Louis, Missouri; and Tampa-St. Petersburg, Florida) served municipalities with a range of 6,000 to 499,000 citizens. Police observation was conducted over 900 shifts in 60 neighborhoods targeted explicitly based on their racial and income distribution. A total of 5,688 police-citizen encounters were observed and coded on a standardized form (see Caldwell, 1978).

Worden and Sheppard's (1996) reanalysis of the four aforementioned studies failed to find any indication that the previous findings were biased either in their operationalization of demeanor or the failure to adequately control for crime.

Worden and Sheppard were also able to conclude that according to their data, the effect of a hostile demeanor on police behavior was not conditioned on how demeanor was measured.

In support of their conclusion, Worden and Sheppard (1996) offered several key inferences regarding the effect of demeanor on police behavior to attempt to explain Klinger's null finding. The first justification was that Klinger's analysis was based on an ordinal measure of demeanor consisting of three distinct response categories: (a) highly hostile, (b) moderately hostile, and (c) civil. Klinger reported that in his Metro-Dade study, 28% of the citizens were observed to have a hostile demeanor on their initial encounter with the officer, whereas only 13% of the citizens were observed to have a hostile demeanor according to the PSS data. Therefore, Worden and Sheppard suggest that prior research on demeanor may have only been identifying and recording an antagonistic citizen demeanor based on what Klinger defined as "highly hostile" behavior, or Metro-Dade police officers were encountering an unusually high amount of suspect hostility.

Worden and Sheppard (1996) further argued that the coding instrument Klinger used for demeanor may have led to an underestimation in the association between demeanor and arrest. Klinger's measurement failed to differentiate between the demeanors of the suspects from that of the other citizens present during the encounter. Demeanor research focuses on how the suspect's hostility influences their likelihood of arrest; however, in the Metro-Dade study, if a complainant or a witness was observed to be moderately or highly hostile, then the encounter was scored as hostile. Worden and Sheppard caution that if the role of citizen bystanders in a police encounter is not attended to or controlled for in the analysis, then perhaps this will determine the difference between a statistically significant and a statistically insignificant finding.

Worden and Sheppard (1996) also point toward a more practical explanation of Klinger's failure to find significance. They suggest that the null finding might be indicative of the shift in policing toward increased professionalism (Brown, 1981; White, 1972), increased risk of civil liability, and the changing demographics of officers that occurred during the decade lapse between the two data sets. The PSS data were collected in 1977, whereas the Metro-Dade data were collected in 1985-1986.

Worden and Sheppard (1996) conclude that the prior research on demeanor displays an inconsistency in how demeanor was defined and illustrates a relative inattention toward establishing a linkage between demeanor and the indicators used to measure the concept. They emphasize that different studies, as well as additional analyses of prior data sets, have applied contrasting coding schemes for measuring demeanor and used varying operationalizations for the same construct of interest (i.e., demeanor). Similar to Lundman (1994), Worden and Sheppard suggest that Klinger's arguments expose the conceptualization and operationalization issues germane to prior research on demeanor and underscore the need for future research investigating the demeanor hypothesis.

Klinger's (1996) reanalysis of the Metro-Dade data that he used in his original study (Klinger, 1994) provided some evidence of a threshold effect for the influence of suspect hostility on arrest. Citizens who displayed an "extremely hostile" demeanor increased their likelihood of arrest. According to Klinger (1996, p. 75), this finding "suggests that displays of hostility may independently increase the odds of arrest once they [citizens] pass a severity threshold."

Klinger (1996) further challenged future research to search for interaction effects of additional extralegal factors including suspect's race, gender, and age, as well as the presence of bystanders to determine their influence on demeanor and arrest decisions. If significant main or interaction effects are found, Klinger argues that additional analyses be conducted to discover the extent to which having knowledge of a suspect's demeanor increases the ability to predict an officer's decision to either arrest or not. It is important to recognize that the research on demeanor has continued to rely on the assumption that it remains stable throughout the interaction process and uses single measures at the onset of the police-citizen encounter or as an overall characterization.

The Present Study

Our research seeks to fill some of the gaps in the previous examinations of demeanor. Although most previous studies have focused on the important relationship between demeanor and the outcome of the encounter, there is insufficient research that explores how the actions of one actor affect the actions of the other. The present study examines the important sequence of actions and reactions during the police-citizen encounter. Our methodology is primarily qualitative, and the information collected helps improve our understanding of what takes place during police-citizen interactions. We measure both officer and suspect demeanor at the beginning of the encounter and how each actor's demeanor changes in response to the other actor. Furthermore, we attempt to identify the reasons the actors change their demeanor during the interaction. Previous research rests on the assumption that demeanor remains relatively constant during police-citizen encounters. Therefore it was thought that it is sufficient to measure demeanor only at the beginning of an encounter, or to construct one general characterization of demeanor for the entire event. We contend that an analysis of process, by examining demeanor changes and the reasons for those changes throughout encounters, will strengthen and improve our knowledge of the behavior of the police and citizens during these encounters.

Methodology

Our study investigates discretionary police-citizen interactions in Savannah, Georgia. In 2002, field observers accompanied officers in each of the four precincts

and on all three shifts. Observers went on 132 tours with officers who made 103 stops (see Dunham, Alpert, Strohshine, & Bennett, 2005). These stops resulted in 29 warnings, 36 traffic tickets, and 10 arrests. Police officers used force in five incidents, and suspects actively resisted in seven incidents. In other words, in 27% of the stops, there was no negative outcome, and in 28% of the encounters, only a warning was issued. The small number of observations, especially arrests, limits our ability to analyze the relationship between demeanor and outcome or to generalize our findings to all police–citizen encounters. However, the richness of the data with respect to measures of demeanor and its changes throughout the interaction process makes the study an important step in learning more about how demeanor should be measured and its effects on police–citizen interactions.

Observers were instructed to watch the interactions between the officer and suspect(s) to document what they saw and to note the sequence of events as they unfolded. Observers were trained to take note of both the officer’s and suspect’s demeanors. Observers collected detailed information on the character of the encounter, such as suspect and officer demeanors at the beginning and end of an encounter, whether either actor was disrespectful toward the other during the course of the encounter, who displayed disrespect first, and the nature or “cause” of any changes in demeanor. The observers were provided with specific training concerning the identification of “demeanor” and “disrespect.” Observers were trained to interpret demeanor as any verbal comments, actions, or body language that was not threatening or illegal but could be interpreted as either positive, neutral, or negative by the other actor (i.e., professional, personal, direct, dominating, friendly, authoritative, defensive, arguing, angry, etc.). Similarly, they were trained to identify disrespect by language, including swearing or insults. Disrespect might also be displayed through actions (e.g., rolling eyes, turning away while being spoken to without clearly disobeying the officer’s orders). The following aspects of the interaction process are used in our analysis:

- Officer’s initial demeanor
- Officer did something to negatively affect behavior of suspect
- Description of what officer did to negatively affect behavior of suspect
- Suspect’s initial demeanor
- Suspect did something to negatively affect behavior of officer
- Description of what suspect did to negatively affect behavior of suspect
- Officer’s demeanor changed during encounter
- Nature of change
- Description of officer’s demeanor change
- Suspect’s demeanor changed during encounter
- Nature of change
- Description of suspect’s demeanor change
- First person to become hostile
- Description of first person to become hostile

- Officer's final demeanor
- Suspect's final demeanor
- Description of any change in officer's demeanor from beginning to end of encounter
- Outcome of the encounter

Findings and Discussion

Observers recorded the demeanor of suspects and officers specifically at the beginning and end of each encounter. In addition, the observers were told to record whether a suspect or officer's demeanor changed during the encounter. Although there were observations of more than 100 police–citizen interactions, not all included changes in demeanor. At the beginning of the contact, officers acted more positively toward suspects than suspects did toward officers. While only 5% ($n = 5$) of officers had a negative initial demeanor, 14% ($n = 14$) of suspects were negative at the beginning of the encounter with the police. Next, observers noted whether either the demeanor of police officers or suspects changed during the course of the encounter.

Suspect and officer demeanor changed at approximately the same rate during their interaction; in roughly one fourth of all cases, the officer and suspect changed their demeanor during the course of the encounter. The demeanor of officers improved (i.e., negative to positive, negative to neutral, neutral to positive) in half of the cases (50%; $n = 11$). In the remaining 50% of cases ($n = 11$), officer demeanor changed for the worse (i.e., neutral to negative, positive to negative, positive to neutral). These changes are shown in Figure 1.

The nature of suspect's change in demeanor was also evenly divided between changes for the better and for the worse. In more than half of the encounters (52%; $n = 12$), suspects' attitudes improved as their interaction with officers progressed, whereas in the remaining 48% of cases ($n = 11$), the demeanor of suspects worsened, which is shown in Figure 2.

At the end of encounters, officers had a more positive demeanor than suspects. More than half (55%; $n = 56$) of the officers had a positive final demeanor, 39% ($n = 40$) were neutral toward suspects, and a small percentage (6%; $n = 6$) had a negative demeanor at the end of the encounter. In contrast, only 41% ($n = 41$) of suspects had a positive demeanor at the end of their encounter with the police. A slightly larger percentage (44%; $n = 45$) was neutral toward officers, and 15% ($n = 15$) of suspects had a negative demeanor at the conclusion of their encounter with the police.

To better understand the reasons behind the change in demeanor of suspects and officers, observers were instructed to provide written descriptions of any changes in demeanor from the beginning to end of encounters. Table 1 provides a sampling of the descriptions recorded by observers. Of these descriptions, perhaps most notable are observers' descriptions of the change in officers' demeanors. Regardless of whether officers' demeanors changed for the better or worse, officers overwhelmingly appeared to be responding to the attitude/demeanor displayed by the suspect.

Figure 1
Nature of Officers' Demeanor Change (N = 22)

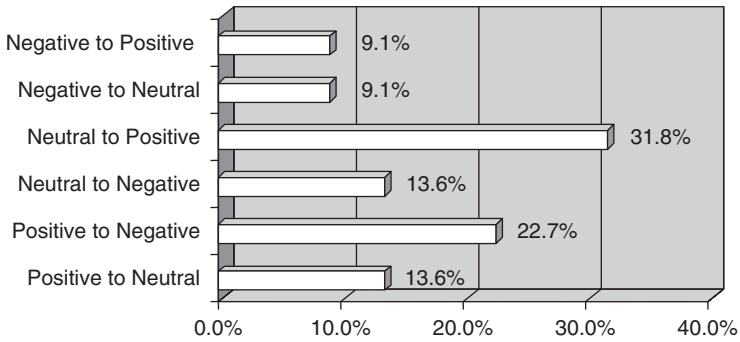
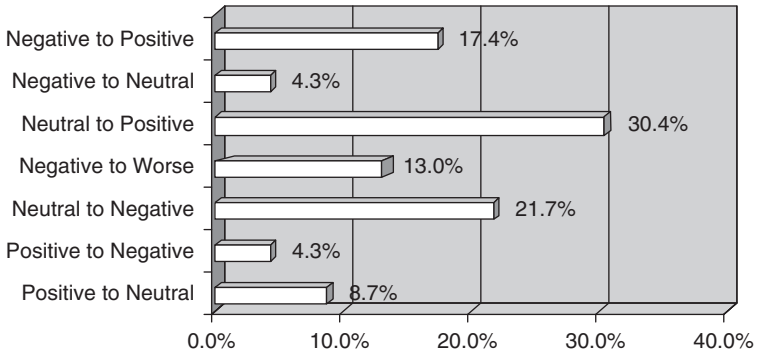


Figure 2
Nature of Suspects' Demeanor Change (N = 23)



In addition to providing a description of the nature of the change in demeanor among officers and suspects in this study, observers were also asked to document whether there was a specific point when the officer lost the cooperation of the suspect under observation. Similarly, they were asked to identify whether the suspects' behavior had a negative impact on the officer. In cases when either was true, observers were asked to describe the circumstances in narrative form.

Officers did something to negatively affect the behavior of the suspect in 11% ($n = 11$) of cases. In these cases, observers were asked to describe the action(s) officers took to affect suspects' behavior. Some actions taken by officers are described below:

- Officer corrected woman and said she had run red (not yellow) light
- Reacted negatively after continually interrupted by suspect
- Officer searched vehicle, found drugs, and arrested suspect
- Told suspect he would have to wait there awhile
- Told suspect he would have to place him in back seat of squad car
- Tried to stop individual (and had to chase and fight him)
- Wanted to question suspect

It is impossible to determine why the citizens became upset with the officers and whether the citizens were reacting to the officers' actions or their own plight.

Suspects engaged in action(s) that had a negative influence on the behavior of officers in this study at nearly twice the rate than did officers toward suspects. In almost one fifth (19%; $n = 19$) of encounters between officers and suspects in this study, the suspect took an action that negatively affected the officer's behavior. Again, observers were asked to provide a narrative description of the actions taken by suspects that led to this outcome. Examples of the descriptions provided by observers are found below:

- Suspect's action was suspicious, hesitant, reluctant
- Argued with officer, saying light was yellow not red
- Did not roll window down all the way and only talked through the back window (offered no explanation for behavior)
- Did not immediately pull over and did not put on seat belt even after getting ticket for it
- Individual was scared and so stopped in middle of road, which made officer think he was going to run
- Suspect jumped out of vehicle to tell police officer his fiancée was a cop
- Individual kept interrupting officer
- He lied to officer
- Man refused help and frustrated officer
- Suspect started cursing and said he would get a lawyer to stop the harassment
- Suspect was being uncooperative
- Man threatened officer with father's supposed influence
- Man tried to explain and get out of ticket
- Suspect was offended because he was stopped and asked questions about his activities
- Individual would not respond to officer

Unfortunately, it was not possible to determine why the citizens or police officers responded to each other's actions and whether those actions and reactions were justified.

Disrespectful Demeanor (Misdemeanors)

Information on disrespect was also collected during the police–citizen encounter. Officers were asked whether they thought the suspect was disrespectful. In other

Table 1
Descriptions of Officer and Suspect Demeanor Change During Encounter

Descriptions of <i>Officer</i> Demeanor Change
<p>Demeanor improved by end of encounter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officer referred more than once to how polite and respectful she was • By end of encounter, officer and suspect were talking about boxing • Once woman started talking, police officer calmed down • Officer was happy the driver was nice and polite (he said driver was actually thankful about being told about tag) • Officer relaxed after more contact with car occupants • Officer became friendlier as encounter went on • Officer got nicer as suspect got more cooperative • Officer shared laugh with suspect, talked about more than traffic stop • Realized driver was just scared; driver was polite and cooperative <p>Demeanor worsened by end of encounter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After suspects became hostile, officer became more stern • Officer became impatient and agitated with man • Officer became more loud and serious when suspect didn't immediately comply • Officer abandoned attempts to be pleasant and was just impersonal • When driver was an ass, the officer stopped trying to be nice and just issued ticket
Descriptions of <i>Suspect</i> Demeanor Change
<p>Demeanor improved by end of encounter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At first individual was defensive, but then said he understood and didn't argue • Suspect calmed down during encounter, was happy she only got warning • Even after being put in car, suspect came out smiling, asking questions, friendly • She was happy she only got a warning • She was happy/relieved she didn't get a ticket • Suspect got more cooperative after he realized he needed to comply • Woman seemed relieved she wasn't being pulled over for something else • He shared a laugh with the officer and talked about more than the stop • Suspect was confused until he saw his tag was actually gone, then lightened up • He was uneasy/offended at first, but talking to officer at end of encounter about boxing <p>Demeanor worsened by end of encounter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woman became hostile after she got the ticket • Suspect became more belligerent toward officers • At first, individual was cooperative, then mad/abusive, neutral by end of encounter • Suspect got angry and started cussing after he was told he'd be there awhile • Suspect rolled her eyes and shook her head (showed nonverbal negative attitude).

words, officers were asked to identify suspect that they thought to be disrespectful. Some examples of disrespect exhibited by suspects are presented in Table 2.

Observers reported that in very few of the cases (4.4%; $n = 4$) were officers disrespectful toward the citizen during the encounter. Of the four cases when an officer was disrespectful to the citizen, only one was assessed as being unprovoked; in the

Table 2
Examples of Suspect Disrespect

Disrespectful language

- Argumentative, told officer to stop harassing him
- Cussing, loud voice
- Derogatory comments (suspect told officer to “quit fucking with niggers in the hood”)
- Started cursing while talking to officers
- Verbally abusive toward officers

Disrespectful behavior

- Ignored officer (would not speak to him) because he was mad about being pulled over
 - Kept interrupting officer
 - Would not stop to talk to police officer initially, didn’t follow instructions (e.g., taking hands out of pockets)
-

remaining instances, officers were reacting to disrespect exhibited by the citizen. Although the overall percentage of suspects who displayed disrespect to the police was also relatively low, suspects were disrespectful at more than twice the rate (13.2%; $n = 12$) as officers.

Conclusions and Implications for Training

Whereas most of the previous research on demeanor during police–citizen interactions has focused on the relationship between demeanor and the outcome of the encounter, the present study is designed to add to our understanding of police–citizen encounters by addressing a limitation of the previous research that most studies measured demeanor only at the onset of the encounter or as an overall perception of the encounter. As a result, any change in demeanor or escalation in the citizen’s or officer’s hostility during the encounter is not detected. Our research is designed to examine changes in demeanor, thereby capturing the important sequence of actions and reactions during the process.

Our examination of the sequence of actions and reactions involved in the police–citizen encounters revealed that the demeanor of both officers and suspects changed during the encounters in a substantial number of cases. This finding contradicts the assumption that the demeanor of suspects and officers remains stable during most police–citizen encounters by viewing an encounter as a series of events that involves multiple stages that can change and be modified by one or both of the parties. Our examination of the reasons for the changes in demeanor revealed that officer and suspect demeanor was reactive to the demeanor and behavior of the other actor. This tells us that both actors can greatly influence the behavior of the other throughout the interaction process, even in serious events. Finally, we found that

changes in demeanor were almost equally positive and negative for both officers and suspects.

These findings not only point out the importance of studying the interactive process as it unfolds during police–citizen encounters but also have important implications for training. If it is possible for the officer to affect the demeanor of the suspect either positively or negatively by his or her own demeanor, then officers should be trained to understand the influence of their positive demeanor and respect shown for citizens during an encounter. Officers should also be trained to avoid responding negatively to a suspect’s demeanor. Note that our data showed that most officers’ negative demeanor was a reaction to something the suspect said or did.

Our preliminary observations show that such a positive outlook can effectively bring suspects under control and elicit cooperation. It is important for officers to avoid the common tendency to develop negative demeanor and behavior in response to something the suspect said or did. Of course, officer safety and survival is the primary goal for all officers, and threats, including verbal ones, must be taken seriously.

Contemporary research on demeanor is nested in an era of reform where many departments are embracing problem solving and community coproduction of services and paying closer attention to the core functions of their police officers. Agencies are modifying their officer’s crime-fighting and law enforcement roles to favor order maintenance, improving the quality of neighborhood life, and solving a range of social problems, as well as creating an environment that encourages citizens to be the “eyes and ears of the police.” An important part of this paradigm shift in policing should involve training police more rigorously in interacting effectively with the public, especially suspects. The training module we suggest is a modification of what has been called *verbal judo*, and provides officers with the tools to manage suspects with psychological control techniques (see Thompson and Jenkins, 2004). Verbal judo is a set of principles and tactics that teach officers to use verbal rather than physical control techniques to calm difficult people who may be under severe emotional distress, to calm hostile people, to diffuse potentially dangerous situations, and to perform professionally without responding to the negativity of the suspect.

As the importance of information about crimes, people, and places increasingly becomes recognized, officers need to exploit every opportunity to encourage citizen support and assistance. If a positive attitude and demeanor can help increase public trust and confidence, it can be used as another effective tool to fight crime and disorder.

More research on demeanor is needed to provide the knowledge base necessary for training of officers. Future ethnographic research combined with debriefing officers and citizens, and incorporating some form of advanced qualitative research techniques such as protocol analysis might assist in the development of a more comprehensive and universal understanding of demeanor on the outcome of an encounter. Also, research should investigate the officer’s perceptions of the citizen’s hostility and further attend to the occupational (e.g., drunk driving, public drunkenness, traffic

violations, or citizen disputes) and the social or neighborhood (public vs. private) context of the encounter.

Therefore, we have learned from the present research and from the observable flaws in the methodology of earlier demeanor research that future studies need to analyze police–citizen encounters as a process. In addition, researchers should employ multiple measures of demeanor at various times during the interaction process. Withstanding criticism, previous studies have succeeded in uncovering a range of issues related to factors that contribute to an officer’s decision to arrest and have provided insight into potential predictors of citizen compliance/noncompliance. However, additional theoretical development and empirical inquiry is required to improve the understanding of the effects of legal, extralegal, and situational, in addition to suspect and officer characteristics on police discretionary behavior.

The present research is one step in an effort to provide more information on the contours of the police–citizen encounter, including how the actions and reactions of one party affect the other. If a positive demeanor can help improve encounters between police and the public, which can lead to an increase in public trust and confidence, then it is a strategy that should be employed.

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