
THE STRUCTURE OF BLACK AMERICANS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE POLICE

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Abstract

Conflictual relationships and negative sentiments between black Americans and law enforcement agencies are long standing concerns in the United States. In the last half of the 20th century, research on the negativity, distribution, and sources of black Americans' attitudes about the police has been an important facet of efforts to theoretically understand these problems and of policy efforts to improve relationships between black Americans and the police. Assumptions about the negativity and the distribution of black Americans' attitudes have been primarily derived from cross racial studies comparing black and white Americans' attitudes. This paper examines black Americans' attitudes about the police using a large national survey of black Americans to evaluate theoretical and policy assumptions about the nature, distribution, and sources of black Americans' attitudes. The paper finds that those assumptions overstate the negativity of black Americans' attitudes about the police and the importance of social status and racial discrimination in the distribution of those attitudes.

Literature Review

Research has contributed to three general assumptions about the negativism, distribution, and sources of black Americans' attitudes toward the police. First, black Americans are believed to hold general and diffusely negative attitudes toward the police (e.g., Huang & Vaughn, 1996; Murty, Roebuck, & Smith, 1990; Sigelman, Welch, & Bledsoe, 1997; U.S. Department of Justice, all; Weitzer, 2000; Weitzer & Tuch, 1997; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999; Welch, et al., 1996). Second, social status is treated as the most important factor influencing the distribution of these attitudes among black Americans, with lower social status black Americans assumed to hold the more negative appraisals of the police (e.g., Caplan & Paige, 1968; Fogelson & Hill, 1968; Huang & Vaughn, 1996; Murty, Roebuck, & Smith, 1990; Ostrom & Whitaker 1974;

Parker, et al., 1995; Smith, Graham, & Adams, 1991; Weitzer, 2000). Third, negative black Americans' attitudes about the police are attributed to historical problems of race relations in the United States; the symbolic and instrumental roles the police have played as agents of racial discrimination and oppression (Dulaney, 1996; Flynn, 1999; Hawkins & Thomas, 1991; Myrdal, 1964; National Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968; National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, 1969); poorer police crime protection services and antagonistic contacts with the police.

Diffuse and Generalized Attitudes

The prevailing assumption, reinforced by empirical studies, is that black Americans tend to hold general and diffuse negative appraisals of the police and their performance. This assumption overstates the evidence¹. For example, the representation of black Americans' attitudes toward the police as generally negative, is based, in part, on the fact that the percentage of black Americans holding unfavorable attitudes has often been found to be larger than the percentage of white Americans expressing unfavorable attitudes (Bayley & Mendelsohn, 1969; Boggs & Galliher, 1975; Blumenstein, et al., 1975; Campbell & Schuman, 1968; Ennis, 1967; Gallup, 1997; Hagan & Albonetti, 1982; Henderson et al., 1997; Huang & Vaughn, 1996; Murty, Roebuck, & Smith, 1990; NBC News, 1995; Time, 1995; U.S. Department of Justice, all; Weitzer, 2000; Weitzer & Tuch 1999; Welch, et al., 1996). In spite of these differences between racial groups, the majority of black Americans express a positive degree of satisfaction with or approval of the police (e.g., Huang & Vaughn, 1996; U.S. Department of Justice, all). In a few instances, studies have reported that the percentages of black and white Americans expressing favorable attitudes are comparable². Recent surveys indicate that although the majority of whites and blacks indicate that they are satisfied with the police, whites indicate higher levels of satisfaction than

¹ White and Menke (1978) critically discuss the ambiguous and atheoretical conclusions that characterize most studies of public perceptions of the police. While they review studies of public attitudes toward the police generally, we confine our interest to the conclusions those studies convey regarding the attitudes of black Americans.

² Bayley and Mendelsohn (1969, Table 2-4, page 42) report for evaluations of the type of job police were doing in Denver, Colorado, that 85 percent of the white respondents felt police were doing an excellent to pretty good job compared to 83 percent of the black respondents (27 percent of the white and 12 percent of the black respondents felt police were doing an excellent job). On the other hand, Campbell and Schuman (1968, Table IV-a, page 40) studying attitudes across 15 American cities indicate for quality of police services, that 85 and 86 percent of the white men and women, respectively, were generally or somewhat satisfied compared to 68 and 65 percent of the black men and women, respectively. For white men and women and black men and women, 66, 69, 48 and 45 percent, respectively, felt generally satisfied with the quality of police services.

blacks. For instance, in the 1998, 12 City Criminal Victimization and Perception of Community Safety Study, 90% of whites and 76% of blacks indicated that they were satisfied with the police that served their neighborhood (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999: Table 34). In this study 69% of black adults in Chicago, 82% in Los Angeles, 77% in New York, and 75% of black adults in Washington D.C., indicated that they were satisfied with the police (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999: Table 34).

Also, research does not clearly support the assumption that black Americans' evaluations of the police are diffuse; that is, that black Americans apply negative appraisals to the police without reference or sensitivity to different aspects of police work and responsibility. Some research, for instance, shows that black Americans hold different degrees of satisfaction and favor with alternative aspects of police performance (i.e., crime fighting, community service, interpersonal relations). These studies suggest that black Americans distinguish between different dimensions of policing roles and police performance of their law enforcement roles (e.g., Campbell & Schuman, 1968: Tables IV-f through I, pp. 42-43; Wilson, 1968). Studies like these challenge the hypothesis that black Americans' attitudes about the police are diffuse and undifferentiated evaluations.

Social Status, Demographic, and Experiential Distribution of Black Americans' Attitudes

Negative attitudes toward the police are believed to be distributed differently among black Americans by social status, demographic traits, and experiences with the police and with crime victimization. Although social status is postulated to be an important predictor of negative appraisals of the police among black Americans, the direction of the relationship is unclear because social status attributes like income and education do not exhibit consistent associations with black Americans' attitudes toward the police across studies and for different dimensions of police performance within studies. The most frequently espoused assumption is that the most unfavorable attitudes are held by lower status black Americans (e.g., Boggs & Galliher, 1975; Haugh & Wilson, 1996; Lang & Lang, 1968; Parker, et al., 1995; Parker, et al., 1995; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999). Competing evidence suggests that either the most unfavorable attitudes are held by higher social status black Americans (e.g., Ennis, 1967; Bagley & Mendelsohn, 1960) or occur without differentiation by social status (e.g., Fogelson & Hill, 1968; Caplan & Paige, 1968)³. The assumed importance of social status in the distribution of negative attitudes about the police among black Americans is weakened by contradicting evidence about the direction of that

³The direction of social status-attitude toward the police relationships is a social-psychological extension of the riff-raff and representative theories debate of riot participation among black Americans during the 1960's.

relationship.

Among demographic and experiential traits, gender also fails to exhibit consistent relationships to black Americans' attitudes about the police, but age and various types of experiences with the police and with crime victimization factors have exhibited more consistent relationships (compare for example, Bayley & Mendelsohn, 1969; Boggs & Galliher, 1975; Campbell & Schuman, 1967; Haugh & Wilson, 1996; Parker, et al., 1995; U.S. Department of Justice, all). This consistency may mean that age and experiential factors are more important in the distribution of black Americans' attitudes toward the police than is their social status⁴. The relative importance of the social status, demographic, and police/victimization experience backgrounds of black Americans in the distribution of their appraisals of the police requires additional evaluation.

Sources of Black Americans' Attitudes

Black Americans' attitudes toward the police are frequently attributed to historical problems of race relations in the United States and to the symbolic and instrumental roles the police have played as agents of racial discrimination and oppression (Mann, 1993; McCormick, 2000; Myrdal, 1964; National Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968; National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, 1969; Weiser, 2000). This assumes that culturally black Americans share a continuing ambivalence and negative appraisal of the police in response to their past roles as defenders and perpetrators of discrimination and oppression. This culturally transmitted ambivalence is currently reinforced by more aggressive styles of policing and negative conflictual interactions between the police and black communities (Wilbanks, 1987: 57-83). Secondly, these attitudes are attributed to poorer crime protection services the police provide black communities.

The literature is deficient because it does not directly evaluate assumptions regarding the symbolism of the police as racial oppressors and police service quality as sources of black Americans' attitudes. Rather, their contributions to the distribution of black American's attitudes toward the police are implicitly assumed to be demonstrated

⁴ One reason for the under emphasis of experience with the police and crime may be that social status is correlated with such factors. The less advantaged are more likely to be victims of crime, to require more police assistance (contact police for service), and more likely to be subjects of police action (i.e., arrest) (Hindelang, 1978; Nettler, 1979; Quinney, 1975). It should be noted though that Cohen, et al. (1981) suggests that this relationship may not be as narrowly status-based as generally believed, at least in terms of victimization rates among black Americans.

through social status and experience with the police and crime variables. The roles of symbolic discrimination and of police service and relationship quality on these attitudes need to be directly evaluated.

In this paper, questions raised in the literature review about research and assumptions about black Americans' attitudes about the police are evaluated for a large national sample of the black population in the United States. The analysis evaluates:

1. The extent to which black Americans held favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward the police in 1979-80 (*Are black Americans' generally negative in their appraisal of the police?*), and whether their attitudes were consistently held for two dimensions of police performance, e.g., police protection and police community relations (*Are black Americans' appraisals of the police diffuse and undifferentiated?*).
2. The structural distribution of attitudes among black respondents by social status, demographic, experiential, perceptions of racial discrimination, urbanicity, and regional traits (*What is the relative importance of social status, racial discrimination, and other attributes of black Americans as correlates of their attitudes about the police?*)⁵.

Methodology

The research presented in this paper differs from most previous research in three ways. Most of the previous research has depended on bivariate analyses. Multivariate techniques are used here to control for spurious effects among the independent variables. Also many of the studies reviewed in the literature depend on local, state or regional samples of respondents. Also previous research primarily comparative analyses across racial groups. Some of the differences in findings reported in this literature may reflect local and regional variations in black Americans' attitudes about the police and the correlates of their distribution among this population. The findings may also be related to the fact that cross racial comparisons are characteristic of many of those studies. The present research uses a national sample of black Americans and therefore provides a representative assessment of their attitudes across the U.S.

Sample

The data used in this study were obtained from the 1979-80 National Survey of Black

⁵Urbanicity and region are added to control for spurious relationships between social status and other independent variables with attitudes toward the police which might be attributable to urbanicity and region.

Americans (NSBA), Institute of Social Research, University of Michigan. The NSBA sample is a multistage sample of the black American population consisting of 2,107 respondents with a 69 percent response rate. The sampling design was based upon the 1970 Census, and subsequent updates. The sample was self-weighting with each black American in the continental United States having an equal probability of being selected.

Dependent and Independent Variables

Table 1 summarizes the coding used for the variables included in the analysis. Atti-

Table 1. Variable Coding for Perceptions of Black Americans Toward the Police, 1979-80 NSBA Survey	
<p>Dependent Variables Police Protection: Community Relations: (How well police and residents get along)</p> <p>Independent Variables Respondent age: Gender: Total family income: Education: Working status:</p> <p>Perceived discrimination compared to 20 years ago: Recent problems with police: Contacted police: Recent victimization: Frequency of crime in neighborhood:</p> <p>Control Variables Urbanicity: U.S. Region:</p>	<p>Variable Coding Dissatisfied=1, Satisfied=2 Not Well=1, Well=2</p> <p>Actual age in years Male=1, Female=0 Actual income in dollars Actual years and degree education Work in primary sector=1, Work in secondary sector=2, Officially unemployed=3, Hidden unemployed=4, Not interested in work=5</p> <p>Greater=0, Same=1, Less=1 No=0, Yes=1 No=0, Yes=1 No=0, Yes=1 Never=1, Hardly ever=2, Not often=3, Fairly often=4, Very often=5</p> <p>Rural area=0, Urban area=1 South=0, Northeast=1, Northcentral=1, West=1</p>

tudes held by black Americans for two dimensions of police performance are examined in this analysis. One is an ordinal measure of respondent satisfaction with *police protection* and the other an ordinal measure of respondents' perceptions of how well police and residents of the respondent's neighborhood get along (we refer to this second measure as *police community relations*). Although these two variables are moderately associated ($\text{Gamma}=.51$), they are evaluated as attitudes held about two separate dimensions of police performance.

The dependent variables are forced choice measures with excluded neutral categories. Following Schuman and Presser (1981), we assume that this consideration does not severely distort the substantive implications of analysis. The dependent variables were recoded for analysis, creating dichotomized versions of the police protection measure and of the police-community relations measure. The recoded police protection variable represents DISSATISFIED (combining the very and somewhat dissatisfied categories in the original measure) versus SATISFIED (combining the somewhat and very satisfied categories) with police protection. The recoded police community relations variable is coded NOT WELL (combining the not well at all and the not well levels of the original variable) versus WELL (combining the well and very well levels of the original measure) meaning that the police do or do not get along well with community residents.⁶

Independent Variables

Independent variables include measures of *respondent age, gender, total family income, education, working/occupational status, racial discrimination*, and four measures of respondent's experience with the police and crime.

Social status is measured by the working/occupational status (working status hereafter), total family income, and respondent education measures. The working status variable incorporates both employment status and occupational status. The categories of this variable are: (1) working in the primary sector, (2) working in the secondary sector, (3) officially unemployed, (4) hidden unemployed, and (5) not interested

⁶ For the analysis presented, the dependent variables are dichotomized between all levels of positive versus all levels of negative attitudes because previous research gives the impression that black Americans are dissatisfied as opposed to satisfied with the police. Because the attitude variables used here are skewed toward positive appraisals of the police, the most positive compared to the less than most positive appraisal dichotomy was the only other reasonable choice we might have made. Analysis, not presented, of these alternative dichotomies for the police protection and police community relations variables did not suggest conclusions which differ critically from those provided. See footnote 8 for a comment.

in working⁷. Total family income is the total annual dollar income earned by all of the respondent's family members as reported by the respondent. Education is the respondent's total number of years of formal education and degrees as reported by the respondent.

Perceived racial discrimination is used as a proxy measure for respondents' sensitivity to the symbolic role of the police as agents of racial discrimination. The discrimination variable measures whether respondents believed racial discrimination in 1979-80 was greater, less, or the same as 20 years ago.

The four experiential variables examined are: 1) whether the respondent or a family member had been a victim of a crime over the past month or so (*recent victimization*); 2) whether the respondent had problems with the police over the last month or so (*problems with the police*); 3) whether the respondent had ever contacted the police about a problem or concern (*contact with the police*); and 4) the respondent's perception of the frequency of crime in his/her neighborhood (*frequency of crime*). The crime victimization and the problems with the police variables are more restrictive than desired. They only distinguish between respondents who did and did not have such experiences within the last month or so. While the perception of crime frequency variable is grouped with the experiential variables, it is also used here as an indicator of respondents' perceived need for police crime fighting/protection services within their neighborhood. This assumes that perceptions of the frequency of crime in one's neighborhood is related to perceived need for police protection services.

Control Variables

Two control variables are included in this analysis. One is *urbanicity*, respondent lives in an urban or a rural area. The other is *region*, the region of the U.S. in which the respondent lives.

All independent and control variables are dummy coded except for respondent age, family income, and education.

⁷ The primary and secondary sector differentiation is essentially a white collar-blue collar classification. Respondents who were professionals, managers, sales people, clerical and crafts people are categorized as working in the primary sector. Operatives, laborers, farm workers and service workers are categorized as working in the secondary sector. Respondents who were laid off or were unemployed but actively searching for a job were classified as officially unemployed. The hidden unemployed category include unemployed persons interested in working but not actively searching for a job. Respondents not interested in employment are those reporting that they are not working and would not accept employment if offered. These respondents are mostly disabled, homemakers, students or retired persons.

Table 2. Percent Distribution of Black Americans' Attitudes Toward Police Protection and Police Community Relations, 1979-80 NSBA Survey

Police Protection ¹ (n=2068)		Police Community Relations ² (n=1976)	
Dissatisfied	33.1%	Not Well	15.2%
Satisfied	<u>66.9</u>	Well	<u>84.8</u>
	100%		100%

¹Percent distribution of original Police Protection variable: very dissatisfied (12.7), somewhat dissatisfied (20.4), somewhat satisfied (41.7), very satisfied (25.2).
²Percent distribution of original Police Community Relations variable: not well at all (5.5), not well (9.7), fairly well (48.3), very well (36.5).

Analysis Method

Logistic regression is used in analysis because the dependent variables are dichotomized ordinal measures and the independent variables a mix of categorical, ordinal, and integer measures (Hanusek & Jackson, 1977; Aitchinson & Spivey, 1951, Winship & Mare, 1984).

Since no predictions are made regarding the directions of relationships, two-tail tests of significance are used.

Results

Black Americans' Attitudes toward the Police

Table 2 shows the percent distribution of respondents' attitudes for police protection and for police-community relations for this sample. About 67 percent indicated that they were satisfied with police protection. For the police-community relations item, about 85 percent of the respondents reported that the police and residents in their neighborhood get along well. These show that the majority of black respondents held favorable attitudes toward the police. The moderate difference between the percentages expressing favorable attitudes regarding police protection and police community relations also shows that respondents differentiated between these two dimen-

sions of police performance in their appraisals of the police. Black Americans in 1979-80 held more favorable attitudes regarding police-community relations than for police protection.

The Distribution of Attitudes toward the Police

Logistic regressions are summarized for the attitudes held for police protection in Table 3 and the attitudes held for police community relations are summarized in Table 4. For each dependent variable, the tables summarize regressions on 1) social status variables only and 2) social status, demographic, experiential, perceived racial discrimination, urbanicity, and region variables.

In the social status model for the dissatisfied-satisfied with police protection dependent variable, Table 3, Model 3-1, black Americans with more education and those who were officially unemployed were significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with police protection than respondents with less education and/or who were employed in the primary sector. Family income and the other employment status variables were not significantly related to attitudes regarding police protection.

In Model 3-2 for police protection, with all variables in the regression, none of the social status variables are significant. Three experiential and the northeast region variables are the only significant measures in the model. Respondents who had problems with the police, had contact with the police, who perceived crime frequency as being high in their neighborhoods, and who lived in the northeastern United States were more likely to be dissatisfied with police protection.

Table 4 summarizes regressions for black Americans' attitudes regarding police-community relations. Model 4-1 shows that three of the social status variables are significantly related to attitudes on whether the police and residents of the neighborhood get along well or not well. Respondents with more education and those who were officially unemployed tended to feel that the police and neighborhood residents did not get along well compared to their counterparts. Respondents not interested in working, on the other hand, felt more positive about police community relations than did those working in the primary sector.

In the complex regression, Model 4-2, none of the social status variables are significantly related to respondents' appraisal of whether the police and community residents get along well or not so well. The demographic and perceptions of crime variables are significant. Younger respondents, males, and those who perceived the frequency of crime in the neighborhood as high were more likely to feel that community residents and the police did not get along well. Urbanicity, region, perceptions of racial discrimination and the remaining experiential variables do not contribute sig-

Table 3. Logistic Regressions for Two Models of Black Americans' Perceptions of Police Protection on Social Status, Demographic, Experiential, and Control Variables, 1979-80 NSBA Survey

	Model 3-1	Model 3-2
Intercept	-7.60***	-6.15*
Total Family Income	-.00	-.00
Education	-.06**	-.04
Working Status:		
Work in Secondary Sector	-.05	-.08
Officially Unemployed	-.46*	-.32
Hidden Unemployed	-.11	.05
Not Interested in Work	.23	.06
Age		.00
Gender		.15
Problems with Police		-.68*
Contact with Police		-.27*
Recent Victimization		-.06
Frequency of Crime		-.43***
Perceived Discrimination:		
Discrimination Less		.25
Discrimination the Same		.09
Urbanicity		.09
Region:		
Northeast		-.34*
Northcentral		-.19
West		-.30
-2log (likelihood) Chi ²	31.37***	155.7***
df	1755,6	1652,18

Significance (2-tail test):

*** p<.001

** p<.01

* p<.05

nificantly to this model.

Table 4 shows that the weak but significant associations of social status variables with attitudes about whether the police and neighborhood residents get along well or not so well, disappear when other factors are taken into consideration. In addition, per-

Table 4. Logistic Regressions for Two Models of Black Americans' Perceptions of Police Community Relations on Social Status, Demographic, Experiential, and Control Variables, 1979-80 NSBA Survey

	Model 4-1	Model 4-2
Intercept	-7.60*	-.27
Total Family Income	.03	.03
Education	-.06*	.01
Working Status:		
Work in Secondary Sector	.04	.13
Officially Unemployed	-.55*	-.19
Hidden Unemployed	-.15	-.08
Not Interested in Work	.69*	-.18
Age		.04***
Gender		-.41*
Problems with Police		-.61
Contact with Police		-.28
Recent Victimization		.22
Frequency of Crime		-.49***
Perceived Discrimination:		
Discrimination Less		.25
Discrimination the Same		.37
Urbanicity		.16
Region:		
Northeast		-.34
Northcentral		-.31
West		-.41
-2log (likelihood) Chi ²	28.89***	173.55***
df	1685,6	1593,18

Significance (2-tail test):

*** p<.001

** p<.01

* p<.05

ceived racial discrimination is not important in the distribution of these attitudes. Perceptions of crime frequency, age and gender are more important compared to social status or racial discrimination in the distribution of this measure of attitudes about police community relations.

Perceptions of crime frequency and experiences with the police, age and gender are more important correlates of the distribution of black Americans' attitudes about the police than either social status or perceptions of racial discrimination. Perceptions of crime in the neighborhood is consistently associated with attitudes regarding both police protection and police community relations. Gender and age are correlates of attitudes regarding police community relation, and, other experiences with the police variables are correlates of attitudes regarding police protection⁸.

Discussion

The majority of black Americans in 1979-80 expressed favorable appraisals of police protection and police community relations, 67 and 85 percent, respectively. Although other comparative research reports that the percentage of black Americans holding favorable attitudes about the police is frequently less than the percentage of white Americans holding favorable attitudes (i.e., U.S. Department of Justice, all; Welch, et al., 1996), the fact is that the majority of black Americans are positive, not negative, in their appraisals of the police. This is contrary to the public image and inferences from research that black Americans' hold generally negative appraisals of the police. Furthermore, they differentiate between different aspects of police performance rather than diffusely applying the same assessment to all police roles and relationships with their communities.

In this analysis, community relations with the police was less of a concern than was police service in terms of protection from crime. The higher positive appraisal of police community relations indicates that black Americans perceived the police generally interacting acceptably or well with citizens in their community. Indirectly, this could also mean that they did not perceive police discrimination or disrespect toward black citizens in their community. This inference is supported by the absence of a significant relationship between this sample's perceptions of change in racial discrimination in the United States with their attitudes about police protection and police community relations. Although the majority of black Americans expressed satisfaction with police crime protection, the lower percentage expressing satisfaction compared to police community relations indicates that it is a greater concern.

⁸ Regressions for a police protection attitude variable dichotomized as very satisfied and less than very satisfied and a police community relations attitude variable dichotomized as police and residents get along very well and less than very well were also evaluated. With all variables in these regressions, some social status variables were significantly related to attitudes held for police protection. Social status measures were not significant in the police community relations regression. These results do not provide evidence that our conclusions regarding the relative inconsistency and unimportance of social status compared to other factors should be altered.

Social status, demographic, experience with the police and crime factors, perceived racial discrimination, urbanicity and region are not particularly strong predictors of the distribution of black Americans' attitudes about the police. Theory and policy assumptions proposing these as important in the distribution of their attitudes about the police rely on very weak explanatory variables to account for black Americans' attitudes.

Experiential traits, perceptions of crime frequency, and age and gender provide more predictive utility in accounting for the distribution of black Americans' attitudes toward the police than do the social status variables. Experiences with the police and crime crosscut social status groups more than has usually been argued (Cohen et al., 1981; Priest & Carter, 1999; U.S. Department of Justice, 1983; Webb & Marshall, 1995). This is particularly true of black Americans because in spite of social status differences they are more likely to live in or frequent the same or contiguous residential and commercial areas (Erbe, 1975; Duncan & Duncan, 1955; Massey & Denton, 1993; Massey & Fischer, 1999; Massey & Hajnal, 1995). Experiences and perceptions of police protection, police community relations, contact with the police, and crime may only marginally differ between black American income, occupational, and educational groups as a consequence. Given small experiential differences in police services and relationships with community residents, and exposure to crime frequency, minimal differences in appraisals of the police might be expected among black Americans across status groups. As a result, experiential and perception of police contact and crime factors are more important as determinants of the distribution of black Americans' attitudes toward the police.

Similarly, the age and gender associations with attitudes toward police community relations are understandable and supported by other strands of research. Differences in lifestyle, integration into established institutions, and fear of crime between younger and older black Americans (Janson & Ryder, 1983; Lee, 1983; McAdoo, 1993; Norton & Courlander, 1982; Priest & Carter, 1999; Toseland, 1982) and male and female black Americans (Braungart, et al., 1980; Clemente & Kleiman, 1977; Toseland, 1982) account for some of their differences in attitudes toward the police. The lifestyles of younger and male black adults bring them into the types of contact with the police where hassles and suspicious interactions are more apt to occur. The more negative appraisal of the police held by younger and male black Americans are accounted for by these lifestyle differences. In addition, older adults and females have been found to have greater fear of crime victimization. A greater sense of dependency on the police motivated by fear of victimization may contribute to their more positive attitudes regarding police community relations.

A police service model of black Americans' attitudes toward the police was more viable than a racial discrimination model in 1979-80. The fact that attitudes in this

sample were positive but less favorable for police protection than for police community relations and the importance of the perception of community crime frequency variable in the regressions supports this service model interpretation. The frequency of crime in the community and the perceived quality of police crime protection provide the more critical underlying basis for black Americans' evaluations of the police as opposed to their American sensitivity to racial discrimination. Black Americans' appraisals of the police is situationally dependent on what is most important in their current relationship with the police. Crime protection was a more important correlate of police community relationships than indicators of racial discrimination. Black Americans' sensitivity to and criticisms about discrimination, however, can be situationally instigated by police behavior. Lasley (1994) and Tuch and Weitzer (1997) found that in several instances of highly publicized cases of police brutality between the mid-1970's and the mid-1990's, i.e., Rodney King and others, support for the police declined significantly among both white and black Americans.⁹ Over time, levels of positive support for the police returned to their former levels although the time period was significantly longer for black Americans. In the absence of continuous and persistent incidents of police discrimination and misconduct toward black Americans, the police service-crime protection model appears to be their more important concern.

A final comment can be offered about previous research and assumptions about black Americans' attitudes about the police. Assumptions about the negativity of black Americans' attitudes about the police and their distribution across social status, experiences with crime and the police, and racial discrimination are grounded in two observations. During the first three quarters of the 20th century, discriminatory police relations and poor performance of duties relative to black Americans were formally and informally institutionalized in the United States. As a consequence, their attitudes were pronounced and legitimate in their negativity (Campbell & Schuman, 1968; Myrdal, 1964). Social and political accomplishments of black Americans, the formal deinstitutionalization of discrimination, and the police professionalization movement

⁹ Currently concerns over racial profiling may have lowered the degree to which blacks view the police favorably (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Data from a Harris survey in 2000 indicated that only 36% of blacks believed that police treat all races fairly (as compared to 69% of whites) and 36% of blacks believed that the police will stop and arrest them when they are completely innocent (as compared to 14% of whites) (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000: Table 2.30, 2.31). Data from a December, 1999 Gallup Poll indicated that 42% of blacks felt that they have been stopped by the police just because of their race or ethnic background (as compared to 6% of whites); 58% of blacks had a favorable opinion of their local police whereas 85% of whites had a favorable opinion of their local police and; 66% of blacks indicated that they were treated fairly by their local police as oppose to 91% of whites (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000: Tables 2.32, 2.34, 2.35).

(Brown, 1981) over the past 30 years have altered police conduct relative to black communities. The result has been a trend over the last quarter of a century of more positive attitudes among black Americans about the police. The importance of racial discrimination in their appraisals of the police has diminished as a consequence although black Americans retain a residual ambivalence.

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