"Protect and Serve Each Other": Contentious Politics and Collective Action in a Police Accountability Organization

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ABSTRACT

This rticle examines the tactics employed by the Peaceful Streets Project (PSP), a police accountability organization in Austin, Texas. Specifically, it explores the activists' reasons for addressing police accountability and why the majority of the members are men. Drawing on analysis of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and organizational materials, the findings suggest that collective action and contentious politics play roles in the activists' decisions to address police accountability and their measures for doing so. This study adds to the social movement literature by examining how collective action and contentious politics aid in the tactics for addressing police accountability and the racialized, classed, and gendered dynamics of member participation.

Introduction

On a chilly night in Austin, Texas, I walk up and down Sixth Street, a popular bar district in downtown Austin, Texas with two white men who are equipped with video cameras and walkie-talkies. We hear sirens and see a police car pull over a driver. We run toward the direction of the police car and I watch as the two men pull out their video cameras and begin filming the police encounter (fieldnotes, October 5, 2013).

This scene is part of a larger set of events organized and tactics employed by members of a police accountability group called the Peaceful Streets Project (PSP) in Austin, Texas. This group is a direct action grassroots organization that uses various tactics including cop watching and protests to address police accountability and inform the community of instances of police misconduct. The purpose of this research is to examine why PSP activists address police accountability and why they choose the tactics they use. In addition, I explore why this group, the majority of whom are white, middle class men themselves risk arrest and police abuse to focus on a social issue that typically affects people of color and people from lower socioeconomic statuses.

Literature Review

This paper draws on two bodies of literature including high-risk collective action and contentious politics (McAdam 1986; McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007) and police misconduct (Feagin 1991; Goffman 2009; Huey 2006; Stuart 2011; Weitzer and Tuch 2005, 2006). Taken together, collective action, contentious politics and police misconduct literature help to lay the empirical and theoretical groundwork for examining activists in a police accountability organization.

High-Risk Collective Action and Contentious Politics

The concept of collective action has been widely researched in the social sciences, particularly in studies of social movements, generating various theories and definitions (Beckwith 2000; Ellemers and Baretto 2009; Jasper 2004; Klandersman 2002; Leenders 2012; Loveman 1998; Lyer and Ryan 2009; Oliver 1984; Russell 2011; Snow, Cress, and Jones, 1998; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). Literature on collective action typically focuses on the importance of identity, resource mobilization, and social ties in understanding the emergence and timing of collective efforts (Beckwith 2000; Ellemers and Baretto 2009; Jasper 2004; Klandersman 2002; Leenders 2012; Loveman 1998; Snow, Cress, and Jones, 1998; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

I rely on the definition by Tilly and Tarrow (2007, 5), who describe collective action as "coordinating efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs." Sidney Tarrow (1994) and Charles Tilly (2007) are frequently cited for their exhaustive explanations of the various episodic, social, and spatial conditions under which collective action emerges. Their definitions and examples of collective action revolve around the notion that collective action 1) takes many forms, and claim-making by actors can become contentious, 2) social actors join forces in contentious confrontations, 3) political opportunities draw social actors into collective action through forms of contention, and 4) common interests, or solidarity among social actors, can be a defining feature for the emergence of collective action. For instance, solidarity, especially in regards to ethnicity and nationalism, are important factors in mobilizing instances of collective action (Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

Contentious politics plays an important role in defining collective action and understanding the conditions under which collective action occurs (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007;) Contentious politics refers to "interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 4). Scholars of contentious politics argue that political contention depends upon mobilization and collective interaction among group members and that political contention is at the center of a series of collective, political, and contentious interactions (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

A defining characteristic of contentious politics is the desire to disrupt a government institution or practice (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007; Walgrave 2011; Vasi 2011). Studies of contentious politics typically feature comparative and historical sociological research on the use of strikes, protests, rallies, and revolutions as specific tactics used by social actors to disrupt and make claims against the state. According to these studies, the contentious collective action utilized by social actors is often high-risk (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

The concept of high-risk collective action, or activism, illustrates the various dynamics that are part of the mobilization of social actors into a high-risk movement or episode of collective action. The work of Doug McAdam (1986) is a foundational and frequently cited piece of scholarship that shows the processes that play into recruiting activists into high-risk contexts. McAdam (1986) analyzes the concept of high-risk or high-cost activism and suggests that it is important to distinguish the recruitment process between high and low-risk or -cost activism. He defines high-risk activism as "the anticipated dangers…of engaging in a particular activity" (67).

McAdam's (1986) study on the process of recruitment into activism for the Freedom Summer campaign of 1964, which was aimed at registering black voters in Mississippi who had been historically prevented from voting, finds that participants in the movement were more likely than people who withdrew from the movement to be involved with political organizations and have strong social ties to other participants. Additional scholarship on high-risk collective action also finds that social networks, face-to-face interaction, sociopolitical timing and space, and affiliation with political parties are important to collective action participation in high-risk contexts (Loveman 1998).

Shared beliefs and identity are important in understanding activist participation in collective efforts. Studies show that gender and race are salient factors in determining who participates in high-risk activism, and in what contexts (Gordon 2008; Irons 1998; Robnett 1996). Irons' (1998) study on black and white women activists during the civil rights movement shows that black women and white women participated in activism in different ways, and that black women's participation was more high-risk. Moreover, black women participated in the movement because of personal experiences with oppression. In contrast, white women participated out of sympathy and were involved in low-risk activism (Irons 1998). Additionally, scholars assert that women activists are often involved in organizing activism rather than being leaders, and men are more likely to participate in high-risk activism. In other words, there is often gender exclusion and sexism in high-risk activist contexts (Gordon 2008; Irons 1998; Robnett 1996).

Research on collective action and activism has also highlighted the importance of group solidarity in creating collective action (Jasper 2004; Leenders 2012; Tarrow 1994), and recent studies illustrate the dynamics of collective actionand group membership. Specifically, researchers have begun to look at why privileged groups participate in collective action on behalf of marginalized groups that does not benefit them. Studies suggest that they often do so out of sympathy (Russell 2011).

While there is a substantial amount of scholarship on high-risk collective action and contentious politics, it does not frame high-risk activism as a form of contentious collective action aimed at the state and does not address why privileged social actors are involved in a form of high-risk collective action that does not necessarily benefit them (McAdam 1986; McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). This article fills this gap by drawing on high-risk contentious collective action (McAdam 1986; McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007) to explore how privileged activists in a police accountability organization use high-risk, contentious collective action to try to disrupt the state, specifically the Austin Police Department, and to understand the dynamics and reasoning behind their participation and tactics.

Police Misconduct and Accountability

In addition to high-risk collective action and contentious politics, I rely on the literature on police misconduct and accountability. There has been a large amount of research on the racialized and classed dimensions of police misconduct (Dottolo and Stewart 2008; Elicker 2008; Feagin 1991; Goffman 2009; Howerton 2006; King, Messner, and Baller 2009; Mbuba 2010; Nier et al. 2012; Romero 2006; Sadler et al. 2012; Weitzer and Tuch 2005, 2006). Many studies have illustrated the prevalence of police misconduct among people of color and people from lower socioeconomic statuses (Dottolo and Stewart 2008; Feigin 1991; Goffman 2009), as or are more likely than white people to hold negative perceptions of the police (Dottolo and Stewart 2008; Feagin 1991; Goffman 2009; Mbuba 2010; Sadler et al. 2012; Weitzer and Tuch 2005, 2006). Research has shown that police officers typically harass, abuse, and arrest people of color more than white people because of racial stereotypes that equate people of color with criminality (Alexander 2011; Feagin 1991; Goffman 2009; Sadler et al. 2012). In addition to police abuse, the police are more likely to treat white victims of crime with respect and put more effort into solving their cases than those of black victims of crime

(Howerton 2006; King, Messner, and Baller 2009).

People of color, especially black men and Latinos, are more likely to be targets of racial profiling and police abuse (Alexander 2011; Feagin 1991; Goffman 2009; Sadler et al. 2012). Alice Goffman's (2009) ethnographic study of a poor, urban area in Philadelphia finds that black men avoid the police in their everyday lives because of the risk of arrest and abuse. Goffman suggests that police officers create fear in the community, which causes lower class black men to avoid not only the police, but also dangerous places and interactions because of fear of arrest and police misconduct. Feagin's (1991) study on race and public discrimination also highlights fear of the police because black men, including middle class black men, are often perceived by the police and the public to be criminals. Feagin finds that black men attempt to use their middle class resources to avoid police mistreatment, or try to avoid the police altogether.

Because of the prevalence of police abuse, there have been recent instances of police accountability organizations addressing issues of police misconduct. There are two pieces of empirical research known to the author that focus on police accountability organizations (Huey 2006; Stuart 2011). These studies explore citizens who address police accountability and the tactics they employ (Huey 2006; Stuart 2011). Their findings suggest that counter-surveillance is being used by activists as a way to address police accountability and provide evidence of police misconduct. Recent advances in technology such as camera phones and the internet give citizens a modern resource to hold the police accountable (Huey 2006; Stuart 2011).

While there are a few studies on police accountability activism, they only address "cop watching" as a tactic (Huey 2006; Stuart 2011) and do not use a collective action or contentious politics framework to analyze the organizations and the nuanced ways in which membership participation is racialized, gendered,

and classed. This article fills the gap by examining the various tactics a police accountability organization uses as well as the racialized, classed, and gendered aspects of member participation.

Organizational History

The Peaceful Streets Project began on New Year's Eve 2012. Antonio Beuhler, a local activist, was a designated driver for his friends and pulled into a gas station in downtown Austin. At the gas station, Antonio saw that the police pulled a woman over for a sobriety test. According to Antonio and eyewitnesses, the police were physically harming the woman, so Antonio pulled out his phone and began filming the incident. A police officer noticed what Antonio was doing and began questioning why he was filming, which led to his arrest. The local media covered the story extensively, leading people to approach Antonio and tell him their own stories of police abuse (Peaceful Streets Project 2015).

Antonio teamed up with local activists to help start the Peaceful Streets Project and they worked to develop the first Police Accountability Summit. This is an annual conference where police accountability activists from around the country speak about police abuse and rights. Today, PSP holds "know your rights" trainings for the citizens of Austin, protests aimed at the Austin police department, and cop watches where activists film police encounters throughout Austin (Peaceful Streets Project 2015).

Methods

My analysis of PSP involves using data collected from participant observation, in-depth interviews, and an analysis of the organization's documents such as the group's website, Facebook page, and YouTube videos posted by PSP members. Between August and November 2013, I conducted over 20 hours of participant observation. I attended various events held by the group including their annual Police Accountability Summit, two community organizing meetings, protests aimed at the Austin Police Department and Leander Police Department, a "mail to jail party" in which letters

were written to political prisoners, and two cop watches (see Table 1 for the specific events, dates, and times of my observations). During these events, I acted as an observer and as a participant. I participated in the meetings, cop watches, and protests. While participating in these events, I took notes in a notebook on the surroundings, conversations, and interactions that took place. Once I returned home, I typed and elaborated on my notes. My typed field notes include an analysis that I wrote after each event and reflections on my own experiences in the field, including ways my own positionality may have shaped various encounters. My positionality as white and middle class allowed me to build rapport with members of PSP because we have similar backgrounds. In addition, my positionality as a woman permitted some of the men in the organization to take me under their wing and educate me on what they perceived to be my lack of knowledge of the government and my overall rights as a citizen. My similar background with the participants, as well as their attempts to educate me, shed light on their views of the government as well as the gendered and racialized dynamics of the organization. In other words, our similar racial and class backgrounds allowed the members to be more comfortable expressing their opinions with me and their willingness to educate me helped give me a better understanding of their political beliefs.

In addition to participant observation, I conducted seven in-depth, semi-structured interviews with current and former members of the organization. Before each interview was conducted, I informed interviewees that their participation was completely voluntary and that questions could be skipped and the interview stopped at any time. Six respondents chose to use their real names and one chose to use a pseudonym. Three interviews were face-to-face, three were over the phone, and one was over Skype. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in agreed-upon public locations. I interviewed people who I met while in the field to create a sample of participants who are active with the organization. I also interviewed one person who is no longer active

in the group to gain an additional perspective of the organization's dynamics. The interview questions focused on the participants' knowledge of the history of PSP, the tactics PSP utilizes, their reasons for addressing police accountability, and the demographics of the organization (see Appendix for a list of interview questions).

Six respondents are men and one is a woman. Five of the respondents are white, one identifies as racially mixed, and one as white Latino. The respondents range in age from 27 to 62 with a median age of 37. In terms of political orientation, two of the respondents identify as libertarian, one as a conservative republican, one as a voluntaryist, one as a communist, one as non-partisan, and one as an advocate for direct democracy. In addition, four respondents identify as middle class, one as working class, one as a worker, and one as lower class (See Table 2 for a list of demographic characteristics of the respondents). Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the author.

My final method of analysis was examining organizational materials including PSP's website, Facebook page, and YouTube videos filmed by PSP members. My analysis of organizational materials allowed me to have a better understanding of PSP's history as well as how they may be perceived by the public. Specifically, my analysis of YouTube videos shed light on PSP's tactics because the majority of their YouTube videos consist of their filming of police encounters.

Findings

High-Risk Collective Action and Contentious Politics

The Peaceful Streets Project (PSP) is comprised of members who predominantly identify with conservative political beliefs, which contributes to the development of contentious collective action by establishing solidarity, common interests, and similar goals among group members (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007; Walgrave 2011). In fact, four out of seven respondents identify with conservative political beliefs

(interviews with Jack, Antonio, Richard, and Catherine). The conservative political beliefs are illustrated at various events held by PSP and through PSP's organizational materials. For example, during a community organizing meeting, PSP activists discussed their distrust of the government for holding police accountable and state that PSP seeks to work outside of the current political system. The members also discussed the group's goal of creating a shift in which "communities protect and serve each other" by purchasing police rovers and patrolling marginalized neighborhoods. A PSP member claimed that they would let the police know that the police would no longer be welcome in these neighborhoods. Another PSP member responded by stating he thinks the group should look into raising money to "hire private security companies to protect communities" (fieldnotes, September 12, 2013).

The mission of the organization, which is to provide a cultural shift whereby "communities protect and serve each other" and do not rely on the police for protection, is also voiced on the group's website and in all seven interviews. This notion of not relying on the police for protection acts as a form of political contention in which members of PSP make claims against the government and try to disrupt its activities (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). While not all conservative individuals are against the government, the participants in PSP make claims and hold practices against the state that highlight their distrust of the government and their conservative political leanings. For instance, Brave New Books, an underground bookstore in Austin is a partner of PSP and holds many PSP events. The Southern Poverty Law Center labeled the bookstore as an active "Patriot group" in 2012 and characterizes Patriot groups as groups that advocate for antigovernment doctrines (Southern Poverty Law Center 2013). Brave New Books' conservative leaning and antigovernment ideologies can be seen in the items sold at the store. I went to the bookstore for a PSP event and arrived early so I could have the opportunity to examine what items the bookstore

sold. The majority of items sold at Brave New Books were books, T-Shirts, and bumper stickers that voiced anti-government, pro-capitalism, pro-anarchy, and anti-liberal sentiments. Moreover, the bookstore sold many PSP items about counter-surveillance and the importance of filming police activity (fieldnotes, September 12, 2013).

The items sold at Brave New Books do align with conservative ideologies, especially in regards to the books and bumper stickers that are anti-government and anti-liberal. In addition, Brave New Books serves as the headquarters for the Texas Libertarian Party (fieldnotes, September 12, 2013). The bookstore sells PSP items and endorses and holds their events, which creates a space for contentious collective action and solidarity among PSP members who may hold certain conservative beliefs (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). These shared political beliefs are important in creating collective action, as demonstrated by research into how political parties influence the mobilization of collective behavior (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

In addition, Joshua, a former active member of PSP and a white man who identifies as a communist and as a worker, elaborated on the role of political orientation in PSP by stating in interview that "the typical Peaceful Streets activist is either libertarian or anarcho-capitalist and anti-state control. In that, comes spite for the police because they try to enact that [state control]." Joshua's response suggests that some PSP members are anti-state, which informs their contentious claims aimed at the police (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). According to McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow, these shared political beliefs are important in creating collective action because political parties influence the mobilization of collective behavior by organizing on behalf of shared beliefs and interests (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). PSP's

contentious collective action then informs the tactics the activists employ, as well as the high-risk facets of their activism. Joshua also identifies the libertarian and anarcho-capitalist affiliations among the group that are seen in the items sold at Brave New Books, which reaffirms the group's shared interests.

I have argued that the conservative political orientations and ideologies of some PSP activists help to establish their contentious collective action and reasons for addressing police accountability. In other words, some PSP activists hold anti government views, which is their reason for addressing police accountability and creating contentious political claims (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). I will now discuss how PSP's contentious collective action informs the tactics the activists employ, as well as the high-risk aspects of their tactics.

I use McAdam's (1986, 67) distinction between low and high-risk activism where risk refers to "as the anticipated dangers…of participating in a particular activity." McAdam explains that some forms and contexts of activism have more dangerous risks than others. For example, signing a petition might not have any risks, while participating in a campaign such as Freedom Summer might have risks involved that include legal trouble or even death (McAdam 1986). The main tactic that PSP uses is cop watching, which consists of PSP members going to areas of Austin where police abuse is prevalent and filming the police as they interact with citizens. Cop watching is a tactic that is employed by other police accountability activist groups (Huey 2006; Stuart 2011). I argue that cop watching is a high-risk tactic because PSP members are often arrested while filming and some members try to disrupt police encounters and act aggressively toward the police, which increases the likelihood of arrest. In this context, being arrested is a potential danger associated with participation in PSP (McAdam 1986).

While cop watching is high-risk, all seven respondents state that their collective action of filming the police is the most useful tactic for holding the police accountable and protecting other citizens. For instance, when asked about the effectiveness of cop watching, Richard, a white, middle-class man states,

"I've seen a very visible change in police behavior on Sixth Street since we've started this…If you've ever been on Sixth Street about 2:30 a.m. after the bars are closed, they clear the street with horses and they will run you over. They will hurt you. I've seen them less often running people over…I'm seeing the police use a little bit of restraint."

Richard believes that PSP's counter-surveillance of the police has indeed changed the behavior of police officers. All seven respondents assert that police behavior has especially changed on Sixth Street. Their argument that police behavior has changed suggests that members of PSP believe that their filming and disruption of police encounters protects citizens of Austin who would normally experience police misconduct. PSP's filming the police mirrors the findings of previous research on cop watch organizations where group members believe that counter-surveillance is the most effective way to hold police officers accountable and to provide the public with evidence if police misconduct occurs, which then protects citizens (Huey 2006; Stuart 2011).

Another police accountability tactic that PSP uses is protests against the Austin Police Department. Protests are typically aimed at what PSP refers to as "corrupt cops of the month" (Peaceful Streets Project 2015). However, the two protests I attended were aimed at the Austin Police Department and the Leander, Texas Police Department for the shooting and killing of two citizens' dogs (fieldnotes, September 21, 2013 and November 9, 2013). The shooting and killing of dogs is an issue that has been addressed at the protest and at PSP's annual police accountability summit (fieldnotes, August 17, 2013). The protest allowed me

not only to gain insight into an additional reason for holding the police accountable, but also to have a conversation with Julian, a male white Latino PSP member about the risks associated with PSP activism. He told me, "they [the police] can arrest you for anything if you don't know your rights. That's why you have to film them. They could arrest us right now if they wanted to because they could say that we are illegally protesting or that we are doing something wrong" (fieldnotes, September 21, 2013). Julian's argument suggests that cop watching is not the only form of high-risk activism in which PSP members participate; protests also become a site for risk. Indeed, protests are cited in the literature as a common example of a form of contentious collective action (Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

All seven respondents state that the group typically cop watches in east Austin and on Sixth Street, because these areas are where police activity and abuse are high due to the demographic characteristics of people who live and socialize there (Dottolo and Stewart 2008; Feagin 1991; Goffman 2009; Mbuba 2010; Sadler et al. 2012; Weitzer and Tuch 2005, 2006). Jack, a middle-class white man who identifies as a conservative Republican elaborated in interview:

"Well there's a lot [police abuse] on Sixth Street. Or there used to be a lot on Sixth Street. There's a lot in east Austin I would say. Well I'd say it's because more people are out on the streets and out late at night in that area. That's one reason at least. Another reason might be that they [the police] can get away with it."

I asked Jack why he thinks the police can "get away" with misconduct on Sixth Street and in East Austin. He replied, "Those people don't have enough political power to prevent it." Jack's statement implies that people of color and people from lower socioeconomic statuses do not have enough political power to address or prevent police abuse. While studies have shown that

people of color and people from lower socioeconomic statuses are targeted by the police (Dottolo and Stewart 2008; Feagin 1991; Goffman 2009; Mbuba 2010; Sadler et al. 2012; Weitzer and Tuch 2005, 2006), suggesting that certain communities do not have enough political power to address police accountability shows the privilege in the ideologies associated with PSP members. That is, PSP members are participating in a form of collective action where their privilege allows them to act collectively on the behalf of groups that they do not think have enough power (Russell 2011).

High-risk collective action is often racialized and gendered (Gordon 2008; Irons 1998; Robnett 1996) and the police do systemically abuse people of color and people from lower socioeconomic statuses (Dottolo and Stewart 2008; Feagin 1991; Goffman 2009; Mbuba 2010; Sadler et al. 2012; Weitzer and Tuch 2005, 2006). However, the assumption that certain communities do not have power is problematic because there are other factors that play into activist participation (Gordon 2008; Irons 1998; Loveman 1998; McAdam 1986; Robnett 1996). In the next section, I address the factors that go into activist participation with PSP and how PSP's high-risk collective action creates a context for racialized, gendered, and classed participation.

Racialized, Classed, and Gendered Police Accountability Activism Participation

The use of high-risk collective action and contentious politics to address police accountability allows for membership participation in PSP to be racialized, classed, and gendered. Numerous studies show that people of color are more likely than white people to be systemically abused by the police and that black men are far more likely than white men to be incarcerated (Alexander 2011; Feagin 1991; Goffman 2009; Sadler et al. 2012). In addition, research on high-risk activism discusses the factors that play into gender exclusion in activist work (Gordon 2008; Irons 1998; Robnett 1996).

During interviews and community meetings, PSP activists explain the problems associated with racial profiling and police misconduct and recognize that people of color and people from lower socioeconomic statuses are more likely than white people and middle-class people to be abused by the police (fieldnotes, September 12, 2013). In fact, all seven respondents state that people of color and people from lower socioeconomic statuses are more likely to be victims of police abuse. So why are the members of PSP white, middle class woman, why PSP members are predominately white, middle-class men during her interview she stated, "Well, because they care. I think that a lot of people of lower socioeconomic statuses and people of color do believe that it's just the way it is and learn to tolerate it within their communities."

Catherine's response resonates with previous research on privileged group members participating in collective action on behalf of marginalized groups out of sympathy (Russell 2011). I argue that her response is also problematic because she suggests that people of color and people from lower socioeconomic statuses are monolithic groups that do not recognize their oppression. Research suggests that people of color and people from lower socioeconomic statuses do recognize the injustices committed by the police toward communities of color and lower social classes, but there might be other factors that play into the lack of activist participation (Mbuba 2010; Weitzer and Tuch 2005, 2006).

For instance, during the annual police accountability summit, a panel discussed the prevalence of police shooting and killing dogs. Julian, a white Latino man (and also one of the activists I later interviewed), was one of the members of the panel and told his story:

"Another victim of dog shootings was Julian, a Latino man whose dog was shot three times because the police thought his dog was aggressive. He tried to work with the police department and went to the media, but nothing was done and he was

given no answers as to why his dog was shot…After the speakers shared their stories, the audience asked questions…The last question an audience member asked was directed to the first speaker, a white woman, on dog shootings. A man in the audience asked her if the reason the police helped her and not Julian had anything to do with her skin color. She agreed and said that the police were probably more willing to work with her because she was white."

During the panel and at a protest I attended with with Julian, he told me and other members about how the police and the media are not helping him with his case because he is classified as a person of color (fieldnotes, August 17, 2013 and September 21, 2013). It is not that Julian does not recognize the injustices committed by the police toward communities of color like Catherine previously asserted. He does recognize his mistreatment by the police, but the police often stereotype people of color as criminals and are more likely to help white victims of crime, which makes it harder for him to get justice from law enforcement (Howerton 2006; King, Messner, and Baller 2009).

In addition to one member of PSP arguing that PSP's lack of diversity is because some communities do not recognize their oppression, another member suggests that people of color have given up on police accountability. When I interviewed Antonio, the founder of PSP and a racially mixed, middle-class man who identifies as libertarian, I asked him why PSP lacks diversity. He explained:

"I think that minorities, in general, have given up on police accountability… I personally believe it can be different because we are engaging the specific demographic that you pointed out because quite frankly the establishment doesn't care what poor black people think or poor Hispanic people think. But they do tend to care about what middle-income white people think, so I think that's powerful."

While the establishment might value the opinions of white, middle-class people more than people of color and lower socioeconomic statuses, other factors play into the lack of diversity among PSP members. For instance, previous literature has shown that police officers are more likely to target and shoot black and Latino people than they are white people and that black men are fearful of the police because of racial profiling and try to avoid police encounters.

Given the empirical evidence, it is understandable that people of color would not engage in high-risk activism such as filming the police with PSP because many members are arrested while filming. For instance, Alice Goffman (2009) found in her ethnographic study of an urban area in Philadelphia that black men avoid the police in their everyday lives because of the risk of arrest and abuse. Specifically, police officers create what Goffman (2009, 353) refers to as a "climate of fear and suspicion" in the community. That is, lower-class black men are afraid of the police because of the risk of arrest and avoid not only the police, but also dangerous places and interactions.

Feagin's (1991) research on race and public discrimination also highlights the fear of the police because the police and the public often equate black men with criminality. To avoid the dangerous implications of being viewed as criminals, black men use their middle-class resources to avoid police mistreatment, or try to avoid the police altogether (Feagin 1991). These two studies highlight the potential consequences of people of color filming the police. Because PSP members are often arrested, people of color who film the police could be put at a higher risk for arrest, which would continue to perpetuate the perceived criminality of people of color and higher incarceration rates among people of color, especially black men (Alexander 2011, Feagin 1991; Goffman 2009). Additionally, a PSP member posted a video of an Austin Police Association member publicly threatening PSP members with violence. So not only would people of color be put at a higher

risk for arrest, they could also even be victims of violence since research shows that police officers use unnecessary force and often shoot and kill people of color at higher rates (Sadler et al. 2012).

In addition to participation in PSP being racialized and classed, it is also gendered. No women attended the two cop watches I observed and there were very few women at the two protests, which are PSP's riskier tactics. In fact, the only occasions when women were actively participating in PSP events were during the summit, community meetings, and the mail to jail event. Catherine, a middle-class white woman, addressed the absence of women from some PSP tactics by explaining in interview that cop watching is a male-dominated tactic and many women left PSP because they were offended by Antonio's use of language: "When Antonio is calling cops pigs and cowards, it does turn off the female population… I'm working with the women who are offended by the Peaceful Streets and we're going to put on an anti-oppression training at Brave New Books." Joshua also elaborated on the gender dynamics in PSP by stating during interview that "there were some internal conflicts and accusations of sexism committed by Antonio from some of the female members." Both Catherine and Joshua explain that sexism and gender exclusion in PSP impacts activist participation. That is, some women experienced sexism behind the scenes of PSP and no longer wanted to participate with the group.

Research on gender in high-risk activist contexts has shown that women activists experience sexism and are often not in leadership roles. Instead, many women work behind the scenes and are less likely than men to participate in high-risk activism (Gordon 2008; Irons 1998; Robnett 1996). The empirical data on gender and activism thus mirror some of the gendered patterns in PSP such as women not participating in cop watches and working behind the scenes by helping with organizing instead of participating in direct action.

In sum, the high-risk contentious collective action in PSP allows for participation to be racialized, classed, and gendered. The high-risk context of the activism and the racialized, classed, and gendered assumptions impact group membership and the roles the members take. White, middle-class men are able to collectively act in riskier forms of activism, while women, people of color and people from lower socioeconomic classes may be excluded from participation or participate behind the scenes.

Discussion and Conclusion

Using participant observation, interviews, and organizational materials, this research analyzed the collective action, contentious politics, and racialized, gendered, and classed participation of a police accountability organization. My findings suggest that PSP uses high-risk collective action and contentious politics as a way to address police accountability. The group is associated with conservative ideologies, which contribute to their contentious politics. PSP's claims of contention against the Austin Police Department then inform their collective action, which utilizes high-risk tactics such as cop watching and protests in order to disrupt a form of government. In addition, my findings indicate that the white, male, middle-class characteristics of PSP members stem from the fact that people of color may be fearful of being involved with police accountability activism because of racial profiling and police abuse, which allows for white, middle-class PSP members to use their privilege to address police accountability.

My findings are in line with previous scholarship showing that solidarity and social ties are important in collective action (McAdam 1986; McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). Similar political beliefs create social ties that help bring PSP members together to try to achieve a common goal of disrupting the police and not relying on the police for protection. This study also adds to the literature on high-risk collective action by expanding on what is characterized as high-risk, as well as on the racialized, classed, and gendered dimensions of

high-risk Collecective action. Drawing on ethnographic data, this article has added to the scant literature on police accountability organizations and activists by exploring the various experiences and tactics of police accountability activists and the ways race, class, and gender impact member participation. A limitation of this study is that I was only able to focus on one police account-ability group. Future research should attempt to examine multiple police accountability groups in order to have a better grasp on the experiences, goals, and tactics of police accountability activists. Another limitation is that I only focused on PSP members and not on members of the Austin community who might experience police abuse. Additional research should focus on communities of color and their attitudes toward police accountability activism, instead of police accountability activists' ideas and assumptions about people of color's involvement.

PSP is a complicated organization because its group dynamics are both conservative and progressive. These nuances are important because they shed light on understandings of po-lice accountability and police abuse. While many members of PSP express sincere empathy with communities that experience police misconduct, they are not necessarily in solidarity with these com-munities and often make troubling racialized assumptions. Mem-bers of PSP hope to see the organization grow and believe it is on the verge of becoming a social movement. New chapters of PSP and other police accountability organizations have recently been established throughout the country and the members of these new chapters are also predominately white, middle-class men. If PSP wants to continue to successfully mobilize as an organiza-tion, whether with high-risk or milder tactics, they will need to build coalitions with diverse groups in Austin and throughout the country to create a way for all communities to protect and serve each other.

TABLE 1: Participant Observation

Date	Time	Event	Duration
8/17/13	10:30am-12:30pm	Summit	2 hours
9/12/13	6:35pm-8:45pm	Meeting	2 hours, 10 minutes
9/21/13	12:00pm-2:00pm	Protest	2 hours
9/26/13	6:15pm-8:35pm	Mail to Jail	2 hours 20 minutes
10/5/13	10:00pm-12:40am	Cop Watch	2 hours, 40 minutes
11/9/13	12:00pm-2:00pm	Protest	2 hours
11/14/13	7:00pm-9:15pm	Meeting	2 hours, 15 minutes
11/15/13	10:00pm-3:00am	Cop Watch	5 hours

Total hours of participant observation = 20 hours, 15 minutes

ENDNOTES

1. MikeHansonArchives. "Austin Police Union Thug Wayne Vincent Threatens Peaceful Streets Project With Violence." YouTube Video, 4:38, June 25, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hb9_3_WuE7E

TABLE 2: Interviewee Demographics

Respondent	Gender	Race Ethnicity	Age	Political Orientation	Social Class
Jack (Pseudonym)	Man	White	62	Conservative Republican	Working
Antonio	Man	Mixed	37	Libertarian	Middle
Richard	Man	White	52	Liberatarian	Middle
Catherine	Woman	White	29	Voluntaryist	Middle
Joshua	Man	White	27	Communist	Worker
Julian	Man	White Latino	45	Non-Partisan	Lower
Ben	Man	White	37	Direct Democracy	Middle

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