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Transforming neoliberal social psychology into an emancipatory science: *A call to abolish the police*[1]

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Abstract
Social psychology's response to continued police brutality against Black people and their communities has been to work with police departments to implement interventions and trainings. We first discuss neoliberalism and then show how mainstream social psychology's various forms of interventions underscore it as a neoliberal practice, thus limiting its capacity to fight police violence. Social psychology should, instead, become an emancipatory science by incorporating structural-level and historical analyses in addition to individual- and cultural-level analyses. For us, an emancipatory psychology is an intersectional Marxist psychology and involves the following elements: (1) investigating police brutality from a structural and historical perspective, which most clearly shows that the police are a tool of repression that needs to be abolished; (2) this means being in solidarity with social movements such as Black Lives Matter, and requires radical solutions, i.e., anti-capitalist, against police brutality and racism; (3) the oppressed are seen as the principle agents of change whose experiences and analyses become primary drivers of social psychological research; and finally, (4) following from the prior elements, all resources are democratically controlled and allocated in a manner that respects the movement's call to defund and abolish the police. Armed with that understanding, we critique major social psychological interventions at different levels: implicit bias and procedural justice trainings such as the Behavioral Insight Model targeting situational-level changes, and community policing targeting institutional-level changes. We also discuss the strengths and limitations of cultural psychology's approach to fighting racism. We end with examples of research (studies connecting social movements to aggregate changes in implicit attitudes) and methodologies (critical participatory action research) that incorporate analysis from the levels of the situation to that of the structure, and thus align with an emancipatory psychology.

Keywords
abolition, implicit attitudes, intersectional, Marxist psychology, neoliberalism, police, reform, social psychology

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> Put simply, capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it.
>
> Ruth Wilson Gilmore[2]

> Some reforms end up reproducing the system in another form...you put out some kind of a reform, and then that reform becomes institutionalized. Worse than institutionalization, the reform actually creates a new form of consciousness and a new form of "common sense". That reform itself becomes the new common sense, and that's so dangerous on so many levels.
> We cannot reform police. We cannot reform prisons. We cannot.
>
> Mariame Kaba[3]

George Floyd was murdered on May 25th, 2020, by a Minneapolis police officer who pressed his knee onto Mr. Floyd's neck for nine minutes and 29 seconds. David McAtee was killed by the Louisville police on May 31st, 2020, while he was protesting the murder of George Floyd. Another Louisville resident, Breonna Taylor, was fatally shot in her apartment by her city's police department on May 13th, 2020. The catalogue of police violence will be longer if we include incidents such as the arrest of six-year-old Kaia Rolle, who suffers from pediatric obstructive sleep apnea and thus could be prone to tantrums, for accidentally kicking her teacher. It is a list that ranges from being arrested while waiting for a friend at a local Starbucks to being confronted by the police for playing golf "too slowly". A list that includes the police killings of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, and Mya Hall. A list, one that is ever increasing, indicative of a deeply rooted racism within U.S. society and its institutions on all levels—exemplified here by its police departments. These latest atrocities against Black people have resulted in nationwide protests, strikes, and walkouts not just for police reforms, but with the loudest demands being made for the outright defunding and abolishment of the police.

What role should social psychology play in fighting police brutality—a particularly pernicious component of racism? Presently, many social psychologists are actively working *in partnerships with* police officers and departments (Jasperse & Stillerman, 2021). On one side of the spectrum, this takes the form of marshalling evidence *against* racial bias in police shootings (e.g., Cesario, 2021; Johnson et al., 2019 - retracted). In the more liberal mainstream of social psychology, these partnerships with police advocate for reforms meant to address the racism in policing (Fridell, 2008; Goff, 2017; Luscombe, 2020; Russell-Brown, 2018; President's Task Force, 2015). We pose the question, are these alliances between social psychologists and police adequate means to eliminate pervasive brutality and racism within the institution of

[2] Gilmore, R. W. (2015). The Worrying State of the Anti-Prison Movement. *Social Justice: A Journal of Crime, Conflict & World Order.* Retrieved from http://www.socialjusticejournal.org/the-worrying-state-of-the-anti-prison-movement/

[3] Kaba, M. (2021). *We do this 'til we free us: Abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.

policing, or can we take a more effective emancipatory approach? Our stance is that social psychology has to incorporate structural and historical analyses (i.e., historical-materialism) to understand racism more fully, and it necessarily has to transform itself into an emancipatory science in order to help liberate us from racism. We expand on both these points below, but suffice it to say, "an emancipatory psychological science", as Ratner (2015) succinctly states, is one that "empowers people to evaluate society and change it".

What follows, then, is a call to transform current social psychology into a field that actively amplifies the ever-increasing efforts across the globe to reform and revolutionize society (Youngs, 2017). In order to illustrate the reasoning and methodology behind our call, and to address a most pressing issue of our times, i.e., racialized state violence, we will examine social psychology's interventions (such as implicit bias and procedural justice trainings) in police departments from the perspective of intersectional Marxist social psychology (Gampa & Sawyer, 2021). We list here the elements, adapted from Le Blanc (2016), of such a perspective as it applies to racism and policing, and expand upon them in the rest of the document. The first element is seeing policing as a tool of repression. This can only be done if both the individual police and the individual's social context are studied from a structural and historical perspective—i.e., analysis extending beyond the immediate situation. Second, it involves a radical anti-capitalist commitment when considering solutions against police brutality and racism. Third, it centers the oppressed and exploited as agents of change. Finally, it demands democratic control of resources such that "the free development of each will be the condition for the free development of all" (Marx & Engels, 1888). Using these elements, we will illustrate how a structural and historical analysis of policing inevitably leads to questioning social psychology's current practice of addressing police brutality by supporting police reform at the individual or even institutional level. Part of this analysis is to connect social psychology to neoliberalism, which then allows us to implicate capitalism in the persistence of police brutality. This further underscores our call for solidarity with grassroots social movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM). In other words, we present an intersectional Marxist psychology (IMP)[4] argument to abolish the police.

We take a small digression here to note that we recognize the heterogeneity of actions, policies, philosophies, locations, and peoples involved in anti-racism work in general, and BLM in particular. As such, we do not claim to be speaking on behalf of any particular group. The range of conversations within the current Movement for Black Lives includes the full spectrum from defending the status quo to revolutionary. Social psychology, however, engages mostly with reformist perspectives, or even with reactionary perspectives (e.g., Cesario, 2021), but never with abolition perspectives (see Table 1).

[4] The terms "intersectional" and "Marxist", just like the word "cultural", also imply "social", making it redundant. Also, IMP is more fun than IMSP.

Table 1. The number of times the following terms appear within social psychology conference programs: police (or policing)/reform*/defund/abolish.

	Professional Organization							
	Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI)				*Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP)*			
Year	**Police/ing**	**Reform**	**Defund**	**Abolish**	**Police/ing**	**Reform**	**Defund**	**Abolish**
2013					10	1	0	0
2014					13	4	0	0
2015					38	1	0	0
2016	65	13	0	0	28	1	0	0
2017	42	8	0	0	41	0	0	0
2018	53	5	0	0	20	5	0	0
2019	82	19	0	0	34	1	0	0
2020		No conference.			34	5	0	0
2021	111	25	2	2**	22	2	0	0

Note: SPSSI did not publish full conference programs for years 2013 to 2015.
*reform: could be for anything, not just for policing; doesn't reflect reforms-based research that doesn't use the word reform, for example use of cameras. ** not an explicit call to abolish

Similarly, as shown in Table 2, capitalism, perhaps the single greatest *global* structure dictating our lives, also seldom appears in psychology literature. As we show, the absence of these two topics within social psychology is not accidental. We endeavor to rectify this omission.

Table 2. Number of Articles in Major Social Psychology Journals Whose Text Mention the Word Capitalist/Capitalism/Capitalistic, 2007 to 2022

Journal	**# of Articles**
Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin	1
Personality and Social Psychology Review	0
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	1
Journal of Economic Psychology	1
Journal of Social Issues	2
Social Issues and Policy Review	1
Social Psychological and Personality Science	0
Political Psychology	2
Journal of Social and Political Psychology	2
American Psychologist	1

Journal of Consumer Psychology	0
Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology	3
Psychological Bulletin	0
Psychological Inquiry	1
Psychological Review	0
Nature Human Behavior	0
Proceedings of the National Academy of the Sciences	1
Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy	3
Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin	1
Total	19

Note. Searched via APA's PsycInfo database. This table is inspired by Table 1 in Kasser et al. (2007) which showed that these terms appeared 14 times between 1887-2006, though not in the very same journals.

Social Psychology and Neoliberalism

First, by *social psychology*, we mean *a field whose subject matter is individual-level social cognition* and is almost exclusively grounded in individualistic ontology and positivist epistemology (Arfken, 2015; Dienes, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2014). This field, housed in psychological social psychology and experimental social psychology (compared to social psychology housed in sociology departments or the psychosocial persuasion within psychoanalysis), is "the dominant or mainstream approach" of studying the individual in the context of a social situation (McDonald et al., 2017, p.364). The space carved out by social psychology is the interaction between the individual and the situation, *where the situation is defined narrowly* to include only the immediate situation, but not necessarily the cultures or institutions, and much less the histories and structures, that make the situation possible (Trawalter et al., 2020). Such a narrow conception of social forces was not always the case in social psychology (Fine, 2012; Gergen, 1973; Lewin, 1939), and those who use a broader conception usually fall under the banner of *critical* social psychology (Reicher, 1997).

Second, we consider the *current mainstream form of social psychology as neoliberal social psychology* (NSP; Adams et al., 2019; Arfken, 2015; Arfken, 2018; Ratner, 2015). For Fine (2012), neoliberalism through social psychology is the reorientation of social psychology away from "macrointerests and shared fates", thus, an urging to "look away from the 1%" and ignoring the privatization of public life. This turning away from structural politics has been made the "global standard through processes of intellectual and cultural imperialism" (Adams et al., 2019), resulting in social psychology's empirical obsession with

"the individual who is 'damaged,' 'at risk,' or a 'potential terror'" (Fine, 2012, p.422). Social psychology, then, not only is shaped in the image of neoliberalism, but furthers neoliberalism in and of itself (Ratner, 2015).

Neoliberal thought is a utopian ideology built on libertarian values in which each entity in society (whether it is an individual or an organization) is treated as an entrepreneurial unit, wherein the success and failure of that unit ought to be attributed to its own efforts and merits, or lack thereof (Foucault et al., 2008; Harvey, 2007). During the postwar era, the growing grassroots movements—labor, civil-rights, and anti-war—in addition to decades of Keynesian economics that promoted a welfare state, had eroded power amongst the economic and political elites (Harvey, 2007). This was tolerable to the ruling classes as long as the economy continued to expand during the postwar boom. The global economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, however, resulted in an overall policy shift to neoliberalism, a response by the financial and political elite to reign in the power of labor and to roll back the gains of the civil rights' and women's movements in order to restore the elite class' dominance (Harvey, 2016). Thus, neoliberalism emphasizes individual outcomes as the result of personal responsibility and choice, while purposefully obfuscating and/or minimizing any structural underpinnings of behavior. Neoliberal logic discourages social- or societal-level analysis of behavior and discounts social responsibility for individual outcomes (Ratner, 2015). Simply put, neoliberalization is an "articulation of state, market and citizenship that harnesses the first to impose the stamp of the second onto the third" (Wacquant, 2012).

Psychology has not only been swept along by the shift towards neoliberalism, it has also championed research that pushes the neoliberal agenda. As Adams et al., (2019) argue, the dynamic relationship between neoliberalism and psychology results in the understanding of individual behavior as one with an unfettered but ultimately illusory *sense* of freedom for the individual, afforded by a radical abstraction of experience from material and structural conditions and cultural settings. In the field of personality psychology, Teo (2018) argues that the neoliberal form of subjectivity has influenced topics such as positive psychology, happiness, the self, and agency. This ahistorical and decontextualized neoliberal psychology then results in the centering of the self as an ongoing entrepreneurial development project, in the reconceptualizing of well-being as a constituent of individual growth and personal fulfillment, and in the emphasizing of affect regulation as key to personal success. Perhaps the most direct aspiration of social psychology and neoliberal ideology is in Schwartz's (2012) suggestion that, "we need psychologists whispering in the president's other ear" to bring expert advice on human behavior into the highest levels of policy making. Obama's Executive Order 13707 in 2015, "Using Behavioral Science Insights To Better Serve the American People" (National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.) is one iteration of that aspiration. A growing body of research suggests that the strongest attempt of this marriage between neoliberalism and psychology is in behavioral economics, a field that is deeply rooted in experimental social psychology (Adams et al., 2019; Leggett, 2014; Millward-Hopkins, 2017). Based on this critique of social psychology, and

psychology in general, Clegg and Lansdall-Welfare (2020) conclude that neoliberal theories are being actively transformed into policy through the work of applied social psychology, which "glosses over the social origin of most human difficulties" (pg. 1). They then conclude that mainstream psychology's "alienated and individualist epistemology makes it a potent neoliberal institution rather than a discipline that can generate alternatives" (pg. 1).

When studying racism, social psychology does not account for structural and historical factors (Trawalter et al., 2020), thus resulting in the field's study of racism as purely "in the head" (Salter et al., 2018). For instance, social psychology at times has taken the logical step in the neoliberal approach by advocating for racially marginalized people to be less vigilant, like their White counterparts, about perceiving racism (see Adams et al., 2019, pg. 12 for a number of articles). The blame is placed on the oppressed individuals' tendencies to perceive racism, rather than the perceptibly racist society, for a variety of life outcomes (Adams et al., 2019). Thus, in a society that constantly pushes one to "pick oneself up by the bootstraps", discrepancies in life outcomes between Black and White people are attributed to individual failings (or a "culture of poverty" among Black people) rather than an actively racist society. Obviously then, the burden of overcoming "underperformance" is placed on the oppressed by demanding they act like the proverbial John Henry to overcome structural constraints via sheer superhuman efforts (Bennett et al., 2004).

Racism's historical and significant role lies is in its destabilization and destruction of working-class solidarity—a role that is also, as was stated earlier, an aim of neoliberalism (Cox, 1948; Fields & Fields, 2014; Roediger, 1999). Social psychology's limited understanding of racism can further weaken worker solidarity in capitalist society in various ways, if not by commission, then certainly by omission (Arfken, 2015, 2016). For instance, the race-based disparities in income can be explained away by a "culture of poverty" instead of considering how "the white wage" is used by capitalists to drive a wedge between workers of different races (Du Bois, 1935; Roediger, 1999). Further, the institution of policing, as will be detailed below, is a tool of repression of workers, especially those who are Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC).[5] Social psychology's work is routinely being applied in police departments across the nation with the goal of reforming the individual police officers and departments, while actively denigrating (Luscombe, 2020) the call of defunding and abolishing the police. Again, by not supporting the calls to abolish the police, social psychologists support a system designed to repress the working class. Unsurprisingly, concerning the role of psychology vis-à-vis neoliberalism, Adams et al., (2019) conclude that, "Rather than a disinterested bystander, hegemonic forms of psychological science are thoroughly implicated in the neoliberal project."

[5] Even as we use the language of "BIPOC", the paper is specifically about anti-blackness due to our research and community-organizing work. If we take struggles against settler-colonialism seriously, then the case against policing only gets vehemently stronger. However, given our lack of expertise and lack of material relations of solidarity with indigenous peoples and their struggles, the two of us cannot do service to the discussion of death and destruction policing has caused to/on Turtle Island and beyond.

Neoliberal Social Psychology Wants to Be Part of the Solution: "Racism Equals Power Plus Prejudice"

Social psychology's beginnings were meandering, but if one is forced to select a single starting point, then 1908 might do; it was the year that William McDougall's (1908) 'An introduction to social psychology' and Edward Ross' (1908) 'Social psychology'—the first two social psychology texts—were published. And if 1908 represents the field's beginning then it is doubtful—to put it lightly—that social psychology started as an emancipatory field. Both McDougall and Ross were also eugenicists. Consider McDougall's (1920) statement here,

"Although the greater part of Africa, perhaps the richest continent of the globe, has been in possession of the negro races during all the ages in which the European, Asiatic, and American civilisations were being developed, those races have never founded a nation… We may fairly ascribe the incapacity to form a nation to the lack of men endowed with the qualities of great leaders, even more than to the lower level of average capacity" (pp. 135-136).[6]

Moreover, Ross coined the term 'race suicide' (1907), that is, a belief in the threat that people from inferior racial groups will outbreed Whites—this certainly informed and motivated his work on eugenics. He lamented, "The theory that races are virtually equal in capacity leads to such monumental follies as lining the valleys of the South with the bones of half a million picked Whites in order to improve the conditions of four million unpicked Blacks" (Ross, 1907, p. 715).

The field's more liberal beginnings also converge on a specific date: 1936—the founding of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI). As SPSSI members, social psychologists were committed to examining more liberal concerns (i.e., "racial prejudice, class conflict, and war" [Binning & Sears, 2015], p. 18). It may be worth noting, however, that Gordon Allport—a former SPSSI president—when reviewing McDougall's words above, remarked that his examination of racial differences was "brilliant" (Allport, 1929, p. 125). Neoliberal social psychology no longer relies on such problematic premises, and many in the field would affirm SPSSI's call for interventions that address racism.

Unfortunately, even those theories in NSP that purportedly incorporate power dynamics miss the mark. Consider Operario and Fiske's (1998) argument that "racism equals power plus prejudice", which seems to obviate the need for our emancipatory psychology project because it seemingly brings in historical and institutional analyses into psychological analyses via the concept of power. In fact, their argument is routinely reflected in works on the social psychology of racism (Richeson & Sommers, 2016; Roberts & Rizzo, 2020), which is why we discuss it here in detail. In line with the neoliberal inner-logic to ultimately blame the individual (Foucault et al., 2008), their argument still treats prejudices as natural, universal and as the result of basic human tendencies (Operario & Fiske, 1998, p. 34 and p.41)—necessarily limiting the potential for radical and emancipatory responsibility, at both the individual and societal level. As Leach

[6] A recent retracted article, Clark et al. (2020), was not far from this 1920 argument.

(2002) argues, an understanding of racism as a combination of power and prejudice still is unable to fully *disentangle* racism and prejudice because this understanding still views racist activity and all racism as ultimately "a function of weak personality, biased perception or ethnocentric categorization…[therefore placing] prejudice in the individuated person rather than in societal practices and institutions" (Leach, 2002, p. 440). Furthermore, even as Operario and Fiske (1998) foreground power in their equation, it is approached in an abstract and ahistorical manner.

Our current research project, IMP, concretely grounds the creation of American racism in the service of exploitation by settler-colonialism and capitalism. Operario and Fiske's "power plus prejudice" formulation, on the contrary, downplays the role of power as merely "supplementing" prejudicial biases (p. 34)—in actuality, the term "hijacking" would have been more appropriate. In continuation with their argument of "supplementation", their paper argues that "societal power...directs" (p. 35) or provides the "impetus" (p.38) or "exert[s] extra energy" (p.50) for the construction of racial categories. As we expand on this throughout the paper, this treatment of racial categorization is ahistorical, abstract, and universalizing—ultimately in line with neoliberalism. We also argue for an alternative language of "creates", in place of "directs" or "impetus", because that situates our project in the concrete and directly traceable history of the creation of transatlantic racism and racial categories—and the creation of the police for the enforcing of said racism in the service of capitalism and settler-colonialism (Fields & Fields, 2014).

Analysis such as those by Operario and Fiske (1998) leads social psychologists to routinely "not advise ridding society of the concept of race altogether" (p53; see also Richeson & Sommers, 2016; Roberts & Rizzo, 2020). Which then also explains, in what might be the most telling articulation of NSP, why the recent president of Association for Psychological Science pushes back against the BLM calls for defunding the police (Luscombe, 2020): if races are to continue to exist and race relations are to be managed, then, as we will discuss below, the police, though in much need of reform, cannot be defunded and dismantled. In sum, NSP is incapable of helping to build *emancipatory* solutions because it has yet to incorporate the structural and historical underpinnings of racism. So *how*, and perhaps equally important, *where,* exactly, should social psychologists committed to racial justice intervene?

Social Psychology Must Become an Emancipatory Science

> *"You can't be neutral on a moving train… Events are already moving in certain deadly directions, and to be neutral means to accept that." Zinn (1994, p. 8)*

Fully recognizing social psychology's ideological tendencies (by one estimate the ratio of liberals to conservatives in the field is greater than 10:1 and growing, Duarte et al. (2015)) and decades-long arguments over what role, if any, political values should play in the production of science (Brandt et al., 2014; Sears, 1994),

we nonetheless eschew contemporary calls for value neutrality (Stevens et al., 2018). Such calls are often value-laden themselves (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Petras, 2015), as they prioritize protecting the public image of ideological groups (i.e., conservatives) over solving large-scale social problems (i.e., racism). Consider Tetlock (1994), who claimed that "To label someone a racist, or to label support for a viewpoint as racist, is to pass moral-political judgment on that individual or viewpoint. Standards of evidence need to be exceptionally clear in passing such judgments" (p. 513). To use a current (and rather poignant) example, we think social psychologists would be better off in having the temerity to name President Joe Biden's solution, for the police to shoot their assailants "in the leg instead of the heart"[7] as a way to avert the killing of civilians, as racist rather than being timorous about how such labeling would affect his moral status—lest social psychologists recognize their own call for problematic reforms in his solutions.

In a world plagued with oppression, exploitation, and ecological annihilation, there can be no neutral social science, and social psychology is no exception: either we are firmly a "science for the people" (Gampa & Sawyer, 2021) or we, by omission or commission, aid in the continued oppression of the people. An emancipatory science is a dialectic of two contrasting impulses. In one direction, it critiques and deconstructs our ontologies, epistemologies, and applications of our science vis-à-vis forms of oppression and exploitation. In the other direction, as a "science for the people", it helps to envision and support new capacities for overcoming said forms of oppression and exploitation (Martin-Baro, 1996; Parker, 2007; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). An emancipatory social psychology, to reiterate, is one that "empowers people to evaluate society and change it" (Ratner, 2015). In other words, we propose transforming neoliberal social psychology into an intersectional Marxist psychology, an unambiguously emancipatory project that expands the "social" and the "situation" by integrating historical analyses and incorporating a critical understanding of the structural, i.e., capitalism, racism, and heterocetera-patriarchy[8]. Echoing Marx (1845), expanding this understanding is not only for the purpose of interpreting human behavior but for changing human behavior.

The framework utilized in this paper has affinities with macro-cultural psychology (Ratner, 2011) and other applications of Marxism to psychology—i.e., situating the psychological within the structural (e.g., Arfken, 2017, 2018; Foster, 1999; Vygotsky, 1997). Other intersecting points include Arfken's (2015) use of a Marxist critique to bring to light the liberal foundations of the cognitive revolution in psychology along with the field's "commitment to an atomistic and mechanistic view of psychological explanation" (p.26). Foster (1999) argued that the Marxist tradition provides some necessary corrections to the various ways orthodox psychology accounts for and studies racism. Specifically, for Foster, the new understandings of racism in psychology throughout the 20th century, such as racism as prejudice and stereotyping, racism as intergroup relations, and racism

[7] https://www.yahoo.com/video/biden-suggests-police-could-shoot-assailants-in-the-leg-instead-of-the-heart-201750470.html

[8] Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Crossing Press.

as discursive/rhetorical, all potentially further racism by ignoring its structural underpinnings.

Our work complements and extends these prior Marxist psychological works in two specific ways. Firstly, unlike Ratner & Silva (2017), who consider anti-racist demands within capitalism to be a distraction from class struggle, we take for granted that antiracism work is integral to fighting U.S. capitalism (Sawyer & Gampa, 2018). This need for antiracist struggle as central to the fight against capitalism will be made most overt in the connections that we will elaborate between policing and the necessary need for controlling the working class, especially BIPOC, under capitalism. In examining the deep intertwining of racist oppression and capitalist exploitation, our approach is intrinsically intersectional in its Marxism (Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977; Taylor, 2016). Secondly, we center the oppressed as agents of collective liberation, and support social movements, activism, and other efforts to transform our society "from below" (Le Blanc, 2016). Building on prior work on Marxist psychology and our interventions to said work leads us to the earlier discussed elements of our approach, namely: investigating the individual police and their brutality from a structural and historical perspective, which leads one to conclude the police as a tool of repression that needs to be abolished; such a conclusion requires radical anti-capitalist solutions against police brutality and racism; the oppressed and exploited are not just seen as recipients of the solutions designed by social psychologists but are seen as the principle agents of change whose experiences and analyses become primary drivers of social psychological research; and finally, what follows from the prior three elements is that all resources ought to be democratically controlled and allocated in a manner that respects the growing call to defund and abolish the police.

At the core of IMP is the understanding that psychology should be implicated in dismantling oppressive and exploitative societal structures. As opposed to the dominant practice in social psychology of grounding individual psychology in the immediate situational (or even institutional) context, the Marxist approach situates psychology within a dynamic, social structure with a history of development—one that is rife with social contradictions and revolutionary possibilities.

An Intersectional Marxist Psychology – The Case of Police Racism

To better understand the psychology of police brutality and the racism exhibited by police officers, IMP should start with a serious consideration of the social, economic, and political history of the police as an institution—the first element of our approach. By gaining this historical and sociological context, psychology can make better sense of what seems to be systematic racism exhibited by police officers, rather than reformulating the problem into a clinical question of "a few bad apples" or into a set of racial associations that might be easily shifted by implicit bias or procedural justice trainings. Just to illustrate how deeply racism is woven into policing, even the FBI has recognized and warned about systematic

infiltration of police departments by White supremacist networks (Speri, 2020), from a neo-Nazi gang formed by Los Angeles police who targeted Black people and Latinos (Tobar, 1991), to White supremacist officers in Virginia (Jones & Murphy, 2019), to officers and entire agencies with connections to White supremacist groups in Ohio, Illinois, and Texas (Downs, 2016). This requires answering what is it about policing that has made police departments such fertile ground for recruitment by fascist and White supremacist groups, and what makes it an apparently useful tool for the furtherance of their political aims.

The police as an institution came into being relatively recently, making its first historical appearance in England and the U.S. between the 1820s to 1850s, and spreading to a number of urbanizing capitalist societies. As counterintuitive as it may seem today, *there were no standing bodies or social institutions dedicated to the policing of society before the rise of modern capitalism* (Whitehouse, 2014). Crucially, the formation of modern police departments was not undertaken as a response to a rise in crime (Gordon, 2005). Rather, the purpose of police was to control and subdue large, unruly crowds that posed political challenges. In England and the U.S., some of the first goals of policing were to control defiant strikers in England, urban rioters in the Northern U.S., and the imminent threat of enslaved insurrectionists in the U.S. South. By comparison, under feudalism, the ruling rural landholders recruited armed forces on an ad hoc basis to quell revolts or unrest among serfs who were bound to the land and worked in conditions approximating slavery (Whitehouse, 2014).

In the 1700s, as capitalism developed in England, the government forced peasants off the land and into cities to live and work (Fairlie, 2009). Social inequality widened between these new workers and the bosses who employed them in ever-larger workshops. Crowds of workers became rebellious under these conditions, with strikes and demonstrations increasing in size and number from the 1790s to 1820s. The army was sometimes ordered to fire into these crowds, or constables would arrest and hang the leaders of the rebellion, but both of these responses often produced further rebellion in the name of the martyrs who were killed. Constables were different from modern police in that (1) they did not patrol or do detective work, (2) there were typically only small numbers of them on duty, and (3) they acted as emissaries of the court who carried out summonses and arrest warrants (Whitehouse, 2014). The increasingly wealthy capitalists would soon find that the combination of constables and ad hoc use of soldiers was insufficient to retain control as class struggle began to intensify during the industrial revolution.

The London Metropolitan Police was formed in 1829, with the new tactic of inflicting *non-lethal* (for the most part) violence to disperse crowds and avoid creating martyrs. When not massed together to confront crowds, the police were dispatched primarily to poor and working-class neighborhoods to surveil and police the streets and daily life. As Whitehouse (2014) puts it, this dual role is the hallmark of modern police, “There is the dispersed form of surveillance and intimidation that’s done in the name of fighting crime; and then there’s the concentrated form of activity to take on strikes, riots, and major demonstrations.” Importantly, daily patrolling gets the police practiced in the art and mindset of

inflicting non-lethal violence for the "public good" so that they are prepared to do so on a larger scale when a mass social movement or strike arises.

The New York City police department was founded in 1845, on the heels of urban riots throughout the 1820s and 1830s and inspired by the London Metropolitan Police (Brandl, 2019), and constituted an expansion and professionalization of the part-time urban watch that had existed previously. A more centralized military-style chain of command was also instituted to make police more responsive to the needs of the ruling class. Meanwhile, in the U.S. South, the forerunners of the police were slave patrols, composed of White volunteers with their own weapons who roamed the countryside terrorizing and brutalizing slaves into submission (Brown, 2019). When some Black slaves were allowed to "live out" during agricultural off-seasons in towns like Charleston, SC, working and paying dues to their masters, these slaves developed lively communities separate from the plantation control mechanism. In response, during the late 1820s and 1830s these volunteer slave patrols were professionalized, and patrolled the city at all hours, carrying rifles with bayonets, with the specific aim of intimidating the Black community, curtailing their political activity, and harassing their daily life (Whitehouse, 2014). Thus, anti-Black racism was built into Southern police forces from the start (Brown, 2019), just as Northern police forces disproportionately targeted growing urban Black and Irish populations (Whitehouse, 2014).

As we have seen, not only do the police directly repress working class militancy by wielding force against crowds and social movements, but they also use racism to divide workers while carrying out their daily surveillance, intimidation, and arrests chiefly in working-class and poor neighborhoods of color. All of this is carried out in the racially-coded name of "fighting crime" and maintaining "law and order," obscuring their fundamental purpose. In other words, police institutions are designed to buttress race and class inequalities. Racism has been baked into policing since its beginning, as slave patrols were transformed into Jim Crow policing in the U.S. South, and urban management of the working class and freed slave populations became ghetto policing in the Northern U.S. (Vitale, 2017).

Given the social role that policing has always played in maintaining capitalist order by acting as a coercive and disruptive force against oppressed and exploited communities, it should come as no surprise that police officers have been found to have a greater social dominance orientation than other legal actors, such as public defenders and jurors, as well as university students (Sidanius et al., 1994). In other words, police officers tend to have greater preferences for non-egalitarian (hierarchical) intergroup relations (Gatto et al., 2010). Whether they possessed these attitudes upon joining the force or were socialized into it by repetitive coercive interactions with other officers (Gatto et al., 2010), this ideology facilitates the upholding of relationships that benefit capitalists over workers. A Marxist psychology is well equipped to investigate this connection between the sociohistorical, political, and institutional milieus that exist on a societal level, and the psychology of groups and individuals acting within these milieus.

While the individual police officer may sometimes hold progressive views, or even rarely come to reject the role of policing itself, the police institution has never historically "defected" to take the side of people struggling against oppression and exploitation. Unlike the military, which has often rebelled against its commanding officers' dictates and taken the side of social movements (e.g., the 1917 Russian Revolution, U.S. soldiers during the war in Vietnam, or the Egyptian military in 2011 and 2013 during the Arab Spring) (Baywood, 2013), the police have always remained loyal to the capitalist class. This may be partly due to the fact that the military typically operates against the enemy "out there" beyond national borders, and thus are less likely to follow orders to use force against fellow citizens. The police, on the other hand, operate *exclusively* against the local population, or the "enemy at home," and this has a conservatizing effect on their psychology. As James Baldwin (2016) wrote about the policing of Black people in U.S. cities, "The police are the hired enemy of this population. They're quite stunningly ignorant and since they know they're hated they're always afraid. One cannot possibly arrive at a more surefire formula for cruelty."

Many reforms can and have been demanded of the police, including instituting civilian complaint and oversight mechanisms, community policing, and requiring that police wear body cameras. In total, however, these reforms have done little to diminish the brutality or racial disparities in policing in the United States. Eric Garner was killed by NYC police officer Daniel Pantaleo in 2014 when the officer applied an *illegal* chokehold to Garner's neck, as he shouted, "I can't breathe!" *eleven* times. This was captured quite clearly on video and yet it was eventually announced (just before the 5-year deadline) that there will be no federal charges pressed against the officer (Benner, 2019). Most recently, Jayland Walker was shot more than 90 times by eight officers on June 27th, 2022, and there are hours of video recordings of this murder.

Because the police are routinely not charged or indicted, much less convicted, for crimes of police brutality, it is painfully obvious that body cameras will not do enough to check the institutional impunity with which police officers function. Furthermore, despite the fact that Black people have virtually no anti-Black implicit bias compared to White people (Sawyer & Gampa, 2018), police brutality and racism continue even in cities where police forces have substantial numbers of Black officers; for instance, in Baltimore, where Freddie Gray was killed at the hands of police (Taylor, 2016).

All of this suggests that more than an individualistic psychology, or even a social psychology that admits of an immediate social situation and cultural factors, is required to understand and transform the racism and violence intertwined in institutions such as U.S. policing. Again, we submit that IMP would be better equipped to address the challenge of accurately explaining such *social* situations.

Situational, Institutional, And Structural Levels of Analysis

In order to situate social psychology within a structural analysis we integrate the aforementioned Marxism "from below" approach outlined by Le Blanc (2016) with the levels of power metaphor introduced by Alford and Friedland (1985; as cited in Wright, 2015). Thus, when considering racism as "power plus prejudice" (Operario & Fiske, 1998), it is necessary to think of power as operating on different levels: structural power, institutional power, and situational power. Using the metaphor of "playing a game" (Wright, 2015), structural power corresponds to struggles over *what game ought to be played*, institutional power corresponds to struggles over the *rules within a game*, and situational power relates to *possible moves within a game,* given a fixed set of rules.

Table 3. Explanation for Levels of Analysis.

Level of Analysis	Metaphor	Definition
Situational	Possible moves within a game	Concerned with the actions and/or the immediate situation of the individual; interactions between individuals.
Institutional	Rules within a game	Concerned with policies within institutions (e.g., schools, police, housing, etc.) and potential reforms of those institutional policies and actions.
Structural	What game ought to be played	Concerned with society as a systemic whole, transformation of overall political and economic arrangements, and systems (e.g., capitalism, socialism, social-democracy, etc.)

Ascending through the levels, NSP operates primarily on the situational, investigating racism at the level of the individual and the interpersonal—potentially erasing any relationship to institutions, cultures, and structures (Adams et al., 2019; Trawalter et al., 2020). On the institutional level, cultural psychology in particular explores the way that cultures within institutions promote and facilitate racist and racialized behaviors, attitudes, and emotions. Within this framework, individuals are seen as selecting and amplifying cultural resources, artifacts, and contexts that exacerbate racism (Adams et al., 2019). What is missing on the institutional level, i.e., the cultural-psychology approach, is an analysis of the political economy that underlies cultural institutions—the material motivations for creating, nurturing, and perpetuating racist practices and police in the first place (Gordon, 2005). Because of this missing foundation, a structural-level analysis of racism is required to understand and incorporate the economic and political forces that generate racist cultural norms and institutions.

Below, we expand on the concept of levels of analysis by examining widely-considered solutions to police brutality from social psychology. This is

not an exhaustive coverage of solutions being offered to reform policing; they are some of the more visible solutions that help to illustrate our arguments (see Abrams (2020) for more social psychology solutions beyond reforming policing). First, we discuss implicit attitudes and trainings, which are situational-level solutions. We then consider procedural justice and the behavioral insights model, both of which put forth situational-level and institutional-levels solutions to police brutality. We then discuss cultural psychology as another approach providing institutional-level changes and finally we provide our own approach as one that incorporates all the levels of the analyses: situational, institutional, and structural.

Implicit Racial Attitudes and Anti-Bias Interventions in Police Departments: Situational Levels of Analysis

Disproportionate police brutality against minorities (Scott et al., 2017) is of urgent concern, and one that many social psychologists have taken up as a research topic (Correll et al., 2007; Kahn & Davies, 2017). Currently, dozens of police departments across the country are being trained through implicit attitude trainings (Wallace et al., n.d.) to improve relationships between the police and the communities they police (Tyler et al., 2015). We thus center our first analysis of situational-level solutions on implicit racial attitudes and trainings.

Research in implicit racial attitudes has accumulated a convincing amount and variety of evidence to show that racism at an individual and interpersonal level is pervasive throughout our society. Implicit bias[9] is recognized as a problem in schools, healthcare facilities, corporations, and police departments (Hoffman et al., 2016; Staats et al., 2015). Research and interventions centered around policing include laboratory work on racialized shooter biases (Correll et al., 2007; Cox et al., 2014). A central thrust of these interventions has been institutional, state, and national implementations of implicit bias reduction trainings.

In California, for example, more than 50 law enforcement executives from 28 departments trained with SPARQ (Social Psychological Answers to Real-world Questions, Stanford University's applied social psychology lab) to identify situations in which one is more likely to act on racial bias, in order to exercise greater control over such situations. Although a small sample relying only on self-report and lacking any behavioral measures, participants did report that they developed a better understanding of implicit bias and also believed that the course could help in *decreasing police-community tension* (Wallace et al., n.d). The Las Vegas Police Department (LVPD) worked with the Center for Policing Equity (CPE), a think tank led by a social psychologist that works with police departments to reform biased policing (Goff et al., 2013). They identified that disproportionate minority contact by police in their department occurred as a

[9] We use the terms "bias" and "prejudice" without the adjective "racial" because that is the standard language in neoliberal social psychology. We, however, are not narrowly concerned with "prejudice" or "bias" in this paper, but racism: behaviors and attitudes against BIPOC by individuals, institutions and structures and created and encouraged by our current socio-economic system to continue to target BIPOC.

result of foot chases in POC communities. CPE helped implement a policy in which officers are not allowed to lay hands on suspects, given officers find it difficult to spot the potential for implicit bias during such chases. Instead, another officer would be required to step in if force was necessary (Richardson, 2015). Finally, the New York City police department, notorious for its punitive "zero tolerance" or "broken windows" policing (Jashnani et al., 2017), signed a $4.5 million contract with for-profit implicit bias training company Fair and Impartial Policing (Baker, 2018). The focus on implicit attitude trainings is not just at the city and state level but is also one of the recommendations of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015) initiated by Barack Obama.

The growth in the study of implicit attitudes and their application in anti-bias trainings has been a mixed bag for anti-racism efforts. Though it has helped to dispel the pernicious myth that we are now in a post-racial, color-blind society, the evidence for anti-bias trainings improving attitudes and biases is mixed at best (Forscher et al., 2019). Most recently, the NYPD itself reported, "Overall, we found insufficient evidence to conclude that racial and ethnic disparities in police enforcement actions were reduced as a result of the [implicit bias] training" (Worden et al., 2020). In response to "null" results for behavioral changes in the NYPD implementation, social psychologists like Banaji, one of the pioneers of implicit cognition research, argue that trainings should not be mandatory as they could backfire (Kaste, 2020). Given that a disproportionate number of police officers hold racist views (LeCount, 2017), both before and increasingly during their career (Gatto et al., 2010; Sidanius et al., 1994), it is reasonable to assume that actively racist police officers, the very ones in need of training, will opt out of voluntary trainings. It is unclear how social psychologists deal with this impasse. IMP, however, would reveal that such interventions still leave the *purpose* of the police uninterrogated and unchallenged. For instance, an emancipatory approach would start by asking why POC are being chased through their own neighborhoods in the first place (Mooney, 2014), and what the psychological ramifications of these actions are. And, as we discuss later, a Marxist "from below" approach would reorient the social psychologist's focus away from the efforts to maintaining social order and efficiency of police departments, and towards the benefit and health of communities that are currently being policed—which, we will also argue, necessitates heeding the call of social movements led by Black people and their allies to defund and abolish the police.

Procedural Justice: Situational and Institutional Levels of Analysis

Implicit bias is one significant contributor to what many social psychologists consider to be the central problem with policing: a lack of procedural justice that requires actively making changes on both the situational level and institutional level (Goff, 2017; Goff et al., 2017; Richardson, 2015; Tyler et al., 2015; Wallace et al., n.d; Weir, 2016). On the situational level, procedural justice

entails citizens being treated with respect by the police and experiencing police procedures and decisions as neutral and unbiased. On the institutional level, it entails changing and designing institutional policing policies to support and encourage changes on the situational level. The thrust of "policing for the 21st century," from the procedural justice perspective, is to transform the police "force" to a police "service" and the culture within the police departments from that of "warriors" to "guardians" (President's Task Force, 2015).

Some specific implementations of procedural justice are the required use of body cameras by the police and the use of checklists and protocols (e.g., the aforementioned policy change in foot chases) to ensure that every interaction follows the same procedure, regardless of the race of the suspect. Greater transparency and access to police data collected by police departments is another increasingly implemented aspect of procedural justice. Over 100 law enforcement departments have committed to release data on various police actions such as use-of-force, vehicle stops, and searches and arrests. For example, the Austin Police Department (APD) worked with the CPE and the White House's Police Data Initiative to examine the behavior of their police officers. Data analyses indicated disparities based on race and ethnicity in vehicle-based stops and use of force. As a result, the APD has recently adopted a policy that an officer may be terminated immediately if his or her camera is deactivated without appropriate justification during a deadly force incident (Goff et al., 2017).

This shift towards procedural justice is not meant to replace deterrence and force but is meant to be an *additional motivation for the public* to act in accordance with "social-order maintenance" (Tyler et al., 2015). The deterrence approach focuses narrowly on the rational choice-making of the potential criminal, i.e., by making the costs of illegal behavior higher than any potential benefits. Procedural justice, by contrast, is meant to appeal to people's belief in a just world and their need for a broader social meaning and sense of belonging. As Tyler et al. (2015) state, "The effects of punishment should be supplemented by building legitimacy and drawing on its motivational power to further enhance efforts at *maintaining social order*" (p. 78, emphasis ours).

Our primary concern here isn't on the relative effectiveness (or lack thereof) of procedural justice implementations. However, it bears mentioning that a meta-analysis of seventy studies showed body-worn cameras have no statistically significant effect on either officer behavior or *citizens' view of the police* (Lum et al., 2019), and that the APD program mentioned above now reports a number of compliance issues, including a lack of review of the footage by supervisors— "The audit said of the 151 videos in the audit, they found one that had been reviewed by a supervisor" (Bradshaw & Wilson, 2019).

We are primarily concerned with two assumptions fundamental to social psychologists' collaborations with police which almost always go unexamined. First assumption, that a society is better off with rather than without police: "It is equally clear that there are problems when there is little or no policing. The impact of police presence is especially striking when compared to zero policing" (Tyler et al., 2015, p. 79). On the contrary, there is evidence suggesting that a

reduction of assertive policing, or even elimination of policing as a whole, would actually *reduce* major crime (Sullivan & O'Keeffe, 2017). For example, when NYC police officers temporarily reduced their "proactive policing" of low-level offenses in 2015 (in protest to their perceived mistreatment by NYC's mayor over cases of police brutality), reports of major crimes occurring in the city actually *decreased,* based on the NYPD's own crime statistics (Sullivan & O'Keeffe, 2017). Second assumption, that the maintenance of the social order and status quo is a natural and positive goal to pursue: "The central argument that flows from this research is that the psychological theories underlying legitimacy and procedural justice are a viable basis for constructing models of social-order maintenance" (Tyler et al., 2015, p.87). In other words, social psychologists are working to bolster an explicitly system-justifying psychology when it comes to the role of police in maintaining the social status quo. A Marxist turn in social psychology interrogates the impact of existing social institutions, including the police, on individual attitudes and behaviors and seeks the social and psychological sources to help radically transform them.

Behavioral Insight Model: Situational And Institutional Levels of Analysis

We next discuss the behavioral insight model (BIM; Goff, 2017), for multiple reasons. One, it is also an approach that embraces both the individual- and institutional-level changes. Two, it is being advocated as a corrective for the traditional civil rights model (TCRM) of fighting racism and police brutality—a model that is singular in its push against the status quo. Finally, proponents of BIM, who work with dozens of police departments[10], have a wide audience outside of academia—for instance TED talks[11] with more than 2 million times and a presentation at World Economic Forum[12]. For Goff (2017), the TCRM supposes the police to be bigoted at worst and ignorant or apathetic at best and thus relies on direct action, protests, and legal battles to fight racism and to respond to police brutality. Goff (2017) contends that these tactics take an "adversarial approach" to police, and this could lead to worse relations between police and "the communities they are sworn to protect". BIM is meant as a "less antagonistic" model that is based on the fundamental social psychological premise that the situation one is in can have more power than one's attitude in shaping one's behavior, including racial discrimination (Goff, 2017). Therefore, it argues, we should focus on identifying which situations improve or worsen interactions between the police and the public. An example of the implementation of BIM is the aforementioned case of scripts for foot chases in the LVPD or the camera use policy by the APD.

[10] Centering Community to Spur Progress. https://2021.policingequity.report/

[11] Goff, P. A. (n.d.). *How we can make racism a solvable problem -- and improve policing*. TED. https://www.ted.com/talks/dr_phillip_atiba_goff_how_we_can_make_racism_a_solvable_problem_and_improve_policing

[12] Tackling racism in business through data analysis. https://policingequity.org/newsroom/media-coverage/tackling-racism-business-through-data-analysis

The BIM goes beyond simply focusing on the situation and makes room for the moral authority of the police. As is explicitly stated, "By working backward from the disparity without an *a priori* theory about police officers' character, the BIM allows researchers to assume (either strategically or genuinely) that all actors involved intend to do the morally just thing" (Goff, 2017, p.13). This moral assumption is in line with the procedural justice approach, along with its prima facie assumption about the police as "sworn to protect" BIPOC communities. Such an assumption, apart from making little room to question policing and police officers as a naturalized requirement of a society, is ahistorical, as discussed earlier, and ignores how the structural priorities/policies and ideology of policing *actively* socialize cops to be racist (Alexander, 2010; Gatto et al., 2010). It also erases how police institutions facilitate the intricate networks of fascists, White supremacists, and other misanthropes within police departments, which have been brought to light under various investigations. In fact, police officers who are the most willing to use force against political demonstrations are routinely promoted, which means callous brutality toward oppressed and working people is directly encouraged within police departments (Williams, 2015). Stated explicitly, "Police violence is very frequently over-determined—promoted from above and supported from below" (Williams, 2015, p. 30). The only just approach to a repressive force is demanding abolishment, a most antagonistic demand.

If BIM is based on the idea that situations are often more powerful predictors of human behavior than attitudes, why not consider the fact that under racialized capitalism such "situations" that encourage racism and violence on the part of police will constantly recur due to the social and political role that police play? In other words, why is the scope of the situation not allowed to expand beyond the immediate temporal and interpersonal level, or even the cultural level of particular police departments? Because such an expansion would betray the narrow definition of social situations that is a hallmark of NSP. The study of cultural practices, and the socio-economic relations that underpin them, is necessary in order to propose actionable changes that can transform extended, dynamic situations by construing them as outcomes of cultural institutions and not as discrete events.

Cultural Psychology: Institutional Level of Analysis

Not only is the role of the police as a permanent fixture of society not questioned in the work of the social psychologists discussed so far, but there are direct collaborations with police being formed at institutional and cultural levels—e.g., the city level (Goff et al., 2017), state level (Wallace et al., n.d.), and national level (President's Task Force, 2015). This institutional-cultural connection is the level of analysis and criticism that cultural psychologists argue needs to be considered in order to help dismantle racism. Among efforts to achieve institutional- cultural changes, is the increasing call for community policing that encourages positive and nonenforcement contact between the police and

communities. In one of the few experimental studies on community policing, Peyton et al. (2019) found that even a single instance of 10-minute "positive and nonenforcement" interaction by police officers resulted in improved public attitudes towards the police and willingness to cooperate. Notably, these results persisted after 21 days. Most disconcerting, however, is the finding that after the interaction, participants increased their support of *expanding* the police force by 10%! Precisely due to such system-justifying outcomes, Dixon et al. (2012) are critical of intergroup contact interventions because they can result in the marginalized group reevaluating and downplaying structural problems after the intervention. Additionally, such cultural-level changes limit the understanding of "culture" to the culture of an institution, but do not take into consideration the culture that the structures, such as capitalism and racism, create and perpetuate, and which police institutions uphold.

Taking for granted that the psychological and cultural are "inseparable outgrowths of one another," Salter et al. (2018) explicitly call for a fight against racism grounded in the cultural, where they define culture on a level that takes into consideration racism, *though not capitalism*. Such critical cultural psychologists, rather than *situating* racism in an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, go further by situating the pervasiveness of racism in a "set of ideas, practices, and materials embedded in the structure of everyday cultural worlds" (Salter et al., 2018). According to this view, culture promotes and facilitates racialized experiences, behaviors, and emotions, while individuals select and shape the context within which racism operates.

One feature of such a cultural psychology is that it incorporates into psychological analyses the fact that the roots of current forms of racism are located in the historical conditions of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. For example, in education this relationship is enforced in a manner that constantly privileges the oppressor (Whites) at the expense of the oppressed (BIPOC). Unsurprisingly, White-American students see little to no racism in U.S. society because they are relatively ignorant about any critical knowledge concerning historical racism (Nelson et al., 2013).

Recognizing the limitation of a "Psychology" that has "focused almost exclusively on individual bias" when concerning racism, Trawalter et al. (2020) call for a socioecological psychology of racism, an approach resonant with critical cultural psychology. This approach harks back to Lewin's (1939) social psychology that included history and structures in the "social", not just the immediate situation. In the context of policing, Trawalter et al. (2020) suggest that a socioecological approach should take into consideration the history of the modern police force in that it "stems from Slave Patrols and Night Watches in the American South, and constables in New England" (p. 49), and that current policing adheres to a racist ideology that permeates the structures of policing. Ultimately, beyond behavioral changes among police officers, they argue that socioecological psychology might reveal that increasing the trust in police among oppressed communities "will likely require a *reconciliation* process for contending with a history of abuses" (p. 49; emphasis ours).

Both critical cultural psychology and socioecological psychology models of racism suggest that the solutions to racism should ultimately be to destabilize Western colonialism and imperialism. Such an analysis rooted in historical conditions goes far in showing the temporal durability of racism in the US and can lead to concrete reforms that include removing Confederate monuments from public spaces or increasing accessibility to Black studies in universities (Salter et al., 2018). But Salter et al. (2018) state, "Hegemonic commemoration practices…tend to achieve prominence because they resonate with powerful interests," (p. 153). Although we agree, it is from this premise that we diverge. Their concern is the way ordinary people (i.e., the ones without hegemonic power) "shape collective memory by selecting or reproducing some features of the past while deselecting or omitting others" (p. 153). Our concern is with the political and economic structures and elite class interests that undergird the aforementioned powerful interests and hegemonic practices. In prior work, we have examined the role of social movements in aggregate implicit attitude change (Sawyer & Gampa, 2018; 2022), as such we see considerable promise in examining social movements and other forms of struggle and activism that directly challenge the racist structures that gave rise to police in the first place.

Similarly, Arfken (2015) warns that, while such cultural analyses are intended to critique Western imperialism, they inadvertently make culture an ever-more obscure entity by ignoring the socio-economic relations underlying cultural practices (p. 29). As an illustration, consider Salter et al. (2018) comment, "Europeans constructed their identity as "White" and imagined themselves as more developed and more human in comparison with the darker-skinned "others" (whether African or indigenous) whom they dominated" (p. 151). From our IMP perspective, a more accurate reading of history, one that applies intersectional analysis by incorporating anti-capitalism, is that *some* ruling-class Europeans constructed racism to serve a very particular *purpose*: that of preempting and annihilating growing worker solidarity and resistance to colonialism at the beginning of capitalism (Allen, 1994; Fields & Fields, 2014). Racism today is no longer just about the destruction of working-class solidarity; it has become its own fully-fledged form of oppression. However, it is not irrelevant to the needs of capitalism. Erasing the role of class politics in the roots of racism makes it harder to envision emancipatory practices, which might explain why ultimately Trawalter et al. (2020) limit their vision to a "reconciliation" with police, not policing's abolishment. As Fields and Fields (2018) would argue, even such a historical understanding of racism, "looks like a relation between people or race relations, but it's really a submerged economic relation". In other words, even a psychology that takes into consideration a more historical approach to racism but ignores the relationship to capitalism can be one that is in line with neoliberalism to the extent that the role of capitalism is obscured, and consequentially the structures aren't deemed fundamentally blameworthy.

In the long span of writing this paper, an article explicitly titled, *"Toward a Psychological Science of Abolition Democracy: Insights for Improving Theory and Research on Race and Public Safety"* was published. While it discusses

concerns similar to those raised in this paper, it ultimately falls short of *explicitly* calling for the abolition of the police. Instead, they urge psychologists to "engage seriously with abolition democracy by locating the source of contemporary policing problems in slavery and historical racism" (Najdowski & Goff, 2022, p. 64). Such a framing is seemingly in line with our push for incorporating historical and structural analyses into psychological sciences but again incomplete insofar as it narrowly and exclusively locates the origin of policing in slavery and racism. What is missing is the centrality of capitalism, in addition to racism, which requires the repressive role of policing in order to keep workers' organizing activity in check against increasing inequalities. Their framing makes the problems in policing appear only as a legacy of slavery rather than seeing policing as an essential, dynamic, and ever-present feature of capitalism (Gilmore, 2007). The paper cites Akbar (2020), Davis (2005), Kaba (2017), and of course Du Bois (1935), who all *explicitly* grounded an abolitionist framework in an *anti-capitalist* framework, yet this line of analysis is missing in the paper. Their cited references might differ in their means but not in their desired end: abolition. There is not even a dismissal, much less discussion, of the anti-capitalist commitment in the references that Najdowski and Goff (2022) cite, leaving the reader to wonder if, in line with Margaret Thatcher, they believe "There is no alternative!". Our paper, however, furthers an intersectional argument against policing by incorporating both anti-capitalist and anti-racist frameworks—one that can be useful in advocating for police abolition in not just the USA but anywhere policing serves capitalism.

Intersectional Marxist Psychology: Situational, Institutional, and Structural Levels of Analysis

Hamid Khan, an organizer for *Stop LAPD Spying Coalition*, provided a simple litmus test for evaluating reforms: are reforms being put in place to justify oppressive systems *or* are they being put in place to support working-class people and marginalized people? Anti-bias trainings and social psychological interventions of implicit bias that operate on the situational level, and procedural justice interventions that operate on the institutional level, do not align with marginalized people in so far as they are incapable of connecting the blunt end of police brutality with a racist and capitalist society that necessarily requires policing. Tyler et al. (2015) grounds their work in the explicit assumption that there would be major social problems if there were little to no policing, and that the police serve and protect the public under difficult circumstances (p. 77). Similarly, Eberhardt, recent president of Association for Psychological Science, dismisses the call to defund the police as "...a call for defunding that is based on the feeling that the police are bad and that there's nothing that could be done, no, I don't support that...There are a lot of levers that we can move to bring about more equitable policing" (Luscombe, 2020).

Neoliberal social psychology's goal, then, is to improve policing such that the public comes to "...trust in the *benevolence* and *sincerity* of police in their

dealings with the public" (Tyler et al., 2015; p. 76; emphasis ours), by offering interventions to police departments. Thus, one core assumption of NSP is that the overrepresentation of groups like Black people and trans people among those incarcerated in the U.S. is primarily the result of officers' implicit biases (Spencer et al., 2016). However, regaining "credibility" (Tyler et al., 2015) in the eyes of the public is not a new project, but was in fact propounded in the 19th century by Robert Peel, the founder of the London police department, who referred to this as "policing by consent" (Lentz & Chaires, 2007). Further evidence of supporting the status quo is that CPE researchers signed a memorandum of understanding with police departments to protect police from liability issues and from the requirement to disclose sensitive data after anticipating that police departments might be unwilling to share the data they gather for several reasons, including public relations and potential liability. This agreement also guarantees that police departments have the right to receive the results of any research before the public receives it, to remain anonymous if the results are published, and to be given *reasonable* time to implement solutions or *to do nothing* (Goff et al., 2017; p. 392). The glaring problem is that by not allowing room for questioning the necessity of policing, agreements between police and psychologists ultimately concede power to the oppressor *against the expressed needs of the oppressed*, severely limiting any accountability towards community stakeholders.

Clearly, social psychologists cannot assume that police have benign intentions; furthermore, they cannot accept the maintenance of social order as necessarily being a worthy goal. While socioecological psychology and critical cultural psychology approaches might be amenable to police reforms that are more in line with the explicit demands of BLM and their allies, they do not make such approaches explicit. An emancipatory psychology, in contrast, is fundamentally aligned with efforts made by ordinary citizens to hold the police accountable in meaningful ways—for example, by winning the power to hire and fire them, and to control their budgets, or in completely abolishing them if the community deems it necessary. One starting point for such an emancipatory psychology can be scrutinizing the process by which social psychologists enter into memorandums with the police on behalf (or over the heads) of the public, as well as the results of these agreements.

An IMP is clearly needed to help us discriminate between the deceptive and transformative solutions, between the reforms that support the status quo and the reforms that are in solidarity with, and accountable to, the struggles of marginalized people. Critical participatory action research (CPAR)[13] is one of the methodologies that are most useful for such a psychology, because it is a framework for conducting research in solidarity with "communities, groups, and individuals living at the margins, that is those with relatively little sociopolitical power" (Fine et al., 2020, pg. 2). Making the oppressed genuine partners, and having their experiences and analyses drive social psychological research, opens

[13] We are rarely exposed to such methods in a typical social psychology program. As a past participant, I (Anup Gampa) highly recommend attending the Critical PAR Institute (https://publicscienceproject.org/critical-par-institutes/)

up the possibility to discuss and decide how to democratically control and allocate resources in a manner that respects the growing call to defund and abolish the police—therefore incorporating multiple elements of IMP.

The Public Science Project at City University of New York, and particularly their Morris Justice Project (Jashnani et al., 2017), is an example of work that understands that oppressors virtually never yield power without the oppressed fighting for it (Davis, 2016). This CPAR project, a collaboration between psychologists, primarily BIPOC residents, and organizers, focused on the neighborhood-level effects of the New York Police Department's "stop and frisk" policy, in which officers stopped, questioned, and searched civilians deemed to be "suspicious", disproportionately targeting people of color. This activism brought public pressure that contributed to the ending of the program. Of course, police resisted this public pressure for as long as they could and warned that crime would skyrocket if the program were ended. Against their claim, crime dropped to record lows following the abandonment of stop and frisk (Equal Justice Initiative, 2019). This instance underscores the need for further, explicit CPAR approaches, as well as approaches that engage with the oppressed outside of formal, psychological-research frameworks. This can include studying and partnering with existing social movements.

Taking a structural-level analysis, i.e., asking "should we be playing this game?", requires us to meaningfully engage with the biggest social movement to fight racism in recent history, and one that explicitly demands the abolishing of police—the BLM movement. As discussed above, there is little evidence for any durable effects of implicit-attitude interventions in changing people's anti-Black attitudes. Even the purported "Obama effect", i.e., the notion that the presidency of Barack Obama should have the power to induce a progressive shift in implicit attitudes at the societal level because he was the perfect instance of a high-status Black exemplar with unprecedented visibility and pervasiveness, has shown to be ineffective (Schmidt & Axt, 2016).

Looking back in our country's history, we know that Americans' explicit (fully consciously endorsed) attitudes toward desegregation and toward Black people in general changed immensely during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s despite violent backlash and counter-movements (Bobo et al., 2012). Unsurprisingly, then, there is growing evidence both for the impact of the historical and structural contexts on individual attitudes and the impact of social movements in changing those attitudes. Payne et al. (2019), for instance, show that counties and states with greater dependency on Black slaves before the Civil War had higher levels of anti-Black implicit bias today among White residents. They explain these results partially through measures of structural inequalities, such as poverty, intergenerational mobility among White and Black residents, and housing segregation. The authors concluded that more attention needs to be paid to changing "social environments" rather than individual attitudes to effectively combat implicit bias. Political movements reach far more people for longer periods of time than scattered, short-term trainings. More importantly, they challenge the social

conditions and racial disparities that can breed and reinforce racist attitudes in the first place.

In the most comprehensive study to date of changes in aggregate implicit attitudes from 2007 to 2016, Charlesworth and Banaji (2019) found that implicit attitudes regarding sexual orientation, race, and skin-tone became less biased, while attitudes toward age and disability did not change, and implicit attitudes toward body-weight became more biased. From an IMP perspective, it stands to reason that social issues that are targeted by repeated social movements would have lower overall bias in related attitudes. U.S. history, for example, has witnessed multiple movements against racism and multiple struggles for gay liberation and LGBT rights, with BLM and the struggle for marriage equality being the latest high-profile incarnations. Thus, the finding that changing attitudes around race, skin-tone, and sexuality are related to lower overall bias levels for these attitudes (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2019) may reflect the impact of social movements on these attitudes. This idea is further supported in the negative by evidence that attitudes around age, disability, and body-weight either did not change or became more biased (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2019). None of those issues have been visibly central to mass social movements in recent decades.

In a direct application of testing the impact of social movements on implicit attitudes, Sawyer and Gampa (2018) examined implicit racial attitudes in relation to BLM. Implicit attitudes from 2009 to 2016 were less pro-White during BLM than pre-BLM, became increasingly less pro-White across BLM, and were especially less pro-White during high points of BLM struggle. There are several lines of standard social psychological theories for why social movements should have an impact on implicit attitudes. The associative-propositional evaluation (APE) argues that constant and pervasive exposure to exemplars like Obama may succeed in activating specific preexisting positive associations with Obama (e.g., powerful, accomplished), and as a result influence associative evaluations of Black people in general. However, these activations might be temporary and incapable of fundamentally altering one's association towards Black people in general because Obama, the exemplar, is individually specific. A social movement that repeatedly and literally pairs Black people in general with basic and positive words ("Black Lives Matter"), images, and traits (courageous, agentic) may cause more fundamental and lasting changes on the societal level as a result of systematically changing the underlying valence of associations with Black people (Sawyer & Gampa, 2018; 2022). "Bias in crowds", another line of research in support of the potency of social movements argues that implicit bias is fundamentally a feature of social contexts and not an individual trait. Specifically, implicit attitudes are temporary activations cued by stereotypes and inequalities. Even though implicit bias for any individual might be temporary and idiosyncratic, implicit bias at the aggregate level may mirror the durable inequalities in the social environment (Payne et al., 2017). Thus, BLM might also have changed the social context in which evaluative associations are formed.

Social movements like BLM are also in line with the frameworks outlined by Le Blanc (2016) and Wright (2015). Recall that these frameworks require one

to expand the understanding of the situation to consider the structural-level foundations of society with a historical analysis, with the intention of liberating that society by centering the oppressed and supporting their platforms and movements. Truly transformative demands, such as those from BLM, include ending mass incarceration, disarming the police, ending capital punishment, and establishing community control of local budgets and law enforcement.[14] The website for the Movement for Black Lives also sets out the following radical goal:

> Until we achieve a world where cages are no longer used against our people, we demand an immediate change in conditions and an end to all jails, detention centers, youth facilities and prisons as we know them. This includes the end of solitary confinement, the end of shackling of pregnant people, access to quality healthcare, and effective measures to address the needs of our youth, queer, gender nonconforming and trans families.[15]

In addition, community control would entail direct democratic control over all levels of law enforcement, "ensuring that communities most harmed by destructive policing have the power to hire and fire officers, determine disciplinary action, control budgets and policies, and subpoena relevant agency information."[16] Social movements like BLM, therefore, both challenge the structural conditions that breed racism, and provably alter the implicit bias attitudes that help to maintain it.

What if social psychologists took seriously the call to defund and abolish the police? We must resist the temptation of dismissing such an approach on the grounds of objectivity—remember, by working with police departments and supporting the calls to reform *but not* defund, social psychologists have already committed to biased work. Our call, therefore, is to be biased in favor of the oppressed. Methodologically, in order to further socioecological psychology, Trawalter et al. (2020) suggest measuring the impact on psychological outcomes and mechanisms as a result of both (1) exposures to structures and systems of racism, and (2) manipulating salience of historical harms or systems in lab experiments. Additionally, they advocate for leveraging natural experiments and testing associations between racist systems and psychological mechanisms and outcomes. These align well with our own call but are not enough.

Ultimately, an emancipatory psychological science is one that takes account of all three levels: it takes as given that individual-level changes and agency need to be investigated as that is the blunt end where much of police brutality occurs; it expands its scope to better understand how such brutality is perpetuated and supported; and it finally brings into view the forces for whom such police brutality is perpetuated for, which allows one to then understand and navigate the opportunities and limitations of fighting police brutality at the more concrete levels, i.e. the individual- and institutional-levels, with the ultimate aim of abolishing repressive systems.

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[14] *Vision For Black Lives*. M4BL. (2021, April 28). https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/.
[15] *Vision For Black Lives*.
[16] *Vision For Black Lives*.

Conclusion

> However, some might be wondering, "Is abolition too drastic? Can We really get rid of prisons and politicking all together?" The short answer: We can. We must. We are.
>
> Mariame Kaba[17]

Neoliberal policies have had devastating effects on Black people, and people of color in general. As a result of austerity policies, funding has been slashed across all social services, which disproportionately hurts marginalized communities. Agencies at all levels of government are disinvesting in housing (Desmond, 2016), education (Hursh, 2016), health services (Labonté & Stuckler, 2016), while unemployment or underemployment is increasing (Nunn et al., 2019). At the same time, homelessness, truancy, and mental health problems have been criminalized (e.g., Leifman, 2019). Evidence suggests that investing in non-carceral alternatives such as mental health resources and job trainings (Heller, 2014) have greater returns on investment for society than policing and incarceration of marginalized people. Yet, these alternatives are rarely well-funded because under the neoliberal regime of austerity and the neoconservative approach of punitiveness, the response to social discord is policing instead of understanding and addressing the underlying problems. The inevitable result is the disproportionate contact of marginalized communities with the police! No amount of tinkering with the dynamics of discrete situations involving police confrontations with citizens will alter this larger political trend. Addressing the root of the issues would require redistribution of wealth beyond trickle-down-economics and scrutinizing the systems responsible for the "need" and role of policing—to repress workers, especially BIPOC (Alexander, 2010; Vitale, 2017).

Black communities and their comrades have again responded to the latest incidents of police brutality with protests and riots across the nation, and across the globe. Louder than ever, they demand defunding, even abolishing, the police. Incredibly, various municipalities answered these demands with commitments to unprecedent reforms: Los Angeles has committed up to a $150 million decrease in its $1.8 billion budget; and the city council of Minneapolis, where George Floyd was killed, has committed to abolishing their police department! And, most recently, the police officer directly responsible for killing George Floyd was convicted of the murder.

We have reason to be optimistic, yet we are already seeing ways in which public demands are being routed. For instance, the Minneapolis public-school system severed ties with the police department, only to have the police replaced by former police, security, or correction officers—now called "public safety support specialists" (Cheney-Rice, 2021). Such a corruption of progress *is* American history. The promise of reconstruction was corrupted into the Jim Crow era (Du Bois, 1935). The promise of civil rights was corrupted into the

[17] Kaba, M. (2021). *We do this' til we free us: Abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.

New Jim Crow era (Alexander, 2010). This is what is at stake. A call for defunding or abolishing that is not made with an understanding of capitalism can be corrupted into a New Jim Crow era once again (Davis, 2016; Taylor, 2016). Though racism has been, at least in the Americas, instrumental in the expansion of capitalism, this certainly doesn't mean that it is just about economics anymore. However, if we are to strategize the way forward to fight for a society beyond racism, then we have to target one of the fundamental masters it serves. We have to attack capitalism.

It is with this anti-capitalist and anti-racist (not to mention anti-imperialist and anti-patriarchal) understanding that Angela Davis (2016) called for abolishing the police and warned against deceptive solutions of better prisons and better policing. In spite of her admonishment, and the rallying call for defunding the police and mounting evidence of the ineffectiveness of police trainings, social psychologists continue to push for police reforms that are out-of-step with the demands of the protestors, and even an increasing number of government agencies. In 2021, Los Angeles Review of Books published "Beyond Bias: The Case for an Abolitionist Psychology". This article is a rare exception in that it explicitly calls for police abolition from an intersectional and anti-capitalist perspective. It is entirely in line with the argument we make in this paper, perhaps without laying out the evidence and the arguments as extensively as we do here.

Demands of defunding and abolishing the police are bold and go to the heart of the problems with policing under capitalism, so much so that winning them would threaten the capitalist system itself, if not form a key demand of a revolutionary transformation of capitalism as a whole. In fact, because policing has been so integral to defending the social hierarchy and exploitation that are endemic to capitalism, it is difficult to imagine eliminating police forces without also eliminating capitalist society (Gordon, 2005). Maybe partly for this reason, discussions of policing within social psychology virtually never discuss the reduction or elimination of policing in its modern institutional form.

We are heartened by the exciting new proposals in social psychology that aim to expand the focus of the "social" by incorporating sociological and historical analyses. Most recently, Kraus and Torrez (2020) have argued for a shift in considering power as a trait-based variable to power as a construct embedded in societal hierarchies. Overall, their hope is "to understand power as it is experienced in the world, as a psychological process that is grounded in the institutions, identities, and group dynamics through which much of human behavior is experienced" (p. 88). We also embrace their approach to move social psychology out of the lab and into the field in order to test the limits of generalizability of current research on power. One implication of such a broadening, they argue, will allow us to investigate the impact of collective actions on individual-level power. However, their approach, along with the aforementioned proposals for expanding the concept of the social, such as the socioecological psychology of racism (Trawalter et al., 2020) and "bias of crowds" (Payne et al., 2017) only partially incorporate all of the elements of an IMP. For instance, what is left undefined in these approaches is whether power is

to be treated as a zero-sum game or as gradational. Evidence is starting to build that an explicitly antagonistic approach to class (workers vs. capitalists; i.e., zero-sum) provides a better understanding of worker alienation, in comparison to the socioeconomic status (SES; i.e., gradational) approach of social class (Sawyer & Gampa, 2020). This approach results from a historical understanding of capitalism as one that is at its core an exploitation of the majority of the population by a minority of the population. Such an understanding then also sheds light on the role of the police, as discussed earlier, and provides a roadmap for potential solutions to tackling police brutality. Most importantly, our approach makes it explicit that we eschew any misconceptions of neutrality, and work in solidarity with oppressed communities.

We hope that our framework will help other social psychologists to also envision how an intersectional Marxist psychology can provide structural and historical analyses of the relationship of the individual to the situation, and of the situation to its structural and historical context. We believe it will add to current efforts to incorporate more intersectional analysis in social psychology (Goff & Kahn, 2013), and believe it can help to combat the increasing number of plagues besetting us and looming upon future generations, from racism and exploitation to the climate crisis. Our framework can also bridge social psychologists with other areas of psychology, such as those in community psychology, that are also working on abolition (see Fernández in this issue). Ultimately, we hope abolition theory outlined here can be applied to psychological study of abolition of not just police and prisons, but also to other oppressive institutions such as work (Prole.info, 2014) and family (Lewis, 2019).

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