



Perceptions of the police

Past findings, methodological issues, conceptual issues and policy implications

Perceptions of
the police

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Abstract *This research updates and expands upon Decker's article "Citizen attitudes toward the police: a review of past findings and suggestions for future policy" by summarizing the findings from more than 100 articles on perceptions of and attitudes toward the police. Initially, the value of research on attitudes toward the police is discussed. Then the research pertaining to the impact of individual level variables (e.g. race) and contextual level variables (e.g. neighborhood) on perceptions of the police is reviewed. Studies of juveniles' attitudes toward the police, perceptions of police policies and practices, methodological issues and conceptual issues are also discussed. This review of the literature indicates that only four variables (age, contact with police, neighborhood, and race) have consistently been proven to affect attitudes toward the police. However, there are interactive effects between these and other variables which are not yet understood; a finding which indicates that theoretical generalizations about attitudes toward police should be made with caution.*

Introduction

It was Bellman's (1935) "Police service rating scale" which provided the original impetus for studies of public perceptions of the police. With a little assistance from August Vollmer, Bellman (1935, p. 75) developed the scale as a method of rating "a police organization according to certain standards". Shortly thereafter, Parratt (1936, 1938) offered suggestions for improving Bellman's scale and developed a survey instrument to measure citizen evaluations of the police. Parratt (1938, p. 739) argued that, while an internal evaluation of police effectiveness was useful, the police also needed a method of determining "what is desired or approved by an effective sector of citizen opinion". Although research on public perceptions of the police dates back to the era of August Vollmer, it is only within the last few decades that it has gained much attention.

One of the best known works in this field is Decker's (1981) article "Citizen attitudes toward the police: a review of past findings and suggestions for future policy." Decker (1981) provided an analysis of the effects that individual variables (e.g. race, socioeconomic status) and contextual variables (e.g. crime rates, victimization) have on attitudes toward the police. As the body of



research on attitudes toward the police has significantly increased since the publication of Decker's (1981) article, it is appropriate that it be updated. The following review of more than 100 articles on perceptions of and attitudes toward the police does precisely this.

To understand the value of research on attitudes toward the police and the need for policies based on such research, one need only examine the problems associated with negative perceptions of the police. Case in point, the urban riots of the last half of the twentieth century, most of which were due in part to police actions and negative attitudes toward the police (Cox and Fitzgerald, 1996, pp. 142-5; Fogelson, 1968). As Jefferis *et al.* (1997, p. 391) summed it up:

History has demonstrated that, when relationships between police and minority communities are strained, a single critical incident can have deleterious effects.

Beyond the physical damage that occurs during riots, there is the harm done to attitudes toward the police. Block (1971) analyzed NORC data gathered in 1966, a time when fear of the police had captured national attention. In addition to Supreme Court decisions indicating a need to limit police power (e.g. *Escobedo v. Illinois*, 1964; *Miranda v. Arizona*, 1966), there was nation-wide civil disorder, for which the police were partially responsible. However, crime rates were also increasing, which might have led people to support giving the police more discretionary power. Block (1971) found that fear of crime was not significantly correlated with support for the police, but fear of the police was. If neither fear of crime nor aggressive policing induced support for the police, the most reasonable course of action for police agencies would have been to earn the trust of the public by working with citizens in a respectful fashion. As demonstrated by the riots in Miami in 1980 and Los Angeles in 1992, some police departments did not adopt such an approach. Both riots were sparked by police beatings of minority males (Arthur McDuffie in Miami and Rodney King in Los Angeles), the acquittal of the officers, and public hostility toward the police (Mathews, 1992; Murty *et al.*, 1994; Pike, 1980).

These incidents and the subsequent riots serve as symbols of both hostility toward the police and the media's thirst for stories about brutal law enforcement. Cases such as these show up in televised news, magazines, and local newspapers across the country. Just after the Rodney King beating in April 1991, the cover of *Time* read: "Law and disorder: why cops turn violent." Then there was the coverage of the Philadelphia officers, who admitted to beating and coercing confessions from poor minorities, fabricating evidence, and perjuring themselves in more than 1,500 cases (Kramer, 1997). Writing in *The New York Times*, Shipler (1997, p. A33) commented that:

It is difficult for blacks not to doubt the police, and the doubts undermine law enforcement . . . Many blacks have come to see the police as just another gang. Alarm bells should be going off, for the judicial system cannot function without credibility.

There were also the incidents in New York City in which Abner Louima, a Haitian immigrant, was sodomized by an officer with the handle of a toilet

plunger and Amadou Diallo, an unarmed Guinean immigrant, was shot at 41 times by four officers.

Studies indicate that such incidents cause people to doubt the integrity of the police (Jefferis *et al.*, 1997; Jesilow and Meyer, 2001; Kaminski and Jefferis, 1998; Lasley, 1994; Sigelman *et al.*, 1997). For example, Tuch and Weitzer (1997, p. 642) analyzed data gathered:

Before and after three well-publicized brutality incidents in the Los Angeles area: the 1979 killing of Eulia Love; the 1991 beating of Rodney King; and the 1996 beatings of two Mexican immigrants.

They found that:

A precipitous decline in approval ratings occurred after each major incident of police brutality (Tuch and Weitzer, 1997, p. 642).

Moreover, Gallup data indicate that people viewed the police more negatively in 1995 than in previous years, most likely because of the racist attitude of Mark Fuhrman and the police handling of the O.J. Simpson case (McAneny, 1995a,b).

Public hostility toward the police can affect the careers of officers, administrators, and even politicians. Following the Diallo shooting, citizens began demonstrations targeted at New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Shortly thereafter, well-known figures such as Susan Sarandon and Jesse Jackson joined the protesters, which generated additional press coverage. As McWhorter (1999, p. 17A) commented in *USA Today*:

What the Diallo protests have done is make a growing constitutional problem vivid to white America.

The Rodney King incident resulted in the resignation of Chief Daryl Gates and the incidents in New York became an issue when Giuliani was considering campaigning for a seat in the US Senate (Bai and Beals, 1999; McWhorter, 1999). In short, police officers and administrators ought to be concerned about how they are viewed by the public, if for no reason other than preservation of their careers.

Another reason why perceptions of the police are important is that public distrust of the police may reduce the ability of the police to control crime. As noted by Decker (1985), citizens who are dissatisfied with the police are less likely to contact them or provide officers with information about criminal activity. This is important, because some studies indicate that fear of crime lowers evaluations of the police (e.g. Percy, 1986; Reisig and Giacomazzi, 1998). Thus, it is conceivable that negative perceptions of the police contribute to a cycle of reduced police effectiveness, increased crime, and further distrust of the police. Finally, the police need to be concerned about how they are viewed by the public, because they are public servants (Fleek and Newman, 1969; Percy, 1986):

There can be little dispute that, in a democratic society, the public has a right to tell the police what their job is and how to carry it out (Marenin, 1989, p. 73).

One means of improving police-community relations and increasing police accountability is using surveys to gauge perceptions of the police and creating policies and practices designed to induce public support (Bordua and Tifft, 1971, p. 157; Klyman and Kruckenberg, 1974, p. 227). The Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services and Bureau of Justice Statistics conducted a study to develop a methodology and instrument police departments could use to collect data on citizen attitudes toward the police, victimization, willingness to report crimes, and the effect of community-policing tactics (Brann and Chaiken, 1999, p. iii). According to the researchers:

One of the most significant results of this project is the demonstration of the benefits of collecting this type of information at the local level (Brann and Chaiken, 1999, p. iii).

Surveys can be used to assess officer performance, police services, and police-community relations as well as to help police structure their priorities, alert police to local problems, and evaluate community-policing programs (Beck *et al.*, 1999; Carlson and Sutton, 1981; Gnagey and Henson, 1995; Hesketh, 1992; Marenin, 1989; Oettmeir and Wycoff, 1998; Peak *et al.*, 1992; Percy, 1986; Skogan, 1975; Thurman and Reisig, 1996; Weisel, 1999). The US Department of Justice has even published two guides to help police departments survey citizens (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1993; Weisel, 1999). Although a few police administrators have recognized the value of information on public opinion (e.g. Gnagey and Henson, 1995; Overman, 1994; Venegas and Kidd, 1994), they are the exceptions, not the norm. Whereas surveys play an important role in assessing the police in the UK, the role of such research in the USA is minimal (Skogan, 1996). This is a problem which needs to be addressed.

It is essential to note, however, that while there has been a fair amount of public hostility toward the police, numerous studies indicate that the general public views the police favorably (Benedict *et al.*, 2000; Cao *et al.*, 1996; Chackerian, 1974; Chermak *et al.*, 2001; Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch, 1999; Davis, 1990; Dunham and Alpert, 1988; Furstenberg and Wellford, 1973; Gourley, 1954; Hadar and Snortum, 1975; Hindelang, 1974; Kaminski and Jefferis, 1998; Koenig, 1980; Marenin, 1983; Priest and Carter, 1999; Reisig and Giacomazzi, 1998; Scaglione and Condon, 1980a; Shaw *et al.*, 1998; Smith *et al.*, 1991; Smith and Hawkins, 1973; Sullivan *et al.*, 1987; Thomas and Hyman, 1977; Zevitz and Rettammel, 1990). For instance, Peek *et al.* (1978, p. 371) compared “the degree to which the general public like the local police in relation to how well they like 15 other well-known organizations”. Only the USA (as a whole) and the FBI were viewed more favorably than the police: even the American Medical Association, Congress, and the Supreme Court received less positive evaluations than the police (Peek *et al.*, 1978, p. 372). The Bureau of Justice Statistics and Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services interviewed over 13,000 people residing in 12 cities and found that:

Nearly 80 per cent or more of the residents in each city were satisfied with the police in their neighborhood (Smith *et al.*, 1999, p. v).

Nonetheless, studies indicate that support for the police varies between demographic groups and variables such as contact with the police influence perceptions of the police. The following literature review summarizes the key findings.

Individual-level variables

The effects of race

The most commonly studied minority has been blacks and the majority of research indicates that blacks view the police less favorably than whites (Benson, 1981; Block, 1971; Bordua and Tifft, 1971; Brown and Coulter, 1983; Furstenberg and Wellford, 1973; Gourley, 1954; Hadar and Snortum, 1975; Hagan and Albonetti, 1982; Huang and Vaughn, 1996; Jefferis *et al.*, 1997; Kaminski and Jefferis, 1998; Klyman and Kruckenberg, 1974; Kusow *et al.*, 1997; Lasley, 1994; Leiber *et al.*, 1998; McAneny, 1995b; Murphy and Worrall, 1999; Murty *et al.*, 1990; Peek *et al.*, 1981; Reisig and Parks, 2000; Sampson and Bartusch, 1998; Scaglione and Condon, 1980a; Smith *et al.*, 1991; Tuch and Weitzer, 1997; Webb and Marshall, 1995; Worrall, 1999). Thomas and Hyman (1977, p. 77), for instance, compared the effects of race, gender, age, income, education, occupational prestige, victimization, and residence, and found that race is “the best predictor of evaluations of police performance . . . [and that] the majority of blacks in this sample are highly critical of the police”, a finding recently supported by Weitzer and Tuch (1999).

According to Jacob (1971, p. 73):

Blacks perceive the police as more corrupt, more unfair, more excitable, more harsh, tougher, weaker, lazier, less intelligent, less friendly, more cruel, and more on the bad than the good side than white respondents.

Zeit (1965, p. 297) noted that, among blacks, “Mention of the police brought forth a deluge of complaints”. Walker (1997, p. 221) found a “deep hostility to the police among African-American adults and students” and Hahn (1971) found pervasive resentment of the police by blacks in a Detroit “ghetto.” However, Hahn (1971, p. 184) conducted the survey “shortly after one of the nation’s most destructive riots”. Levin and Thomas (1997) created three videotapes of two police officers arresting a black suspect, who resisted the arrest to a small extent: in one tape both officers were white, in one tape one officer was white and the other was black, and in one tape both officers were black. Levin and Thomas (1997, p. 582) showed different versions of the tape to randomly assigned black and white college students and found that black students “were more likely than their white counterparts to perceive violence and illegality on the part of the arresting officers”.

Furthermore, blacks’ negative evaluations of the police are not confined to the USA. “British surveys show a much higher level of hostility to the police among Afro-Caribbeans than among white people or Asians” (Smith, 1991, p. 1). For example, Jefferson and Walker (1993) surveyed males in Leeds, UK, and reported that blacks held less positive views towards the police than whites. Waddington

and Braddock (1991) surveyed juvenile males in two cities in the UK and found that black juveniles viewed the police more negatively than white and Asian juveniles. One research team, however, found that race had no effect on attitudes toward police power among residents of the UK (Hayes and Brewer, 1997).

As to the query of why blacks view the police negatively, some researchers have attributed the poor evaluations to negative contact with the police (Walker *et al.*, 1972; Walker, 1997). Weitzer and Tuch (1999) found that blacks were five times more likely to report having been mistreated by the police. Dean (1980, pp. 458-9) analyzed data obtained from over 12,000 telephone interviews conducted in three metropolitan areas and reported that race alone does not affect evaluations of the police, but that “the combined effect of being black and having contact with the police lowers respondent evaluations”. Other researchers, however, found that blacks’ negative perceptions of the police are not due to negative contact with the police. Jacob (1971) found no significant difference between black and white respondents who had been arrested, but that blacks still perceived the police more negatively than whites. Erez (1984) reported that blacks were no more likely than whites to be chased, questioned, or warned by the police, but still held more negative views toward the police. And Smith and Hawkins (1973) found that blacks who had not been arrested viewed the police as negatively as those who had been arrested.

Neighborhood conditions may also affect blacks’ evaluations of the police. Apple and O’Brien (1983, p. 81) found that:

An increase in the proportion of blacks in the neighborhood will have a negative effect on the manner in which individual blacks evaluate the police.

They offered two possible explanations. The first is that the greater the number of blacks in a neighborhood, the greater:

... the opportunity for blacks to associate with others who have negative attitudes toward the police, and this results in an overall increase in their negative sentiment toward the police (Apple and O’Brien, 1983, p. 83).

The second is that, as the number of blacks in an area increases, hostile interchanges between black residents and the police increase, resulting in a greater chance for negative contact with the police (Apple and O’Brien, 1983, p. 83; see also Smith *et al.*, 1991).

One more possible explanation is that blacks may be more likely to reside in deteriorating neighborhoods. Cao *et al.* (1996) found that blacks and other minorities were less satisfied with the police than whites. However, in one theoretical model, they introduced two contextual variables:

Citizen perceptions of neighborhood disorder and informal collective security. When these variables are included, the effect of race on confidence in the police is no longer significant (Cao *et al.*, 1996, p. 12; also see Sampson and Bartusch, 1998; Weitzer, 2000a).

Jesilow *et al.* (1995, p. 82) found that race was not correlated with attitudes toward the police, but that residents who perceived their neighborhoods negatively also viewed the police negatively.

Blacks' attitudes toward police may also be affected by conditions in the city. Skogan (1978) reported that blacks in Chicago, Los Angeles, St Louis and Philadelphia rated the police more negatively than whites, but found few differences between blacks' and whites' evaluations of the police in Denver and Atlanta (also see Kusow *et al.*, 1997). In contrast with the findings of Hahn's (1971) Detroit study, Frank *et al.* (1996, p. 324) found that "in Detroit blacks hold more favorable attitudes toward the police than do whites". Based on the facts that blacks constitute the majority of the Detroit population, Detroit has had a black mayor since the 1970s, and the Chief of Police and over half of all the police officers are black, Frank *et al.* (1996, p. 332) propose the idea that:

Because whites are now a minority in the city, it is quite possible that they hold attitudes previously reserved for "minority"-group members.

As for other minority groups, Song (1992) surveyed Vietnamese and Chinese residents to evaluate the seriousness of several issues involving police-Asian interactions such as failure to report crimes, slow police response to calls, and poor cooperation between Asians and the police. Song (1992, p. 710) discovered that: "The Vietnamese consistently rated all the problems as more serious than did the Chinese". Both groups also felt that the police should be more aware of their cultural backgrounds (Song, 1992, pp. 710-13). Walker (1997) reported that Hispanic immigrants in a midwestern city were fearful of the police and reluctant to file complaints due to concerns about their immigration status and jobs. Carter (1983, p. 225) surveyed Hispanics in Texas and, using NCS data for a comparison, found that "Hispanics rate the police relatively lower than does the entire white population". Most research indicates that Hispanics' attitudes toward the police are more negative than whites', but more favorable than blacks' (Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Gourley, 1954; Hadar and Snortum, 1975; Lasley, 1994; Murty *et al.*, 1990; Tuch and Weitzer, 1997). The only researcher to find that Hispanics view the police more negatively than blacks is Mirande (1980). However, Mirande (1980) interviewed Hispanics in a southern California barrio and used national data for the comparison.

Recent research indicates that Hispanics' attitudes are changing. Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch (1999, p. 99) reported that Hispanics in Midland and Odessa, Texas, have positive attitudes "toward police work and the police profession". Although Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch (1999) did find that Hispanics were more likely than whites to view police use of excessive force as a problem, their finding that Hispanics view the police as positively as whites on several measures, whereas Carter (1983, 1985) found that Hispanics in Texas view the police negatively, is similar to Frank *et al.*'s (1996) finding that blacks in Detroit evaluate the police favorably, whereas Hahn (1971) found that blacks in Detroit view the police negatively. Furthermore, recent research conducted in urban areas with racially diverse populations indicates that race has no impact on perceptions of the police (Chandek, 1999; Chermak *et al.*, 2001; Jesilow *et al.*, 1995; Thurman and Reisig, 1996). In short, regional demographic patterns may confound the impact of race.

The effects of socioeconomic status and political alienation

The variables socioeconomic status and political alienation are herein treated together, because the poor usually have the least political power. Research on socioeconomic status, political alienation, and evaluations of the police indicates that a "single attitude does not exist in isolation, but is a part of a set of attitudes, sometimes assumed to constitute a value system" (Albrecht and Green, 1977, pp. 70-1). Several researchers found that perceptions of the police are intertwined with perceptions of the political and judicial systems, especially among persons in the lower socioeconomic tiers (Albrecht and Green, 1977; Benson, 1981; Brown and Coulter, 1983; Chackerian and Barrett, 1973; Chackerian, 1974; Hagan and Albonetti, 1982; Jacob, 1971). A couple of studies, however, indicate that perceptions of the police are not associated with perceptions of the criminal justice or political system. Peek *et al.* (1978) found that most people rated the FBI more favorably than the police, while rating the Supreme Court more negatively than the police, stating that blacks' negative evaluations of the police were not related to blacks' assessments of other public organizations. Priest and Carter (1999) reported that blacks in Charlotte rated the local police more positively than the local schools.

As for the effects of socioeconomic status, several researchers found that persons in the lower socioeconomic tiers hold more negative attitudes toward the police than the wealthy (Benson, 1981; Brown and Coulter, 1983; Cao *et al.*, 1996; Huang and Vaughn, 1996; Marenin, 1983; Murty *et al.*, 1990; Percy, 1980; Sampson and Bartusch, 1998; Smith *et al.*, 1991; Zevitz and Rettammel, 1990). One of the most innovative projects was Boggs and Galliher's (1975) study of perceptions of the police among black "street" and "household" respondents. In addition to surveying black household residents, they mapped businesses and areas where black men congregated and interviewed 117 black males between the ages of 20 and 40, who had no steady job and/or had resided in three or more places within the previous year. Boggs and Galliher (1975) found that street respondents rated the police more negatively than household respondents and noted that this was probably due to the frequent contact street respondents had with the police.

Boggs and Galliher (1975) also found that black household respondents with a high social status rated the police more negatively than black household respondents with a low social status, indicating that wealthy blacks hold greater resentment toward the police than poor blacks. Hagan and Albonetti (1982) noted that blacks and whites in the lower socioeconomic tiers view the police negatively but, as whites move up the economic ladder, their views become more positive, while the views held by upwardly mobile blacks remain negative. Gamson and McEvoy (1970) found that wealthy blacks were more opposed to the police use of violence than blacks at the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder and Priest and Carter (1999) found that income has no impact on blacks' perceptions of the police. In sum, much of the research indicates that the impact of socioeconomic status on attitudes toward the police is influenced by race.

Furthermore, some researchers found that, regardless of race, socioeconomic status has no impact on perceptions of the police (Block, 1971; Davis, 1990; Parker *et al.*, 1995; Smith and Hawkins, 1973). Weitzer and Tuch (1999) found that income has no effect on blacks' or whites' beliefs about the quality of policing in black and white neighborhoods or on the belief that racism is common among the police. Correia *et al.* (1996, p. 25) reported that a person's level of education (which is generally indicative of socioeconomic status) "was not a significant determinant in his or her perception of state police". And several researchers found that wealthy and well-educated persons view the police less favorably than those with lower incomes and less education (Gamson and McEvoy, 1970, p. 105; Gourley, 1954, p. 140; Murphy and Worrall, 1999, p. 339; Peak *et al.*, 1992, p. 35; Percy, 1986, p. 79; Poister and McDavid, 1978, p. 141; Weitzer and Tuch, 1999, p. 500).

The effects of contact with the police

Most research indicates that positive contact with the police improves perceptions of the police, while negative contact has the opposite effect (Smith *et al.*, 1991; Worrall, 1999); it is not clear which type of contact has the greatest effect. Scaglion and Condon (1980b) found that contact with the police has a stronger impact on satisfaction with the police than age, race or socioeconomic status. Cheurprakobkit (2000), Huang and Vaughn (1996), and Walker *et al.* (1972) reported that positive contact with the police has a greater effect on support for the police than negative contact with the police; Dean (1980) and Jacob (1971) found the opposite.

Some research indicates that witnessing and having knowledge of inappropriate police actions are correlated with negative perceptions of the police (Thomas and Hyman, 1977). Smith and Hawkins (1973, p. 141) noted that, although much of the police wrongdoing respondents had witnessed "was relatively minor, it did have a significant impact on attitudes toward the police". Dean (1980, p. 457) reported that:

The variable with the strongest influence on general service evaluations is citizen knowledge of police mistreatment of members of the public.

Based on an analysis of the 1991 *World Values Survey* data, Cao and Hou (2001) concluded that the Chinese view the police less favorably than Americans and the low levels of support for the police in China may have been affected by the 1990 Tiananmen Square incident. The negative effects of seeing police misbehavior have also been documented by Canadian researchers (Koenig, 1980; Thornton, 1975) and research conducted in Nigeria (Alemika, 1988), Delhi (Singh, 1998), and Eastern Europe (Land, 1998) revealed low evaluations of the police, which were most likely due to respondents' knowledge of, or experience with, corrupt or brutal officers.

Brandl *et al.* (1994, p. 129) investigated global (i.e. general) and specific attitudes toward the police and found "that global attitudes toward the police influence evaluations of the police in particular contact situations". Brandl

et al.'s (1994, 1997) research indicates that a person's global attitude toward the police influences whether the person interprets contact with the police as positive or negative. UK researchers who studied juveniles also found:

A high correlation between the scores measuring attitudes to the police in general and stereotype of the police in general (Hopkins *et al.*, 1992, p. 212).

And Reisig and Chandek (2001, p. 95) found that:

Citizen satisfaction with police encounters is a product of the congruence between individual expectations of service and the perceptions of the actual service rendered.

As for persons who contact the police, Cheurprakobkit (2000, p. 332) reported that citizens who initiated contact with the police "viewed police as more favorable than those whose contact was initiated by the police". However, Cheurprakobkit (2000, p. 331) also found "that the more citizens contacted the police, the less they were satisfied with police performance". The effect that citizen-initiated contact with the police has on attitudes toward the police appears to be confounded by perceptions of the services rendered. Numerous studies indicate that crime victims who are satisfied with the officers' handling of the incident rate the police more favorably than dissatisfied victims (Bordua and Tiffit, 1971; Brandl and Horvath, 1991; Carlson and Sutton, 1979; Chandek, 1999; Coupe and Griffiths, 1999; Furstenberg and Wellford, 1973; Poister and McDavid, 1978; Reisig and Chandek, 2001; Reisig and Correia, 1997; Smith and Hawkins, 1973; Stephens and Sinden, 2000).

Studies of the effects of police-initiated sanctioned contact have produced mixed results. Jesilow *et al.* (1995, p. 80) noted that respondents who had received a citation or been arrested made "more negative comments about the police than did respondents who had no contact"; a study conducted in London yielded similar results (Maxfield, 1988). Smith *et al.* (1991, p. 25) found that negative assessments of the police were higher among respondents who had been "personally stopped by the police for some matter". Yagil (1998) reported that Israeli military personnel who had been stopped by the Israeli military police were likely to be angry about the incident and Australian researchers found that people stopped by the police would prefer the police to place a lower priority on traffic duties (Beck *et al.*, 1999, p. 206).

Smith and Hawkins (1973) found that having been arrested was related to negative evaluations of the police, but having received a traffic citation was not. Cox and White (1988, p. 108) reported that college students who had received a traffic citation trusted the police less than those who had not, but that having received a:

... citation is not associated with citizen perception of police capabilities to prevent crime, or police competence, nor does it seem to affect general attitudes toward the police.

Cox and White's (1988) study indicates that it was not the citation but perceptions of the officer's behavior as inappropriate that caused the negative attitudes (also see Thurman and Reisig, 1996). Reisig and Correia (1997) found that receiving a traffic citation is linked to negative evaluations of state police,

but not to negative attitudes toward municipal police or county sheriffs (also see Correia *et al.*, 1996).

Moreover, some studies indicate that having a criminal record, which necessitates sanctioned contact with the police, does not cause persons to view the police negatively (Primeau *et al.*, 1975). Vermunt *et al.* (1998) found that first-time detainees evaluated the police more negatively than repeatedly incarcerated detainees. Erez (1984) compared the effects of race and offender status on evaluations of the police and discovered that known offenders (black and white) are more likely to have contact with the police than non-offenders, but do not view the police more negatively than non-offenders. Erez (1984, p. 1298) argued that known:

... law violators feel that they "deserve" the treatment the police accord them; they seem to understand or accept the "costs" of breaking the law, namely, being the primary target of police surveillance or crime control efforts.

Mylonas and Reckless (1968), however, found that inmates in Greece and the USA view the police more negatively than other groups.

Research also indicates that the effects of police contact are mitigated by race (Walker *et al.*, 1972). Dean (1980, p. 456) examined the effects of four types of police contact – police contacts due to victimization, police rendering assistance, police stopping citizens, and citizens calling the police for information – and found that:

For each contact type the percentage of blacks rating police actions as favorable is smaller than the corresponding percentages among white respondents.

Bordua and Tiftt (1971) reported that most respondents who had been stopped and searched by the police perceived the encounter negatively and that blacks were more likely than whites to discern racial prejudice (also see Langan *et al.*, 2001). Boggs and Galliher's (1975) research indicates that, among blacks, the effects of contact with the police are influenced by a combination of socioeconomic status and initiation of contact. They found that black street respondents rated the police more negatively than black household respondents (most likely due to frequent contact with the police), but that black street respondents who contacted the police evaluated the police more favorably than black household respondents who contacted the police (Boggs and Galliher, 1975, pp. 404-5).

Two more variables that may mediate the impact of contact with the police on perceptions of the police are type of incident and response time. Bordua and Tiftt (1971, p. 169) discovered that:

Disturbance incidents produce more negative reactions (or fewer positive or "appreciative" reactions) than do crime call incidents.

One study indicates that victims of crimes against the person were more satisfied with the police handling of the incident than victims of crimes against property (Poister and McDavid, 1978), while another indicates that there is no difference between the two types of victims (Carlson and Sutton, 1979). With

respect to response time, most research indicates that long response time is related to negative evaluations of the police (Davis, 1990; Furstenberg and Wellford, 1973; Percy, 1980; Poister and McDavid, 1978; Priest and Carter, 1999). However, Brown and Coulter (1983) found that it is not actual response time which influences evaluations of the police, but perceptions of response time, a finding which supports Brandl *et al.*'s (1994) thesis that global attitudes toward the police influence how police actions are perceived (also see Chandek, 1999; Percy, 1986).

The effects of age

The vast majority of studies which included age as a variable indicate that younger persons view the police less favorably than older persons (Brown and Coulter, 1983; Cao *et al.*, 1996; Chandek, 1999; Chermak *et al.*, 2001; Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Correia *et al.*, 1996; Gourley, 1954; Hadar and Snortum, 1975; Huang and Vaughn, 1996; Jesilow *et al.*, 1995; Kaminski and Jefferis, 1998; Koenig, 1980; Kusow *et al.*, 1997; Lasley, 1994; Marenin, 1983; Murphy and Worrall, 1999; Murty *et al.*, 1990; Percy, 1980, 1986; Reisig and Correia, 1997; Reisig and Giacomazzi, 1998; Sampson and Bartusch, 1998; Smith and Hawkins, 1973; Thornton, 1975; Thurman and Reisig, 1996; Webb and Marshall, 1995; Worrall, 1999; Yagil, 1998). Young respondents are less likely than older respondents to think that the police should deal more aggressively with crime (Hindelang, 1974, p. 106), more likely to think that the police use too much force (Jefferis *et al.*, 1997, p. 389; Langan *et al.*, 2001, p. 20), and more likely to be dissatisfied with the treatment afforded them by the police (Walker *et al.*, 1972, p. 63; Weitzer, 1999, p. 839). In addition, Corder *et al.* (1986) found that college students evaluated campus police less favorably than did faculty and staff.

There are, of course, a few exceptions. Davis (1990) and Parker *et al.* (1995) found that age was not correlated with perceptions of the police. Reisig and Correia (1997) found that age has no impact on evaluations of county sheriffs and Larsen (1968) found that older persons evaluate the police more negatively than younger people. However, Larsen (1968) surveyed 103 students at Brigham Young University, ranging in age from 18 to 33, thereby excluding anyone who would be considered middle-aged or older.

The effects of gender

There is no consensus about the effects of gender. Cao *et al.* (1996), Cheurprakobkit (2000), Hadar and Snortum (1975), Lasley (1994), Reisig and Giacomazzi (1998), and Smith *et al.* (1991) found that females view the police more favorably than males. Jefferis *et al.* (1997, p. 389) reported that "males are somewhat more likely than females to believe that the police use too much force". Research conducted in New Zealand indicates that females are more likely than males to be satisfied with the police handling of problems (Jonas and Whitfield, 1986). In contrast, Brown and Coulter (1983), Correia *et al.* (1996) and Gourley (1954) found that males view the police more favorably than

females. Moreover, numerous studies indicate that gender has no effect on perceptions of the police (Benedict *et al.*, 2000; Chermak *et al.*, 2001; Davis, 1990; Huang and Vaughn, 1996; Jesilow *et al.*, 1995; Kusow *et al.*, 1997; Larsen, 1968; Marenin, 1983; Murty *et al.*, 1990; Parker *et al.*, 1995; Percy, 1980; Reisig and Correia, 1997; Sampson and Bartusch, 1998; Smith and Hawkins, 1973; Thurman and Reisig, 1996; Worrall, 1999).

Contextual variables

The effects of victimization and fear of victimization

The findings on the effects of victimization and fear of victimization are mixed. Block (1971), Carter (1985), Homant *et al.* (1984), Kusow *et al.* (1997), Priest and Carter (1999), and Smith *et al.* (1991) found a link between victimization and negative evaluations of the police. Thurman and Reisig (1996, p. 579) reported that respondents in one city who had been victimized evaluated the police less positively than those who had not been victimized, while in another city victims “held slightly more favorable views of the police than those who had not been victimized”. Smith and Hawkins (1973) found no difference between attitudes toward the police held by respondents who had and had not been victimized. Research conducted in London indicates that victims viewed the police more negatively than persons who had not been victimized, but that the negative attitudes were:

In part due to the large proportion of victims who have some type of proactive contact with the police (Maxfield, 1988, p. 203).

As for fear of victimization, Benson (1981), Davis (1990), Murty *et al.* (1990), Percy (1986), Reisig and Giacomazzi (1998), and Sampson and Bartusch (1998) reported that respondents who believed that neighborhood crime rates were high evaluated the police negatively. Cao *et al.* (1996, p. 12) found:

That fear of crime and recent victimization experiences exert a larger effect on confidence in the police than do any of the demographic variables.

On the other hand, Marenin (1983), Skogan (1978), Smith and Hawkins (1973), Thomas and Hyman (1977), and Zevitz and Rettammel (1990) found that fear of crime was not correlated with attitudes toward the police. Research conducted by Mirande (1980) and Block (1970, 1971) further clouds this issue. Mirande (1980) found that fear of crime was associated with favoring increases in police power, especially among Hispanics. Block (1970) discovered that blacks and whites who were fearful of crime supported giving the police additional authority to stop and question people and that whites who were fearful of crime opposed increased protection of civil liberties. However, Block (1971, p. 96) found this only among people who had an “extreme” fear of crime and noted that lower levels of fear of crime were “not significantly related to support for the police”.

The effects of residence (neighborhood and rural/urban differences)

Several researchers noted that different communities have different needs and expectations of the police (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1993; Cordner *et al.*,

1986; O'Brien, 1978). Most researchers who included neighborhood as a variable found differences in perceptions of the police between neighborhoods (Apple and O'Brien, 1983; Cao *et al.*, 1996; Dunham and Alpert, 1988; Gnagey and Henson, 1995; Jacob, 1971; Jesilow and Meyer, 2001; Jesilow *et al.*, 1995; Kusow *et al.*, 1997; Murty *et al.*, 1990; Reisig and Giacomazzi, 1998; Reisig and Parks, 2000; Sampson and Bartusch, 1998; Skogan, 1978; Weitzer, 1999, 2000a,b). Only Davis (1990) and Webb and Marshall (1995) found no correlation between neighborhood and evaluations of the police. However, Davis (1990) selected respondents non-randomly from four arbitrarily chosen areas and Webb and Marshall (1995, pp. 58-9) noted that:

... even though empirical support did not manifest itself in this study, neighborhood is an important factor affecting attitudes toward the police.

There is no consensus about why attitudes toward the police vary by neighborhood. Whereas Apple and O'Brien (1983) and Smith *et al.* (1991) found that the proportion of blacks in a neighborhood affects attitudes toward the police, Weitzer (1999, p. 839) reported that neighborhood race is not related to perceptions of police misconduct, when the age, education, gender, income, and race of individual respondents are controlled (also see Weitzer, 2000a). Dunham and Alpert (1988, p. 521) concluded that combinations of ethnicity and socioeconomic status "seem to generate specific neighborhood climates or cultures that influence attitudes toward policing practices". Cao *et al.* (1996, p. 12), on the other hand, reported that it is not race, but perceptions of neighborhood disorder, incivility, and informal collective security which have the greatest explanatory power. These findings indicate that potentially infinite combinations of variables such as education, fear of victimization, race, and socioeconomic status affect neighborhood differences in perceptions of the police.

As for differences in attitudes toward the police between residents of rural and urban areas, the little research that exists does not allow any conclusions to be drawn. Some studies indicate that residents of rural communities and small towns view the police more negatively than residents of large cities (Janeksela *et al.*, 1976; Zamble and Annesley, 1987). Other research indicates that rural residents view the police as favorably as the urban middle class and more favorably than the urban poor and minorities (Albrecht and Green, 1977; Clark and Wenninger, 1964). And some studies indicate that rural residents view the police use of force and ability to prevent crime more favorably than urban residents (Huang and Vaughn, 1996; Worrall, 1999).

Juveniles' perceptions of the police

In contrast with the large number of studies of adults' perceptions of the police, few researchers have examined juveniles' perceptions of the police. Most research on juveniles indicates that positive contact with the police increases favorable evaluations and negative contact reduces favorable evaluations (Bouma, 1973; Cox and Falkenberg, 1987; Hurst and Frank, 2000; Rusinko *et al.*,

1978). Griffiths and Winfree (1982) found that experience with the police (positive or negative) has a greater impact on attitudes toward the police than any other variable. As for juvenile delinquents, Leiber *et al.* (1998) found that any contact with the police lowers delinquents' evaluations of the police. On the other hand, Giordano (1976, p. 105) found that juveniles' evaluations of the police are not "affected by the amount of contact a youth has had through the system"; a finding which supports research indicating that having a criminal record is not correlated with negative perceptions of the police (e.g. Erez, 1984; Vermunt *et al.*, 1998).

A few researchers have examined the effects of sending officers into schools. A UK study indicates that, while juveniles view police-school liaison officers more favorably than the police in general, juveniles attending schools utilizing police-school liaison officers view the police less favorably than juveniles attending schools with no such officers (Hopkins *et al.*, 1992). Hopkins *et al.* (1992, p. 212) also found that, among juveniles in all schools included in the study, "There is a general deterioration of attitudes, stereotypes, and overall liking of the police over time". Another UK study indicates that juveniles' favorable perceptions of the police-school liaison officers are not generalized to police outside the schools and that juveniles distinguish between officers encountered in the schools and those encountered on the streets (Hopkins, 1994).

Research conducted in the USA indicates the opposite. Goggins *et al.* (1994) evaluated the effects of a cooperative project between the Akron (Ohio) schools and police department. Most students and school personnel indicated that the officers increased safety in the schools and helped reduce drug and gang activity, but some students thought that the officers were too aggressive (Goggins *et al.*, 1994). Derbyshire (1968) evaluated perceptions of the police held by third-graders in three Los Angeles schools: a predominantly black school in an impoverished area, a predominantly Hispanic school in a lower middle-class area, and a predominantly white school in an affluent area. Derbyshire (1968) gauged the effects of the "Policeman Bill" program, in which an officer gave a presentation to schoolchildren and allowed them to play in a patrol car, by having psychiatrists evaluate pictures of police officers drawn by the children before and after the presentation.

Derbyshire (1968, p. 187) concluded that the presentation produced a "significant change in the direction of less antipathy toward the police". Derbyshire (1968) also noted that poor black and middle-class Hispanic children view the police more negatively than upper middle-class white children; a finding which has received additional support over the years (Bouma, 1973; Hurst and Frank, 2000; Leiber *et al.*, 1998). Kuchel and Pattavina (1969) found that black juveniles were more likely than white juveniles to say that police officers target juveniles, can be bribed, and are bossy, lazy and overweight. Rusinko *et al.* (1978, p. 65) reported that black juveniles view the police more negatively than white juveniles and, in contrast with their

conclusion that positive police contact enhances juveniles' perceptions of the police, they noted that:

Positive police contact did not diminish the tendency for black youth to be less positive in their opinions of police.

Taylor *et al.* (2001, p. 300) found a racial hierarchy of support for the police with white and Asian juveniles being most supportive, black juveniles being the least supportive, and Hispanic and native American juveniles falling in between; a result similar to those reported in studies of adults (e.g. Lasley, 1994; Murty *et al.*, 1990).

Juveniles' perceptions of the police have also been linked to attitudes toward teachers, parents, and delinquent activities. Research indicates that favorable attitudes toward parents and teachers are correlated with favorable attitudes toward the police (Clark and Wenninger, 1964; Krause, 1975; Wirths, 1958), while involvement with delinquent activities is correlated with negative attitudes toward the police (Chapman, 1956; Cox and Falkenberg, 1987; Giordano, 1976; Leiber *et al.*, 1998). Psychological research also indicates that:

... adolescents' belief systems concerning law and crime are organized and structured in terms of coherent belief systems (Nelsen *et al.*, 1982, p. 56).

In brief, it is normal for juveniles who engage in illegal behaviors and view such behaviors positively to view the police negatively.

The limited number of juvenile studies which included gender and residence as variables does not permit conclusions to be drawn. Whereas Hurst and Frank (2000, p. 196) found that "females were more likely to express less favorable attitudes than males", Bouma (1973) and Taylor *et al.* (2001) found that females view the police more favorably than males. As for the effect of residential area, Hurst and Frank (2000) and Taylor *et al.* (2001) found that juveniles in large urban areas view the police more negatively than juveniles residing in less populated areas, but clearly more research is needed to verify this finding.

Perceptions and the effects of police policies and practices

Pursuit policy

Fennessy *et al.* (1970) examined citizens' opinions of police pursuit policy in Fairfax County, Virginia and found that the majority of respondents thought that officers should engage in pursuit even for minor traffic violations. Homant and Kennedy (1994) conducted a survey in a Detroit suburb and found that most persons favored pursuit policies which minimize risk but do not prohibit pursuits even for minor traffic violations. MacDonald and Alpert (1998, p. 189) examined:

... attitudes toward police pursuit held by citizens in Aiken County, South Carolina, Omaha, Nebraska, and Baltimore, Maryland.

The majority of respondents supported pursuit of persons who have committed serious offenses, but support for pursuit declined with the seriousness of the

offense. One group of respondents in Baltimore was given information about the potential outcomes of police pursuits and it was concluded that:

Public support for pursuit decreases when information about the dangers of pursuit is presented (MacDonald and Alpert, 1998, p. 193).

Police use of force

Cullen *et al.* (1996) found that citizens concur with the Supreme Court's ruling in the 1985 *Tennessee v. Garner* case: namely, that officers should be able to use deadly force to stop fleeing felons, who have exhibited dangerous behaviors such as bank robbery. Cullen *et al.* (1996) also found that blacks were less likely to support the illegal use of deadly force than whites, but more likely to support the legal use of deadly force. Carte (1973, p. 192) found that "respondents favored a limiting criterion upon lethal weapons use". Holmes (1998, p. 113) surveyed residents of El Paso, Texas and reported that:

Both Anglos and Hispanics residing in the barrio perceived more abusive practices than Anglos residing outside that area. However, respondents in the barrio reported having seen little more police abuse than Hispanics residing outside the barrio.

Chackerian (1974, p. 145) surveyed residents in five Florida cities and found that "citizen perception of police reliance on force leads to a positive rather than to a negative view of the police."

Weitzer (1999, p. 831) examined perceptions of the police in a white middle-class neighborhood, a black middle-class neighborhood, and black lower-class neighborhood in Washington, DC and reported that respondents in the black lower-class neighborhood perceived the most police misconduct, but that many residents in the neighborhood supported aggressive policing and "called for more police intervention to stem the tide of public drug dealing and other street deviance". Chermak *et al.* (2001, p. 384) studied Indianapolis residents' perceptions of aggressive patrol tactics and found "that the public strongly supports traffic enforcement crack-downs as a response to crime".

Police acceptance of gratuities

Sigler and Dees (1988) surveyed residents of Reno and found that most respondents believed that officers treat the providers of gratuities favorably and should not be allowed to accept gratuities. Residents of Brisbane, Australia indicated similar views toward police acceptance of gratuities (Prenzler and Mackay, 1995). Jones (1999) evaluated data gathered in North Carolina and found that religiously conservative blacks held more negative views toward officers accepting gratuities than any other demographic group.

Community-oriented policing

According to Cordner (1997, p. 466):

The vast majority of studies that have looked at the impact of community policing on citizens' attitudes toward the police have uncovered positive effects.

Conversely, this literature review located mixed evidence pertaining to support for, and effects of, community-oriented efforts. Reisig and Giacomazzi (1998) found that most respondents, even those who viewed the police negatively, supported community-policing efforts. The Merriam (Kansas) Police Department sent questionnaires to local businesses to evaluate the community-policing program and found that, "overall, the Merriam business community had a very favorable opinion of its police department" (Sissom, 1996, p. 13). Peak *et al.* (1992, p. 38) found that the community policing efforts in Reno contributed to:

Significant improvement in the RPD image and in the community perception of its overall performance, handling of offenders, and feeling of concern projected by street officers.

Jesilow *et al.* (1995, p. 82) found that respondents involved with community policing programs "were more likely to have positive attitudes toward the police".

Diamond and Lobitz (1973) conducted a study in the early 1970s, when students across the country were rioting in protest at the US invasion of Cambodia. They evaluated the effects of "the police student depolarization project" at Stanford University. The researchers set up student ride-alongs with the police, arranged for officers to have dinner and "rap sessions" with students, and scheduled "encounter sessions" (i.e. group discussions) between students and police officers. According to Diamond and Lobitz (1973, p. 105), the project achieved its goals of increasing understanding:

Between police and students, depolarizing police and student attitudes toward each other (changing attitudes in a positive direction), and changing students' intended behavior toward police in a positive direction.

Other researchers, however, found that community-oriented efforts do not generate public support. Greene and Decker (1989, p. 115) studied the effects of an educational program involving officers and citizens called COPE (Community-Oriented Police Education) and found that citizens involved in the project became less antagonistic toward the police, but that "citizen support for the police declined dramatically after the COPE program". Webb and Katz (1997) examined support for community-policing activities in Omaha, Nebraska and found that residents were more supportive of traditional law enforcement tactics (e.g. drug sweeps) than community-oriented programs (e.g. graffiti removal). Research conducted in Australia also indicates that support for conventional policing tactics such as criminal investigation is greater than support for service programs like handling found property (Beck *et al.*, 1999). Lumb (1996) examined citizens' opinions regarding citizen responsibility for assisting the police with crime control and reported that most respondents (regardless of age, gender, income, or race) stated that the police bear the majority of the responsibility for crime control.

Assorted additional findings

Carte's (1973, p. 339) research indicates that citizens support residency requirements for police officers, but Murphy and Worrall (1999) found:

That residency requirements have a negative impact on citizens' confidence in the ability of the police to protect them.

Breci and Murphy (1997, p. 200) examined perceptions of police handling of domestic disputes and reported that respondents were divided about whether or not the police should intervene in the case of loud arguments, but the majority stated that officers should intervene when property destruction or physical attacks occurred. Hindelang (1974), Zamble and Annesley (1987) and Huang and Vaughn (1996) all found that conservatives view the police more favorably than liberals.

John *et al.* (1997), in collaboration with the Tucson Police Department, surveyed residents about where the police should concentrate their efforts and found that the citizenry believed that the police should concentrate on robberies, burglaries, narcotics, auto theft, destruction of property and juvenile crime. Benedict *et al.* (1999, p. 149) conducted a survey in collaboration with the Charleston (Illinois) Police Department and found that the majority of respondents thought that "police officers should aggressively seek out and respond to crime rather than wait for citizens to call before taking action". Zevitz and Rettammel (1990, p. 36) studied the impact that police services, designed to meet the needs of the elderly, have on elderly victims' perceptions of the police and found that training officers to "assist elderly victims can produce correlative benefits for the victim and for the law enforcement agency".

Carte (1973, p. 200) found that "the public endorses a more aggressive program of minority recruitment". However, increasing minority recruitment has not been proven to reduce blacks' negative attitudes toward the police (Decker and Smith, 1980). Research indicates that the race of the officer who responds to the call (same as or different from the victim) has no effect on victim evaluations of the police (Chandek, 1999) and that the percentage of black officers in a police department has no effect on the rate of citizen complaints filed (Cao and Huang, 2000).

Baseheart and Cox (1993, p. 13) studied the effects of the police use of profanity and found that an officer who used profanity:

Was perceived by the offender to be lower on the qualities of friendliness, justness, and fairness than she/he was when not using profanity.

They also found, however, that an officer who used profanity was "perceived to be more qualified and more dynamic than when not using profanity" (Baseheart and Cox, 1993, p. 17). As for perceptions of the value of filing complaints against the police, Walker (1997, p. 220) reported that most focus group participants believed that "police departments cover up misconduct by their officers".

Methodological issues

Despite the wealth of research on perceptions of the police, there are several methodological problems which indicate that the previously discussed findings should be interpreted with caution. For example, many people who are in a

position to evaluate officers' behaviors (e.g. witnesses and suspects) are not included in studies of perceptions of the police (Mastrofski, 1981). Moreover, finding the clientele of the police is not always easy. In attempting to locate people who had contact with the police, Bordua and Tifft (1971, p. 161) found that people who were stopped by the police were difficult to locate using addresses provided to the officers, because:

No fewer than 48 persons of 120 on the list were not at the given address. In some cases, no such address existed.

Percy (1986, p. 73) also noted that:

In some cases it was difficult to contact identified respondents (because of incomplete information about addresses and telephone numbers),

and Furstenberg and Wellford (1973, p. 397) reported that "problems in locating the respondents were greater than had been anticipated".

Another sampling problem is the exclusion of the poor and minorities. As noted by Boggs and Galliher (1975, p. 394), one difficulty with studying the effects of socioeconomic status on blacks' perceptions of the police is:

The omission of lower-class young adult black men that may occur in the use of conventional survey methods, which exclude those persons who do not permanently reside in households.

As for surveying minorities who reside in households, Priest and Carter (1999) reported difficulties surveying blacks in Charlotte by telephone, because a third of the respondents refused to participate, and Song (1992) had extreme difficulties obtaining the cooperation of Asians in the Los Angeles area. Moreover, in a study mainly concerned with blacks in Washington, DC, Weitzer (2000a, p. 315) reported response rates as low as 41 percent despite paying respondents \$25 for their participation.

Next is the issue of the validity of reported negative police contact. Researchers need to develop objective, independent measures of police activity to better determine the impact of officers' behaviors on attitudes toward the police. Most studies indicating that negative police contact and witnessing inappropriate police behavior reduce favorable evaluations of the police have relied upon respondents' perceptions of whether the contact (or witnessed police behavior) was positive or negative (e.g. Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Thomas and Hyman, 1977). Similarly, studies indicating that blacks are less satisfied with police contact and more likely to discern racial bias than whites have relied upon the respondents' perceptions of police behaviors (e.g. Bordua and Tifft, 1971; Dean, 1980).

However, Brown and Coulter's (1983) study of the effect of police response time (a police activity measured independently of respondents' perceptions) indicates that it is not actual response time which influences evaluations of the police, but perceptions of response time. The research of Jacob (1971) and Erez (1984), which indicates that blacks view the police more negatively than whites, even though they are no more likely than white respondents to have had police-initiated sanctioned contact, also casts some doubt on the theory that

inappropriate police behavior is the cause of blacks' negative attitudes toward the police (also see Levin and Thomas, 1997). Moreover, several studies indicate that a person's pre-existing attitude toward the police influences whether the person interprets contact with the police as positive or negative (Brandl *et al.*, 1994; Chandek, 1999; Hopkins *et al.*, 1992; Reisig and Chandek, 2001).

Yet another problem is making sense of the data. Brandl *et al.* (1997) compared responses to questions which varied in focus and reference and reported that support for the police was unaffected by the type of question. Brandl *et al.* (1997, p. 479) (see also Hopkins, 1994; Walker, 1997) concluded that:

Loosely structured interviews would allow deeper insight into the form and structure of citizens' assessments of the police.

Murphy and Worrall (1999, pp. 334-5), on the other hand, asked respondents about the ability of the police to provide protection from crime, solve crimes, and prevent crimes and found significant variation in the responses. These findings that the type of question may or may not affect responses are not the only documented inconsistencies.

The surveys conducted for the President's Commission on Law Enforcement in the mid-1960s revealed that, although a large proportion of citizens never contacted the police to request assistance, many people nonetheless perceived the police as ineffective and desired more assertive policing tactics (McIntyre, 1967, p. 45). Brown *et al.* (1998) noted that although respondents viewed speeding vehicles as a problem and were unconcerned about house parties, they opposed tactics designed to reduce speeding (e.g. stationary patrol) and thought that the police should deal more aggressively with house parties. Marenin (1983) found that residents who viewed the police favorably were less likely to have voted in favor of a tax increase to fund a new building for the police department than those who viewed the police negatively.

Conceptual issues

Most early studies of perceptions of the police were atheoretical and examined the relationship between single variables (e.g. race) or simple combinations of variables (e.g. race and contact with the police) and perceptions of the police (Cao *et al.*, 1996, pp. 3-4). However, as noted by several researchers, one or two variables cannot adequately predict differences in how individuals view the police (Cao *et al.*, 1996; Hayes and Brewer, 1997; Poister and McDavid, 1978; Reisig and Parks, 2000). More recently, researchers have begun developing complex theoretical models of attitudes toward the police and subjecting these models to rigorous statistical analysis (e.g. Chandek, 1999; Dunham and Alpert, 1988). Nonetheless, measuring attitudes toward the police is difficult, because the attitudes are not unidimensional and different demographic groups may "not share the same ways of conceptualizing aspects of policing" (Sullivan *et al.*, 1987, p. 177; also see Shaw *et al.*, 1998).

Scaglione and Condon (1980a, p. 281) found “differences between white and black attitudinal domains”. Vermunt *et al.* (1998, p. 1110) argued that there are differences between the effects of the role-related and person-related aspects of citizen-police encounters on evaluations of procedural fairness. Chandek (1999) reported that victims’ expectations of the police varied by race and that victims’ perceptions of the police are affected by whether or not the police handling of the incident met the victims’ expectations. Dunham and Alpert (1988) and Webb and Marshall (1995) used five scales to measure attitudes toward the police and found that the independent variables (e.g. neighborhood) had different effects on the different measures of attitudes toward the police. In a study of juveniles’ perceptions of the police, Hurst and Frank (2000, p. 195) found that the “level of support varies depending upon the focus of the attitudinal question” (also see Bouma, 1973).

In addition, several researchers have distinguished between diffuse and specific support for the police. Diffuse support is an overall evaluation of an organization’s performance, whereas specific support is an evaluation of specific organizations, policies or individuals (Walker *et al.*, 1972, pp. 45-6). Cox and Falkenberg (1987), Hurst and Frank (2000), Walker *et al.* (1972) and White and Menke (1982) all found that specific support for the police is lower than diffuse support. Kaminski and Jefferis (1998) examined the impact of media coverage of an aggressive police arrest in Cincinnati and found that it had a negative effect on perceptions of police use of force, but not on diffuse support for the police. Kaminski and Jefferis (1998, p. 700) concluded that:

... measures of support are not limited to a simple “specific-diffuse” dichotomy, but are better conceptualized as lying along a continuum.

And Worrall’s (1999, p. 62) analysis of the distinction between “efficacy” and “image,” which is roughly analogous to the specific-diffuse dichotomy, indicates that none of the relationships between individual and contextual level variables and perceptions of the police:

Are as tidy as most research has assumed. This observation leads to the assertion that support for the police is a “fuzzy,” complicated, and multidimensional concept.

Furthermore, there is no consensus as to which combinations of variables explain the greatest variance in attitudes toward the police. This literature review indicates that researchers need to include combinations of individual and contextual variables, and incorporate the role of contextual and historical specificity in theoretical models of attitudes toward the police. First, future analyses should examine the differing effects that combinations of variables have on attitudes toward the police. For example, Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch (1999) found that Spanish-speaking Hispanics and whites were more likely to agree that people should cooperate with the police than English-speaking Hispanics, which indicates that acculturation may affect the relationship between race and attitudes toward the police. Hagan and Albonetti (1982) found that socioeconomic status had a positive effect on perceptions of the police among whites, but no effect on blacks’ attitudes toward the police. These

findings indicate that the impact of variables such as race and socioeconomic status is not uniform; a theory further supported by the lack of consensus regarding the effect of socioeconomic status in general.

Clearly, all the confounding variables have yet to be identified. One place to begin would be further research on the effect that political affiliation and personal ideology (conservative or liberal) have on attitudes toward the police. Several studies indicate that perceptions of the police are intertwined with perceptions of other political institutions (e.g. Albrecht and Green, 1977; Benson, 1981). Thus, it may be the case that personal ideology confounds the impact that variables such as race and socioeconomic status have on attitudes toward the police. Hindelang (1974) found that Republicans were more likely than Democrats to hold favorable attitudes toward the police. Huang and Vaughn (1996) and Zamble and Annesley (1987) reported that conservatives view the police more favorably than liberals. Although these are the only studies indicating that political ideology affects perceptions of the police, research on political opinion indicates that "liberal-conservative identifications have effects that are fairly uniform throughout the electorate" (Jacoby, 1991, p. 201; also see Neuman, 1981).

Moreover, some research indicates that education affects perceptions of the police, with better-educated persons viewing the police less favorably than persons with lower levels of education (e.g. Percy, 1986; Weitzer and Tuch, 1999). This is significant, because there are studies suggesting that education and liberalism are correlated (see, for example, Finney, 1974; Weil, 1995). Thus, it may be that better-educated persons are more likely to hold liberal attitudes favoring civil liberties and, as a result, view the police less favorably than those with lower levels of education. However, numerous studies also indicate that higher education is correlated with higher income (see, for example, Brunner and Wayland, 1958; Duncan and Hodge, 1963; Glenn and Taylor, 1984; Carlan, 1999). It would thus be logical to conclude that persons in the upper socioeconomic tiers (i.e. those with higher levels of education) would view the police more negatively than persons in the lower socioeconomic tiers, but there is no consensus in the literature as to the relationship between socioeconomic status and attitudes toward the police.

One possible explanation for this inconsistency is that type of education (as opposed to level of education) affects both personal ideology and attitudes toward the police. It may be, for instance, that type of institution affects the relationship between education and attitudes toward the police, with persons who attended liberal arts colleges viewing the police more negatively than persons who attended state universities. Another possibility is that college major influences the relationship between education and attitudes toward the police, with persons who majored in the liberal arts (e.g. English, philosophy, sociology) viewing the police more negatively than those who majored in a business-related or technical area of study (e.g. bakery science management, business administration, nursing). However, as there is no evidence pertaining to the relationship between type of education and attitudes toward the police,

this is pure speculation. The point here is that including some measure of type of education, personal ideology and political affiliation may help future researchers disentangle the multiple relationships between education, race, socioeconomic status and attitudes toward the police.

Next, it is important to incorporate the role of contextual specificity. While there is no consensus in the literature about the effect population density has on perceptions of the police, researchers have documented some rural-urban differences in attitudes toward the police (e.g. Janeksela *et al.*, 1976; Worrall, 1999). In addition, conditions within a municipality may affect attitudes toward the police (Skogan, 1978). Most studies on the relationship between race and attitudes toward the police indicate that blacks and Hispanics view the police less favorably than whites, but Jesilow *et al.*'s (1995) survey of residents of Santa Ana (where Hispanics constitute over half of the population) indicates that race does not significantly affect perceptions of the police. And Frank *et al.*'s (1996, p. 324) survey of Detroit residents (where blacks constitute over half of the population) indicates that "blacks hold more favorable attitudes toward the police than do whites". It thus appears that sociodemographic conditions within a city can imbue the impact that race has on attitudes toward the police.

Examinations of the role of contextual specificity should incorporate contextual differences at the micro level as well, because numerous studies indicate that neighborhood conditions affect perceptions of the police (e.g. Kusow *et al.*, 1997; Reisig and Parks, 2000). However, there is no consensus as to which neighborhood characteristics explain the greatest amount of variance. Some studies indicate that neighborhood racial composition affects attitudes toward the police (e.g. Apple and O'Brien, 1983; Smith *et al.*, 1991), some indicate that neighborhood race is not significant when other neighborhood conditions such as education level and socioeconomic status are controlled (e.g. Weitzer, 1999, 2000a), and some indicate that it is crime rates and perceptions of neighborhood disorder which affect attitudes toward the police (e.g. Cao *et al.*, 1996; Murty *et al.*, 1990), a finding which is in concurrence with Shaw and McKay's (1942) emphasis on "social disorganization." Hence, it is conceivable that the relationship between residential conditions and perceptions of the police will vary from one area to the next, a theory which helps explain the contradictory findings pertaining to both rural-urban and neighborhood differences in perceptions of the police.

Finally, theoretical models of perceptions of the police need to incorporate the role of historical specificity. Carte's (1973, p. 182) comparison of data gathered in 1938 and 1971 "showed that significant changes have occurred over the years in the public's view toward police organization and practices". Some recent research on minorities' perceptions of the police contradicts the findings of earlier studies. Carter's (1983) research indicated that Hispanics in Texas view the police more negatively than whites, but Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch (1999) found no differences between whites and Hispanics in Texas on several measures of attitudes toward the police. Hahn (1971, p. 184) surveyed black residents in Detroit just after the 1967 riot and found "extensive local animosity

toward police behavior”, but Frank *et al.*'s (1996) Detroit study indicates that blacks view the police more favorably than whites. The change in attitudes toward the police among Hispanics in Texas and blacks in Detroit has most likely been affected by historical shifts in the demographic composition and political climate of these areas, a theory further supported by studies indicating that perceptions of the police are affected by the socioeconomic and political power of the demographic group (e.g. Albrecht and Green, 1977; Hagan and Albonetti, 1982).

Given that public opinion on most (if not all) issues changes over time, it would be absurd to expect that public perceptions of the police would not. Research on publicized incidents of police misconduct indicates that such media coverage has a negative effect on attitudes toward the police (e.g. Jefferis *et al.*, 1997; Jesilow and Meyer, 2001), but the impact of negative press does not appear to be permanent (Shaw *et al.*, 1998; Tuch and Weitzer, 1997). To date, there are no empirical studies of the impact that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 had on attitudes toward the police. Nonetheless, given the public reaction to those attacks and the media portrayal of the police officers in New York as heroes, it would be reasonable to assume that New York residents' attitudes toward the police were more favorable after September 11, 2001 than in 1999 and 2000, when the Diallo shooting and the acquittals of the officers involved in the shooting generated public outcry and protests.

The only variable which seems to have the same impact on perceptions of the police is age, with younger people viewing the police more negatively than older people. Most studies indicate that minorities view the police less favorably than whites, but recent research conducted in racially diverse metropolitan areas indicates that the effects of race are influenced by contextual variables at both the municipal and neighborhood level. Many researchers found a link between negative contact with the police and negative perceptions of the police, but they all relied upon the respondents' perceptions of whether the contact was positive or negative. Furthermore, some studies indicate that having a criminal record and receiving a traffic citation do not produce negative evaluations of the police. Finally, numerous studies indicate that attitudes toward the police are extremely complex and people evaluate the police differently depending upon how the police are conceptualized. In sum, theoretical generalizations about attitudes toward the police should be made with caution.

Discussion and policy implications

Decker's (1981) conclusion that age, contact with the police, neighborhood and race have a significant impact on attitudes toward the police is supported by this review of more than 100 articles. There is still no consensus about the effects of education, gender, socioeconomic status, victimization or fear of victimization on perceptions of the police. Moreover, there are several methodological and conceptual issues which raise concerns about the previously discussed findings. Although there is clearly interaction between

variables (e.g. race and neighborhood), the interactive effects are not yet understood. The absence of a comprehensive theory explaining attitudes toward the police and how combinations of variables affect perceptions of the police casts doubt on the usefulness of such research for policy development (Skogan, 1975, 1978; White and Menke, 1978).

For example, most studies indicate that blacks and young people view the police less favorably than whites and older people, but means of improving these demographic groups' attitudes toward the police have yet to be documented. A commonly proposed tactic for reducing blacks' negative perceptions of the police is hiring more black officers, but there is no empirical support for such programs (Decker and Smith, 1980; Chandek, 1999). Nonetheless, the extant research does indicate a few areas on which police administrators should focus:

- tailoring law enforcement tactics to meet the different needs of individual communities;
- improving relations with minorities and young people;
- maintaining a professional demeanor, while interacting with citizens; and
- developing a good working relationship with the press.

To provide a few suggestions, it is proposed that police departments make serious efforts to develop community-policing programs. Although the effectiveness of community policing has not been proven (Riechers and Roberg, 1990; Roberg, 1994), it is clear that attitudes toward the police (and crime rates) vary between cities and neighborhoods. Allocating community-oriented resources to high crime areas and neighborhoods with large minority populations would be the most logical place to begin. Moreover, this review of the literature indicates that making broad generalizations about attitudes toward the police may not be possible. It is thus essential that police programs and tactics be tailored to meet the needs of individual neighborhoods.

Programs targeting young people should also be considered. One option would be having officers work with high schools and colleges – not necessarily sending officers into classrooms to speak with students, but having them work with student organizations, peer-jury programs, promote awareness of date rape, and so on. Young people should be encouraged to learn about the police and question irrational concepts about them (Frazier *et al.*, 1986). Another option would be assigning officers to entertainment districts frequented by young adults to interact with the young people in a non-threatening fashion. If young adults become accustomed to seeing officers on the streets and in bars without making arrests or hassling people, they should perceive the officers more favorably. This would, however, require overlooking minor violations such as public intoxication. Thus, “zero tolerance” campaigns should be avoided.

Research also indicates the need for decentralizing the administrative structure of police departments. If police departments are to develop tactics

citizens will support, it is the line officers and supervisors who should have the discretion to design the programs, because they are in the best position to determine what works and what does not. However, the success of decentralizing the administrative structure depends upon having educated, competent officers, which means that rigorous hiring, training and promotion standards must be maintained. The problem is that recruiting and retaining qualified personnel require higher salaries and better benefit packages, which, depending upon local resources, may not be an option.

Next, and perhaps most importantly, all personnel – telephone operators, line officers, detectives, supervisors and administrators – should concentrate on conducting themselves in a courteous and professional manner at all times, because there is no dispute in the literature about the effects of perceived inappropriate police behaviors. Owing to the growth of camcorders, roving news helicopters, the media, and the Internet, even an isolated incident of inappropriate police activity can be publicized and create a public relations nightmare. Officers should be aware that their every move is under public scrutiny and that even minor indiscrepancies can do damage to the reputation of the police. Administrators should strive to promote professionalism, investigate complaints, and develop strict policies to minimize inappropriate behaviors.

Finally, there is a need for a good relationship with the press (Parrish, 1993). Reporters will develop stories about the police and ongoing investigations with or without the cooperation of the police (Otto, 2000). Hence, line officers and supervisors should be trained in media relations and the police should provide more information to reporters, especially in cases of alleged illegal police actions, because silence can be construed as a cover-up (Otto, 2000; Parrish, 1993). All the research on publicized incidents of police misconduct indicates that such press coverage negatively affects attitudes toward the police. Although the impact of positive media attention has yet to be studied, it stands to reason that, if negative coverage produces negative views of the police, then positive coverage would foster positive views (Jefferis *et al.*, 1997, p. 392). It would thus behove police departments to utilize the local media to promote any community-oriented service programs they may offer (e.g. bicycle registration, citizen police academies).

These are, however, merely suggestions and will not be applicable for all police departments. One of the clearest implications of this literature review is the need for research on perceptions of the police to be conducted on a regular basis. As noted by Skogan (1996, p. 431):

National polls are almost always conducted in response to some crisis, such as the Rodney King episode or the Mark Fuhrman testimony in Los Angeles. As a result, when questions are asked about the police, they are not consistent across time.

Thus, evaluating the role of historical specificity will be especially arduous. Moreover, individual departments need to study how they are viewed by the public. An annual national poll of perceptions of the police may be helpful, but

cannot provide a police chief with information about the concerns of the local population, different concerns between neighborhoods, or variables which influence local attitudes toward the police.

In addition, there is a need for more research on juveniles and for studies which include both juveniles and adults. To date, only a few researchers have examined juveniles' attitudes toward the police. While most research on the relationship between age and attitudes toward the police indicates that young people view the police more negatively than older people, it is not clear when these unfavorable attitudes begin to develop. Unless researchers examine the development of perceptions of the police, from late childhood through early adulthood, and better identify the age period during which hostility towards the police emerges, it will be substantially more difficult for law enforcement (or educational) professionals to develop effective means of improving young persons' attitudes toward the police.

There is also a need for research on perceptions of female officers. It was Koenig (1978, p. 272) who first noted that attitudes toward policewomen have not been examined and that "most of the information available is purely conjecture". With the exceptions of Leger's (1997) and Singh's (1998) research, nothing has changed since Koenig's (1978) work was published. And there is a need for more research to be conducted in small towns and rural areas. Most research on perceptions of the police has been conducted in "metropolitan areas or metropolitan suburbs, which is not necessarily the best approach, because the majority of police departments in the USA are not large, metropolitan departments" (Brown *et al.*, 1998, p. 829). Finally, there is a dire need for research on how minority groups other than blacks and Hispanics (e.g. Asians, native Americans) view the police.

Unfortunately, there has been a lack of interest on the part of police officials in survey research. Although this has started to change, the change has been lethargic. Despite the growth of community policing, few departments are making an effort to determine community attitudes and needs prior to developing community-oriented programs. Until law enforcement practitioners acknowledge the worth of survey research and begin developing programs based on such research, large quantities of valuable data will continue to be collected and analyzed, only to gather dust in the bowels of government archives and university libraries.

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