


5-2022

Voluntary Contacts with Police: Do Differences in Perceptions of Police Still Exist?

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Voluntary Contacts with Police: Do Differences in Perceptions of Police Still Exist?

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology

by

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Bachelor of Arts in Criminology, 2019

May 2022
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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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ABSTRACT

Publicized police misconduct and brutality over the past decade have contributed to increased tensions between the police and community. Exposure to these encounters can result in negative perceptions of police and have serious policy implications for funding of police departments. Although prior research has focused on previous contacts with police, little is known about how *voluntary* contacts with police can shape an individual's perceptions. Given the recent death of George Floyd and movement to "defund the police," the current study aims to determine whether there are demographic differences in perceptions of police among those who have experienced prior voluntary contacts and if satisfaction is a mediating factor. Utilizing data from the 2018 Police-Public Contact Survey (PPCS), results show that minorities and lower-income individuals are more likely to contact police in the future when compared to whites and higher income groups but that racial disparities are contingent on satisfaction level. These results add to the current literature, which focuses primarily on involuntary contacts with police, and demonstrates the need for future studies on voluntary contacts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my esteemed thesis director – Dr. Yang for his invaluable supervision and support during the course of my degree. My gratitude extends to the Data Analytics that are Robust and Trusted (D.A.R.T) team and the National Science Foundation for the funding opportunity and exposure to advanced data analytics. I also thank Dr. Drawve and Dr. Thomas for their expertise and contribution to my thesis committee over the past year. Most importantly, I'd like to thank my family for always giving me the strength and confidence to pursue my dreams.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my fiancé, Matthew Hodges, who has supported me throughout my time at the University of Arkansas. Thank you for always encouraging me to keep going – I couldn't have done this without you.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Significance of the Study

Over the last decade, unjustified killings of Black men and women by police have taken headlines and sparked protest across the United States. Prior to 2020, the most well-known police-involved death was in 2014 when Michael Brown was shot and killed in Ferguson, Missouri. Brown's death came shortly after the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012, which led to the creation of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The Ferguson community was outraged by Brown's death, and days of protest and unrest took place among the Black community in hopes of justice (History.com, 2020). Those who studied the aftermath of the events in Ferguson found that it wasn't the so-called "Ferguson effect" that caused an increase in crime rates but rather the long history of violence, large populations of Black residents, and increased police presence in those areas (Pyrooz et al., 2016). Prior to the deaths of Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin, there was an incident in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 2004 where Frank Jude was severely beaten by officers. After the assault, research estimated that over 20,000 calls to police were lost (Desmond et al., 2016). The loss of calls to police, possibly due to decreased trust or legitimacy by community members, presents researchers with a unique issue that should be studied further as police-public tensions continue to rise.

More recently, the death of George Floyd sparked turmoil across the nation and eventually led to a movement aimed at "defunding the police." In May of 2020, Floyd was approached by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota and after resisting arrest, was pinned to the ground with a knee to his neck until he lost consciousness and later died. His infamous last words, "I can't breathe," has become a plea for help in the Black community who experienced Floyd's death vicariously. Protests took place across the nation, monuments were destroyed,

businesses were burned, and stores were looted in retaliation (The New York Times, 2020).

Floyd's death and the media attention that came with it quickly led to a nationwide movement that would dramatically change policing strategies.

The movement to defund the police places emphasis on re-allocating police resources to other public services that could be better suited to serve minority communities (Andrew, 2020; McDowell & Fernandez, 2018; Muhammad, 2020). Those who support defunding the police argue that the police are responsible for handling public challenges that they are not trained, or equipped, to handle (Viatale, 2017). For example, defunding the police could reduce the police response to 911 calls related to mental health issues and shift responsibility to mental health providers. Additionally, police could reduce their response to minor offenses and concerns which might expose individuals to the cycle of arrest, systemic racism, and the criminal justice system (Geller et al., 2014; Meares, 2015; Neusteter, Subramanian, et al., 2019). Defunding the police has been met with mixed opinions, especially among communities that experience high crime and poverty. According to a Gallup's Center on Black Voices poll in 2020, 61% of Black respondents wished for police presence to remain at least the same in their neighborhood (as reported for Gallup by Saad, 2020). Regardless of the concern minority communities express with police, there might still be a need or desire for police presence in those areas.

The true effects of Floyd's death remain to be studied and the increased tension between minority communities and police calls for further research on public-police relations. Most importantly, Floyd's death and the movement to defund the police allow for further evaluations of 21st century policing and the factors that might lead to increased trust and improved relationships between the police and the community. Despite the focus from the media and prior research on negative encounters with police, it is important to recognize that the police are also

responsible for responding to non-crime related and service calls. Those calls can consist of a multitude of responsibilities (i.e. traffic concerns, domestic disputes, disturbances), which demonstrates the lack of a better-suited organization tasked with handling them (Lum, Koper, Wu, 2021). Recognizing the duties involved with policing and how the community relies on the police for those tasks is the first step in evaluating current funding for police departments. After that, it is up to social researchers to help determine whether their service-oriented tasks, or voluntary contacts initiated by citizens, are creating a negative or positive impact.

Statement of the Problem

Incidents of police-involved brutality can have a negative impact on how the community perceives the police (Desmond et al., 2016) and unfortunately, most of what we know about contacts with police is based on involuntary, or police-initiated, contacts. These contacts can occur during a traffic stop, street stop, or any other instance where the police approach the individual. While not all stops result in misconduct or arrest, they are known to be a key player in whether an individual supports the police (Eith & Durose, 2011; Tyler, Fagan, & Geller, 2014). The literature on 21st century policing distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary contacts (Decker, 1981) but little is known on how *voluntary* contacts with the police can impact perceptions of police.

Purpose of the Study

The current study aims to fill the gap in the literature, and inform the defunding debate, by focusing on individuals who have experienced voluntary contact with the police and determining whether there are differences in the likelihood of future contact. Furthermore, the study will determine whether satisfaction with the previous voluntary contact effects the likelihood of

future contact. Those who have called on the police for their service can provide important insight on what is most important during public-police interactions and can help researchers and policy makers understand whether key factors, such as race, are the most important in predicting perceptions likelihood of future contact.

Research Questions:

- 1) Are there demographic differences in perceptions of police across age, racial, income, and sex groups in the likelihood to voluntarily contact the police again in the future?
- 2) How might satisfaction with prior voluntary contact impact observed differences across demographic groups?
- 3) Does income intersect with satisfaction to predict future likelihood of contact with police?
- 4) Does race intersect with satisfaction to predict likelihood of contact with police?

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND & LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Conflict Theory

To understand why tensions exist between community members and police, researchers often use a theoretical framework rooted in conflict theory. Conflict theory argues that maintaining social order through coercive strategies is aimed at regulating threats to power (Chambliss, 2001; Turk, 1969) and, when applied to policing, might explain why excessive force is used in some situations where police view minorities as threatening (Holmes, 2000; Liska & Yu, 1992). The minority threat hypothesis is supported by empirical research linking use of violence to the racial makeup of communities (Holmes, 2000; Jacobs & O'Brien,

1998; Liska & Yu, 1992; Smith, 2003; Smith & Holmes, 2003) and could help explain racial differences in perceptions of police.

Minority Threat Hypothesis

Minority threat hypothesis maintains that measures of minority threat (i.e. percentage of non-white residents) predict the employment of crime control mechanisms by police, such as use of force (Liska, 1992). Oftentimes, stereotypes associate race with criminality (Bender, 2003; Quillan & Pager, 2001) and the mere presence of minority populations can heighten the fear of crime among white community members (Chiricos, Hogan & Gertz, 1997; Liska, Lawrence, & Sanchirico, 1982). In response to this perceived fear, police might use excessive force, a coercive mechanism of control, to protect the interests of the dominant group (Holmes, 2000). The minority threat hypothesis helps researchers understand why police might respond to minority groups with more force during involuntary contacts but there remains a lack of focus in the literature on racial differences in perceptions of police when examining voluntary contacts.

Previous Contact with Police

Prior studies have found that attitudes toward the police are related to perceived neighborhood crime (Reisig & Giacomazzi, 1998), disorder (Cao, Frank, & Cullen, 1996; Reisig & Giacomazzi, 1998), fear of crime (Cao et al., 1996; Dowler & Sparks, 2008; Reisig & Parks, 2000) and that there are racial differences in perceptions of police (Bordua & Tiff, 1971; Decker, 1981; Weitzer, 2000; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999; Wheelock, Strohshine, & O'Hear, 2019). To understand *why* these differences exist, researchers also focus on previous contacts with police.

There is a large amount of literature on the importance of police contacts in increasing or decreasing public's confidence in police (Alberton and Gorey, 2018; Correia et al., 1996; Cao, 2011; Gau, 2011; Lim, 2015; Murphy, 2009; Sced, 2004; Ren et al., 2005; Renauer and Covelli, 2010; Skogan, 2005; Wells, 2007), regardless of neighborhood (Rosenbaum et al., 2005). Negative contact or experience with police has an unfavorable effect on overall perceptions of police (Bridenball and Jesilow, 2008; Cao, 2011; Gau, 2009; Lim, 2015; Murphy, 2009; Nofziger and Williams, 2005; Shelly et al., 2012). On the other hand, positive contact would increase confidence in police (Cao, 2011; Frank et al., 2005; Murphy and Worrall, 1999; Schafer et al., 2003; Tyler, 1990). Not only does previous contact with police matter, but the type of contact and the individual's satisfaction with the contact are also important (I.e. Bordua & Tifft, 1971; Decker, 1981). Differentiating between voluntary and involuntary contacts with police will help determine whether perceptions of police change among citizens who had satisfactory contact with police.

Contacts with police must be distinguished between voluntary and involuntary (Decker, 1981). When an individual voluntarily initiates contact with police, often to request a service, their confidence in the police increases (Correia, Reisig, & Lovrich, 1996; Skogan, 2005). In contrast, being stopped by police involuntarily (traffic stops, searches) is associated with decreased satisfaction and less favorable feelings (Eith & Durose, 2011; Tyler, Fagan, & Geller, 2014). The consequences of having negative, involuntary encounters with police can be detrimental (Legewie & Fagan, 2019), so differentiation between the type of contact is extremely important.

Satisfaction, Procedural Justice, and Confidence

Previous studies have found that the quality of police contacts is one of the most important factors in predicting public's confidence in police (Alberton and Gorey, 2018; Bradford et al., 2009; Cao, 2011; Correia et al., 1996; Gau, 2011; Lim, 2015; Murphy, 2009; Sced, 2004; Ren et al., 2005; Renauer and Covelli, 2010; Wells, 2007). Increasing confidence in the police is crucial for community policing, perceiving police as legitimate (Cao, 2011; Gau, 2011; Tyler, 2006), and overall cooperation with police (Nix et al., 2015; Ren et al., 2005; Tyler, 1990). The treatment of these individuals by officers during the contact, or *procedural justice*, and satisfaction can impact perceptions of police.

When focusing on individuals who experienced police-initiated contact, procedural justice was proven to be a significant factor in explaining variation in satisfaction levels (Wheelock, Strohshine, & O'Hear, 2019) which is consistent with existing literature (Mastrofski, Snipes, & Supina, 1996; Mazerolle et al., 2013; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Those who experience impartial and respectful treatment report higher satisfaction with police (Mazerolle et al., 2013; McCluskey, 2003; Skogan, 2005; Tyler & Fagan, 2008). Interestingly, negative encounters with police appear to have more significant impacts for White people (Rosenbaum et al., 2005) due to their higher expectations for these interactions (Chandek, 1999).

Additionally, confidence in police is an important factor in improving police legitimacy and effectiveness (Gau, 2009; Hawdon et al., 2003; Nalla and Madan, 2012; Ren et al., 2005). As far as satisfaction goes, there are consistent trends in the literature but a complicated relationship with additional demographic factors, neighborhood context, and individual experiences with police (Cao, 2015; Cao, Frank, & Cullen, 1996; Frank et al., 1996; Lai & Zhao, 2010;

McCluskey, McCluskey, & Enriquez, 2008; Reisig & Parks, 2000; Shuck, Rosenbaum, & Hawkins, 2008; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005; Wolfe, Nix, Kaminski, & Rojeck, 2016; Wu, 2014).

Key Factors Shaping Attitudes Toward Police

Previous research has shown that most individuals have generally favorable views of police, reporting high satisfaction levels (Cao et al., 1996; Dai & Jiang, 2016; Wu, Sun, & Triplett, 2009). However, there are also key findings that demonstrate differences in perceptions of police based on several demographic characteristics. Demographics commonly studied include race/ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic status.

Most studies suggest that older citizens hold more favorable attitudes toward police (Cao et al., 1996; Correia, Reisig, & Lovrich, 1996; De Angelis & Wolf, 2016; Frank et al., 1996; Lai & Zhano, 2010; McNeeley & Grothoff, 2016; Ren et al., 2005). Despite overall support, there are demographic differences in police perceptions with young people, the economically disadvantaged, and minorities having far less favorable attitudes toward police when compared to older, richer, non-minorities (Apple & O'Brien, 1983; Garcia & Cao, 2005; Gau et al., 2012; Huang & Vaughn, 1996; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998; Tuch & Weitzer, 1997).

Most prominent in the literature on policing, race /ethnicity produces significant differences in perceptions of police. The majority found that Black citizens hold less favorable views of police when compared to white citizens (Engel, 2005; Frank et al., 2005; Gabbidon & Higgins, 2009; Hurst & Frank, 2000; Reisig & Parks, 2000; Smith, 2005; Wu et al., 2009). When looking at race specifically, research indicates that Black respondents report less police satisfaction than White respondents (Bordua & Tifft, 1971; Decker, 1981; Weitzer, 2000; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999; Wheelock, Strohshine, & O'Hear, 2019). Standardized instruments, like

the Perceptions of Police Scale (POPS), have also confirmed this finding (Nadal et al., 2017). Furthermore, Black individuals have also reported greater understanding for protests and support for movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM) when compared to their White counterparts (Reinka & Leach, 2017).

There is only limited evidence for age differences and satisfaction (Parker, Onyekwulujw, & Murty, 1995; Schuck et al., 2008). Although there is not a clear relationship between age and satisfaction, there is a possible indirect relationship through the “aging out” of crime (Ivkovic, 2008; Murphy, 2009). Studies on gender differences and perceptions of police also produce mixed results (Cao et al., 1996; Lai & Zhao, 2010; Skogan, 2005; Reisig & Correia, 1997; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002; Ratcliffe, Groff, Sorg, & Haberman, 2015). Understanding how demographic characteristics play a role in perceptions of police helps paint a “bigger picture” for public-police relations.

When unjustified killings of Black Americans by police occur in the U.S., the immediate dissemination of information available through news and social media could result in vicarious experiences. Media exposure to incidents of police misconduct and brutality can also play a major role in how individuals perceive the police (Jefferis et al., 1997; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). Studies on how the media effects attitudes toward police have shown that the race of the viewer and the community are important (Jefferis et al., 1997; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004) and when acts of violence by police are publicized, the legitimacy and reputation of police is threatened (Desmond et al., 2016).

Although media exposure has shown to be significant in predicting attitudes toward police (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004), there is also evidence that suggests media variables are not related to perceptions of police. For example, a 2006 study conducted by Chermak et al., showed

that news consumption of a celebrated case of police misconduct had no significant effect on general attitudes toward police. Instead, factors like race, income, fear of crime, and perceived problems in the neighborhood were emphasized as being related to perceived police effectiveness (Dowler, 2002). Given these mixed findings, the role of media exposure in shaping attitudes toward police requires further research, particularly in relation to George Floyd's death, to determine whether coverage of police-involved incidents and misconduct truly influence the shaping of attitudes toward police.

Racial differences in satisfaction with police and media exposure continue to be studied but gaining knowledge on how movements are perceived across demographic groups could offer insight on the underlying issues between police and minority populations.

Community-Oriented Policing

The gaining popularity of community-oriented policing (COP) can be linked to COPS grants (He, Zhao, & Lovrich, 2005), professionalization pressures and protests (Trojanowicz & Bucquerous, 1990), and as part of an effort of responsabilisation processes (Garland, 2001). First introduced in the '80s, community policing is meant to emphasize a service orientation or mindset in officers, and create a cooperative partnership between police and the public (Cordner, 1995; Maguire, 2003; Makin & Marenin, 2017). The practices vary (Makin & Marenin, 2017), but overall community policing involves face-to-face and non-law enforcement contacts with the public, problem-solving, and a decentralized hierarchy where officers have more discretion (Cordner, 1995; Friedmann, 1992; Koslicki & Willits, 2018; Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2012; Seagrave, 1996; Torkanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1990). More recently, community oriented policing involves procedural justice to emphasize fairness, neutrality and respectful communication with citizens during contacts (Rahr & Rice, 2015; Stoughton, 2015).

When events of police-involved shootings or fatalities are publicized, the common response is increased COP, among others, as demonstrated by the recommendations for COP strategies that were developed in the Presidents Taskforce on 21st Century Policing (2015). The literature surrounding COP produced mixed results, with some studies showing that the strategy has a positive impact on perceptions of police (Gill et al., 2014; Peyton et al., 2019) and others suggesting that there was no relation to reduced crime (Gill et al., 2014) and community complaints of excessive force (Smith and Holmes, 2014; Shjarback & White, 2016). The death of George Floyd and recent movement to defund the police call for further analyses of voluntary, or service-oriented, contacts with police and how demographics and satisfaction impact perceptions of police. Despite the recommendations made by Obama's Presidential Taskforce in 2015, little has been done within police departments to foster change and implement COP strategies. If positive voluntary contacts with police are found to be important, it would further emphasize the importance of COP strategies and oriented practices.

Summary and Research Questions

Utilizing knowledge from the existing literature, the current study will determine whether there are differences across sex, gender, income, and age groups in the likelihood of voluntarily contacting the police in the future. Focusing on voluntary contacts in this study will help inform public policy on service-oriented policing and whether the community is likely to contact the police again in the future. Consistent with previous research on involuntary contacts, I expect to find racial differences in the likelihood of contacting the police again in the future, along with age and income group differences. More specifically, I hypothesize that minorities, younger, and low-income individuals will be less likely to contact police in the future.

Next, I believe that including satisfaction in our analysis could result in some changes in perceptions of police and that there might be an interaction between income and satisfaction as well as race and satisfaction. Results of the study are produced below, followed by a discussion of further research and implications of our study.

III. DATA AND METHODS

Data for this study come from the Police-Public Contact Survey (PPCS), conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau between July 1, 2018 and December 31, 2018. This survey provides detailed information on the nature and characteristics of face-to-face contacts between police and the public, including the reason for and outcome of the contact and the respondent's satisfaction with the contact. The PPCS collects data from a nationally representative sample of U.S. residents aged 16 or older as a supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). The nationally representative sample is a product of stratified multistage cluster sampling and selected households were interviewed via computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) about their contacts with police during the previous 12 months. The overall weighted response rate for the 2018 PPCS was 53.6%.

Sample Selection

When respondents begin the PPCS, they are asked questions about both voluntary and involuntary contacts they may have had with police in the last 12 months. Each respondent responds to these questions and is then separated into groups based on their most recent contact. Those who reported having a voluntary contact with police were then asked to complete the portion of the PPCS related to voluntary contacts. Although an individual can have reported having both voluntary and involuntary contact, they were only allowed to complete one portion

of the survey or the other. A total of 12,447 responses were collected from this portion of the survey. Those who answered “Don’t know” or failed to respond to a question in this portion were excluded from the sample (N=225), resulting in a final sample of 12,222. The descriptive frequencies for the sample are provided in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Descriptive Frequencies of participants in the final sample of those with voluntary contacts across our dependent variable, *future contact*.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Less or Just as Likely to Contact Police</i>	<i>More Likely to Contact Police</i>	<i>Total (N=12,222)</i>
Age			
16-17	40 (74.1)	14 (25.9)	54 (0.44)
18-24	643 (75.7)	206 (24.3)	849 (6.95)
25-44	3449 (80.3)	846 (19.7)	4295 (35.14)
45-64	3423 (75.6)	1104 (24.4)	4527 (37.04)
65+	1841 (73.7)	656 (26.3)	2497 (20.43)
Race			
White	7523 (79.1)	1988 (20.9)	9511 (77.82)
Black	611 (64.2)	340 (35.8)	951 (7.78)
Hispanic	783 (70.1)	334 (29.9)	1117 (9.14)
Asian	222 (69.8)	96 (30.2)	318 (2.60)
Other	257 (79.1)	68 (20.9)	325 (2.66)
Income			
\$24,999 or less	1432 (71.0)	586 (29.0)	2018 (16.51)
\$25,000 to \$49,999	2059 (74.8)	692 (25.2)	2751 (22.51)
\$50,000 to \$74,999	1714 (77.0)	512 (23.0)	2226 (18.21)
\$75,000 or more	4191 (80.2)	1036 (19.8)	5227 (42.77)
Sex			
Male	4183 (77.2)	1232 (22.8)	5415 (44.31)
Female	5213 (76.6)	1594 (23.4)	6807 (55.69)
Futurecontact	9396 (76.9)	2826 (23.1)	12222

Variable Description

The dependent variable used in this analysis is labeled as *future contact* and is a result of respondents being asked “Would you be more likely, less likely, or just as likely to contact the police in the future?” Future contact was recoded as a dummy variable with 0= less likely or just as likely and 1= more likely. We found that there was no significant difference when separating all three responses into ordinal categories and determined that a logistic regression would provide readers with a straightforward interpretation of the data.

Based on prior research, we have included multiple independent variables that could effect likelihood of future contact with police. The data for these variables were collected through the NCVS/PPCS and recoded as follows:

SEX – Gender of respondent based on NCVS data

0: Male

1: Female

AGE – Age of respondent based on NCVS data

1: 16-17

2: 18-24

3: 25-44

4: 45-64

5: 65+

INCOME – Allocated income values from NCVS

Income was recoded as a dummy variable for our analysis in order to determine whether those who fall below the poverty line are more or less likely to have future contact.

0: \$25,000 or more

1: \$24,999 or less (or NA if there are any missing)

RACE – Race of respondent based on NCVS data

Race was recoded as a dummy variable to aggregate minority group data. This was decided after logistic regressions showed that all minority groups produced similar outcomes.

0: White

1: Non-White

SATISFACTION – Satisfaction with the outcome of the contact

Dummy coded as a result of being asked, “Were you satisfied with the outcome of the contact?”

0: Not Satisfied

1: Satisfied

Model of Analysis

Using logistic regression in SPSS, the following analyses test whether sex, age, income, and race are significant factors in predicting future contact with police. An additional model also includes satisfaction as a factor. After recoding the independent variables, the reference categories are as follows: male, 65 years or older, less than \$25,000 or more annual income, white, and being not satisfied. As an exploratory analysis, interaction effects were evaluating

between income and satisfaction and their effect on future contact as well as race and satisfaction. The logistic regression coefficients were then converted into odds in the form of:

$$\% \Delta = (e^b - 1) * 100$$

In this equation, e^b indicates the exponentiated coefficient and is subtracted by 1 and times 100 to produce the percentage increase or decrease due to a one-unit change in the independent variable. This method for interpreting regressions provides readers with a more intuitive comparison (Pampel, 2000).

IV. RESULTS

Logistic regression results and the converted odds for our base model (Model 1) with age, race, income, and sex are presented in **Table 2**. When examining differences across race, it was found that non-white respondents were significantly *more likely* to contact police again in the future, when compared to white respondents. There are also significant differences in the age and income categories that will be discussed below.

Table 2: Logistic regression including age, race, income, and sex (Model 1).

VARIABLE	B	S.E.	DF	SIG.	ODDS
AGE					
65+	REF				
16-17	-.115	.317	1	.716	-10.863%
18-24	-.264	.094	1	.005**	-23.203%**
25-44	-.438	.061	1	.000***	-35.467%***
45-64	-.116	.058	1	.045*	-10.952%*
RACE					
WHITE	REF				
NON-WHITE	.557	.050	1	.000***	74.543%***
INCOME					
\$25,000 OR MORE	REF				
\$24,999 OR LESS	.274	.056	1	.000***	31.521%***
SEX					
MALE	REF				
FEMALE	.009	.044	1	.842	90.406%

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Results of the logistic regression support our hypothesis that there will be differences in the likelihood of contacting police in the future, but with an interesting twist. The following sections will provide detailed results of the analysis with existing literature that either supports or contradicts these findings.

Racial Differences

Previous research has shown that there are racial differences in perceptions of police (Bordua & Tiff, 1971; Decker, 1981; Weitzer, 2000; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999; Wheelock,

Stroshine, & O’Hear, 2019) and our results support this finding, although not in the direction anticipated. For example, the odds of being more likely to voluntarily contact the police in the future are 75% higher for non-white respondents in this sample than for White respondents. Based on prior policing literature, which states that Black individuals have reportedly less favorable attitudes toward police (Nadal et al., 2017; Engel, 2005; Frank et al., 2005; Gabbidon & Higgins, 2009; Hurst & Frank, 2000; Reisig & Parks, 2000; Smith, 2005; Wu et al., 2009), one might expect for non-white respondents who had voluntarily contacted the police in the last 12 months from the sample to be less or just as likely to contact police in the future. Instead, non-white respondents were significantly more likely to contact police voluntarily in the future than White respondents.

The racial differences in our results demonstrate how what we know about policing through studies on involuntary contacts might not translate into voluntary contacts. The individuals who are answering these questions have contacted police previously, likely to request a service from police, and this analysis shows that minority groups are more likely to contact them again. Although it is not clear why this finding exists, one could argue that it’s possible minorities who had a positive contact the police might re-evaluate their perceptions based on that interaction. Another possible explanation for this finding is that minority populations are more vulnerable and require the services of police more than White individuals. Future studies should ask more questions about the details of these engagements in order to determine why there are differences in responses across racial groups.

Age Differences

Next, the results of our study offer some insight on how age impacts the likelihood of future contact with police. Younger individuals are known to have less favorable perceptions of

police (Chandek, 1999; Chermak et al., 2001; Cao et al., 1996) and would be expected to be less likely to contact the police in the future. The results from this analysis support these findings, with younger age groups being significantly less likely to contact police in the future when compared to those who are 65 years or older.

The odds for those who fall under the 18-24 and 25-44 age groups, respectively, of contacting the police in the future are 23% and 35% less likely when compared to those who are 65 years or older. Supporting our hypothesis, we can assume multiple reasons for this finding. It's possible that older individuals require more assistance than those younger than them due to their age. Additionally, younger individuals could hold more animosity toward the police due to their more rebellious nature in younger years. Once again, "aging out" of crime would explain why contacts with police are reduced with age.

Income Differences

Next, there were significant differences for those who make \$24,999 or less when compared to those who make less than \$25,000 or more per year in the likelihood of future contact. Respondents who made less than \$25,000 were actually more likely to contact police, when compared to those in the reference group. When studying socioeconomic status, several studies show that persons with lower socioeconomic status hold negative attitudes toward police than the wealthy (Cao et al., 1996; Huang & Vaughn, 1996; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998; Smith et al., 1991). Our findings indicate that those in the lower socioeconomic tier are actually more likely to contact police in the future, which contradicts prior research, but it's possible that more contextual factors, such as neighborhood, could be at play.

This finding does not support our hypothesis that lower-income individuals would be less or just as likely to contact police again in the future, but it is important to address environmental factors that could impact how someone perceives police. Community context includes aggregate levels of race, poverty, unemployment, crime, and overall quality of life. Several studies show a link between citizen perceptions of police and their neighborhoods (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Dai & Johnson, 2009; Dai & Jiang, 2016; Reisig & Parks, 2000; Sharp & Johnson, 2009; Wu et al., 2009) and additional factors like social disorder and victimization rates could also play a role (Haberman et al., 2016; Ratcliffe et al., 2015; Reisig & Parks, 2000; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998). Understanding how income and neighborhood context plays a role in policing and perceptions of police is extremely important because policies and reform can be implemented to make sure that the experience of these people is positive when engaging with police.

Sex Differences

The sex variable is not significant in our analysis, which is consistent with the literature stating that gender has no effect on perceptions of police (Benedict et al., 2000; Chermak et al., 2001; Davis, 1990). Given the current social climate and shift toward accepting more gender identities, future research could include those to better understand how LGBTQ+ individuals are impacted by contacts with police.

Results from Model 1 show that non-white and lower-income individuals are more likely to contact police again in the future, which is contradictory to the current literature and our hypothesis. Given that satisfaction is known to be an important factor in shaping perceptions of police (Bordua & Tifft, 1971; Decker, 1981), Model 2 will demonstrate how adding satisfaction as an independent variable either changes or does not change our outcome and is presented in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Logistic regression including age, race, income, sex, and satisfaction (Model 2).

VARIABLE	B	S.E.	DF	SIG.	ODDS
AGE					
65+	REF				
16-17	-.132	.320	1	.679	-12.366%
18-24	-.273	.094	1	.004**	-23.891%**
25-44	-.428	.058	1	.000***	-34.819%***
45-64	-.103	.058	1	.077	-9.787%
RACE					
WHITE	REF				
NON-WHITE	.602	.051	1	.000***	82.577%***
INCOME					
\$25,000 OR MORE	REF				
\$24,999 OR LESS	.295	.057	1	.000***	34.313%***
SEX					
MALE	REF				
FEMALE	.023	.044	1	.600	2.327%
SATISFACTION					
NOT SATISFIED	REF				
SATISFIED	1.172	.102	1	.000***	222.844%***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

As shown in **Table 3** above, satisfaction is an extremely significant factor. In fact, those who were satisfied with the outcome of their previous contact were over 200% more likely to contact the police again in the future. Regarding how it changed the overall model, the age group 45-64 was no longer significantly different than those who are 65 or older. This change is not very important to the current study and is predicted in the literature on aging out of crime.

Including satisfaction in our analysis helps paint a better picture of perceptions of police and how voluntary contacts can impact those perceptions. In order to determine just how satisfaction works across our most significant factors, race and income, an interactional analysis is required and produced below in **Tables 4 & 5**.

Table 4. Interaction between race and satisfaction in predicting future contact (Model 3).

VARIABLE	B	S.E.	DF	SIG.	ODDS
AGE					
65+	REF				
16-17	-.132	.320	1	.679	-12.366%
18-24	-.273	.094	1	.004**	-24.270%**
25-44	-.428	.061	1	.000***	-34.819%***
45-64	-.103	.058	1	.077	-9.787%
INCOME					
\$25,000 OR MORE	REF				
\$24,999 OR LESS	.295	.057	1	.000***	34.313%***
SEX					
MALE	REF				
FEMALE	.023	.044	1	.600	2.327%
RACE * SATISFACTION					
WHITE, NOT SATISFIED	REF				
WHITE, SATISFIED	1.177	.164	1	.000***	224.463%***
MINORITY, NOT SATISFIED	-.595	.203	1	.003**	-44.844%**
MINORITY, SATISFIED	.574	.160	1	.000***	77.535%***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

When examining the interaction between race and satisfaction, we see significant results. The extant literature on race effects indicate that minorities are less satisfied with police services overall (Bridenball & Jesilow, 2008; Brunson, 2007) and that direct and indirect experiences, or vicarious experience through media, have a significant impact on perceptions among Black citizens (Lee & Gibbs, 2015; Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2005). We recognize that there is disproportionate contact with minority populations and that the minority experience with police is often different than white citizens (Mbuba, 2010), but our analysis regarding voluntary contacts paints a different picture.

Results of the analysis show that regardless of race, the majority hold favorable attitudes toward the police and is consistent with the existing literature (Schuck and Rosenbaum, 2005). More importantly, the interaction between race and satisfaction indicates that racial differences are contingent on satisfaction. When compared to white respondents who were not satisfied, minorities who were not satisfied were 44% less likely or just as likely to contact the police again in the future. Our previous model 2 suggested that overall non-white respondents were more likely, but after further investigation we can see that it's not necessarily true. Both white and non-white respondents who were satisfied were more likely to contact police again. This demonstrates how important satisfaction with police contact is in shaping perceptions of police, particularly for minorities, and how community-oriented policing could help improve the minority experience.

Our final model includes the interaction between income and satisfaction in the likelihood of future contact with police. Previous research reveals a positive relationship between income and attitudes toward the police with higher income residents being more likely to have

favorable attitudes than lower income residents (Frank et al., 2005; Murty et al., 1990). The results of this interaction are produced in **Table 5** below.

Table 5: Interaction between Income and Satisfaction in predicting future contact (Model 4).

VARIABLE	B	S.E.	DF	SIG.	ODDS
AGE					
65+	REF				
16-17	-.136	.320	1	.669	-12.716%
18-24	-.278	.095	1	.003**	-24.270%**
25-44	-.429	.061	1	.000***	-34.884%***
45-64	-.103	.058	1	.078	-9.787%
RACE					
WHITE	REF				
NON-WHITE	.603	.051	1	.000***	82.759%***
SEX					
MALE	REF				
FEMALE	.023	.044	1	.609	2.327%
INCOME * SATISFACTION					
\$25,000+, NOT SATISFIED	REF				
\$25,000+, SATISFIED	1.560	.236	1	.000***	375.882%***
< \$24,999, NOT SATISFIED	.171	.256	1	.504	18.649%
< \$24,999, SATISFIED	1.238	.232	1	.000***	244.871%***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Results of this interaction show that there is an interaction between income and satisfaction, but only when respondents were satisfied. Despite income level, those who were satisfied were extremely more likely to contact police again when compared to higher income individuals who were not satisfied. These results would support the existing literature on income

but lacks significance in intersectionality with those who are not satisfied. Unlike race, it's possible that satisfaction impacts income only when positive.

V. DISCUSSION

The current study highlights how racial differences do exist among those who have experienced prior voluntary contact with police in the likelihood of contacting them again in the future and that satisfaction is extremely important. Although our base model suggests that minorities are more likely to contact the police again, further analysis showed that these results were contingent on satisfaction. When the interaction between race and satisfaction was evaluated, it was found that minorities who were not satisfied were less likely or just as likely to contact police, compared to whites who were not satisfied. This presents us with an interesting insight to 21st century policing – improving the minority experience during service-oriented calls can significantly affect one's perceptions of police. The shift toward community-oriented policing reflects this importance by attempting to create non-crime related relationships with the people that they serve.

Despite little evidence of an interaction between income and satisfaction, there is still an undertone of contextual and neighborhood-level factors that might also explain differences in perceptions of police. The indication that lower-income individuals are more likely to contact police more broadly demonstrates how, when accounting for other factors, these individuals rely more heavily on police presence and service. Understanding how these voluntary contacts shape attitudes toward police have serious policy implications and could affect how funding is allocated to police departments across the United States. Results from this study serve as a foundation for future research and demonstrates the need for additional research on voluntary contacts with police.

Limitations

Although our study produced insightful and exciting significant results, there are limitations. One limitation of the Public-Police Contact Survey of 2018 (PPCS) is that only those who experienced voluntary contact with police were asked about the likelihood of future contacts. Having information on how those who experienced involuntary contacts with police would respond to this question could allow for researchers to determine which type of contact is more important in shaping attitudes toward police. The recent death of George Floyd in 2020 and additional police-involved incidents require more recent data on how perceptions have changed and future versions of the PPCS will allow for a longitudinal analysis.

Given the mixed results our study produced, it would be beneficial to have more detailed information on the voluntary contacts but the study is restricted to what data is available. The PPCS did not ask detailed questions on voluntary contacts, such as race and gender of the officer, if a threat of violence was used, etc., in the voluntary contact portion of the survey. This severely limits the information available to use in analysis and interpretation.

Possible improvements could be made with the current PPCS data and coding structure, with attention to how groups should be classified. Dummy coding future contact with police provided a more straightforward interpretation of the data, but there was uncertainty on where the category “just as likely to” should fall. For the sake of keeping our data balanced, we lumped it with the “less likely” category.

Summary and Conclusion

The death of George Floyd has severely impacted society and placed extreme attention on policing. Given the history of violence, disproportionate contact, and fatal shootings of

minorities perpetrated by police, it is now up to public figures and social scientists to investigate the true effects these events hold. How someone perceives the police can impact how they vote, how they choose to allocate funding, and how they interact or cooperate with police.

The results of our study demonstrate how important it is to differentiate between involuntary and voluntary contacts with police. The existing literature on 21st century policing strategies often utilizes data collected from involuntary contacts with police, but our findings suggest that more research should be done on voluntary contacts as well. Future research should ask more detailed questions on both involuntary and voluntary contacts in order to investigate whether service-oriented duties are being performed and perceived well, and to determine whether defunding the police will have negative impacts. Unfortunately, those who are likely to need future police assistance are also some of the groups who view police more unfavorably. This dynamic requires further attention, with hopes of reducing tensions between communities and police.

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