

THE ROLE OF POLICE BEHAVIOR IN PREDICTING CITIZENS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE POLICE

**Avdi S. Avdija, Ph.D.
Indiana State University**

The purpose of this research article is to determine the extent to which police behavior affects citizens' attitudes toward the police. Additionally, this study attempts to determine whether or not citizen interaction with the police and citizens' demographic characteristics have a significant effect on attitudes toward the police – after introducing police behavior into the model. The findings of this research study are based on the analyses of the data collected through a self-administered survey questionnaire distributed to 304 undergraduate students as part of a larger study on crime-reporting behavior. The ordinary least square regression analyses suggest that police behavior is the strongest determinant of citizens' attitudes toward the police, followed by citizens' demographic characteristics.

How are the police doing? Generally, little is known about the spectrum of factors that influence citizens' attitudes toward the police and the relationships that the police build with the community. One recent research review concluded that “there is no consensus as to which combinations of variables explain the greatest variance in attitudes toward the police” (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004, p. 2) but, certainly we can say that there are a variety of factors that come into play when discussing people's attitudes toward policing. A great deal of research has been conducted attempting to explore public perceptions of the police. However, most studies have been exclusively focused on citizens' views of police use of force (Alpert & Dunham, 2004; Engel & Smith, 2009; Johnson & Kuhns, 2009; Klinger & Brunson, 2009; McCluskey, Terrill, & Paoline, 2005; Seron, Pereira, & Kovath, 2006; Terrill, 2009). Comparatively, not enough research has been conducted concerning the multidimensionality of public attitudes toward the police. Specifically, there is little in-depth examination of public attitudes toward the police and the factors associated with each dimension of this construct. Even less research exists that employs a deductive logic that would help us better understand public attitudes toward the police. A considerable effort, however, has been made in examining the complexity of this subject only in the past two decades (Hawdon & Ryan, 2003; Hurst & Frank, 2000; Miller & Davis, 2008; Nihart, Lersch, Sellers, & Mieczkowski, 2005; Salmi, Voeten, & Keskinen, 2005; Stoutland, 2001; Tyler, 2005; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005a 2005b).

When focusing the study beyond the individual level, we can argue that there are several factors that have been shown to be empirically associated with shaping citizens' attitudes toward policing. The most researched factors that have persistently shown such association with attitudes toward the police are the number of contacts with the police; types of contacts with the police (e.g., citizen-initiated and police-initiated contacts); satisfaction with police services; personal experiences with the police; trust in the police; the effect of

the mass media; and demographic factors such as race, age, gender, and socio-economic status (Byrne, Conway, & Ostermeyer, 2005; Cheuprakobkit, 2000; Davis, 2000; Delores, 2000; Frank, Smith, & Novak, 2005; Kennedy & Homant, 1983; Nihart et al., 2005; Salmi, Voeten, & Keskinen, 2000; Schafer, Huebner, & Byrum, 2003; Skogan, 2005; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005a, 1999). Additionally, fear of the police, resulting from negative experiences with the police, is another factor that has a great impact on how the police are viewed in the eyes of the public. This public fear mainly is caused by police misconduct (e.g., use of excessive force, corruption, verbal abuse, etc.) and questionable police legitimacy (Bickford, 2004; Davis & Henderson, 2003; Garner & Maxwell, 1999; Goldsmith, 2005; Hurst & Frank, 2000; Stoutland, 2001; Taylor, 2003).

Many researchers have attempted to limit attitudes toward the police as being uniformly distributed within racial or ethnic groups (Rosenbaum, Schuck, Costello, Hawkins, & Ring, 2005). Such limitation, however, would ignore empirical evidence that links the influence of demographic factors and a variety of other factors (e.g., police behavior, quality and quantity of contacts with the police) on attitudes toward the police (Rosenbaum et al., 2005). Therefore, attitudes toward the police extend beyond demographic characteristics of individuals. This is not to say that demographic characteristics do not influence attitudes toward the police; it only means that they become stronger when coupled with other important factors such as police behavior and interaction with the police. Race, for example, has long been a strong predictor of attitude toward the police (Weitzer & Tuch, 1999, 2005a, 2005b). Historically, the relationship between minorities and the police has been challenging, as Howell and his associates put it: “fluctuating from being mildly strained to openly confrontational” (Howell, Perry, & Vile, 2004, p. 45).

Like race, ethnicity, with reference to subgroups who have common cultural heritage, as distinguished by customs and in some instances language, plays an important role on how the police are viewed in the eyes of the public (Chow, 2002). Over a broad spectrum, research shows that minorities express less favorable attitudes toward the police; yet, within minority groups there are significant differences concerning the police. That is, different ethnic communities express an elevated level of positive or negative attitudes toward the police. Taking Hispanics, Asians, and African-Americans, for instance, there is a disparity between these three ethnic groups regarding their attitudes toward the police. In this context, research shows that Hispanics and Asians tend to have more favorable attitudes toward the police compared to African Americans (Chow, 2002; Holdaway, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005a). Additionally, by race/ethnicity, minorities who live in abject status are more likely to express dissatisfaction with the police. However, race/ethnicity is not an inherent factor that affects one’s attitudes toward the police. It is the experience and treatment, which is more pronounced in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, that affects one’s attitudes toward the police.

Moreover, there are other factors, such as a neighborhood’s crime conditions and socio-economic status that affects one’s attitudes toward the police (Howell et al., 2004; Tuch & Weitzer, 1997; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005b). Evidently, Blacks experience harsher treatment by the police. Historically, Blacks always have been disproportionately represented in

cases where police brutality was reported. Inevitably, this factor has led Black residents to form negative views of the police (Weitzer, 2000; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999, 2005a, 2005b). In terms of socio-economic status (SES), empirical evidence shows that people who live in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods or have low socio-economic status are more likely to display negative attitudes toward the police (Huebner, Schafer, & Bynum 2004; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998; Weitzer, 2000; Wu, Sun, & Triplett, 2009).

In addition to race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, gender also is related to the shaping attitudes toward the police (Hawdon & Ryan, 2003; Kennedy & Homant, 1983; Salmi et al., 2000). Research shows that females generally hold more favorable attitudes toward the police (O'Connor, 2008; Taylor, Turner, Esbensen, & Winfree, 2001; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). One possible explanation as to why, in this case, males hold less favorable attitudes compared to females is the frequency of contacts with the police. According to Bureau of Justice Statistics (2002), in 2001 males had a per capita rate of contact with the police about 20% higher than females. About one out of every 4.3 males age 16 or older had contact with a police officer in the year 2001.

The Present Study

Although a considerable amount of empirical research has been accumulated in this area, new empirical evidence is needed. In this context, one objective of the present study is to challenge the research findings in prior studies in this area. However, the main focus of the present study is to determine the extent to which citizens' attitudes are influenced following a negative experience with the police (e.g., police misconduct) and how more generalized attitudes are influenced by the interpretation of citizens' interaction with the police (e.g., citizen-initiated contacts and police-initiated contacts). This study goes beyond the influence of individuals' demographic characteristics and citizen interaction with the police on attitudes toward the police; it includes the influence of police behavior as a main determinant of attitudes toward the police. Thus, to address the influence of police behavior or police misconduct, interaction with the police, and demographic characteristics on attitudes toward the police, the following five research hypotheses were developed:

Ha (1): Individuals who have been exposed to police inappropriate behavior (i.e., the police treated them disrespectfully, were rude, were verbally abusive, or showed inclination to use force) are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward the police compared to those who have not been exposed to such police behavior.

Ha (2): Those who have had voluntary citizen-initiated contacts with the police are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward the police compared to those who have had involuntary police-initiated contacts with the police. In other words, citizen-initiated contacts with the police have a positive influence on attitudes toward the police, whereas, police-initiated contacts have a negative influence on attitudes toward the police.

Ha (3): Females are more likely to hold more favorable attitudes toward the police compared to males.

Ha (4): African Americans are more likely to hold more negative attitudes toward the police compared to Whites.

Ha (5): In general, individuals with higher socio-economic status (e.g., middle-class, upper middle-class, and the rich) are more likely hold positive attitudes toward the police compared to individuals of low socio-economic status (e.g., lower middle-class and the poor).

METHODS

This is a survey-based research study with a cross-sectional design, which implies that the collection of data has been carried out at one-point-in-time only (Maxfield & Babbie, 2008). Additionally, this research study is partially explanatory and partially descriptive in nature. The main objective of this research study is to determine which of the several hypotheses or explanations are empirically supported.

Participants and Design

The data for this analysis were collected in 2009 as part of a larger study on attitudes and crime-reporting behavior. A 141-item questionnaire was distributed to an availability sample of 304 undergraduate university students (169 males and 135 females) enrolled in liberal studies, who ranged in age from 18 to 54 years ($M = 21.9$, $SD = 4.9$). In terms of race/ethnicity, the majority of the participants identified themselves as Whites (71.1%), followed by African Americans (21.4%), Asians (1.3%), Hispanic/Latinos (1.3%), and others (4.9%). Additionally, to draw the sample, a two-stage cluster sampling procedure was adopted. The sample used in this study seems fairly representative of the population from which it was drawn. A comparison between the sample and the population shows that the demographic characteristics of the sample are slightly different from those of the population from which it was drawn. As a whole, this sample still can be considered representative since some of the demographics of the sample (e.g., mean age and gender) are representative of the population. There is a difference regarding race/ethnicity composition of the sample, with African Americans (+5.4%) and Asians (+.3%) being overrepresented. However, this difference does not affect the validity and the reliability of this study. This gives us a degree of confidence to conclude that even when adopting a convenient sampling procedure, the characteristics of the sample will not be much different from those of the population.

Measurements

Dependent Variable

The argument about attitudes in this study is that an attitude toward the police, as a single construct, is multidimensional. Attitudes in the context of policing consist of the following dimensions: trust in the police, satisfaction with the police, confidence in the

police, and fear of the police (Table 1) (Goldsmith, 2005; Ho & McKean, 2004; Howell et al., 2004; Macdonald & Stokes, 2006; Renauer, 2008; Salmi et al., 2005; Schafer et al., 2003; Skogan, 2005; Stoutland, 2001; Thomas & Hyman, 1977; Tyler, 2005; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999). Together, they measure and form a clearer picture of attitudes or a more complete domain of attitudes toward the police as a construct. This eliminates the concerns that we have about the content validity of the measurement – namely the scale – employed to measure attitudes toward the police in this study. For the purpose of this study, an attitude toward the police is defined as a behavioral tendency to act in certain ways toward social control mechanisms, toward the police in particular (see Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fazio & Williams, 1986; Morris & Maistro, 2007).

Attitude toward the police, the dependent variable, in this study was measured by a 30 Likert scale questions/items composite measure that was constructed to measure all four dimensions of attitudes toward the police. The Reliability analysis, as measured by using internal consistency of scores, indicates that this scale is highly reliable. It has a Cronbach's Alpha of .936.

Independent Variables

The second scale measures police behavior. Police behavior in this study is treated as an independent variable along with citizen interaction with the police (e.g., quality and quantity of contacts with the police) and demographic variables (e.g., gender, race, and socio-economic status). This scale consists of 22 Likert scale items (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) specifically designed to measure four types of police behavior; namely police impoliteness or rudeness/ignorance, verbal abuse, tendency to use force, and police disrespect toward citizens (Table 1). This scale had a Cronbach's Alpha of .927.

Additionally, to determine whether or not the respondents have introduced personal bias in their answers to other inventories, a 12-item personal reaction inventory was used (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; McCrae & Costa, 1983; Ray, 1984). People have a tendency to over-report or under-report activities that are considered to be socially or culturally desirable or undesirable (DeVellis, 2003; Moorman & Podsakoff, 1992; Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987). The concern with this effect is that the respondents who tend to respond in more socially desirable ways also may report more positive attitudes toward the police when in fact the reality is otherwise. This scale has a Cronbach's Alpha of .665, which is considered a minimally acceptable level of reliability (DeVellis, 2003). The correlation analysis shows that the effect of social desirability bias on respondents concerning the truthfulness of their responses was minimal, which adds to the validity and reliability of the research findings in this study.

The conceptual model and the dimensions of interests as conceptualized and measured in this study for three constructs; namely, police behavior, attitudes toward the police and social desirability are presented in Table 1. The full domain of both attitudes toward the police, the main dependent variable, and police behavior, the main independent variable, as constructs include four dimensions of interest (Table 1).

Table 1.
Conceptual Model and Measurement Model

Constructs	Dimensions of Interest	Measures (specific questions)
Police Behavior	1. Rude/Impolite 2. Verbally abusive 3. Disrespectful 4. Tendency to use force	22 Items (questions)
Attitudes toward the Police	1. Trust 2. Fear 3. Satisfaction 4. Confidence	30 Items (questions)
Social Desirability	Unidimensional	12 Items (questions)

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 predicted that police misconduct, police behavior, has a negative impact on citizens’ attitudes toward the police. To test this Hypothesis, I used ordinary least square (OLS) regression analysis. In Table 2, the bivariate regression analysis shows that police behavior has a statistically significant effect on attitudes toward the police. Thus, using $\alpha = .05$ criteria, we can conclude that there is a statistically significant interaction between police behavior and citizens’ attitudes toward the police. Based on this empirical evidence, hypothesis 1 is accepted. The unstandardized coefficient for police behavior is $b = -.82$, $t(302) = -14.87$, $p = .000$. This means that for every unit increase in police misconduct, we expect a .82 units decrease in attitudes toward the police score. Or on the reverse interpretation of it (the conversion), this means that it takes a decrease of 1.21 ($1/-.82 = -1.22$) units in police misconduct on a scale of 110 points total to yield a one unit improvement in attitudes toward the police, which is measured on a 150-point scale. However, I

Table 2.
Bivariate Regression Analysis: Regressing Attitudes Toward the Police on Police Behavior (n = 304)

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t
Constant	136.26	2.77	49.17***	
Police Behavior	-.82	.05	-.65	-14.87***

R² = .423
R = .650
F (1, 302) = 221.185***

Note: ***Significance at the .001 level (2-tailed). *Significance at the .05 level (2-tailed)

should note that the scales used to measure police behavior and attitudes toward the police do not have a true meaning of zero, rather they are interval level. Police behavior is measured on a scale of one to five with 22 items composite measure. A higher score indicates the presence of police misconduct, and a lower score indicates the absence of police misconduct. Attitudes toward the police also are measured on a scale of one to five with 30 items composite measure. A higher score on the attitude scale indicates positive attitudes toward the police, whereas a lower score indicates more negative attitudes toward the police. In summation, this means that if we reduce police misconduct by 1.22 on a five-point scale with 22 items, we can increase attitudes toward the police score by one unit. This tells us that citizens who have experienced police misconduct are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward the police.

Additionally, police behavior accounts for a large percentage of the variation in the mode. The explained variation when taking police behavior into account is $R^2 = .423$. In general terms, R^2 is the percentage of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable. Thus, when we take police behavior into account, we can explain approximately 42% of the variation in attitudes toward the police. In other words, we reduce the prediction error of attitudes toward the police by approximately 42% when we take police behavior into account.

When we combine the total explained variation, $R^2 = .495$, in attitudes toward the police, the dependent variable, at the multivariate level (Table 3), we can see that police behavior is the most important variable in the model. That is, when we add seven other predictors into the model, the explained variation in attitudes toward the police increases

Table 3.
Multivariate Regression Analysis: Regressing Attitudes Toward the Police on All Independent Variables (n = 304)

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t
Constant	110.53	6.74	--	16.38**
Age	.17	.18	.04	.93
Gender	3.92	1.89	.09	2.07*
Race	1.97	.70	.12	2.78**
SES	3.02	1.16	.11	2.60**
Frequency of Contacts	1.66	.80	.09	2.06*
Citizen-initiated Contacts	3.66	2.10	.08	1.74
Police-initiated Contacts	-4.64	2.31	-.09	-2.06*
Police Behavior	-.79	.05	-.62	-14.48***

$R^2 = .495$
 $R = .704$
 $F(8, 295) = 36.142***$

Note: ***Significance at the .001 level (2-tailed). **Significance at the .01 level (2-tailed). *Significance at the .05 level (2-tailed).

by about 7%. This tells us that police behavior makes up for the majority of the variation in attitudes toward the police. Additionally, the standardized coefficient for police behavior [partial $b = -.62$, $F(8, 195) = 36.142$, $p < .000$] is nearly six times greater than the individual coefficients of other variables in the model (Table 3).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that citizen-initiated contacts with the police are more likely to produce positive attitudes toward the police, whereas police-initiated contacts are more likely to produce a negative effect on citizens' attitudes toward the police. The results in Table 3 show that this hypothesis partially is supported. Empirical evidence shows that police-initiated contacts have a negative effect on citizens' attitudes toward the police ($b = -4.64$). This impact is statistically significant at $p < .05$. Citizen-initiated contacts, on the other hand, produced a positive influence on attitudes toward the police ($b = 3.66$). This effect, however, is not shown to be statistically significant at $p < .05$, a criteria used to accept or reject this hypothesis. In light of this evidence, therefore, hypothesis 3 partially is supported.

To further examine the differences between citizen-initiated and police-initiated contacts, in addition to OLS analysis, a paired-sample t-test was performed. As shown in Table 4, a paired-sample t-test revealed a significant differences in scores for the citizen-initiated contacts with the police and police-initiated contacts, $t(303) = -2.145$, $p < .05$. This indicates that the mean score for police-initiated contacts ($M = .72$) is significantly higher than the mean score of citizen-initiated contacts with the police ($M = .68$).

Table 4.
A Comparison of Mean Differences for Citizen-Initiated Contacts with the Police and Police-Initiated Contacts (n = 304)

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Number of Cases
Citizen-Initiated Contacts	.68	.484	304
Police-Initiated Contacts	.72	.448	304
Mean Difference -.095			
$p < .033$			

Hypothesis 3 predicted that females are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward the police compared to males. To test this hypothesis, I used OLS regression analysis. The partial coefficient for gender is 3.92, which means that we are measuring the effect of gender on attitudes toward the police while controlling for the effect of other variables in the model (Table 3).

In numerical terms, the partial coefficient for gender is $b_3 = 3.92$, $t(295) = 2.07$, $p = .039$, which means that an increase of one unit in gender produces an average positive linear contribution of 3.92 on the attitudes score. Or, on the reverse interpretation of it (the conversion), it takes an increase of .255 ($1/3.92 = .255$) units in gender to yield an increase of one in attitudes toward the police. Since gender is measured (0 = Female and 1 = Male), then this means the more masculine one is, the less feminine one is, the more favorable atti-

tudes toward the police that person would have, in absolute terms. This empirical evidence does not support the hypothesis about gender. Thus, females are less likely to hold positive attitudes toward the police compared to male counterparts. Additionally, using $\alpha = .05$ criteria, the effect of gender on attitudes toward the police is statistically significant at .05.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that African Americans are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward the police compared to whites. To test this hypothesis, a one-factor between-groups analysis of variance was conducted (Tables 5 and 6). The subjects were divided into six groups according to their race (group 1: Asians; group 2: African Americans; group 3: Latinos; group 4: Native Americans; group 5: Whites; and group 6: Multiracial). A one-factor analysis of variance (Table 5) shows that the mean responses for all racial groups are not the same. This means that the mean responses for African Americans and whites are not the same. The Post-Hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test (Table 6) indicates that the mean score for African Americans ($M = 86.16$, $SD = 18.95$, $p = .000$) was statistically different from the mean score of whites ($M = 101.70$, $SD = 20.78$). Thus, when looking within

Table 5.
One-Factor Analysis of Variance for Attitudes Toward the Police as a Function of Race/Ethnicity (n = 304)

Variable	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Asian	4	92.25	14.40	7.20
African American	65	86.16	18.95	2.35
Latino	4	97.75	4.11	2.05
Native Americans	1	97.00	-----	-----
White	216	101.70	20.78	1.41
Others	14	85.64	23.46	6.27
Total	304	97.45	21.33	1.22

Table 6.
Post-Hoc Comparisons Using the Tukey HSD Test Comparing Whites and all other Racial Groups (n = 304)

Variables	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Race I vs. Race II			
Whites vs. Asians	9.45	10.28	.358
Whites vs. African American	15.53	2.88	.000
Whites vs. Latinos	3.95	10.28	.701
Whites vs. Native Americans	4.70	20.42	.818
Whites vs. Others	16.06	21.09	.005

Note: In this study, the mean difference is considered significant at the .05 level

racial groups, African Americans are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward the police compared to whites and other racial groups [e.g., Asians ($M = 92.25$, $SD = 14.40$), Latinos ($M = 97.75$, $SD = 4.11$), and Native Americans]. It is noteworthy that the mean difference between whites and the “others” category also was statistically significant at $p < .01$ level. However, since the number of subjects in the “others” category was small, with only 14 in the sample, any statistical conclusions about this difference are unwarranted.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that people of higher socio-economic status (e.g., middle-class, upper middle-class, and the rich) are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward the police compared to individuals of lower socio-economic status (e.g., lower middle-class and the poor). The multivariate regression analyses in Table 3 show that an increase of one unit in socio-economic status (e.g., from poor to lower middle-class or from lower middle-class to middle-class) produces an average linear contribution of 3.02 on attitudes toward the police. This tells us that an increase in the socio-economic status produces more favorable attitudes toward the police. Thus, hypothesis 5 in this study is empirically supported.

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this research article was to determine the extent to which police behavior affects citizens' attitudes toward the police. Additionally, this study attempted to determine whether or not citizen interaction with the police and citizens' demographic characteristics have a significant effect on attitudes toward the police. As a general approach to examine the above effects, five research hypotheses were developed. Consistent with prior research (Baumer, 2002; Frank et al., 2005; Goudriaan, Wittebrood, & Nieuwbeerta, 2006; Skogan, 1996), the results of this study show that if we want citizens to display more favorable attitudes toward the police, it is suggestive that the police be respectful, be polite, and control their tendency to use force against citizens since police behavior in this study was one of the strongest predictors, and an influential variable of citizens' attitudes toward the police.

The results of this study also concur with prior studies discussed in the review of the literature, which suggest that police-initiated contacts negatively affect citizens' attitudes toward the police (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002; Byrne et al., 2005; Hurst & Frank, 2000; McAra & McVie, 2005; Skogan, 2005). Citizen-initiated contacts with the police, on the other hand, have not been shown to be a significant variable in predicting attitudes toward the police. Nevertheless, unlike police-initiated contacts, this study shows that citizen-initiated contacts have a positive impact on attitudes toward the police. This means that citizen-initiated contacts, although insignificant, when treated as an independent variable, it remains relevant, and therefore it should be included in the theoretical model.

Furthermore, some empirical evidence shows that the link between personal experiences and attitudes toward the police mainly is based on certain personal characteristics such as gender, race, and socio-economic status. To test the influence of these demographic characteristics, three general research hypotheses were developed. One of the three hy-

potheses attempted to determine whether or not women are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward the police compared to men. By gender, prior literature suggests that males are more likely to encounter negative experiences with the police and, as such, they are more likely to display negative attitudes toward the police compared to females (Beck & Yulia, 2004; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005; McAra & McVie, 2005; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005b). Contrary to prior literature, an unexpected finding in this study was that males were more likely to report favorable attitudes toward the police compared to females. This finding is independent of other demographic variables included in the model (e.g., race/ethnicity and socio-economic status).

In the past two decades, race/ethnicity has been the most vocal variable when discussing attitudes toward the police. A great number of studies show that, by race/ethnicity, African Americans are more likely to become the target of police-initiated contacts (Bates & Fasenfest, 2005; Chiricos, Welch, & Gertz, 2004; Warren & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2009). Davis's (2000) study, for example, indicates that African Americans are most likely to have involuntary contact with the police. The Bureau of Justice Statistics 2007 study also shows that minorities are more likely to experience police-initiated contacts compared to Whites (Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Schafer et al., 2003). Thus, prior research has established that past negative experiences are more likely to occur from police-initiated contacts, which subsequently produce negative effects on attitudes toward the police and a number of other variables that are vital in the functioning of social control mechanisms such as the police. Consistent with prior literature, the findings of this study show that, by race/ethnicity, African Americans are more likely to display negative attitudes toward the police compared to Whites and other racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans). One possible explanation of this is the frequency of contacts with the police. That is, African Americans are more likely to be stopped, searched, and mistreated by the police, making them more inclined to create negative attitudes toward the police (Howell et al., 2004).

Finally, regardless of race/ethnicity and gender, research shows that people who live in socially and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to report having had negative experiences with the police than people who live in more socially and economically developed neighborhoods. For the poor and the unemployed, such experiences have a negative influence on their attitudes toward the police (Bennett & Wiegand, 1994; Goudriaan, 2006; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998; Skogan, 1976a, 1976b; Weitzer, 2000). The findings of this study confirm that socio-economic status significantly influences attitudes toward the police. In this context, this study shows that people of higher socio-economic status (e.g., the rich, the upper middle-class, and the middle-class), are more likely to hold more favorable attitudes toward the police compared to those of lower socio-economic status (e.g., the poor and the lower middle-class).

In conclusion, the findings of this study, at a minimum, illustrate the relevance of including police behavior as an important predictor of attitudes toward the police, in addition to other attitudinal predictors (i.e., demographic factors and the quality and quantity of

citizen interactions with the police). Overall, this study suggests that the police can make a difference on how the public views them since their behavior appears to determine the direction of citizens' attitudes.

REFERENCES

- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice hall.
- Alper, G. P., & Dunham, R. G. (2004). *Understanding police use of force: Officers, suspects, and reciprocity*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Bates, T., & Fasenfest, D. (2005). Enforcement mechanisms discouraging black-American presence in suburban Detroit. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 29 (4), 960-971.
- Baumer, E. P. (2002). Neighborhood disadvantage and police notification by victims of violence. *Criminology*, 40, 579-616.
- Beck, A., & Yulia, C. (2004). Closing the gap between the police and the public in post-Soviet Ukraine: A bridge too far? *Police Practice and Research*, 5, 43-65.
- Bennett, R. R., & Wiegand, B. R. (1994). Observations on crime reporting in a developed nation. *Criminology*, 32 (1), 135-148.
- Bickford, J. H., Jr. (2004). *Effects of occupation as police officer and differential survival status of victims of violent crime on adjudication of criminal*. Department of Psychology, Salem State College, Salem, MA.
- Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2002). *Contact between police and the public: Findings from the 2002 national survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2005). *Contacts between police and the public: Findings from the 2002 national survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2007). *Black victims of violent crime*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Byrne, J., Conway, M., & Ostermeyer, M. (2005). *Young people's attitudes and experiences of policing: Violence and community safety in North Belfast. Northern Ireland*: Institute for Conflict Research.
- Cheurprakobkit, S. (2000). Police-citizen contact and police performance attitudinal differences between Hispanics and non-Hispanics. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 28, 325-336.
- Chiricos, T., Welch, K., & Gertz, M. (2004). Racial typification of crime and support for punitive measures. *Criminology*, 42 (2), 359-389.
- Chow, H. P. (2002). Police community relations: Chinese attitudes toward the police in Toronto. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 34 (2), 90-102.
- Crowne, D. P., & Marlowe, D. (1960). A new scale of social desirability independent of psychopathology. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 24, 349-354.
- Davis, R. C. (2000). *Perception of the police among members of six ethnic communities in Central Queens, NY*. New York: The U.S. Department of Justice.
- Davis, R. C., & Henderson, N. J. (2003). Willingness to report crime: The role of ethnic group members and community efficacy. *Crime & Delinquency*, 49 (4), 564-580.
- Delores, D. J. (2000). Debunking the myth of officer friendly. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 16 (2), 209-229.
- DeVellis, R. F. (2003). *Scale development: Theory and applications* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Engel, R. S., & Smith, M. R. (2009). Policy essay: Perceptual distortion and reasonableness during police shootings: Law legitimacy, and future research. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 8 (1), 141-152.
- Fazio, R., & Williams, C. J. (1986). Attitude accessibility as a moderator of the attitude perception and attitude-behavior relations: An investigation of the 1984 presidential election. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 503-514.

- Frank, J., Smith, B. W., & Novak, K. J. (2005). Exploring the basis of citizen's attitudes toward the police. *Police Quarterly*, 8 (2), 206-228.
- Garner, J. H., & Maxwell, C. D. (1999). *Measuring the amount of force used by and against the police in six jurisdictions. Use of force by police: Overview of national and local data, research report*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.
- Goldsmith, A. (2005). Police reform and the problem of trust. *Theoretical Criminology*, 9 (4), 443-470.
- Goudriaan, H. (2006). Reporting crime: Effects of social context on the decision of victims to notify the police. Veenendaal: University press.
- Goudriaan, H., Wittebrood, K., & Nieuwbeerta, P. (2006). Neighborhood characteristics and reporting crime: Effects of social cohesion, confidence in police effectiveness and socio-economic disadvantage. *British Journal of Criminology*, 46, 719-742.
- Hawdon, J. & Ryan, J. (2003). Police-resident interactions and satisfaction with police: An empirical test of community policing assertions. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 14, 55-74.
- Ho, T., & McKean, J. (2004). Confidence in the police and perception of risk. *Western Criminology Review*, 5 (2), 108-118.
- Holdaway, S. (2003). Police race relations in England and Wales: Theory, policy, and practice. *Police & Society*, 7, 49-74.
- Howell, S. E., Perry, L. H., & Vile, M. (2004). Black cities/white cities: Evaluating the police. *Political Behavior*, 26, 45-68.
- Huebner, B. M., Schafer, J. A., & Bynum, T. S. (2004). African American and white perceptions of police service: Within- and between-group variation. **Journal of Criminal Justice**, 32 (2), 125-135.
- Hurst, Y. G., & Frank, J. (2000). How kids view cops: The nature of juvenile attitudes toward the police. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 28, 189-202.
- Johnson, D., & Kuhns, J. B. (2009). Striking out: Race and support for police use of force. *Justice Quarterly*, 26 (3), 592-623.
- Kennedy, D. B., & Homant, R. J. (1983). Attitudes of abused women toward male (and female) police officers. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 10 (4), 391-405.
- Klinger, D. A., & Brunson, R. K. (2009). Police officers' perceptual distortions during lethal force situations: Informing the reasonableness standard. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 8 (1), 117-139.
- Macdonald, J., & Strokes, R. J. (2006). Race, social capital, and trust in the police. *Urban Affairs Review*, 41 (3), 3-37. Maxfield, M. G., & Babbie, E. (2008). *Research methods for criminal justice and criminology* (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.
- McAra, L. & McVie, S. (2005). The unusual suspect? Street-life, young people and the police. *Criminal Justice*, 5 (1), 5-36.
- McCluskey, J. D., Terrill, W., & Paoline, E. A. III. (2005). Peer group aggressiveness and the use of coercion in police-suspect encounters. *Police Practice and Research*, 6, 19-37.]
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T. (1983). Social desirability scales: More substance than style. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 51 (6), 882-888.
- Miller, J., & Davis, R. C. (2008). Unpacking public attitudes to the police: Contrasting perceptions of misconduct with traditional measures of satisfaction. *International Journal of Police Science and Management*, 10 (1), 9-22.
- Moorman, R. H., & Podsakoff, P. M. (1992). A meta-analytic review and empirical test of the potential confounding effects of social desirability response sets in organizational behavior research. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 65, 131-149.
- Morris, C. G., & Maisto, A. A. (2007). *Understanding psychology* (8th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Nihart, T., Lersch, K. M., Sellers, C. S., & Mieczkowski, T. (2005). Kids, cops, parents and teachers: Exploring juvenile attitudes toward authority figures. *Western Criminology*, 6, 79-88.
- O'Connor, C. D. (2008). Citizen attitudes toward the police in Canada. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 31 (4), 578-595.
- Ray, J. J. (1984). The reliability of short social desirability scales. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 123, 133-134.

- Renauer, B. C. (2008, November). *Fear of police encounters and fear of crime*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology, St. Louis, Missouri.
- Rosenbaum, D. P., Schuck, A. M., Costello, S. K., Hawkins, D. F., & Ring, M. K. (2005). Attitudes toward the police: The effects of direct and vicarious experiences. *Police Quarterly, 8* (3), 343-365.
- Salmi, S., Voeten, M. J., & Keskinen, E. (2000). Relation between police image and police visibility. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 10*, 433-447.
- Salmi, S., Voeten, M. J., & Keskinen, E. (2005). What citizen think about the police: Assessing actual and wished-for frequency of police activities in one's neighborhood. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 15*, 188-202.
- Sampson, R. J., & Bartusch, D. (1998). Legal cynicism and tolerance of deviance. *Law and Society Review, 32*, 777-804.
- Schafer, J. A., Huebner, B. M., & Bynum, T. S. (2003). Citizen perceptions of police services: Race, neighborhood context, and community policing. *Police Quarterly, 6* (4), 440-468.
- Seron, C., Pereira, J., & Kovath, J. (2006). How citizens assess just punishment for police misconduct. *Criminology, 44* (4), 925-959.
- Skogan, W. G. (1976a). Citizen Reporting of crime: Some national panel data. *Criminology, 13* (4), 535-551.
- Skogan, W. G. (1976b). Crime and crime rates. In W. G. Skogan (Ed.), *Sample surveys of the victims of crime* (pp. 105-120). Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Co.
- Skogan, W. G. (1996). The police and public opinion in Britain. *American Behavioral Scientist, 39* (4), 421-432.
- Skogan, W. G. (2005). Citizen satisfaction with police encounters. *Police Quarterly, 8* (3), 298-321.
- Stoutland, S. E. (2001). The multiple dimensions of trust in residential/police relationship in Boston. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 38* (3), 226-256.
- Taylor, N. (2003). Under-reported crime against small business: Attitude toward police and reporting practices. *Police and Society, 13*, 79-89.
- Taylor, T. J., Turner, K. B., Esbensen, F. A., & Winfree, L. T., Jr. (2001). Coppin' an attitude: Attitudinal differences among juveniles toward police. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 29* (4), 295-305.
- Thomas, C. W., & Hyman, J. M. (1977). Perception of crime, fear of victimization, and public perception of police performance. *Journal of Police Science and Administration, 5*, 305-317.
- Tuch, S. A., & Weitzer, R. (1997). Racial differences in attitudes toward the police. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 61*, 642-664.
- Tyler, T. R. (2005). Policing in black and white: Ethnic group differences in trust and confidence in the police. *Police Quarterly, 8* (3), 322-342.
- Warren, P. Y., & Tomaskovic-Devey, D. (2009). Racial profiling and searchers: Did the politics of racial profiling change police behavior? *Criminology & Public Policy, 8* (2), 343-370.
- Weitzer, R. (2000). Racialized policing: Residents' perceptions in three neighborhoods. *Law & Society, 34*, 129-155.
- Weitzer, R., & Tuch, S. A. (1999). Race, class, and perceptions of discrimination by the police. *Crime & Delinquency, 45* (4), 494-507.
- Weitzer, R., & Tuch, S. A. (2002). Perception of racial profiling: Race, class, and personal experience. *Criminology, 40* (2), 435-457.
- Weitzer, R., & Tuch, S. A. (2004). Reforming the police: Racial differences in public support for change. *Criminology, 42* (2), 391-416.
- Weitzer, R., & Tuch, S. A., (2005a). Determinants of public satisfaction with the police. *Police Quarterly, 8* (3), 279-297.
- Weitzer, R., & Tuch, S. A. (2005b). Racially based policing: Determinants of citizen perceptions. *Social Forces, 83*, 1009-1030.
- Wu, Y., Sun, I. Y., & Triplett, R. A. (2009). Race, class, or neighborhood context: Which matters more in measuring satisfaction with the police? *Justice Quarterly, 26* (1), 125-156.
- Zerbe, W. J., & Paulhus, D. L. (1987). Socially desirable responding in organizational behavior: A reconception. *Academy of Management Journal, 12* (2), 250-264.

Received 10/09

Accepted 10/10

Suggested Citation: Avdija, Avdi S. (2010). The role of police behavior in predicting citizens' attitudes toward the police. [Electronic Version]. *Applied Psychology in Criminal Justice*, 6(2), 15-29.