

Perceptions of police among youth who use drugs from  
three communities in British Columbia, Canada:

## Findings from the *Youth Experiences with Police (YEP) Project*

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## Background: Policing & youth who use drugs (YWUD)

- In US: Less positive than adults (Taylor et al. 2001)
- Perceptions contribute to views of police legitimacy, integrity and confidence (Tyler, 1990)
- YWUD:
  - Approach makes a difference (Lancaster et al., 2013)
  - Likelihood of encounters & outcomes (Ti, et al., 2013; Werb et al., 2014)
  - Negative expectations leads to police avoidance (Weitzer and Brunson 2009)

The current study:  
YWUD Experiences  
with Police

- Learn more about experiences with police among YWUD
  - Street checks
  - Police discretion
- What are YWUD perceptions of police and how are they shaped?
- How can we foster more positive relations?

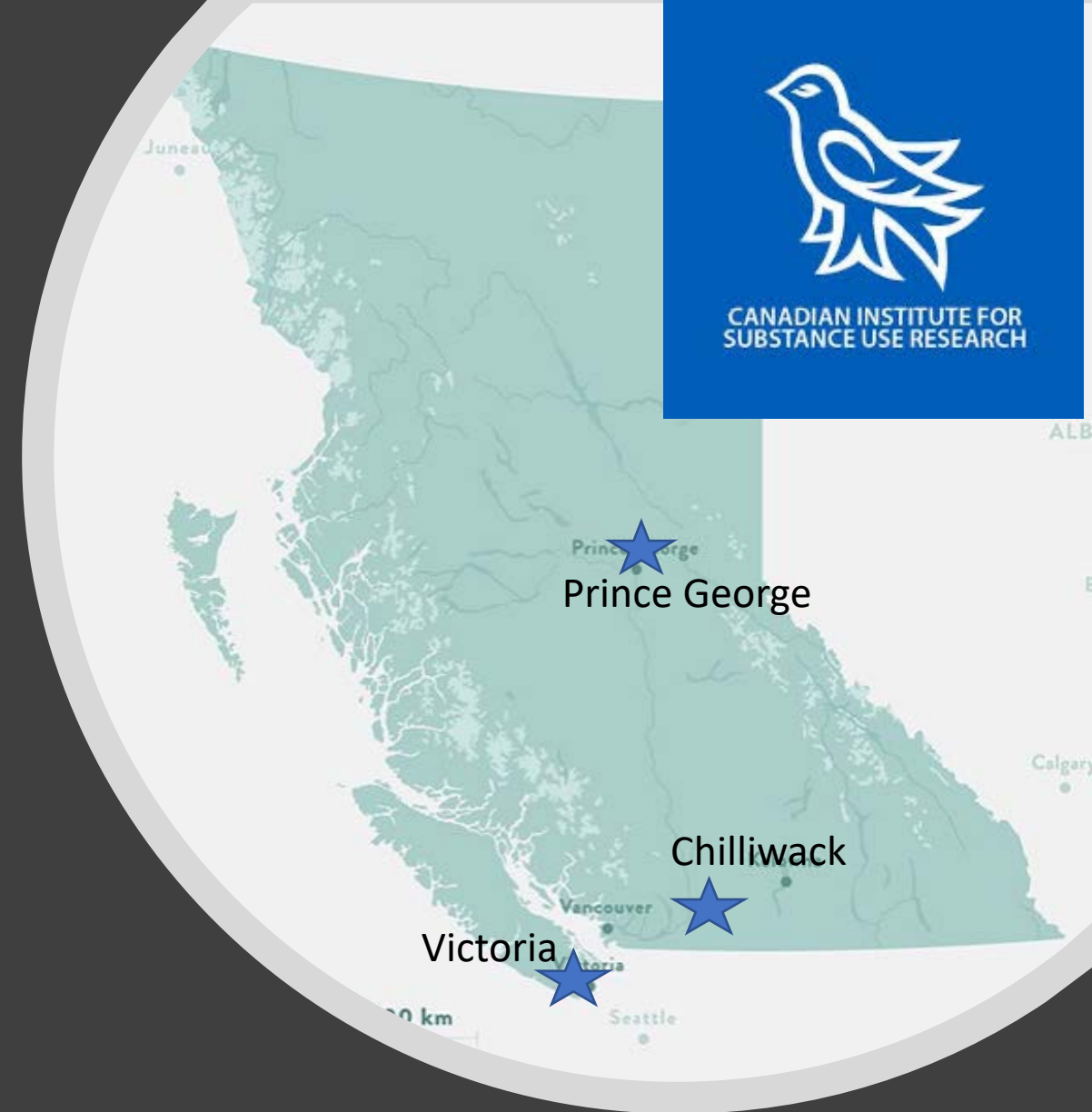
# Youth Experiences with Police (YEP) Project

PI: Dr. Scott Macdonald, Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, University of Victoria

- Mixed methods
  - Qualitative (n=38)
  - Quantitative (n=449)
- Three sites in BC
- Respondent driven sampling
- Interviews lasted approx. 1 hour
- \$30 CAD cash honorarium



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# Qualitative methods

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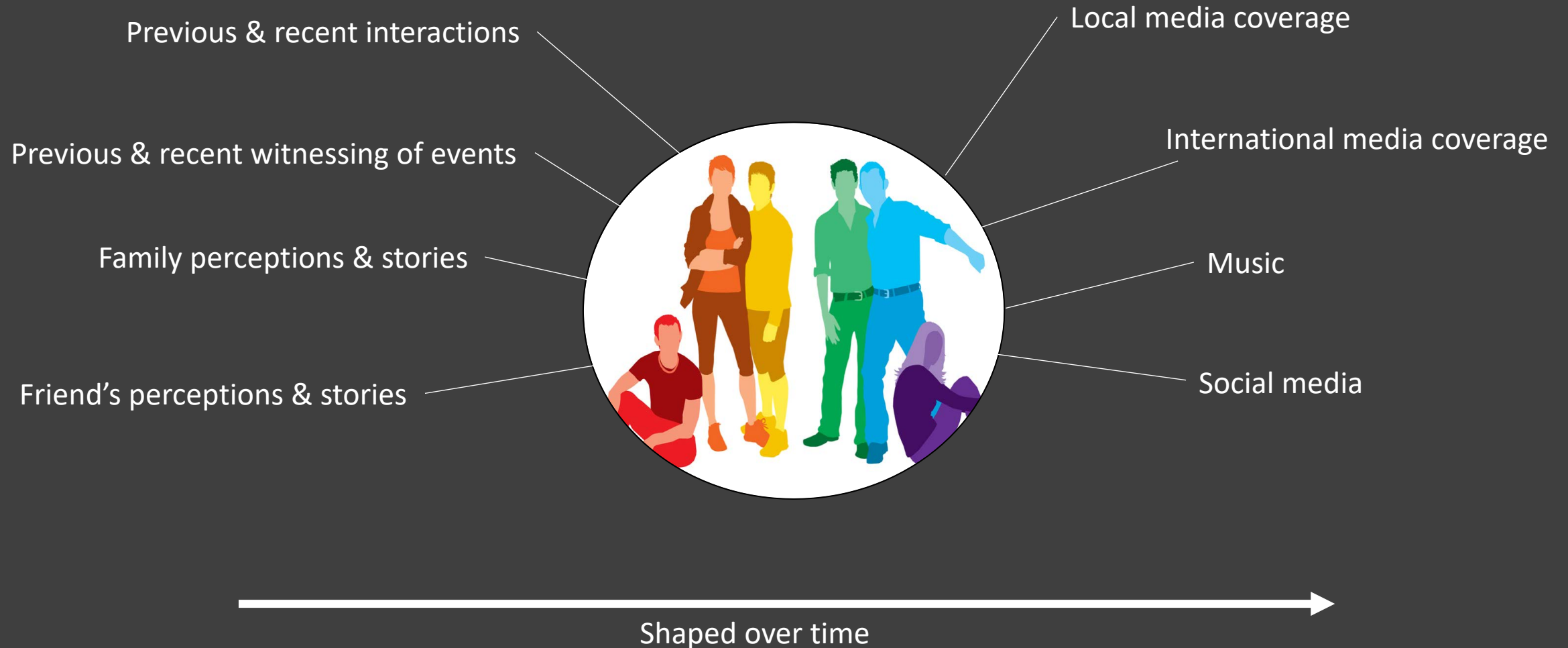
- Questions vetted by the community
- Collaborative, thematic analysis with multiple coders
- Critical theoretical lens

# Qualitative sample (n=38)

Age		
	16-20	39.5%
	21-25	36.8%
	26-30	23.7%
Gender		
	Female	39.5%
	Male	57.9%
	Other	2.6%
Ethnicity		
	White	52.6%
	Indigenous	26.3%
	Other	21.1%

Drug use		
	Mainly marijuana	47.4%
	Mainly opioids	10.5%
	Mainly mixed	42.1%
Street involvement		
	No	42.1%
	Yes	42.1%
	N/A or maybe	15.8%

# What shapes YWUD's perceptions of police?

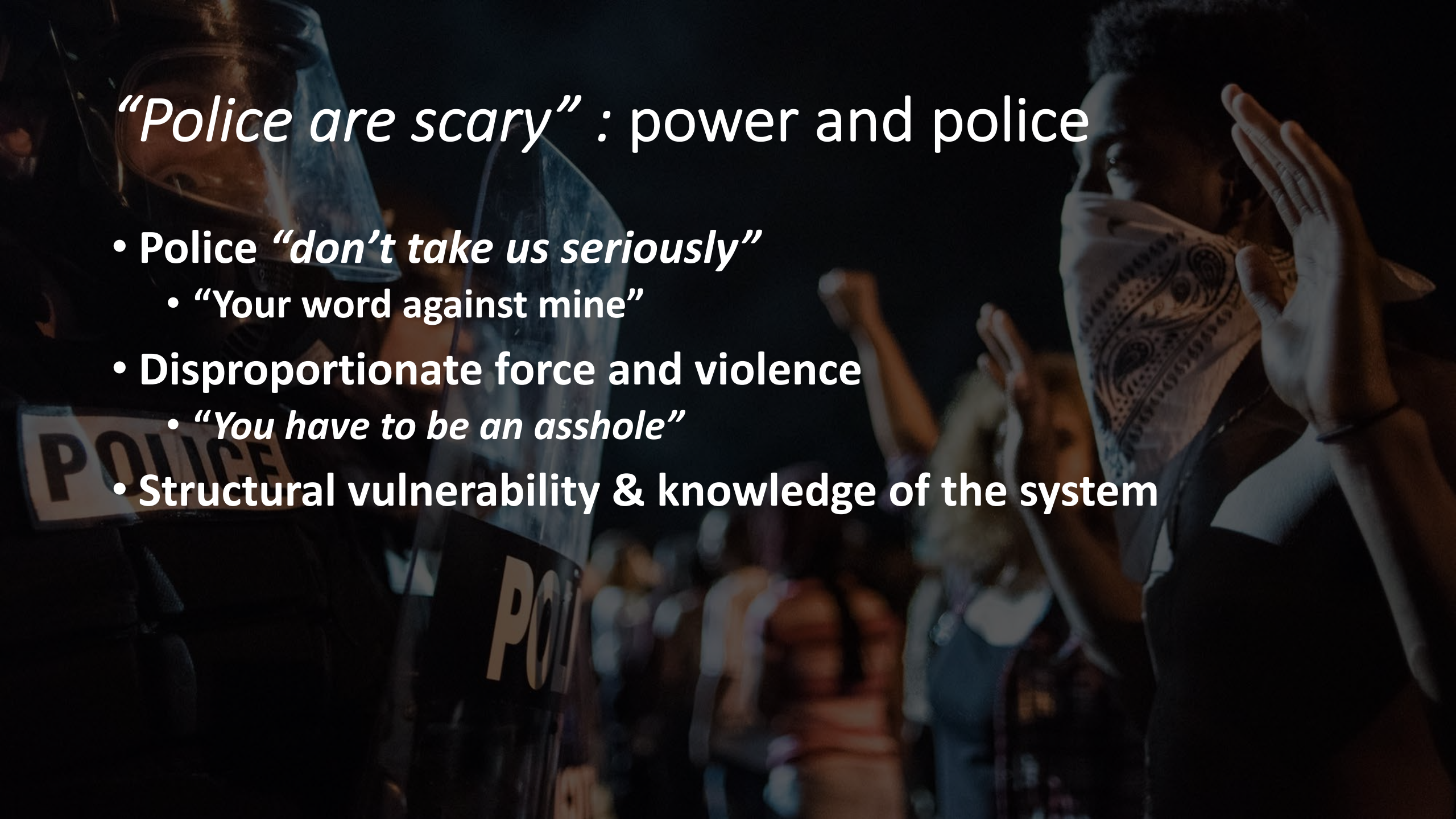


# “Good cop, bad cop”

- Differences of perceptions based on police:
  - Gender
  - RCMP vs City police
  - Senior vs Junior
  - By community & culture
  - Specific police: bullies vs allies





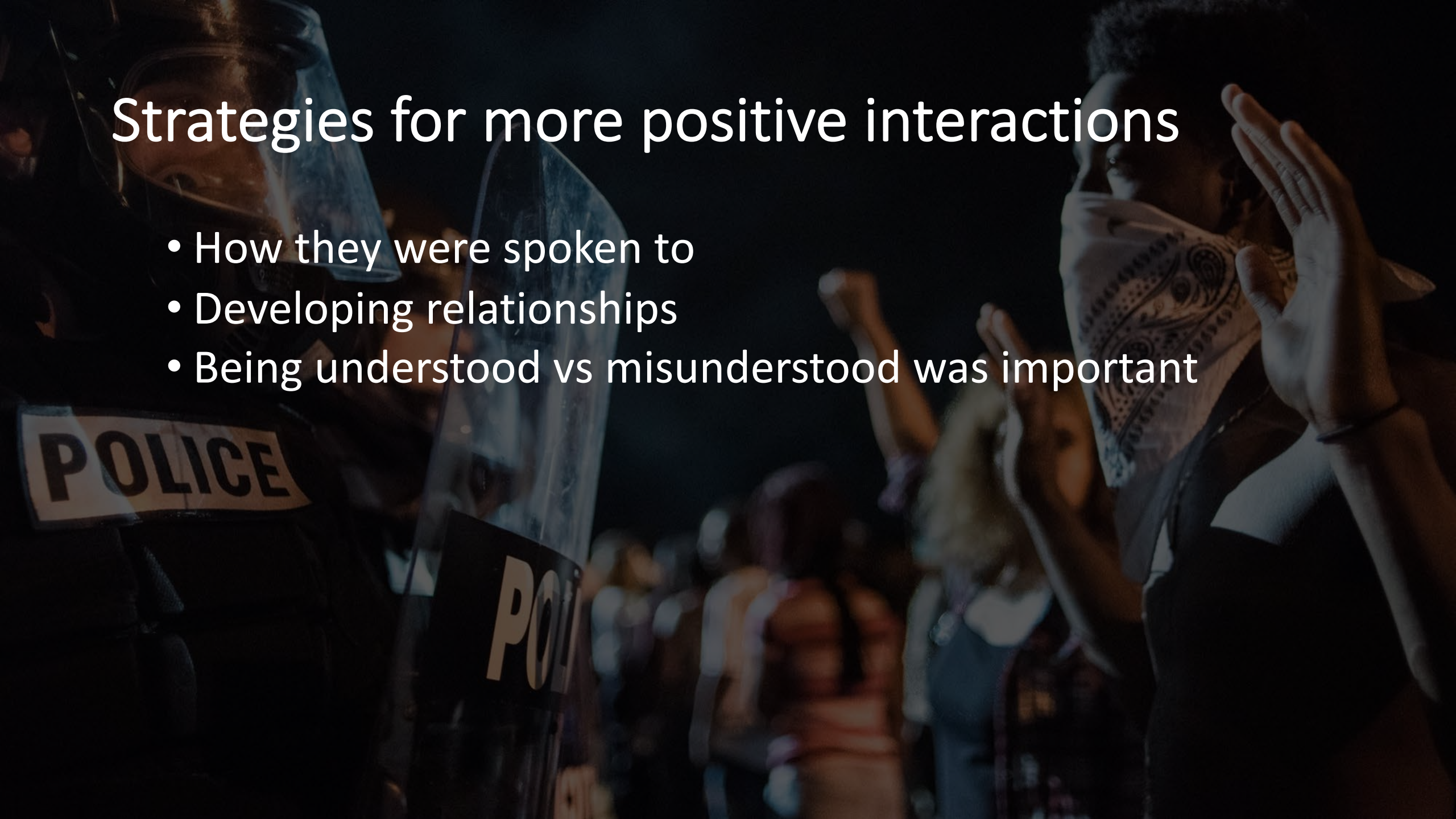


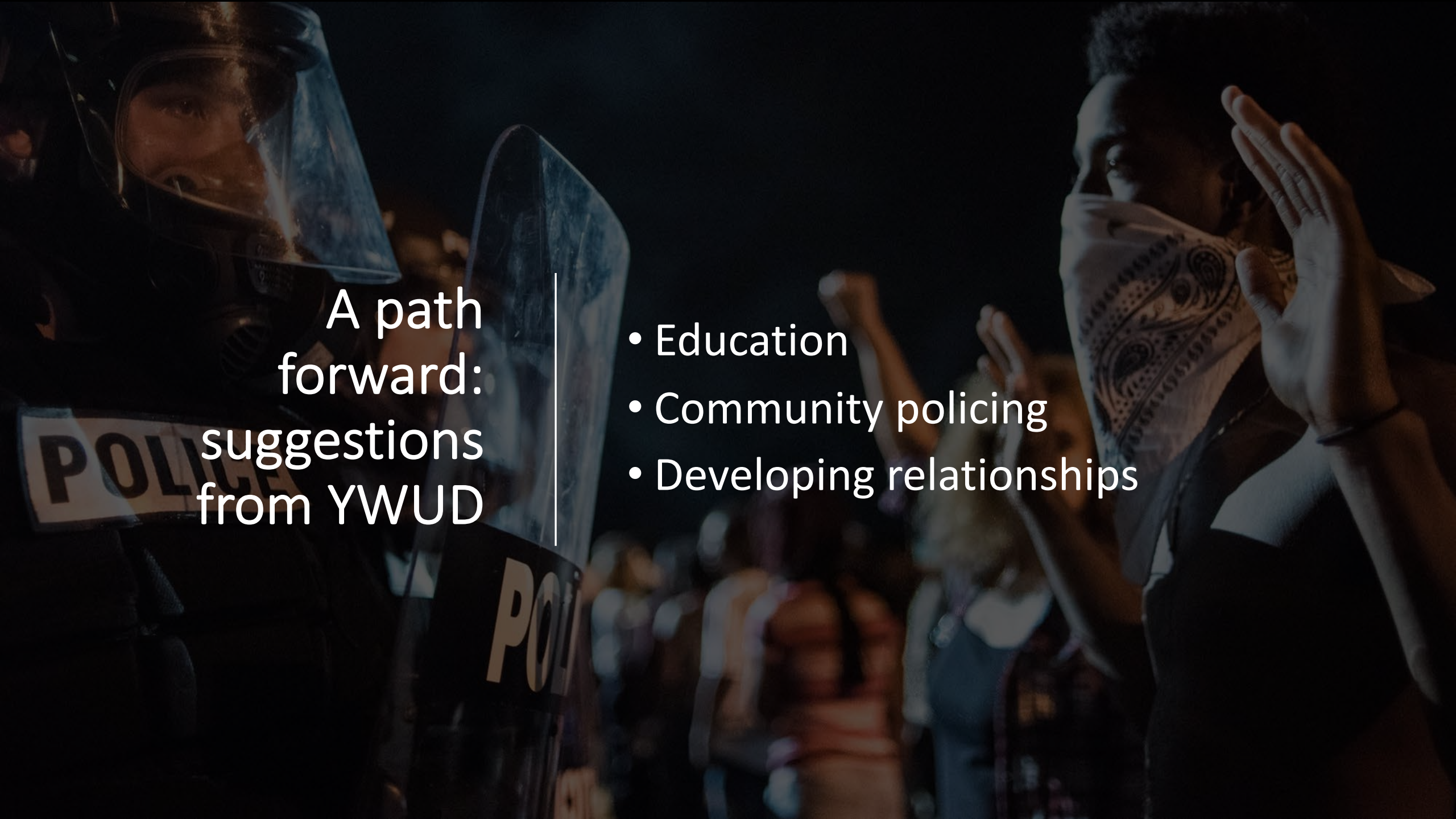
## *“Police are scary”* : power and police

- Police *“don’t take us seriously”*
  - *“Your word against mine”*
- Disproportionate force and violence
  - *“You have to be an asshole”*
- Structural vulnerability & knowledge of the system

# Strategies for more positive interactions

- How they were spoken to
- Developing relationships
- Being understood vs misunderstood was important





A path  
forward:  
suggestions  
from YWUD

- Education
- Community policing
- Developing relationships

# Why this matters

Fear of the police and learned powerlessness

Variability and police discretion

Youth are structurally vulnerable to policing harms

Questions?

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