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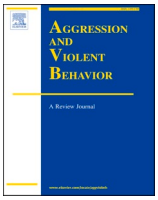

A race-centered critique of place-based research and policing

Rod K. Brunson *, Maria B. Vélez, Elena Tapia

University of Maryland, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, United States of America

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ABSTRACT

Our review offers a compelling case for centering race in place-based research and policing. Specifically, we build on insights gained from the racial structural perspective that well-documented, residentially based race disparities yield divergent social worlds, setting the stage for crime concentration and its durability. Centering race requires a critique of conventional approaches to studying hot spots policing, a heralded public safety initiative informed by the law of crime concentration and troublesome places. Race is unquestionably an organizing feature of American life and its associated indignities have proven exceedingly injurious for distressed Black and Latino communities. Therefore, we implore place-based scholars to thoughtfully consider the data routinely utilized, explore how police actions unfold in hot spots, recognize potential harms associated with intensified policing, and seriously consider that even "evidence-based" crime reduction strategies have the potential to exacerbate racial disparities. We provide guidance for stimulating advancements in hot spots policing research through theoretical integration, methodological innovation, and broadening what kinds of data qualify as evidence. Our goal is to inspire research agendas that holistically investigate why crime clusters in micro-places, engendering effective and fair public safety strategies. Without thoughtful consideration of the underlying causes of crime concentration and critical analysis of policing efforts, we risk worsening existing racial disparities, further alienating impacted neighborhood residents.

The crime and place literature advances the idea that larger, macro units such as census tracts or zip codes inherently mask important *heterogeneity* more readily seen at lower levels of examination. The concentration of crime is driven by small units such as street segments, modest parcels of land or building addresses that are often referred to as micro-places (Lee et al., 2017; Park, 2019; Weisburd, 2015; Weisburd et al., 2012; Wilcox et al., 2017). Even within high crime neighborhoods, work convincingly shows that there are swaths of geography that have little to no crime. That is, the overall elevated level of crime in a particular community is disproportionately driven by one or two "hot spots" (i.e., intersections or street segments). Crime concentration is therefore purposefully attributed to the specific micro-place rather than indicting entire neighborhoods and their attendant social conditions (Wilcox et al., 2017:165). This body of work robustly documents the durable patterning of crime at certain locations, also known as the "law of crime concentration" (Weisburd, 2015) or "the iron law of troublesome places" (Wilcox & Eck, 2011: 476). That offending is densest in small geographic units is the bedrock of focused deterrence and hot spots policing crime reduction strategies (Braga & Clarke, 2014; Brunson, 2015). By conceptualizing crime as disconnected from broader community conditions, the micro-place literature has reasonably devoted less attention to investigating *why* crime concentrates and lasts in certain places and not others.

To address the sizeable knowledge gap, we employ a nuanced approach, identifying the role of race and associated inequalities as a critical step toward unpacking the persistent "why" question. Specifically, bringing in well documented, residentially based race disparities as drivers of crime concentration will cast much needed light on why crime clusters in specific settings and is so intractable. Simply put, we assert that race should be centered in the micro-place literature rather than ignored altogether or relegated to the periphery.

Our advocacy for a race critique is based on a set of indisputable truths. Purposefully centering race recognizes that individuals, groups, and neighborhood conditions are situated in the U.S. time-honored racial hierarchy that historically privileges Whites and their communities while disadvantaging minority residential settings. The racial hierarchy also includes the vile myth of Black criminality and Latino threat that often fuels short-sighted crime control responses, including simultaneous over- and under-policing of minority neighborhoods (Brunson, 2007; Muhammad, 2019; Portillos, 1998). Intentionally focusing on race

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: rbrunson@umd.edu (R.K. Brunson).

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compels scholars to critically engage with marginalized identities beyond a conciliatory "happens to be" characteristic but explicitly as a theoretical underpinning regarding how individuals and groups routinely experience differential treatment in the U.S., particularly at the hands of overly aggressive police. That is, race is a dynamic that can be easily activated, is dexterous, insidious, and historically subjugates minorities, especially Black people. In fact, Muhammad (2019: xiv) stresses that "the myth that black people belong to a criminal race" over time metastasizes into "other forms of racial criminalization."

Because of its almost exclusive reliance on criminal opportunity theory, the crime and place literature, on its face, is race-neutral in its application. We argue, however, that critical elements of the framework such as target suitability, capable guardians, and risky lifestyles are undeniably vulnerable to racial bias. For instance, residential segregation manufactures criminal opportunities, including in micro-places. Accordingly, we advocate for micro-places to be conceptualized in their broader geographical context (see Hipp, 2022; Hipp & Williams, 2020; Rosenbaum, 2019; Wilcox et al., 2017; Wilcox & Tillyer, 2018). Given the intractability of race and place, the racial structural perspective warrants integration into micro-place literature (Peterson & Krivo, 2010; Sampson & Wilson, 1995). This approach attributes the concentration of crime in Black and Latino communities to racialized social structures, producing starkly different neighborhood dynamics and vulnerabilities to crime, both for victims and perpetrators. Recognizing the realities of "divergent social worlds" helps to explain why some places have concentrated levels of crime over time and others do not (Peterson & Krivo, 2010). Introducing a more multifaceted approach in examinations of inequitable crime concentration and its durability will ultimately provide a richer holistic picture. We are fundamentally motivated by the belief that it is simply not enough to know where the hot spots are; we also need to fully appreciate *why* they are there (see also Rosenbaum, 2019). Our review offers tangible strategies for improved theoretical and empirical understandings regarding why crime concentrates and endures at the micro place. Although we strongly encourage future waves of crime and place research, we provide measured caveats.

A race-centered critique requires deep interrogation of the crime control strategies most often associated with crime and place work – hot spots policing. In this review, we implore scholars to go beyond official, law enforcement data as they label hot spots. For instance, the data cobbled together to identify hot spots are often, if not exclusively, based on law enforcement data, often callously failing to seek critical, community perspectives and other pertinent data sources (Telep & Hibdon, 2017; see also Chapter 4 in Groff & Haberman, 2023). This concern is confirmed by well documented patterns of racialized policing underway (e.g., aggressive stop and frisk practices) in far too many urban neighborhoods, calling into question the objectivity of "official data". Moreover, despite the potential of targeted approaches to shrink law enforcement's footprint, some critics argue that they also provide additional opportunities for heavy-handed policing tactics, contributing to minorities more frequent, unwelcome encounters with officers (Gaston & Brunson, 2020; Haberman et al., 2016; Rosenbaum, 2019).

We are interested in learning how certain places are prioritized for hot spots policing and how enforcement actions routinely unfold on the streets. In addition, focused policing has the potential to spill over and undermine community well-being, further subjugating residents of Black and Latino disadvantaged neighborhood settings to mistreatment under the pretext of "good science". A racially grounded examination of the crime and place literature can elucidate how hot spots policing is conceptualized, measured, and delivered, potentially revealing unintended, harmful byproducts. Centering race also means spotlighting the reasons *why* some places are hot and others cold. Theoretically grounding hot spots while also earnestly considering race, expands the understanding of crime and place, offering insights into how to effectively interpret and responsibly implement crime reduction strategies.

Our review begins with a summary of the crime and place literature. Then, we demonstrate that criminal opportunities are embedded within larger racial hierarchies (De Coster & Heimer, 2017; Rivers et al., 2017). We build on recent theorizing that the concentration of crime at the micro-place is best understood by going beyond opportunity perspectives, acknowledging that offending is a consequence of broader contextual conditions – requiring a multi-level framework (Wilcox et al., 2017; Wilcox & Tillyer, 2018). Broader contexts are stratified by race in fundamental ways that also structure patterns of crime concentration. We follow our crime and place assessment with a race-centered critique of the hot spots policing approach. A race-centered approach does not demand less or weakened policing (i.e., defunding) but is based on the principle that public safety strategies can simultaneously be effective and fair, especially "in the neighborhoods that most need the police to improve – not disappear" (Brunson, 2020; Weisburd et al., 2024; Wheeler, 2020). Indeed, extant work shows that Black individuals have a higher rate of reporting violent crime victimizations to the police (Xie & Baumer, 2019). We articulate concrete challenges and suggestions to move this area of criminology forward. Our goal herein is simply to facilitate scholarly integration of race into place-based, policing research.

1. Moving toward an explanation of crime concentration

Crime and place literature appreciates that clusters of *within-neighborhood* offending largely determine local crime rates. Therefore, scholars working in this tradition argue that the patterning of crime is best studied at small geographic units such as street segments, clusters of street sections, or physical addresses (Weisburd et al., 2012; Wilcox et al., 2017). This body of work generally asserts that micro-places more optimally capture crime distribution than do larger ones such as census tracts which this literature considers macro level. That is, troublesome, macro-level areas are not uniformly high crime; rather, elevated crime rates in particular neighborhoods are driven by one or two "hot spots" (i.e., intersections or street segments). This heterogeneity is aptly recognized by crime and place literature given its focus on micro-places. For instance, Wilcox and colleagues note (2017:165) "…crime is seen as a problem specific to 'hot spots' within a community rather than integral to the community as a whole".

Two central findings exemplify the crime and place research tradition. First, research consistently confirms that crime is not randomly distributed but clusters at very small units of geography. Offending is commonly measured using data from local police departments (i.e., official) and captured by crime incidents. Further, most official counts stem from victims' and witnesses' reports, not self-initiated police activity. Weisburd (2018) examined the clustering of officially recorded crime incidents at the micro-place for five large cities (Cincinnati, Ohio; New York, New York; Sacramento, California; Seattle, Washington; and Tel Aviv, Israel) and found that 4.2 % and 6.0 % of street segments were responsible for 50 % of crime. In a separate study of Seattle, Weisburd et al. (2012) demonstrated that about 5 % of street segments accounted for approximately half of the official crime recorded annually. Other scholars' work confirms this empirical pattern in a variety of places, including Albany's reported crime levels (Wheeler et al., 2016), firearm violence in Boston (Braga et al., 2010), Brooklyn Park's crime and disorder incidents (Gill et al., 2017), St. Louis' counts of reported property and violent crimes (Levin et al., 2017), Seattle's juvenile crime arrests (Weisburd et al., 2009), and Vancouver's calls for police service (Andresen et al., 2017). This line of research consistently shows that a small number of micro-places are responsible for driving city-level crime rates.

Second, an important related finding highlights the durability of crime concentration over time. That is, those micro-places that have the most crime – areas that are "hot" – and those micro-places that are relatively crime free – spots that are "cold" – typically remain so over time. For instance, Weisburd et al. (2012) studied street segments in Seattle from 1989 to 2004, finding that half remained in the relatively

crime-free category. Another 30 % maintained a "low stable" crime classification over the 15-year period. Only 1 % were considered to have chronic crime, responsible for 22 % of all offenses during the study period. Similarly, Braga et al. (2010) found that gun violence incidents in Boston from 1980 to 2008 were highly concentrated, and remained so, during the 28-year study period. Taken together, Weisburd et al. (2012) and other scholars (Andresen & Malleson, 2011; Braga et al., 2010; Haberman et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2017; Levin et al., 2017; Schnell & McManus, 2020; Weisburd, 2018; Weisburd et al., 2009) collectively conclude that there is a distinct clustering of reported crime that remains quite constant.

Though most of the work in the place-based tradition focuses on identifying hot spots, a complementary body of scholarship seeks to understand what drives such patterning (Braga & Clarke, 2014; Connealy, 2021, 2023; Kim, 2018; Schnell et al., 2019; Weisburd et al., 2012; Weisburd et al., 2020). This line of research draws heavily from "opportunity theories" – routine activities, situational crime prevention, and crime pattern perspectives (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1993, 1999; Sherman et al., 1989; Wilcox et al., 2017). Criminal opportunity refers to motivated offenders' ability to carry out criminal acts in certain places and situations. These settings and circumstances provide opportunities for the convergence of three factors: (1) the presence of a suitable target, (2) the proximity of motivated offenders, and (3) the absence of capable guardians. Importantly, built environments such as bars, schools, parks, traffic patterns, and structural features (i.e., concentrated poverty, housing type and access to public transportation) can serve as breeding grounds for criminal opportunity (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1993, 1999). That is, certain micro-places hasten the convergence of the aforementioned factors. For example, Schnell et al. (2019) found that indicators of criminal motivation such as having a relatively high percentage of juvenile arrests, and lack of guardianship as measured by abandoned housing, help to explain crime concentration in Newark, New Jersey. Connealy (2021) discovered that crime hot spots were more likely to have apartment complexes and small retail shops than street segments with low crime in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Building on the above findings, some scholars' work has gone beyond examining criminal opportunity theories. The dominant theoretical extension draws from social disorganization theory, as it is the primary explanation for crime at the neighborhood (macro) level (Sampson, 2012). Two investigations by Weisburd et al. (2012, 2020) are particularly instructive here. For instance, in a multi-year study of street segments in Seattle, Weisburd et al. (2012) examined the importance of factors measured at the place-level, derived from opportunity and social disorganization theoretical frameworks. The research team found that the presence of employees and residents was important for signaling target suitability. For social disorganization theory, Weisburd et al. (2012) found that property values and physical disorder at street segments significantly predicted crime, although racial heterogeneity played no significant role. The study revealed that both theoretical perspectives were essential for understanding differences between a chronically high crime street segment and one that was crime-free over time. The authors noted that "both opportunity and social disorganization perspectives are important in this context in understanding the criminology of place" (Weisburd et al., 2012: 160). In a subsequent study of Baltimore street segments, Weisburd et al. (2020) found that collective efficacy captured at the place-level helped to reduce crime, irrespective of opportunity.

An abundant body of research has investigated how criminal opportunities are shaped by broader ecological conditions. Such efforts align with theorizing by Weisburd et al. (2012), Wilcox et al. (2017), Wilcox and Tillyer (2018) and Hipp (2022) offering that a multi-level framework is needed to understand the concentration of crime at the micro-place. For example, a multi-level framework considers crime concentration at the place- (the lowest level of geographical aggregation) and neighborhood-level (higher level of geographical aggregation). How multi-level factors shape the concentration of crime is intricate. It may be that neighborhood conditions are additive to criminal opportunities such that they each independently influence the production of crime clusters. It is also possible, however, that neighborhood conditions either magnify or lessen (i.e., statistical moderation) the role of criminal opportunities.

A handful of studies pinpoint concentrated disadvantage as an important macro-level force in shaping crime concentration. For instance, Connealy (2021) observed that relatively high levels of disadvantage at the block level was a distinguishing feature of high versus low crime concentration concerning Indianapolis, Indiana street segments. Disadvantage has an independent influence net of criminal opportunities – referred to as an additive influence. Furthermore, Tillyer et al. (2021), in a study of San Antonio, TX investigated the extent to which concentrated disadvantage at the block-group level strengthened the influence of crime generators on face-block level violent, property, and drug crime. Tillyer et al. (2021) found that face-blocks (their measure of micro-place) embedded in disadvantaged block groups had more violent and drug crimes than those located in areas with relatively less disadvantage. Findings from San Antonio indicated robust support for the idea of moderation: micro-places' vulnerability to crime "appears to be exacerbated in neighborhoods with extensive criminal opportunity and tempered in neighborhoods with less criminal opportunity" (Tillyer et al., 2021: 537). Therefore, we encourage future work to build on the premise that neighborhood disadvantage increases crime concentration (i.e., additive) and has the potential to exacerbate (i.e., moderate) the criminogenic influence of opportunity at the micro place.

The constellation of factors making up neighborhood conditions associated with crime such as concentrated disadvantage, housing values, and residential immobility are not equally distributed across communities – specifically, they are highly stratified by race (Peterson & Krivo, 2010; Sampson & Wilson, 1995) – a fundamental tenet of the racial social structure perspective. Residential segregation, both in its historical and contemporary forms, spatially organizes racial groups, resources, and opportunities, ultimately creating vastly different social worlds. The result is that Whites commonly reside in segregated neighborhoods with more resources and opportunities, while Blacks and other non-Whites live in segregated areas with fewer resources and opportunities. African American and other minority neighborhoods also experience uniquely high levels of involuntary criminal justice system contact, including intense police surveillance and mass incarceration (Krivo et al., 2021; Lyons et al., 2022; Peterson & Krivo, 2010).

By extending the racial social structure to micro-places, we expect that offending opportunities are racially stratified in ways that help determine crime concentration. That is, the factors that underline elements of criminal opportunity – exposure to motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians – are largely shaped by the racial social structure, namely, residential segregation. As Wilcox and Cullen (2018) note, segregation and racial discrimination in housing policy have created contexts that undermine capable guardians' – what some scholars refer to as "place managers" – ability to prevent crime. When place managers such as landlords do not fulfill their guardianship function, they contribute to "problem properties" (Zoorob & O'Brien, 2024). Indeed, Zoorob and O'Brien, 2024 find that when problem properties undergo intervention, they not only experience a drop in crime and disorder but also encourage new investment. Moreover, because segregated and disadvantaged communities have limited social and governmental capital to exert in the broader political economy, residents' concerns about crime-prone housing and unsafe buildings are frequently dismissed (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Wilcox & Cullen, 2018).

Residential segregation also contributes to some minority groups' isolation in disadvantaged communities with cognitive landscapes that proffer unhealthy conflict resolution such as the street code (Anderson, 1999) or ghetto related behavior (Wilson, 1987). Thus, residents' decision-making calculus is constrained by normative milieus (De Coster et al., 2018; Rivers et al., 2017). Rivers et al. (2017) advance a conceptual model (see their Fig. 1. p. 80) that seeks to understand why

minorities are more likely to engage in criminal offending compared to their White counterparts. Central to their argument is that minorities are more likely to live in disadvantaged neighborhoods, places conducive to cultural toolkits or repertoires that encourage risky, intuitive, and quick decision-making. They offer that "…experiences of concentrated disadvantage and racism (that are unique to minority groups) may exacerbate the use of decision heuristics ultimately [producing] more low quality decision that are likely to lead to crime" (p.88). As such, these normative environments can translate into harmful outcomes to actors in both the short and long term. Relating this concept to crime, Rivers et al. (2017) argue that concentrated disadvantage increases the likelihood that impulsive decision-making tilts toward offending given these normative constraints. The authors are clear that their approach is racially invariant – specifically, any group living in disadvantaged contexts will encounter similar choices and constraints.

Viewing criminal behavior as a choice that is structured by constraints also aligns with intersectionality frameworks. That is, the individual level interactions that make up criminal opportunities *intersect* with broader structures of inequality. In fact, De Coster and Heimer (2017) advance the idea of "choice within constraints". They assert that "By focusing on choice within multiple intersecting constraints, …reveals the complexities in people's decisions about whether to engage in crime and violence, how to enact these behaviors, and who to target, as well as how cultural meanings, identities and reputations can be affirmed or renounced through crime and violence" (De Coster & Heimer, 2017: 17). Intersectional scholars have tirelessly advocated for conventional theories to account for the impact of history, identity, and distinct socialization processes on crime (Isom Scott, 2020; Potter, 2015; Russell-Brown, 2009). For instance, Isom Scott (2020) proposed an integrative structured identities model which is an intersectional approach that prioritizes multilevel systems and contextualizes them within the broader power structure to reveal the processes that produced inequalities in the hope of eventually destroying them. Discussing the need for an intersectional application to traditional theory, Isom Scott (2020: 9) states, "Given that criminal behavior and entanglement with the criminal justice system present some of the largest social disparities, the lack of a nuanced understanding of difference is a gross negligence of orthodox scholarship". This concept readily lends itself to theories of opportunity and was proposed long ago by Mills (1969) who reasoned that the social context dictates diverse constraints on individual behavior, as it can regulate both opportunities and motivations to engage in deviance. In agreement, Brown (2015: 2) asserted that "detaching an individual from their social environment creates a somewhat fictitious unit of analysis because the social environment is a major contributor to an individual's behavior".

2. Moving beyond opportunity

We are steadfast in our belief that crime and place literature should expand its theoretical focus beyond criminal opportunity theories, integrating pathways advanced by the racial structure perspective. Specifically, the racial structure perspective anticipates that racialized ecological inequalities contribute to variations in neighborhood crime via social disorganization and cognitive landscapes that encourage offending (Peterson & Krivo, 2010; Sampson & Wilson, 1995). Social disorganization refers to the diminished ability of neighborhoods to control crime due to sparse friendship networks, few neighbors looking out for each other, anemic participation in community-based organizations, and little, if any, access to local political and economic powerbrokers. Cognitive landscapes such as social isolation and adoption of the street code are expected to increase crime (Anderson, 1999). Therefore, community level dynamics collectively create undercurrents that encourage and discourage crime.

The racial structural perspective is foundational to understanding the longstanding finding of higher crime rates in non-White compared to White neighborhoods (DuBois [1899], 1973; Lyons et al., 2022; Peterson & Krivo, 2010; Sampson & Wilson, 1995; Shaw & McKay, 1942). The racial spatial divide is foundational to inequality research and this well documented phenomenon is durable (Peterson & Krivo, 2010; Sampson, 2012). Recent evidence in support of the racial structural perspective hails from research utilizing the National Neighborhood Crime Study (NNCS) (Krivo et al., 2023; see also Sampson, 2012; Hipp, 2007). Using the first wave of NNCS data, Peterson and Krivo (2010) found that Blacks and Latinos were living in highly segregated conditions in 2000. These segregated conditions translated into extreme levels of disadvantage; such racialized disadvantage was critical for explaining disparate violent and property crime in African American and Latino compared to White neighborhoods. Krivo et al., (2021) evaluate the extent to which the racial social structural perspective applies to neighborhoods in the new millennium using the second wave of the NNCS. They find that disadvantage continues to be fundamental for understanding why crime is higher in Black and Latino neighborhoods compared to White areas. Furthermore, Lyons et al. (2022) documented the importance of the racial structural perspective for understanding change in exposure to violent and property crime for US neighborhoods during the 2000s.

Access to political capital is racially stratified such that minority communities have fewer ties to resources shown to effectively control crime. Moreover, there have been diminishing investment in some minority communities following the Great Recession (Krivo et al., 2021). Given that both NNCS waves find that Black and Latino neighborhoods had significantly lower levels of home mortgage investments than White neighborhoods, it seems prudent to consider the role of past and present exclusionary housing policies toward understanding inequality in crime concentration. Lyons et al. (2023) found that communities that were graded "poor" by the Homeowners Loan Corporation (HOLC), a gradient that mirrored race and class biases in the 1930s, demonstrated higher levels of violence and burglaries 70 years later.

3. Race critique of hot spots policing

Sherman et al. (1989) Minneapolis study was influential toward establishing hot spots as a promising crime reduction strategy (Weisburd, 2018). Hot spots initiatives quickly gained popularity with U.S. police executives soon after being introduced in the late 1980s (Braga et al., 2019; Sherman & Weisburd, 1995). A Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) study revealed that among 192 agencies surveyed, nearly 90 % of departments reported incorporating a hot spots related strategy (PERF, 2008). An appraisal of police leaders' preferred crime reduction initiatives revealed robust levels of support for hot spots across a representative sample of law enforcement agencies (Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018).

Hot spots policing aims to identify locations where there are high levels of problem behaviors, directing resources, tactics, strategies, and programmatic interventions in the hope of curtailing them (Rosenbaum, 2019: 315). A key feature of hot spots policing involves dedicating municipal resources to specific places and individuals, instead of saturating entire communities (Weisburd & Telep, 2014). As such, it is portrayed as evidence-based and thereby less harmful than traditional police responses. Despite being relatively straightforward, definitions of how to think about hot spots, how many hot spots actually exist, which hot spots to prioritize, and implementation strategies vary widely (see Connealy & Hart, 2024). Moreover, Haberman (2016) notes that evaluations of hot spots policing can range in tactics and research design, making it difficult to understand what hot spots policing is and why it might work (see also Braga et al., 2019).

Next, we take stock of the relationship between hot spots policing and crime. While a developing field of inquiry, a National Academies report demonstrated support for the short-term benefits of hot spot policing strategies for crime reduction, without displacement effects (Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018). A Campbell review involving meta-analysis and the use of Cohen's d for determining mean effect sizes,

found that hot spots policing had a small (about an 8% reduction) but significant influence on crime control and disorder (Braga et al., 2019). To the extent that there were displacement effects, they appeared positive and helped to reduce crime in adjacent areas. Braga and Weisburd (2022) assert that when evaluating the mean effect size of hot spots policing on crime, the relative incidence rate ratio (log RIRR) is prefereed over the Cohen's d for methodological reasons in meta-analyses. When employing the log RIRR, Braga and Weisburd (2022) document a stronger deterrent influence of hot spots policing on crime. Specifically, the average crime reduction was about 16% in treatment versus control areas. The authors point to the meaningful impact of hot spots policing while also acknowledging heterogeneity across studies regarding what constitutes a hot spot.

Immediate impacts on community and individuals living in hot spots are less developed. Braga et al. (2019) find that only seven of 65 studies investigated the influence of hot spots for police-community relationships. Furthermore, qualitative research studies were not included in the meta-analysis. Braga et al. (2019), however, hints at occasional signs of worsening police-citizen relations. For example, Kochel and Weisburd (2017) find that the directed patrol treatment was associated with short-term tension between police and residents but not concerning problem-solving; in the long run, residents reported increased willingness to cooperate with police after the hot spot intervention.

Similarly, we know little about the long term, deterrent effect of hot spots policing on improved public safety. In their meta-analysis of hot spots policing research, Weisburd and Telep (2014), discovered few studies that included follow-up periods of more than a year. One study, in a small city, using a seven-year follow-up period, found that hot spots policing yielded a reduction in crime in targeted areas (Koper et al., 2021). Other scholars, however, have suggested that hot spots enforcement might yield diminishing returns along with meager and rapidly fading crime control effects (Braga et al., 2011; Haberman & O'Guinn, 2023; Koper, 1995; Sherman & Rogan, 1995). If hot spots strategies fall short in terms of effectiveness, they may also fail to deliver municipal cost savings as increased police resources for short-term crime reductions may not be sustainable (Gibson et al., 2017) or fiscally prudent. Taxpayer concern about sustainability are reasonable given the sizeable expense of redirecting police resources, and the potential for lasting harm to individuals needlessly ensnared.

Our above evaluation reveals that there is still much to understand about the impact of hot spots on racial inequality. As Braga et al. (2019:3) observed "The growth of hot spots policing warrants further empirical attention on the efficiency of hot spots policing for reducing crime." A racial critique implores hots spots policing scholars to scrutinize the data commonly utilized, explore the way policing occurs in hot spots, acknowledge the potential harm stemming from intensified policing, and seriously weigh the tradeoffs of crime reduction and increased racial inequality.

We believe that it is appropriate to question the dominant use of official data involved in designating places as hot spots. The most common methodological approach involves using reported crime incidents and more recently, citizen calls for service. It makes sense, however, to interrogate additional data sources given concerns that racial inequality largely explains crime patterns. Indeed, relying solely on police department data has the potential to yield a feedback loop causing officers to concentrate their efforts on specific areas labeled "crime-prone," resulting in racially disproportionate arrests (see Neil & MacDonald, 2023). These concerns are amplified given that there is little overlap in how different crime types cluster to create hot spots (Haberman et al., 2017). Not disaggregating by type of crime may obscure the fact that some offenses are more susceptible to police intervention than others (Beckett et al., 2016; Blumstein, 1982). We encourage the field to be more mindful of its reliance on official data and contextualize it vis a vis racialized patterns of policing, especially concerning non-violent offenses.

We readily acknowledge that official data sources are mostly derived from citizens. For example, Weisburd et al. (2021) demonstrated that most violent crime investigations originate with citizens, not police. Beckett (2012) found a similar pattern for suspicious drug activity calls in Seattle and identified several misclassified entries in the city's management system. Because these data are largely generated by citizens, however, does not mean that we should not question whether, and how, they potentially contribute to racial disparities. A growing body of work indicates that citizen calls for service are filtered in ways that can be racially unequal. For instance, public safety organizations determine risk and call classification (see also Neusteter et al., 2019 for a review). Rosenbaum (2019) asserts "the real problems are hidden behind calls for service or arrest data" (p. 318). That is, residents of disadvantaged communities often summon police not necessarily due to a shared belief in officers' effectiveness, but because of a scarcity of other viable public safety options. Recall that there is little empirical evidence of underreporting among Black violent crime victims (Xie & Baumer, 2019). Lum et al. (2020) using systematic observations of a public safety communications center, find that call takers often resolve issues themselves, eliminating the need to send police. As such, call takers largely function as gatekeepers, increasing or decreasing agency footprints. Gillooly (2020) underscores call takers' role in potentially escalating racially biased incidents by examining circumstances leading up to the arrest of Harvard University professor, Henry Louis Gates. She concluded that the dispatcher determined risk based on misinformation provided by the caller and primed the responding officer to behave aggressively during the interaction.

Researchers may overlook problem areas in other parts of a city not recorded by police if we do not go beyond official data (Telep & Hibdon, 2017). At a time when data are increasingly available, police departments should utilize a variety of data sources such as emergency medical records, crowd sourced information, on-site assessments, surveys, and community members' accounts to document where crime and attendant social problems concentrate. Telep and Hibdon (2017) contend "Overall, though, police should use as much data as possible in identifying and responding to high-crime locations. We believe that analysts, supervisors, and officers moving beyond an exclusive reliance on crime data will help better inform the triage of police efforts" (p. 668–9). Therefore, we question the veracity and comprehensiveness of data typically used to designate micro-places as "hot spots".

Hot spots policing is an initiative designed to target and make public safety responses more efficient in the hope of reducing officers' footprints in communities that historically and currently allege racialized, heavy-handed tactics. Observers of hot spots assert, however, that most of the strategizes eventually devolve into traditional policing tactics (Wheeler, 2020); meaning that dubious police actions can also occur in smaller geographic areas, often in the form of increased surveillance, aggressive order maintenance, and directed patrols. As Rosenbaum (2019:322) avows "… a major goal of community policing is to achieve fair and equitable policing, not just to achieve efficient policing" (also see, Eck & Rosenbaum, 1994). Accordingly, we assert that it is important to know what *transpires* during police-citizen encounters and how they might drive racial disproportionality. That is, simply because hot spots policing casts a smaller net than routinely over-policing entire neighborhoods, does not guarantee that officers are constitutionally dispensing their duties.

In distressed neighborhoods, residents often report being simultaneously over- and under-policed, calling into question officers' legitimacy as crime fighters (Brunson & Wade, 2019). For example, Gaston et al. (2023) examined five years of Newark, New Jersey police officers' firsthand accounts of drug arrests of White, Black, and Hispanic suspects at problem locations, finding that place-based perceptions informed unwelcome police contacts of all suspects. Officer initiated stops of Black Americans, however, were typically based on lower legal standards of articulated reasonable suspicion, regardless of arrestees' individual actions. Further, Newark police officers haphazardly designated certain places (e.g., takeout restaurants, corner stores, parking lots, and public

housing complexes) for increased attention based on anecdotal information received from supervisors at rollcall or from having made prior arrests at said locations. True evidence-based approaches purportedly reduce officers' footprint because targeted policing efforts do not involve blanketing the entire neighborhood. On the other hand, Neil and MacDonald (2023) studied six cities finding that hot spots of crime are also hot spots of arrest, that are characteristically racially unequal. They state, "There is a strong relationship between crime and arrest hot spots, making crime hot spots key drivers of citywide racial and ethnic disparities in arrests" (p. 7).

Additional research purposefully designed to elicit residents' views is warranted in the absence of compelling evidence concerning whether hot spots policing erodes citizen trust of police (Kochel et al., 2015; Ratcliffe et al., 2015; Weisburd, 2016; Weisburd et al., 2011; Weisburd & Telep, 2014). We attribute the lack of clarity concerning this matter to methodological challenges and decisions. For example, some studies use survey methods to assess citizen perceptions of hot spots policing but struggle to identify the most appropriate target population. In particular, data are often derived from neighborhood residents near hot spots, but researchers do not purposefully focus on those disproportionately affected by frequent police contact, namely, young Black males (Chermak et al., 2001; Kochel et al., 2015; Koper et al., 2023; Neil & MacDonald, 2023; Ratcliffe et al., 2015; Weisburd et al., 2011). Metcalfe and Pickett (2018) find that the public tends to support allocating resources to hot spots policing, but lower income individuals, as well as Black and Hispanic populations, express less support for such initiatives. An ethnography examining NYC's Operation Impact, where designated hot spots were saturated with police officers, reveals that residents' lived experience reflected fear and immobility (Kaufman, 2016).

Intensive police practices further damage residents' confidence in law enforcement instead of providing much needed protection and are most likely to occur in already disadvantaged communities (Brunson & Wade, 2019). The byproducts of aggressive policing include diminished police legitimacy, public trust, and collective efficacy (Haberman et al., 2016; Kaufman, 2016; Metcalfe & Pickett, 2018). Policing scholars and law enforcement executives have often sidestepped concerns about racial discrimination, asserting that target selection is impartial and based solely on geographic factors (Weisburd, 2016). We see potential for collateral consequences of hot spots policing to reverberate throughout communities over the long term, especially in settings with already fraught police-citizen relations. Finally, we also encourage scholars to seriously consider that null findings do not guarantee the absence of harm. For example, a sudden influx of heavy-handed policing tactics upon a particular geographic area may not result in statistically significant differences in increased arrests or internal affairs complaints (i.e., null findings). Individuals exposed to unwelcome police attention may, however, report feeling alienated, dehumanized, and violated.

4. Avenues for moving forward

In this section, we heed Rosenbaum's (2019) caution that "identifying a hot spot is not the same as understanding it" (p. 317). We offer guidance for advancing crime and place research programs. In particular, we propose an inspiring research agenda, encouraging theoretical integration and inclusive methods that yield rich description as well as causal inference. To fully understand how and why crime is concentrated at the micro-place and determining appropriate public safety responses require expansion of the evidence base.

Two theoretical traditions – social disorganization and opportunity theories – are commonly invoked, mostly in isolation, to make sense of why crime concentrates in some places and not others. Examining these theoretical foundations independently hampers efforts to achieve a comprehensive picture of robust crime concentration. Centering race represents a fundamental step toward bridging these traditions. Integrating racial social structural perspectives highlight how inequality manifests through residential segregation, shaping, and intersecting with criminal opportunities. Race also structures constraints through pathways of cognitive landscapes and community forms of social control. Crime is a complex phenomenon, requiring multiple etiological frameworks. Therefore, theoretical integration is the fruitful way forward (Weisburd et al., 2012; Wilcox & Cullen, 2018).

An essential question for scholars studying the relationship between crime and place involves determining the appropriate unit of analysis. An important first step is to follow theory driven research to consider neighborhoods as a larger unit, enveloping the micro-place. The convention is that census tracts serve as markers of neighborhoods and street segments or intersections serve as indicators of the micro-place. Though the literature has tended to consider the neighborhood and the micro-place as independent forces that exert discrete influence, they are likely interdependent and overlapping. Wilcox et al. (2023) observe that "Crime and place research is increasingly shunning the idea that 'neighborhood' refers to an independent, self-contained mesolevel unit; instead, neighborhood is viewed as a multi-contextual and interconnected set of units spanning the micro-macro continuum" (p. 46). Hipp and Williams (2020) suggest that theory has lagged in its ability to meet the challenge of abundant data at smaller geographical scales such as the micro-place, complicating the micro-macro continuum. They recommend that researchers be more receptive to inductive methods and varied theoretical applications.

Important innovations employing qualitative methods would bolster our understanding of the myriad social and cultural sources of crime concentration and its intractability. First, given recent technological advances (e.g., body worn cameras), we call for a resurgence in police observational research (Brunson & Miller, 2023), including officers' actions, in hot spots. Although such an undertaking would be both costly and labor intensive, the potential insights are well worth it. Second, qualitative methods could be leveraged to intentionally amplify community members' voices, as they are closest to local problems and uniquely positioned to provide practical solutions. A more inclusive approach toward understanding public safety might involve structured interviews with residents of hot spots, not just individuals most likely to call the police but also, those who frequently report being unable to escape officers' undiscerning surveillance. Community voices can help shed light on populations that are often invisible to researchers. Researcher-community collaborations privilege unique knowledge possessed by individuals entangled in violence and the criminal legal system to produce real-world policy solutions (Hitchens, 2023). The approach deliberately attempts to correct the extractive and exploitive nature of research on marginalized communities. "Moreover, the incorporation of lived experience through the participation of directly impacted people in research design and evaluation is critical, as they are often excluded from public policy making and yet have direct knowledge of how existing systems cause and fail to prevent harm" (National Academies, 2023).

Another important and longstanding issue concerning the study of race and crime is restricted distributions – the minimal overlap in disadvantage across White and Black (and other racial minority) neighborhoods. As Shaw and McKay (1942) observed, White neighborhoods rarely experience the level and range of disadvantage, residential segregation, and barriers to upward mobility faced by Black neighborhoods. Sampson (1987: 353–354) famously demonstrated that "… racial differences are so strong that the worst urban contexts in which whites reside with respect to poverty and family disruption are considerably better off than the mean levels for black communities." The issue of restricted distributions likely plagues research on hot spots and attendant policing strategies. One of the few studies that considers the racial and socioeconomic profile of residents living in hot and cold spots, revealed that individuals residing in Baltimore hot spots were much more likely to be Black, disadvantaged and less educated than residents living in cold spots (Weisburd & White, 2019). This finding suggests a problem of restricted distributions for the study of hot spots. Future work will have to be intentional in sampling micro-places that provide

similarly situated hot and cold spots. Otherwise, the lack of similarly situated neighborhoods complicates estimation of the magnitude and direction of predictors across Black, Latino, and White neighborhoods and their residents.

An ambitious and intentional effort is required to achieve the goal of embedding micro-places within broader racial hierarchies. As noted above, this necessitates a multi-level approach; collecting information at the macro – the broader context — and micro – the place — levels that pertains to a particular location. We suggest that researchers draw from the rich traditions of social disorganization, racial structural, and opportunity theories to populate the measures of the macro context. At a minimum, scholars should capture the ethno-racial composition, socioeconomic, and demographic characteristics of the macro context. A key data source for this type of information exists at the census tract or block group, resulting from the decennial census and the American Community Survey (ACS). Scholars should be mindful of ACS period estimates for small geographic areas without accounting for the margins of errors (see Folch et al., 2023).

Scholars should look beyond traditional metrics, integrating other aspects of the racialized context. Particularly helpful would be to incorporate data pinpointing neighborhood location in the political economy (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Vélez & Lyons, 2014). One strategy for determining a neighborhood's fate vis-a-vis the political economy involves examining public and private investments funneled into the community. For instance, to capture experiences related to redlining, the grade given by the Homeowners Loan Corporation in the 1930s to determine creditworthiness could be merged with other metrics of neighborhood well-being (Lyons et al., 2023). Moreover, research could incorporate levels of home mortgage lending and block grant funding which are expected to favor the neighborhood's location in the political economy, catalyze public social control, and keep crime at bay (Ramey & Shrider, 2014; Tillyer et al., 2023; Vélez & Lyons, 2014). Tillyer et al. (2023) incorporated building permits to signal private investment in neighborhoods as well as building code enforcement to indicate public level accountability as precursors to crime concentration at micro-places. Scholars should also collect information on the processes that control or encourage crime. For example, community-based surveys such as the Project on Human Development of Chicago Neighborhoods are critical for understanding how community level dynamics contribute to the concentration of crime. Resident surveys can also illuminate dynamics related to legal cynicism, collective efficacy, the street code, and informal social control.

To examine micro-places, scholars should begin with metrics derived from opportunity theory. Scholars might begin by taking inventory of local institutions that both attract and discourage crime. It is also important to include land use and facilities, including whether it is for residential or commercial purposes. Moreover, problem places that elicit numerous citizen complaints such as abandoned housing and vacant lots should also be incorporated (see Zoorob & O'Brien, 2024). To capture the social dynamics of places, scholars have begun to engage in systematic social observation using both traditional and more recently, have taken advantage of technological advances (i.e., Olaghere, 2023; Weisburd et al., 2020). Video footage can be generated by citizens, researchers, or cities via closed circuit cameras. Olaghere (2023) provides a helpful review of how best to use video footage along with an important discussion of ethical considerations. Weisburd and colleagues have led the field by surveying residents at the micro-place about community dynamics.

Scholars have begun to heed the call to reimagine hot spots in the hope of strengthening police-minority community relations while impartially delivering justice. Weisburd (2016) suggests that equipping officers with procedural justice training can be beneficial to improved police legitimacy. Weisburd et al. (2022) provides support for this approach. Based on observations of police-citizen interactions, the study finds that when police receive training, they are more likely to give voice, show neutrality, and be respectful. This research affirms the promise of procedural justice instruction for positively impacting officer demeanor, encouraging fairness and equality. The study did not, however, find changes in measures of police legitimacy. The authors appropriately call for more research to determine how procedural justice coaching or similar training will shape broader perceptions of legitimacy.

Additional recommendations for addressing citizen distrust include launching interventions prioritizing community collaboration. Police agencies in the United Kingdom have also experimented with continuous impact assessments (CIA) for each hot spot they operate (Sherman, 2022). Implementing policies that require local law enforcement agencies to articulate potential racial impacts of hot spots policing, akin to a financial impact statement, could be instructive. Racial impact statements might include thorough analysis of potential consequences of implementing hot spots, establishing mechanisms for quickly addressing disparities and reducing harm. These impact statements should reflect community members' voices, and other key stakeholders (e.g., clergy, businesses owners, and grassroots organizations).

It is important to thoughtfully identify hot spots as it is a widely implemented public safety initiative. When adopting a race critique, researchers must also acknowledge the blatantly racist practices that have marred American policing and continue to threaten officers' legitimacy in the eyes of neighborhood residents, especially individuals who have had accumulated direct or vicarious negative, police encounters (Brunson, 2007). Social scientists have frequently reported difficulty disentangling race from place because the disadvantage found in many distressed, Black neighborhoods is ecologically unmatched, which leads to methodological concerns related to restricted distributions (Peterson & Krivo, 2010; Sampson & Wilson, 1995). As such, race is not merely "correlated" with hot spots but is deeply embedded in its function. As noted earlier, policing operations are inextricably linked to race and place. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Report on proactive policing and its effects on crime and communities found that although focused policing techniques may lower overall instances of unwelcome police contact, when police target high-risk places and individuals, significant racial disparities are expected in the frequency and outcomes of police-citizen interactions (Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018). As the consensus panel concluded: "There are likely to be large racial disparities in the volume and nature of police–citizen encounters when police target high-risk people or high-risk places, as is common in many proactive policing programs" (Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018: 301). In the present era of police reform, crime reduction strategies can, and must be, effective and fair. As made clear in the National Academies report on racial inequality and crime, there is not an "… inherent trade-off between reducing racial and ethnic disparities and improving public safety" (National Academies, 2023: 7).

We propose an ambitious research agenda that builds on robust theoretical and empirical support along with existing data infrastructure. Specifically, we suggest using data from cities that are included in the second wave of the National Neighborhood Crime Study (Krivo et al., 2023). These police departments have shown willingness to share data that provide reliable estimates of official crime for cities and their respective neighborhoods. Ideally, these police departments provide access to crime data that are both filtered and unfiltered. We recognize that police administrative data may be the only source of crime information within some jurisdictions. Nonetheless, this agenda should involve more than one type of administrative data – calls for service, crimes known to the police, clearance rates, and arrests (Groff & Haberman, 2023). Public safety measures must be connected to geographic identifiers so that the data can be arranged at the neighborhood (e.g., census tract) and place (e.g., street segment) levels, maximizing versatility in analyses of crime concentration. Given the goal of understanding *why* crime concentrates, research is needed toward comprehensively understanding the neighborhood and place level dynamics that contribute to variation in clustering. We suggest using a subsample of

NNCS2 cities where both a community survey and a random control experiment can be conducted. This subsample should represent different regions, demographic settlement patterns, and policing strategies.

Furthermore, rich qualitative assessments of communities can also offer significant insights for this enterprising endeavor. Qualitative assessments that employ traditional and cutting-edge methods are ideal for understanding community dynamics and residents' police experiences. This qualitative assessment would be followed by larger scale community surveys modeled after the Project on Human Development of Chicago Neighborhoods, considered the gold standard for community surveys. Moreover, this bold effort would be incomplete without a random control experiment. We suggest following Weisburd et al. (2020)'s design strategy which focused on a random control experiment across three cities. Interestingly, two of the three cities in Weisburd et al. (2020) are also part of the NNCS2 sample.

An important thread woven throughout our review is that racial inequality shapes the way policing is delivered and experienced. Whether racial disparities are increased or decreased when hot spots are initiated versus traditional policing efforts is unsettled. Therefore, future crime and place researchers should straightforwardly address this matter. Hot spots policing strategies might lessen racial disparities given that fewer people are directly impacted, since it is targeted and does not entangle large swathes of law-abiding citizens. Thus, potential harm reduction aspects might have great appeal. Conversely, it may be that intense policing efforts worsen racial disparities and may adversely impact neighborhood residents' direct and vicarious police experiences. We hope that the proposed research agenda can begin to answer this cardinal question. A thorough understanding of the ways in which place shapes crime patterns requires an expansion of data sources and methodological approaches. Ideally this work will be conducted across multiple cities. An ideal future research agenda would provide a nationally representative sample of micro-places that are embedded within larger geographies across many cities and time intervals. Data that longitudinally tracks macro and place level conditions allows micro-places and their broader contexts to be dynamic, providing a multi-theoretical and methodological framework for understanding change within and between places. Information over time also provides potential for strengthening causal inference.

5. Conclusion

Regrettably, crime and place literature has not fully contemplated how racial inequality shapes characteristics of hot spots. This is an important blind spot given the role that race plays in organizing society. Integrating the racial social structure more centrally into the micro place literature has the potential to illuminate how and why race matters for crime concentration. We assert that racial social structure, largely via residential racial segregation, shapes various factors associated with criminal opportunity. Moreover, a racial structure perspective warrants a broader view to make sense of crime concentration and its durability. Crime and place literature would greatly benefit from serious engagement with scholarship assessing byproducts of the racial social structure for crime (Peterson & Krivo, 2010; Lyons et al., 2023; Sampson, 2012). The cumulative effects of segregation and disadvantage make it difficult for communities to control crime and rebuff normative views regarding violence and retaliation.

Pursuing our proposed research agenda can only be accomplished by valuing the lived experiences of people who must negotiate the high crime landscape while simultaneously bearing the brunt of heavy-handed policing. Approaching the study of crime concentration with an eye toward its structural underpinnings should result in opportunities for implementing more equitable policing strategies. Given the well documented urgent, public safety needs of many distressed communities, we are not calling for diluted, defunded, or retrenched policing. To the contrary, we are steadfast in our belief that crime reduction strategies must be effective and fair.

Admittedly, all policing is principally targeted. Hot spots policing, however, is evidence-based and more intentional than traditional policing strategies. Notwithstanding, it has imperfections that might benefit from careful refinement. Hot-spots policing is well positioned to advocate for public safety innovations given scholars' success at capturing the imaginations of police executives evinced by their willingness to implement randomized control trials. Therefore, we believe that place-based research has wonderfully set the stage for additional inventions.

Our racial critique is not exclusive to place-based analyses. In fact, numerous academic subfields are similarly guilty of not taking race seriously. By neglecting to fully consider the role of race, researchers threaten both our understanding of crime and the goal of equal justice. This routine omission hinders meaningful conversations about the root causes of enduring racial disparities and may also inadvertently perpetuate discrimination. All facets of criminological research should be wary of these pitfalls given how race permeates every aspect of the criminal legal system (see Vélez & Brunson, 2023 for a discussion). For the crime and place literature, overlooking this issue is particularly egregious due to the potential real-world application of their associated crime reduction approaches. Given the prominence of the crime and place perspective and attendant policies, the noted oversights are precisely why our call to action is paramount. Specifically, without careful consideration of the underlying causes of certain phenomena and a thorough investigation into the unintended consequences of specific crime prevention methods, there is a risk of exacerbating existing racial disparities, further alienating impacted neighborhood residents. As noted earlier, race is a dominant organizing feature of American life and its associated indignities have proven exceedingly costly for distressed Black and Latino communities.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Rod K. Brunson: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Conceptualization. **Maria B. Vélez:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Conceptualization. **Elena Tapia:** Writing – original draft, Project administration.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no known conflicts of interest.

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