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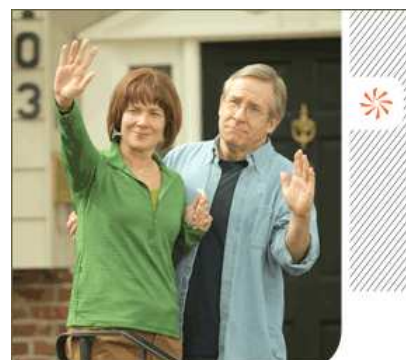
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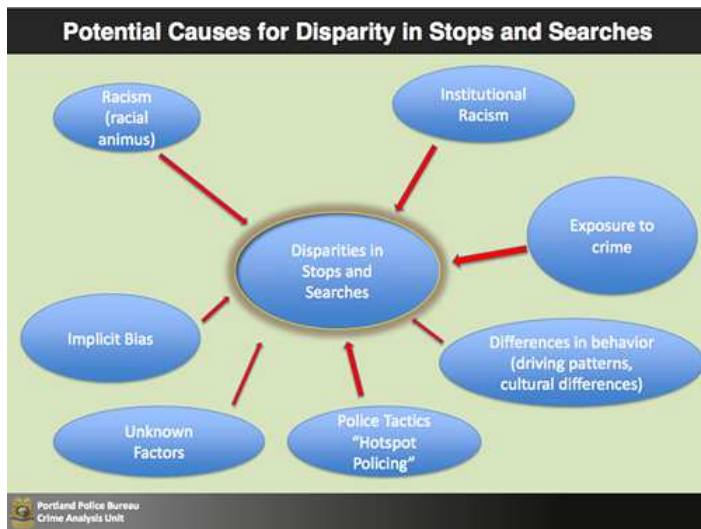
cops What's Behind the Racial Disparity in Traffic Stops? Maybe Racism, Police Actually Acknowledge

POSTED BY DENIS C. THERIAULT ON MON, JUN 25, 2012 AT 4:17 PM

The Portland Police Bureau last week made an eye-opening admission when presenting its most recent batch of data breaking down traffic and pedestrian stops by race and ethnicity.

The new numbers, for 2010, still show **a persistent disparity between how often whites and blacks in Portland are stopped and then searched.** And for the first time that anyone can remember, the bureau swallowed hard and admitted something it's often struggled to say:

Part of the problem might really be racism. Overt, institutional, and even "implicit" racism—which means someone might be a little racist without even realizing they are. The admission came during a police bureau presentation of the stats to the city's Community and Police Relations Committee, whose mission includes tackling racial tensions between cops and citizens. It was noticed immediately.



"It's great. It's amazing. It's a huge jump from where we were," says Dan Handelman of Portland Copwatch, who remembers when some cops didn't want the city's 2008 "racial profiling" committee to be named as such. "They wanted it to be called the bias-based policing committee, because they didn't think racial profiling existed."

What led to the breakthrough? Sergeant Greg Stewart, who works in the bureau's 3-year-old stat-crunching unit and devised the bureau's **presentation (pdf)**, explains it pretty simply: Not saying so would be intellectually dishonest.

"People can be saying the same things but saying them in such a way that folks end up talking at each other or past each other," he says, adding that it was such an obvious component, historically and even right now, that he "was surprised" everyone else was so surprised he offered it.

Stewart does add a caution: Acknowledging racism in the ranks, or in policies, still won't tell the whole story about why traffic stop numbers break so starkly along racial and ethnic lines. He also mentions the usual factors raised by cops: socioeconomic, crime rates, targeted actions like gang enforcement "hotspots," etc. Those things matter as context, he says—and, based on what the bureau decides are its public safety priorities, may not even change much.

But even context only goes so far. Hence the olive branch. Next up? Figuring out how to fix things.

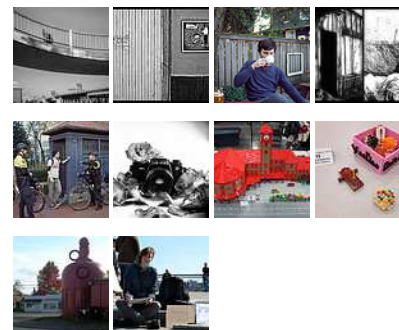
"Context is important. But owning [potential racism] is important, too," Stewart says. "We don't to make excuses, either."

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 Just wondering: Has there been any reduction in crime, and if so, does anyone think the reduction is related to stopping and searching people?

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Posted by **ROM** on 06/25/2012 at 4:53 PM

 There is a real and important difference between finding more crime and preventing crime. Hotspot policing is better at the former than the latter.

That said, the admission by the PPD that racism, institutional and otherwise, may be contributing to disparities in who is stopped is meaningful.

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Posted by **Super Chundy** on 06/25/2012 at 5:58 PM

 Yes, I think it's safe to say that racism is part of it. But as a poor white person, I ask why nobody has yet (as far as I am aware) suggested that classism might also be a component?


It's often really hard to discern the color of a driver at night, especially from a distance and without a direct view, but it's considerably easier to estimate the driver's class position from simple observation of the car. For example, perhaps those who drive clunkers are both disproportionately likely to both be of color and to be stopped.



Driving While Black exists, why not consider and address Driving While Poor? Because it's harder to quantify, or because there is no Poor constituency of consequence?

Terry Pratt, North Portland


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Posted by **Terry Pratt** on 06/26/2012 at 1:11 PM

 Terry has an interesting point...I have seen numerous traffic violations near a police officer that did not result in being stopped. The vehicles:upper end or luxury. The drivers:White or Asian....coincidence? The economic factor seems to be a component however

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Posted by **The Showstopper** on 06/26/2012 at 2:27 PM

 Chundy: "Hotspot policing is better at the former than the latter." Oh, I thought I read a while ago that it was the other way around.. but maybe I'm not remembering correctly (I'm not being sarcastic).

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Posted by **ROM** on 06/26/2012 at 3:22 PM

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


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