

Factors that Influence the Public's Opinion of Police

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research study was to examine the factors that influence the formation of the public's opinion of the police. Demographic and police citizen contact related factors were both examined throughout the course of this study. This research project was completed by secondary data analysis of the Police-Public Contact Survey, 2002 (ICPSR 4273). Demographic factors were tested using the following independent variables were used: citizen race, officer race, gender, age, socioeconomic status, and area of residence. Encounter factors were tested through the following independent variables used: contact initiated by police, respondent was given a legitimate reason for the traffic stop, and the respondents vehicle was searched at the traffic stop. The dependent variables used were proper police behavior and proper police behavior at a traffic stop. All hypotheses regarding encounter details were supported with statistically significant data, while only a few of the demographic hypotheses had statistically significant findings. These demographic hypotheses include race, age, and socioeconomic status.

Introduction

Police officers play a vital role in protecting and aiding the citizens residing in the communities that they police, which places police officers in frequent contact with the public. Police either initiate the contact or the citizens initiate the contact (Avdija, 2010; Dukes, Portillos, & Miles, 2009). Interactions between police and citizens influence the public's attitudes toward the police (Avdija, 2010; Dukes et al., 2009). In order for effective policing to occur, the public must have confidence in law enforcement; (Dukes et al., 2009). If public opinion of the police is satisfactory then citizens will aid police when they can, by cooperating with investigations. They will also feel safer in their communities which would contribute to a more efficient and effective law enforcement system (Dukes et al., 2009).

Dukes et al.'s (2009) conclusion regarding the importance of citizen confidence in law enforcement is supported by Ackerman et al. (2001) who found the percentage of Americans who lack confidence in police to be 10 percent. Every 10 out of 100 Americans lack confidence in law enforcement; the factors which influence their opinions should be examined for a better understanding of where that lack of confidence originates (Ackerman et al., 2001).

Demographic features such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, and residence have been found to shape public opinion of police (Avdija, 2010; Gau 2010; Lurigio, Greenleaf, & Flexon 2009; Mbuba, 2010; Sims, Hooper, & Peterson 2002). The quality of police contact also influences the formation of citizens perceptions of police; factors related to contact include who initiates it, the demeanor of police during the contact, and the legitimacy of their stops (Avdija, 2010; Dukes et al., 2009; Gau 2010; Sullivan, Dunham, & Alpert, 1987; Weitzer & Tuch 2002). The current study examined the degree to which factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, residence, and the quality of contact influences the opinions the public has regarding the police.

Literature Review

Prior research on public attitudes toward the police examined what types of variables influence the public's perception of police. Some studies have focused more on citizen demographics, namely their race (Ackerman et al., 2001; Avdija, 2010; Gau 2010; Lurigio et al., 2009; Mbuba, 2010; Sims et al., 2002; Shuck & Rosenbaum, 2005; Sullivan et al., 1987; Thomas & Burns, 2005; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch 2005), gender (Avdija, 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002), age (Gau, 2010; Sullivan et al., 1987; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005), residence (Weitzer & Tuch, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005), and socioeconomic status (Avdija, 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). Additional studies focus on the quality of contact between the police and citizens as a predictor of the public's opinion (Avdija, 2010; Dukes et al., 2009; Gau, 2010; Sullivan et al., 1987; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). One aspect of the quality of contact is whether the police initiate contact or the citizen does (Avdija, 2010). Other features regarding contact include the legitimacy of a stop and the behavior of the police during it (Avdija, 2010; Dukes et al., 2009; Gau, 2010; Mbuba 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002).

Race/Ethnicity

The race and ethnicity of citizens are major indicators of their perceptions of the police (Avdija, 2010; Gau 2010; Huggins, 2012). In several previous studies, race and ethnicity arose as the most prominent factors in shaping the public's opinion of police (Ho & McKean, 2004; Lurigio et al., 2009; Mbuba, 2010). A majority of the research reviewed for the current study indicated that African Americans viewed the police in a more negative light than Caucasians did (Avdija, 2010; Gau, 2010; Posick et al. 2013).

Mbuba (2010) portrayed Caucasians as having stronger opinions than African Americans in reference to police being important assets to the community. This study also portrayed

Caucasians as holding the belief that the police are not too harsh on suspects. The groups also diverged in their opinions of whether police engaged in racial profiling. Caucasians believed they did not and African Americans believed they did (Mbuba, 2010). While the Caucasians and African Americans in Mbuba's (2010) study disagreed on these issues, they agreed on the falsity of beliefs that police are corrupt and tend to arrest people they do not like.

African Americans tend to encounter police more often than Caucasians, and often in negative situations, such as stops and searches (Avdija, 2010). The contact between African Americans and the police is more frequent than it is for Caucasians and it is more likely to be an involuntary contact for African Americans (Avdija, 2010). These negative situations predispose them to look at the police as a threat rather than a service provider (Mbuba 2010).

Similarly to African Americans, Latinos express less confidence in police than Caucasians (Gau, 2010; Lurigio et al., 2009; Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2005; Sullivan et al., 1987; Thomas & Burns, 2005; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Prior researchers believe that Latinos view police more negatively than Caucasians, but hold a more positive view of them than African Americans (Gau, 2010; Lurigio et al., 2009; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Lurigio et al. (2009) indicated that Latinos are more accepting and respectful to police than African Americans. Latinos' level of confidence in police decreases when levels of police presence decrease in their communities, suggesting a negative relationship (Thomas & Burns, 2005).

While the majority of prior studies support the claim that Caucasians view the police in a more positive way, some research declared the opposite; Sims et al. (2002) found that Caucasians showed a greater lack of confidence in police than African Americans. One possible explanation for this is that African Americans, who are more likely to be the victims of crime,

may have to rely on police to assist them more often than Caucasians do; this gives the police the chance to affect African Americans in a positive manner (Sims et al., 2002).

A different angle examined using race was not just the citizens' race in shaping public opinion but the race of the police as well (Huggins 2012). Huggins' (2012) study examined the relationship between the races of the police and the citizen; the pairings were either same race pairings or different race pairings, with one person being African American and the other being Caucasian. This research reported that lower levels of police approval existed when researchers examined Caucasian citizens in the Huggins (2012) study for interactions that occurred with African American officers compared to Caucasian officers. The study similarly found that African American citizen respondents held lower levels of police approval when the citizen interacted with African American police officers than when they interacted with Caucasian officers (Huggins, 2012). This pattern deviated from Huggins original prediction that pairings where the officer and citizen were of the same race would produce the highest levels of citizens' approval of police. The fact that African Americans are the minority in the police force is a reason Huggins gives for these results. Huggins (2012) explains that, "other citizens perceive that minority officers target minority citizens as a way of placating and fitting in with their predominately White colleagues" (pg 107).

Gender

Race and ethnicity are possibly the most prominent demographic variables in determining public opinion towards police, but some scholars, such as Avdija (2010), Gabbidon, Higgins, & Potter (2011), Mbuba (2010) and Weitzer & Tuch (2002), believe that gender is important. Mbuba (2010) and Weitzer & Tuch (2002) share the same belief that males are more likely than females to view police negatively. Female respondents show that they are less

hesitant to report things to the police than males are (Mbuba 2010). On the contrary to the Mbuba (2010) and Weitzer & Tuch (2002) findings, Avdija (2010) found the more feminine a subject was, the more likely he/she was to have negative feelings toward police; thus according to Avdija (2010) females show a higher tendency to hold negative views of police than males.

Gabbidon et al. (2011) also examined the effect of gender on confidence in law enforcement, but with an all-black sample. Their findings indicate that, while African American women are slightly more likely to view police positively than African American males, compared to other races the two genders are most like each other in their views (Gabbidon et al., 2011).

Age

Beyond gender and race, age also influences public perception of the police (Gau, 2010; Gabbidon et al., 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Research appears to show that as citizens' age increases, their opinion of the police becomes more favorable; older citizens feel more confident in the police to do an adequate job (Gau, 2010; Ho & McKean, 2004; Gabbidon et al., 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Gau (2010) found that not only did older citizens report higher levels of confidence in police than younger respondents in the study, but they specifically believed in the ability of the police to control gun violence. Weitzer and Tuch (2005) interpret the conclusion that younger citizens view the police with less confidence than older citizens as being associated with increased exposure to media reports on police misconduct, compared to older citizens. Gabbidon et al. (2011) used an exclusively African American sample for their results, and found that young African American citizens have a greater negative view of police than their elders because young African American citizens are more likely to experience racial profiling.

Socioeconomic Status

Another demographic feature that shows linkage to citizens' confidence in police is socioeconomic status (Avdija, 2010; Ho & McKean, 2004; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). The higher a citizen's socioeconomic status, the more likely he or she will hold positive opinions of the police (Avdija, 2010; Ho & McKean, 2004; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Ho and McKean (2004) found an exception in that while for most people a positive relationship between income and police confidence exists, in a sample of African Americans the relationship was negative; for African Americans, as the level of income increases, confidence in police declines. In both Weitzer and Tuch studies (2002; 2005), citizens with higher income not only showcase a greater likelihood to view the police favorably, but also hold the belief that they receive fair treatment by police.

Residence

The last demographic feature that influences how citizens perceive police is residency (Avdija, 2010; Crank & Giacomazzi, 2007; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Research indicates that those who live in cities or urban environments have more negative perceptions of police than those who reside in rural or suburban settings (Avdija, 2010; Crank & Giacomazzi, 2007; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). According to Crank and Giacomazzi (2007) there is sometimes a large difference in the way those in urban and non-urban (suburban or rural) settings view police behavior because of the way the citizens live and also due to the culture in those settings differing greatly from one another. Weitzer and Tuch (2002) attribute the higher levels of citizen negativity towards police in urban settings to citizens witnessing unfair treatment of African Americans in cities.

Police Behavior

As mentioned before, not all research on public opinion of the police focuses on demographic factors. In regards to formation of public opinion of police, scholars study the

interaction between officers and citizens. The studies specifically examine the nature of contact in police-citizen interactions and they examine how citizens feel about police conduct (Avdija, 2010; Lurigio et al., 2009; Mbuba, 2010). In order for the public to have a positive outlook on their police officers, the manner in which the police conduct themselves needs to be deemed appropriate by the citizen (Avdija, 2010; Gau, 2010; Mbuba, 2010).

Prior research found that citizens tend to evaluate the police based on personal interactions with them (Gau, 2010; Mbuba 2010). One aspect of the interaction is who initiated the contact: the police or the citizen. Contact initiated by the police tends to cause negative feelings toward the police, while contact initiated by the citizen produces a positive effect on police-citizen relations (Avdija, 2010). Mbuba (2010) suggests that citizens who have already encountered the police in a negative way are less likely to say that they provide an important service to their community. Specifically, Mbuba (2010) concluded that previous negative encounters with police, net of other factors, had a strong influence on citizens viewing the police in a negative and more critical light. A negative, or positive, experience a citizen has with police can change an opinion he or she had already formed (Gau, 2010).

One of the most important determinants of citizen satisfaction with the police analyzes police response to the community; this includes an examination of effective responses and if the officers had a good manner when interacting with the citizens (Dukes et al., 2009; Gau, 2010). Part of effective police response to the community includes the visibility of the police (Dukes et al., 2009; Thomas & Burns, 2005). Trust in police is increased when they are seen going about their duties because this instills into citizens a belief that the police “are making earnest efforts to fight crime” (Dukes et al., 2009, p.311).

Stop Legitimacy and Racial Profiling

The contact that occurs during traffic stops presents another opportunity for opinions concerning police to form (Huggins, 2012). A study by Huggins (2012) found that citizens evaluate the police on proper behavior, meaning by the actions the police take during the stop. These actions include whether the stop is routine or whether the stop deviates from the routine and leads to their vehicle or person being searched. Non routine behavior at stops may cause negative feelings towards police due to the citizen feeling that they were disrespected or that they received punishment (Huggins, 2012)

An influential component in successful interactions between citizens and police is the distinction between legitimate stops and racial profiling (Gau, 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). The legitimacy of a stop plays a very large role; if a citizen feels their stop by the police was for illegitimate reasons, they will lose trust in the effectiveness of the police (Gau, 2010). The degree to which citizens believe racial profiling occurs in their neighborhoods tends to differ by the race of the citizen, but all groups agreed on the wrongfulness of racial profiling (Gau, 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). The difference in the beliefs, between each racial group, regarding the prevalence of racial profiling in citizens' cities is shown in the Weitzer & Tuch (2002) study; the break down is 30% of Caucasians, 59% of Latinos, and 80% of African Americans believe racial profiling occurs in their city (Weitzer & Tuch, 2002).

Positive attitudes from citizens regarding the police are essential to the effectiveness of law enforcement (Dukes et al., 2009). Researchers need to analyze factors, such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, residence, and the manner in which police conduct themselves in order to locate specific variables that hinder positive opinions. Identifying what components of the aforementioned factors lead to negative perceptions of police can provide a better understanding for police officials about what determines their approval ratings, enabling

them to create plans to address those issues. Given the findings from previous research, I developed the following hypotheses to test regarding what factors influence the public's opinion of the police.

Hypotheses 1: Caucasians are more likely than African Americans and Latinos to feel the police behaved properly during encounters.

Hypotheses 2: African Americans are more likely to believe the police behaved improperly in traffic stop encounters with Caucasian officers than Caucasians are.

Hypothesis 3: Caucasians are more likely to believe the police behaved improperly in traffic stop encounters with African American officers than with Caucasian officers.

Hypothesis 4: African Americans are more likely to believe the police behaved improperly in traffic stop encounters with African American officers than with Caucasian officers.

Hypothesis 5: Females are more likely to believe the police behaved properly in encounters than males are.

Hypothesis 6: Older people are more likely to believe the police behaved properly during encounters than younger people are.

Hypothesis 7: Citizens with a high socioeconomic status are more likely to believe the police behaved properly during encounters than citizens with a low socioeconomic status

Hypothesis 8: Citizens who live in central cities of a MSA (metropolitan statistical area) are less likely than citizens who live in outside of the central cities of MSAs to have a positive opinion on the police.

Hypothesis 9: Contact initiated by police is more likely than contact initiated by citizens to cause a negative perception of police.

Hypothesis 10: Citizens who believe the police gave them a legitimate reason for a traffic stop are more likely to have positive views of police than citizens who do not believe they received a legitimate reason.

Hypothesis 11: Citizens whose vehicles are searched by police during traffic stops are more likely than citizens whose vehicles are not searched to be dissatisfied with police.

Methodology

I tested the aforementioned hypotheses to examine factors that prior research found contributed to the formation of the public's opinion of the police. I conducted this research project through the secondary analysis of the Police-Public Contact Survey, 2002 (ICPSR #4273). The Police-Public Contact Survey provided data from research conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (US Department of Commerce, 2002). The purpose of the survey was to accompany the National Crime Victimization Survey, which consisted of interviews with participants every six months (US Department of Commerce, 2002). Researchers administered these interviews in person and by telephone, using a computer assisted program (US Department of Commerce, 2002). The sample was classified as a stratified multistage cluster sample, consisting of 93,410 people (US Department of Commerce, 2002).

The Police-Public Contact Survey does not have data from the entire sample. The Bureau of Justice Statistics was able to conduct 76,910 interviews in total (US Department of Commerce, 2002). Reasons for the missing interview cases included the respondent not being physically or mentally able to participate and the respondent lacking the ability to speak English. All respondents for the interviews were 16 years of age or older (US Department of Commerce, 2002). The sample size for the current research project used a smaller sample at times due to the

examination of hypotheses dealing with traffic stops, making it necessary to filter out only respondents who had experienced a traffic stop.

Although the Police-Public Contact Survey covered an extensive list of variables, the current research examined demographic factors of citizens, the type and quality of the interaction between the police and citizens, and the interaction of the race of the officer and the race of the citizen involved in the interaction. The focus of these analyses was to determine what factors influenced respondents' opinions of the police.

Independent Variables

The independent variables for this study included demographic information of the respondents and variables related to the interaction between the police and the respondent. I used the variable V5V6 as the measure of respondents' race/ethnicity. It classified respondents as white, black and Hispanic. Similarly, I used the variables V52 and V56 to determine the race of the officer involved in contacts. Originally, V52 was coded as white and V56 was coded as black but I recoded the two into OFFRACE, with values of white and black. This study used the variable V3 for the respondent's sex, coded as male and female. The variable AGECAT6 was used for the respondent's age. The variable was coded to identify respondents' ages as 16-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, and 60 or older. The variable INCOME was used to test the respondent's income level and their opinion of police. This variable was coded as values of less than \$20,000, \$20,000-\$49,999, and \$50,000 or more. The last demographic variable was MSA, which identified whether the respondent lived in a metropolitan statistical area (MSA), as defined by the US Census. MSA was coded as central city of MSA, in MSA but not in central city, and not in MSA.

In order to analyze the effect an interaction between the police and a citizen had on the public perception of police, independent variables were used involving who initiated the contact, whether a reason was given by the police regarding a traffic stop, and whether a respondent's car was searched at the traffic stop. The variable V15 was used to determine whether the interaction was initiated by the police and was coded as either yes or no. The variable V80 was used to determine whether a respondent felt they were given a legitimate reason for their traffic stop and was coded as yes or no. Lastly, the variable V61 was used to indicate whether a respondent had his or her car searched at the traffic stop and was coded as yes or no.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables used for this study evaluated the respondents' attitudes towards the police in two contexts: general encounters and traffic stop encounters. The variable V42 was used to determine if the respondent felt that the police behaved properly in general encounters. The variable was coded with values of properly or improperly. The study used variable V91 as the other dependent variable as it measured how the respondent felt the police behaved specifically during a traffic stop. The variable contained properly or improperly options. The variable V91 was used as a dependent variable when examining independent variables that only could have occurred at traffic stops.

Limitations

While the variables tested and the data provided from the Police-Public Contact Survey (2002) included valuable information relevant to what I had examined, it limited my research in some ways. Since I did not collect the data myself I relied on the variables I wanted to test to be included in the dataset, which was not always true. For example, the previous literature reviews mentioned a great deal about how public perception was sometimes influenced by the race of the

officer that a citizen was interacting with. The only way to examine this concept, due to data set errors, included running analysis on the race interactions between officers and citizens at traffic stops which left out any interaction between the entities that may have occurred outside of a traffic stop. The administered date of the survey also became a limitation. The Police-Public Contact survey that I used for this research study came from 2002. The data was still helpful for this particular study but the possibility that the answers to the questions on the initial survey might be different if issued in this time period is quite large. Currently, there is increased media attention towards police officers' behaviors, which could have had an effect on the formation of respondents' opinions on police officer in a way that is different than the 2002 survey.

Statistical Procedure

In order to examine how the public viewed police officers, I performed both univariate analysis and bivariate analysis on the independent and dependent variables. For univariate analysis, I ran frequencies for all variables used. For bivariate analysis, I conducted crosstab analysis. In order for the hypothesis to be supported, I determined if the data produced were statistically significant, based on the chi-square statistic, and whether the pattern operated in the manner I predicted. In order to determine the strength of association I had to calculate epsilons, keeping in mind the effect the amount of columns/row would have on that particular epsilon.

Findings and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics regarding the independent and dependent variables used for this research project. The independent variables shown in Table 1 include demographic information about the respondents to the Police Public Contact Survey, 2002. The majority of the sample (75.8%) indicated that their race was white, leaving only 12.7% of

respondents identifying as Hispanic and an essentially equal number (11.5%) of respondents choosing black for their race. There was a wide percentage gap between the races of police officers that citizens had interactions with, which was 90.3% of the sample having interactions with white officers and only 9.7% of interactions occurring with black officers.

The sample was closely divided in regards to the sex of the respondents. About 47% of respondents consisted of males, and about 53% of females. Another factor in the formation of opinions of police was the age of the respondents. For this sample there was a wide range of ages in the respondents. The age groups examined and their presence in the sample used was as follows: ages 16-19 (6.9%), ages 20-29 (15.8%), ages 30-39 (19.4%), ages 40-49 (20.4%), ages 50-59 (15.0%), and ages 60 or older (21.5%).

Other independent variables included the income and metropolitan statistical area (MSA) status of respondents. Table 1 depicts 38.2% of respondents receiving \$20,000 or less, 27.5% of respondents receiving \$20,000-\$49,000 and finally 34.3% of respondents receiving \$50,000 or more. Although the three categories have a fairly even amount of respondents, the largest amount of respondents identified themselves as earning an income of only \$20,000 or less. The msa status of respondents had a bigger divide between the sample with the highest percentage (56.1%) indicating that they lived in the MSA but not in the central city, 30.3% of respondents noted that they live in the central city of the MSA and 13.6% of respondents said they do not live in the MSA.

The last independent variables used involved a direct interaction between police officers and respondents. According to Table 1, the sample consisted of a close split between respondents whose interaction was initiated by the police (56.8%) and those whose interaction was initiated by either them or others not considered a police officer (43.2%). For respondents

who experienced a traffic stop, the majority (86.1%) of them believed they received a legitimate reason for why they were stopped, while 13.9% disagreed with that. Similarly, most of the respondents in the sample (96.2%) which had experienced a traffic stop did not have their car searched while a small percentage (3.8%) did.

Dependent variables were used that measured if respondents felt the police behaved properly or improperly in general contact situations and also at traffic stops. The breakdown of the general contact variable shows that 92.1% of respondents believed the police behaved properly in their encounters while 7.9% believed the police behavior was improper. The variable that measured traffic stop encounter behavior produced similar results with 89.6% of respondents believing the police behaved properly and 10.4% of the respondents believing that the police behaved improperly.

Crosstabulation Analysis

Table 2 depicts the results of the examination of the first hypothesis that Caucasian respondents would be more likely than the African American and Hispanic respondents to feel that the police behaved properly in their encounters. From running a crosstabulation analysis on the variables involved, the analysis found that of the Caucasian respondents, 92.5% of them believed the police to be behaving properly. For the African American and Hispanic respondents, the analysis portrayed similar statistics; 90.1% of African American respondents and 91.3% of the Hispanic respondents felt proper police behavior took place in their encounters.

While the data portrayed in Table 2 show support for my hypothesis, it has very weak support. Although the pattern of the data is as predicted, that Caucasians are more likely than African Americans and Hispanics to find the police behaved properly, there is really very little difference between the three groups examined. Despite the weak support for my hypothesis, the

finding would be considered consistent with some of the prior research (Avdija, 2010; Gau, 2010; Posick et al. 2013) stated in my literature review while inconsistent with others (Sims et al., 2002). Avdija (2010) and Mbuba (2010) both reported that African Americans would hold more negative views on police than Caucasians. Avdija's (2010) research delves into how the frequent involuntary contact between African Americans and police at traffic stops may be a contributing factor in the development of their negative viewpoints. This research suggests that if the variable of race was run against police behavior at traffic stops a stronger association may have occurred. Gau (2010) stated that although Hispanics had lower levels of acceptance for police than Caucasians, they are more likely than African Americans to hold favorable views of police. This is consistent with the current study, however the percentage of Hispanic respondents who believed the police behaved properly is only slightly higher than African American respondents. These findings are inconsistent with the research of Sims et al (2002) who found that Caucasians are less likely to have confidence in police than African Americans because Caucasians are less likely to need police assistance than African Americans since a smaller amount of Caucasians are victims of crime.

Depicted in Table 3, the data supports my hypothesis that African Americans are more likely to believe the police behaved improperly when encountering a Caucasian officer during a traffic stop than a Caucasian respondent is. The data produced shows that 19.3% of African American respondents reported improper police behavior from a Caucasian officer while only 9.3% of Caucasian respondents showed disapproval of a Caucasian police officer behavior during traffic stops (see Table 3). The data are statistically significant and operates in the manner my hypothesis predicted, implying that there is a strong relationship between an opinion of police behavior occurring at traffic stops and the race of the citizens and officers involved in

the interaction. These findings are consistent with previous literature (Huggins, 2012) who found that African Americans are more likely than Caucasians to hold negative feelings towards the police, especially when encountering, in a traffic stop context, a Caucasian officer. Huggins (2012) infers that African Americans may distrust Caucasian officers for their position of authority.

Table 4 compares the relationship between Caucasian respondents in traffic stop encounters with Caucasian officers against Caucasian respondents in traffic stop encounters with African American officers and the effect it has on the respondents' opinions of police behavior. My prediction that Caucasians are more likely to believe the police behaved improperly at traffic stops when the officer is African American instead of Caucasian is not supported. While the pattern is operating in the manner I expected, with 8.9% of respondents indicting improper police behavior with a Caucasian officer and 11.2% reporting improper police behavior by an African American officer, the data are not statistically significant.

The findings from Table 4 are inconsistent with prior research conducted by Huggins (2012) who discovered that Caucasian citizens were more likely to report improper police behavior by African American officers than they were for Caucasian officers at traffic stops. This may be due to the feeling that the African American officers treat them harshly as revenge for the Caucasian citizen being a part of the majority group (Huggins, 2012). I believe the discrepancy between my data results and the prior literature may be attributed to fact that there very few Caucasian respondents who reported having encounters with African American officers.

In hypothesis 4, I predicted that African Americans are more likely to believe the police behaved improperly in traffic stop encounters with African American officers versus Caucasian

officers. However, the results from Table 5 do not support my hypothesis. This particular test has shown the opposite of my prediction, with 19.3% of respondents disapproving of Caucasian police behavior at traffic stops and 16.7% of respondents disapproving of African American police behavior at traffic stops. These findings are inconsistent with prior research on officer/citizen race relationships, which have found that African American citizens are more likely to find behavior by African American police officers to be improper than they are to report improper behavior by Caucasian police officers at traffic stops (Huggins, 2012). Huggins (2012) has credited this difference to African American citizens feeling as if the African American police officer is attempting to fit in with their Caucasian fellow police officers.

Table 6 portrays the data used to determine if the hypothesis that females are more likely than males to believe that the police behaved properly during encounters has support.

According to Table 3, 91.9% of males and 92.3% of females believe that the police behaved properly. The pattern is not operating as expected since males and females are equally likely to believe the police behaved properly in encounters. Since the pattern is not as predicted and the chi-square test shows that the data found are not statistically significant there is no support for the hypothesis. The findings show that there is no association between a respondent's gender and their opinion on police officers, implying that knowing a person's gender will provide very little help when predicting their opinion on police officers.

The finding that no gender differences exist in attitudes regarding police behavior is inconsistent with prior studies. Some studies (Mbuba, 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002) have found that females are more likely than males to have positive attitudes towards police, while other studies (Avdija, 2010) have found the opposite to be true. Mbuba (2010) suggests that females report being less hesitant than males to report things to the police which will lead to favorable

views, while Avdija (2010) has found that individuals with more feminine traits indicate lower approval ratings for the police. I believe the discrepancy between scholars on using gender as a predictor of approval on police relates to why my research was not statistically significant. There exists the possibility that the size of the sample used constricts the ability to generalize the findings. Perhaps studies should focus on relationships between an individual's gender in conjunction with other demographic features (i.e. race or age) and their opinion on police.

Table 7 represents the test of the hypothesis which predicts that older people are more likely than younger people are to believe the police behaved properly during interactions. For the purposes of this study I considered anyone aged thirty or above to be the "older" respondents I am examining. The table shows that both the 16-19 year old category and the 20-29 year old category had relatively the same percentage of respondents believing the police behaved properly at 88.7% (16-19) and 87.7% (20-29) respectively. The approval numbers for those classified as "older" were as follows: 30-39 (92.8%), 40-49 (92.8%), 50-59 (95.0%) and 60 or over (94.6%). This pattern was as predicted by the hypothesis and the result of the chi-square test was that the data is statistically significant, suggesting that my hypothesis is supported. The association between respondent's age and their opinions on police behavior is strong.

My prediction that older people are more likely to believe the police behaved properly during encounters than younger people correlates with prior scholars (Gau, 2010; Ho & McKean, 2004; Gabbidon et al., 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005) research. Previous research, by a pair of scholars, found that the differentiation of opinions between age groups can be credited to the younger generations having more exposure to media reporting on misconduct in police departments (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Other scholars suggested that this relationship may have arisen due to the increased interaction between younger people and the police (Gabbidon et al.,

2011). The data produced from that study however came from an exclusively African American sample which differs from this study's sample.

Table 8 tested the hypothesis that citizens with a higher socioeconomic status are more likely to feel that the police behaved properly than citizens with a lower socioeconomic status. The table discovered that 94.6% of respondents with an income of \$50,000 or more found the behavior of the police to be proper compared to the 91.8% of respondents with an income between \$20,000 and \$49,000 and the 89.5% of respondents with an income of \$20,000 or less who believed the police behavior to be proper. The pattern of the data is how I predicted it would be with approval of police behavior increasing with the socioeconomic status of the respondent. As the data operated in the pattern that was expected and the chi-square test has shown statistical significance, there exists support for the hypothesis. The findings can be generalized, which implies that knowing a person's socioeconomic status can help a researcher predict what his/her opinion of police may be.

The results from Table 8 are consistent with some prior research (Avdija, 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005) and contrast with others (Ho & McKean, 2004). The research by Weitzer & Tuch (2005) produced similar results as Table 8 in that citizens that receive higher incomes are more likely to showcase favorable attitudes of the police. Weitzer & Tuch (2005) suggest this may be due to a belief that citizens with higher incomes will receive fair treatment from police. Ho & McKean (2004) had found that a negative relationship exists between African Americans with high socioeconomic statuses and confidence in police behavior and ability.

Table 9 portrays the results for the hypothesis that suggests that citizens who live in the central cities of a MSA are less likely than those who live outside of the central cities of MSAs to have positive opinions of the police. The percentages of respondents who felt the police

behaved properly for the three categories were almost identical. Table 9 shows that 91.7% of those living in the central city of MSAs believed the police behaved properly which is compared to the 92.4% of those considered to live in the MSA but not in the central city and the 91.9% of those who live outside of the MSA that feel the same way. This table is not statistically significant, therefore my hypothesis is not supported.

Table 9 illustrates how there is no difference between the different residences of citizens and their opinions of police, which is inconsistent with prior research on residence and attitudes towards police officers (Avdija, 2010; Crank & Giacomazzi, 2007; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Crank & Giacomazzi (2007) attribute the discrepancy between those who live in urban settings and those who live in rural settings and their attitudes towards police to the different lifestyles that those settings produce and the overall culture difference. The reasons for the contrast between prior research findings and my own may reflect that the respondents to the Police-Public Contact Survey, 2002, used for my study, might come from similar culture backgrounds regardless of where they currently reside.

Depicted in Table 10 are the results from the testing of the hypothesis which speculates that when contact is initiated by the police the citizen will be more likely to have a negative opinion of the police than if the contact was initiated by the citizen themselves. It appears that of the respondents who had police initiated interactions, 11.8% of them felt the police behaved improperly compared to the 6.0% of respondents who deemed improper behavior by police whose interaction was not due to police initiation. The hypothesis is supported due to statistical significance and the findings reflecting the expected pattern. These results mirror prior research by Advija (2010) who also found that police-citizen relationships are more likely to be positive when contact is not started by the police but by the citizens themselves. Advija (2010) suggests

that this finding can be credited to the involuntary nature of police initiated contact, as well as the fear and distrust of police that respondents may feel when approached by the police.

Shown in Table 11, the data correlates with my hypothesis that if a citizen believes they received a legitimate reason for a traffic stop they will be more likely to view the encounter in a positive manner than if they believed they did not receive a legitimate reason. This research shows that of respondents who received a legitimate reason for a traffic stop 96.3% believed the police to have behaved properly, while only 51.4% of respondents who did not receive a legitimate reason held the same belief. These results are congruent to prior research (Gau, 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002) which also found that illegitimate reasons for traffic stops causes a lack of confidence in the effectiveness police. Prior studies have found that the lack of legitimate reasons given for traffic stops leads citizens to feel as if racial profiling is occurring (Gau, 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). Weitzer & Tuch (2002) found that although the belief in the prevalence of racial profiling differs between Caucasians, African Americans, and Hispanics, all three groups still believe that it occurs at illegitimate traffic stops.

In support of my prediction for hypothesis 11, citizens who had their vehicle searched during a traffic stop encounter are more likely than citizens whose vehicles were not searched to report improper police behavior (see Table 12). Table 12 portrays the data that 42.2% of respondents who had their vehicle searched and 9.2% of respondents who did not have their vehicle searched reported improper police behavior. The analysis supports my hypothesis and shows consistency with Huggins' (2012) prior research due to the data operating in the manner predicted and statistical significance. Huggins (2012) suggested that specific police-citizen interaction causes a difference in police approval due to those whose vehicles are searched may feel as if their rights had been violated. Those who "escape punishment", or have routine traffic

stops, are more likely to drive away with positive feelings towards the encounter (Huggins, 2012).

Conclusion

While not all of my findings were statistically significant and not all of my hypotheses were supported, there were many that were significant that could have future policy implications. I believe the reason for why about half of my findings were not statistically significant traces back to one of the limitations I identified earlier. Overcoming limitations could lead to significant findings in research studies to come. For example, a limitation discussed regarded the lack of diversity in the sample population used for the Police-Public contact survey which if a new, much more diverse, sample was used in the future, support could possibly be found for my hypotheses regarding the race pairings between citizens and police officers. Tables 4 and 5 were both found to be insignificant but the amount of African American officers that citizens had contact with in the sample could be a contributing factor as to the lack of significance. The use of a more diverse sample could identify a relationship between the variables. Identifying a relationship could also lead to policy implications, such as diversifying police partners, as in Caucasian and African American teams, in order to improve citizen comfort levels in encounters.

Demographic factors that seemed to be the most statistically significant for use in predicting how citizens will feel regarding police officers included race/ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status. The majority of prior research (Avdija, 2010; Gau, 2010; Posick et al. 2013) had identified race/ethnicity as being a prominent factor in opinions of police and my own research findings indicate that race/ethnicity does play a role, although with weak support from the analysis I ran. I credit the weak support for the hypotheses to the lack of diversity in the sample, as the majority of the respondents were Caucasians. Training should focus more intently

on teaching officers how to interact with citizens from all walks of life, specifically the demographic features supported in this research. As age had a significant relationship as a determinant of opinions regarding police officers, with younger citizens holding more negative feelings than older citizens (see Table 7), community outreach initiatives should be developed that place police officers in positive contact with youth in classrooms and after school activities in order to form positive relationships from the start.

Finally, as all hypotheses regarding the specifics of police and citizen contact received statistically significant support from the analysis ran, researchers should conduct more in depth studies regarding the interactions, specifically at traffic stops. This future research should exist in the form of interviews so the researcher is able to understand every detail of the interaction that took place. Also, since it appears that the contact between police officers and citizens is crucial to the development of public opinion of police officers there should be public relations campaigns and events that allow citizens to interact with their neighborhood police officers outside of official police business. Hopefully citizens would already possess a positive outlook of police before any legal contact is necessary that would tarnish their opinions. If future research additionally identifies issues affecting the relationship between police officers and the citizens they police and protect, then those in the position to can form social policy that best reflects what the relationship between the two entities needs in order to flourish, therefore creating a more effective community environment.

Appendix: Tables

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics used in the Analysis

Variables	%
Independent Variables	
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	
White	75.8
Black	11.5
Hispanic	12.7
<i>Officer Race</i>	
White Officer	90.3
Black Officer	9.7
<i>Sex</i>	
Male	47.4
Female	52.6
<i>Age</i>	
16-19	6.9
20-29	15.8
30-39	19.4
40-49	20.4
50-59	16.0
60 or older	21.5
<i>Income</i>	
Less than \$20,000 or n/a	38.2
\$20,000-\$49,000	27.5
\$50,000 or more	34.3
<i>MSA Status</i>	
Central city of msa	30.3
In msa but not in central city	56.1
Not in msa	13.6
<i>Contact Initiated By Police</i>	
Yes	56.8
No	43.2
<i>Legitimate Reason for Traffic Stop</i>	
Yes	86.1
No	13.9
<i>Search of Vehicle</i>	
Yes	3.8
No	96.2

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics used in the Analysis (continued)

Variables	%
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Dependent Variables*Police Behaved Properly*

Properly	92.1
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Improperly	7.9
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Police Behaved Properly During Traffic Stop

Properly	89.6
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Improperly	10.4
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N	93,410
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Table 2: Respondent's race/ethnicity and opinion on police behavior

Police Behavior	Race/Ethnicity of Respondent			
		White	Black	Hispanic
	Properly	92.5% 7095	90.1% 806	91.3% 842
	Improperly	7.5% 579	9.9% 89	8.7% 80
	Total	100.0% 7674	100.0% 895	100.0% 922

Chi-Square: 7.245; DF: 2; P=.027

Table 3: Respondent's race and opinion on Caucasian police behavior during traffic stops

Police Behavior : Traffic Stop	Race of Respondent		
		White	Black
	Properly	90.7% 3704	80.7% 317
	Improperly	9.3% 378	19.3% 76
	Total	100.0% 4082	100.0% 393

Chi-Square: 39.943; DF: 1; P=.000

Table 4: Officer's race and Caucasian respondents' opinions on police behavior during traffic stops

Police Behavior: Traffic Stop	Race of Officer		
		White Officer	Black Officer
	Properly	91.1% 3313	88.8% 292
	Improperly	8.9% 323	11.2% 37
	Total	100.0% 3636	100.0% 329

Chi-Square: 2.040; DF=1; P=.153

Table 5: Officer's race and African American respondents' opinions on police behavior during traffic stops

Police Behavior: Traffic Stop	Race of Officer		
		White Officer	Black Officer
	Properly	80.7% 314	83.3% 90
	Improperly	19.3% 75	16.7% 18
	Total	100.0% 389	100.0% 108

Chi-Square: .380; DF: 1; P=.538

Table 6: Respondent's sex and opinion on police behavior

Police Behavior	Sex of Respondent		
		Male	Female
	Properly	91.9% 4056	92.3% 4968
	Improperly	8.1% 358	7.7% 415
	Total	100.0% 4414	100.0% 5383

Chi-Square: .537; DF: 1; P=.464

Table 7: Respondent's age and opinion on police behavior

Police Behavior	Respondent's Age						
		16-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 or older
	Properly	88.7% 611	87.7% 1645	92.8% 2034	92.8% 2049	95.0% 1427	94.6% 1257
	Improperly	11.3% 78	12.3% 230	7.2% 158	7.2% 160	5.0% 75	5.4% 72
	Total	100.0% 689	100.0% 1876	100.0% 2192	100.0% 2209	100.0% 1502	100.0% 1389

Chi-Square: 91.65; DF: 5; P=.000

Table 8: Respondent's socioeconomic status and opinion on police behavior

Police Behavior	Respondent's Socioeconomic Status			
		Less than \$20,000 or na	\$20,000 - \$49,999	\$50,000 or more
	Properly	89.5% 2882	91.8% 2648	94.6% 3494
	Improperly	10.5% 338	8.2% 237	5.4% 198
	Total	100.0% 3220	100.0% 2885	100.0% 3692

Chi-Square: 62.970; DF: 2; P=.000

Table 9: Respondent's residence and opinion on police behavior

Police Behavior	Respondent's Residence			
		Central city of msa	In msa but not in central city	Not in msa
	Properly	91.7% 2828	92.4% 5037	91.9% 1159
	Improperly	8.3% 257	7.6% 414	8.1% 102
	Total	100.0% 3085	100.0% 5451	100.0% 1261

Chi-Square: 1.546; DF: 2; P=.462

Table 10: Police initiated contact and respondent's opinion on police behavior

Police Behavior	Contact Initiated by Police		
		Yes	No
	Properly	88.2% 2801	94.0% 6160
	Improperly	11.8% 374	6.0% 390
	Total	100.0% 3175	100.0% 6550

Chi-Square: 100.246; DF: 1; P=.000

Table 11: Respondents were given a legitimate reason for a traffic stop and opinion on police behavior

Police Behavior: Traffic Stop	Given Legitimate Reason for Traffic Stop		
		Yes	No
	Properly	96.3% 4343	51.4% 367
	Improperly	3.7% 166	48.6% 347
	Total	100.0% 4509	100.0% 714

Chi-Square: 1404.104; DF: 1; P=.000

Table 12: Respondent's vehicle was searched during traffic stop and opinion on police behavior

Police Behavior: Traffic Stop	Search of Vehicle		
		Yes	No
	Properly	57.8% 118	90.8% 4779
	Improperly	42.2% 86	9.2% 482
	Total	100.0% 204	100.0% 5261

Chi-Square: 229.567; DF: 1; P=.000

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