Citizen attitudes toward the police in Canada

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Abstract

Purpose – Citizens' opinions of the police are important indicators of how well the police are performing their duties and can help to shape police practice as well as public policy. However, little research exists in Canada on people's opinions of the police. This paper aims to provide a more robust understanding of citizen attitudes toward the police in Canada by examining a variety of factors that have been deemed important in shaping people's attitudes in other countries (predominantly from research conducted in the USA).

Design/methodology/approach – The paper utilizes path analysis to decompose and better understand the relationships between sociodemographic/non-sociodemographic variables and attitudes toward the police. Data were drawn from the 1999 General Social Survey conducted by Statistics Canada. A random sample of Canadians was surveyed regarding victimization, personal safety and attitudes toward the criminal justice system.

Findings – Several distinct groups of people (i.e. young people, visible minorities, males, those who have experienced criminal victimization, those dissatisfied with their safety and those who perceive their neighborhoods as being high in crime) emerged as having negative views toward the police, which is consistent with much of the research conducted in the USA.

Originality/value – Police practice should more closely resemble the principles inherent in community policing if certain groups' negative views of the police are to be improved. This can be partly accomplished by the police being more inclusive of diverse opinions in the community and actively seeking out this opinion in order to better inform policing practices and strategies.

Keywords Police, Public opinion, Citizens, Community relations, Attitudes, Canada

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In recent decades, in part as a response to the influence of neo-liberal economic policies and the increasing presence of private security in the role of "policing", police forces across many Western countries have undergone significant changes in their policing philosophy and practice (Caputo and Vallée, 2005; Jones and Newburn, 2006). These changes are reflected in a variety of "new" policing philosophies that have come to dominate modern policing strategies, including community policing, problem-oriented policing, hot-spots policing, and intelligence-led policing (Newburn and Reiner, 2007). Regardless of the specific type of policing philosophy utilized, there has been an increasing emphasis placed on involving citizens in the policing of their communities. For example, the information community members possess can be integral to the police

in identifying and solving community issues (Newburn and Reiner, 2007). As citizens' opinions are taken into account and as policing is more readily thought of as providing a service to "customers", public opinion holds the potential to have an impact on police practice (Davis *et al.*, 2004; Frank *et al.*, 2005) as well as public policy (Tufts, 2000). Citizen attitudes toward the police can act as a gauge as to how well the police are doing their jobs (Hurst *et al.*, 2000; Schuck and Rosenbaum, 2005) and their opinions toward the police can be utilized to help improve police-community relations (Frank *et al.*, 2005; Schuck and Rosenbaum, 2005).

To date, there has been a diverse range of research completed on citizen attitudes toward the police in the USA (e.g. Frank *et al.*, 2005; Schuck and Rosenbaum, 2005) but Canadian research in this area is lacking. The Canadian research that does exist tends to focus on the opinions of particular groups of people (e.g. Chinese Canadians; Chow, 2002) or is mainly descriptive. For example, we know that the Canadian public's support for the police often substantially exceeds their support for other criminal justice institutions (i.e. the courts and corrections) (Roberts, 2001; Tufts, 2000); however, few rigorous methodological examinations have been completed on Canadian's attitudes toward the police more generally. The research questions that then arise are:

(1) What shapes people's attitudes toward the police in Canada?

(2) Who are the people that support the police, and more importantly, what characteristics are associated with the minority of Canadians who think that the police do a poor job?

(3) Where do police relations need to be improved and where do the police need to garner public support?

Citizen attitudes toward the police

Brown and Benedict (2002), in an extensive review of the literature on attitudes toward the police, found that the only variables that consistently influenced citizen attitudes were age, race, contact with the police, and neighborhood. Other variables such as gender and education showed much less consistency in their ability to explain attitudes toward the police. Below I review the literature on attitudes toward the police and illustrate more specifically how a variety of variables have been found to influence citizen attitudes.

As Brown and Benedict (2002) indicate, the variable of age has been found to play a key role in shaping people's attitudes toward the police. Most literature suggests that older people are more likely to feel that the police are doing a good job, while younger people are more likely to think that they are doing a poor job (Cao, 2001; Cao *et al.*, 1996; Dowler, 2002; Hurst and Frank, 2000; Jesilow *et al.*, 1995; Nofziger and Williams, 2005; Webb and Marshall, 1995). However, a minority have found that no relationship exists between age and attitudes toward the police (Davis, 1990), or that as age increases people's views toward the police become more negative (Sims *et al.*, 2002).

Like age, the literature surrounding race/ethnicity and attitudes toward the police has developed a consensus on the importance of this variable in helping to understand what shapes people's attitudes toward the police (Brown and Benedict, 2002; Weitzer and Tuch, 2006). Webb and Marshall (1995) even suggest that race/ethnicity is the single most important factor in predicting attitudes toward the police. Generally, most

research has found that ethnic minorities tend to hold more negative views toward the police than whites (Cao *et al.*, 1996; Dowler, 2003; Schuck and Rosenbaum, 2005; Taylor *et al.*, 2001) – more specifically, the most common finding being that blacks hold less favorable views of the police than whites (Frank *et al.*, 2005; Leiber *et al.*, 1998; Murty *et al.*, 1990; Tuch and Weitzer, 1997; Webb and Marshall, 1995). For example, blacks are more likely than whites to think that the police treat them unfairly and abuse their power (Weitzer and Tuch, 2006). Most research also indicates that Hispanics tend to hold more negative views of the police than whites, but to a lesser extent than blacks (Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Murty *et al.*, 1990; Tuch and Weitzer, 1997; Weitzer and Tuch, 2006). However, Hispanics, like other minority groups, have received much less research attention than blacks.

Despite a seemingly overwhelming consensus on the importance of race/ethnicity in influencing people's attitudes toward the police, there have been alternative findings. For example, a small amount of research has indicated that race/ethnicity does not have an impact on people's attitudes toward the police (Chandek, 1999; Jesilow *et al.*, 1995). Weitzer and Tuch (2005) found that the effects of race/ethnicity on attitudes toward the police were no longer significant after controlling for a variety of other variables (e.g. perceptions of neighborhood and satisfaction with safety). In addition to this, Sims *et al.* (2002) found that blacks held more favorable views of police than did whites.

There is much less consensus concerning the effects of other sociodemographic variables on public attitudes toward the police. In reference to gender, several authors have found that females tend to report more confidence in the police than males (Cao *et al.*, 1996; Nofziger and Williams, 2005; Reisig and Giacomazzi, 1998; Taylor *et al.*, 2001) while others have found that males tend to report more confidence in the police than females (Brown and Coulter, 1983; Correia *et al.*, 1996). However, there is also much research that has found no relationship between a person's gender and attitudes toward the police (Cao, 2001; Davis, 1990; Jesilow *et al.*, 1995; Kusow *et al.*, 1997; Murty *et al.*, 1990).

Similar to gender, the literature surrounding the effects of a person's level of education and income on their attitudes toward the police is ambiguous at best. Some research has found that less educated people have more confidence in the police (Cao, 2001) while others have found that higher levels of education equals more positive attitudes toward the police (Frank *et al.*, 2005; Jesilow *et al.*, 1995) or that there is no relationship between the two variables (Cao *et al.*, 1996; Correia *et al.*, 1996).

Similar contradictions are found for the effects of income on people's attitudes toward the police. Some research has found that as a person's income increased, so did their levels of confidence in the police (Frank *et al.*, 2005; Murty *et al.*, 1990). However, Dowler (2002) found that as income increased, confidence in the police tended to decrease while Cao (2001) found that there was no relationship between the two variables. Also, although almost absent from the literature, a person's marital status has been found to shape his/her attitudes toward the police. Cao (2001) found that married people held more confidence in the police than non-married people.

In addition to the above sociodemographic variables, there are a variety of other variables that emerge as having an influence on the public's attitudes toward the police. Most people who have been victimized by crime consistently have less favorable opinions of the police than non-victims (Besserer, 2002; Cao *et al.*, 1996; Hurst and

Frank, 2000; Sprott and Doob, 1997). Having contact with the police also helps to consistently predict people's attitudes toward the police (Brown and Benedict, 2002). For example, Nofziger and Williams (2005) found that the more contact people had with the police the more negative their views were toward the police. However, most research indicates that it is the type of police contact that is important. For example, if the contact was negative (e.g. a police-initiated traffic stop) rather than positive (e.g. phoning the police for help), it is more likely that people's attitudes toward the police would also be negative (Hurst and Frank, 2000; Hurst *et al.*, 2000). However, Weitzer and Tuch (2005) argue that the type of police contact is irrelevant given that most people never come into contact with the police. Similarly, Sims *et al.* (2002) found that having contact with the police did not affect people's attitudes toward the police.

Fear of crime also plays a significant role in determining people's opinions of the police. Generally, the more people fear crime the more likely they are to rate police performance as poor (Besserer, 2002; Cao *et al.*, 1996; Dowler, 2003; Sprott and Doob, 1997). Alternatively, Sims *et al.* (2002), using fear of crime as an intervening variable, found that it did not play a significant role in determining people's opinions of the police. Similarly, how people perceive their neighborhoods has been consistently found to help predict people's attitudes toward the police (Brown and Benedict, 2002). Most authors find that if people perceive their neighborhoods as being "crime ridden", they hold less favorable opinions of the police (Cao *et al.*, 1996; Dowler, 2003; Murty *et al.*, 1990; Weitzer and Tuch, 2005). However, Sims *et al.* (2002) did find that the more people perceived that there were problems in their community (e.g. drug dealing), the more favorable opinions they had of the police, while a minority of others have found no relationship between neighborhood conditions and opinions of the police (Davis, 1990; Webb and Marshall, 1995).

As we can see from the above literature, there is much contradictory research surrounding attitudes toward the police. Also, given that most of the above literature is based on research conducted in the USA, the goal of this paper is to examine what shapes Canadian attitudes toward the police in order to add a Canadian perspective to the debate. Although Canada and the USA share somewhat similar policing styles – there is increasing emphasis on improving police-community relations in both countries – as well as comparable culture(s) and economies, there are some important differences between the two countries. In terms of policing, the USA's system is highly decentralized with a variety of fragmented local police forces which are supplemented by federal agencies (Manning, 2006). Alternatively, the Canadian system is less decentralized and fragmented in that provinces and municipalities can choose to create their own police forces but often contract out their police services to the federally operated Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), with the exception of the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, which have their own provincial police forces (Steverson, 2008). The notions on which policing are built also vary between the two countries: while ideas surrounding policing in the USA have generally been based on principles of individualism and minimal government intrusion into the lives of citizens (Steverson, 2008), Canada's principles surrounding policing are based more on ensuring the collective good through law and order (Rigakos and Leung, 2006). Also, several authors have found variation between countries as to what shapes citizen attitudes toward the police (Davis *et al.*, 2004; Cao, 2001; Cao *et al.*, 1998). Therefore, it is important to

examine what shapes Canadian attitudes toward the police rather than simply extrapolating from research conducted in other countries.

Methods and procedures
Data and sampling
The data used for this paper were obtained from the 1999 General Social Survey (GSS – Cycle 13) conducted by Statistics Canada (between February and December 1999). A random sample of Canadians, 15 years of age or older, were surveyed to obtain information concerning victimization, personal safety and attitudes toward the criminal justice system. Random digit dialing was utilized to contact Canadian households and a person within each household was randomly selected to participate. The random digit dialing procedure was able to contact a functioning phone number 45.7 percent of the time. Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) was used by interviewers to conduct the survey. CATI is a computer program that allows responses to be entered directly into the computer, which helps produce data sets quickly and with few errors (Statistics Canada, 1999).

A stratification procedure was used to obtain a representative sample ($n = 25, 876$) of Canada's ten provinces. Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and non-CMAs were grouped into 27 strata and then sampled to obtain a representative sample of the population. However, excluded from the sample were people in the three territories, full-time residents of institutions, and those without a telephone (overall approximately 2 percent of the target population were excluded). Data were also weighted to obtain a more representative sample of the Canadian population being surveyed. The overall response rate for the survey was 81.3 percent (Statistics Canada, 1999).

Data analysis
The majority of the current literature (discussed above) surrounding attitudes toward the police has relied solely on either logistic regression or linear regression as an explanatory tool. Instead, this paper utilizes path analysis to decompose and better understand the relationship between sociodemographic/non-sociodemographic variables and attitudes toward the police. Path analysis (using weighted data) was chosen as a methodology over conventional multiple regression analysis because of its ability to decompose the relationships between variables. Path analysis allows researchers to measure both indirect and direct effects, while multiple regression only allows for direct effects to be examined. With path analysis we can more easily trace causal relationships amongst variables and provide a fuller understanding of these relationships (Loehlin, 1998; Pedhazur, 1997).

Hypotheses and theoretical model
After examining the literature surrounding how a variety of sociodemographic and non-sociodemographic variables shape attitudes toward the police, several hypotheses have emerged:

H1. Young people will have less favorable views of the police than older people.

H2. Visible minorities will have less favorable views of the police than whites.

H3. People who perceive their neighborhoods as having high levels of crime will have less favorable opinions of the police.

H4. Married people will hold more favorable views of the police than non-married individuals.

H5. A person's gender will have an influence on attitudes toward the police.

H6. Income will help shape people's attitudes toward the police.

H7. Education will have an influence on people's attitudes toward the police.

H8. Having contact with the police will affect people's attitudes toward the police.

Due to the ambiguity surrounding the variables of gender, income, education, and police contact (and this particular variable's limitations – to be discussed below), the hypotheses tested for these variables will simply be that they have an effect.

It is also hypothesized that people's attitudes toward the police are mediated by both criminal victimization and people's level of satisfaction with their safety (fear of crime):

H9. Those who have more criminal victimizations will have less favorable opinions of the police.

H10. People satisfied with their safety will have more favorable opinions of the police.

As the literature review suggests, people who fear crime and who have been victimized tend to have unfavorable attitudes toward the police. However, the majority of this literature has only examined the direct effects of these variables on people's attitudes toward the police. What has not been examined thoroughly is how these variables act as mediating variables. Although Sims *et al.* (2002) did examine perceived fear of crime as an intervening variable and found it to not be significant, they did not consider whether people had *actually* been victimized. It seems reasonable then to propose that actual victimization and perceived likelihood of victimization both act as intervening variables. Therefore, this article proposes the model shown in Figure 1 to help explain what variables are most important in shaping attitudes toward the police.

Operationalization and measurement
The dependent variable for this model (attitudes toward the police) was created from five questions that asked respondents to rate their local police forces as doing either a good job, an average job, or a poor job in five areas of their work (enforcing the laws, promptly responding to calls, being approachable and easy to talk to, supplying information on crime reduction, and ensuring citizen safety). Examining the results of the factor analysis provides strong evidence that the five items are measuring one underlying factor (eigenvalue $= 3.09$, $\alpha = 0.84$). Also, the factor loadings for each of the five items equaled or exceeded 0.72. Please refer to Table I for a summary of factor loadings and respondents' answers.

The intervening variable satisfaction with safety was measured using respondents' answers to three questions. Respondents were asked to state whether they were dissatisfied, neutral, or satisfied with their level of safety from crime, when home alone in the evening, and when walking alone after dark. The results of the factor analysis provide moderate support for the three variables measuring the same underlying construct (satisfaction with level of safety). The scale reported α of 0.54 and an
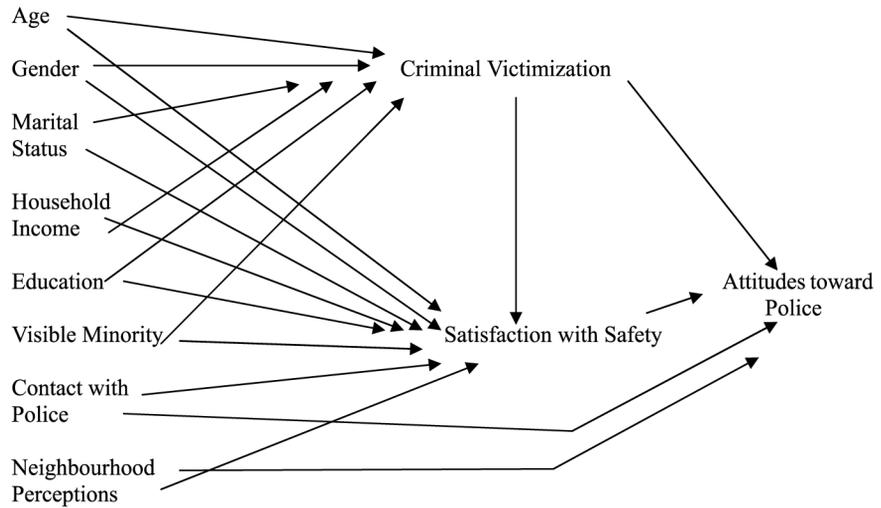
Note: [1]For diagram simplicity the direct effects of the variables age, gender, marital status, household income, education and visible minority on attitudes toward the police are not illustrated in the above diagram but are included in the analysis

Figure 1.
Theoretical model

Question: Do you think your local police force does …	… a poor job (%)	… an average job (%)	… a good job (%)	Factor loadings – principal component factors
… at enforcing laws?	5.60	31.24	63.16	0.82
… at promptly responding to calls?	9.83	26.48	63.69	0.79
… at being easy to talk to?	4.82	19.24	75.94	0.75
… at supplying information?	10.46	28.35	61.19	0.72
… at ensuring safety?	5.43	28.53	66.04	0.83

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding

Table I.
Attitudes toward the police (percentages and results of factor analysis)

eigenvalue of 1.55. In addition to this, factor loadings from the principal components factor analysis were all relatively high (safety from crime = 0.68; home alone = 0.75; walking alone after dark = 0.75). The satisfaction with safety variable was included as a measure of fear of crime due to this author's preference for the variable over fear of crime being measured as walking alone at night. Traditionally, fear of crime has been measured by asking respondents to rate their fear of walking alone at night (Roberts, 2001). Because of my concerns over this variable's ability to capture fear of crime, satisfaction with safety was used as an alternative.

Criminal victimization was measured using the total number of criminal victimizations reported by respondents to have occurred in the past 12 months. Most respondents reported having no criminal victimizations ($n = 19,589$); however, the distribution was highly skewed, with a maximum number of victimizations reported as $n = 193$. Thus, criminal victimization was recoded to within three standard

deviations of its mean which left the total number of victimizations ranging from 0 to 10 (which captured most of the sample; $n = 25{,}761$).

The variables of age, household income and education were each treated as continuous variables. Ages of respondents ranged from 15 to 80 + years. Household income was an ordinal variable but was recoded using the midpoints of each of the 12 categories. For example, income bracket \$5,000-\$9,999 was recoded as \$7,499.5. Similarly, education was measured as an ordinal variable ranging from 1 (elementary or no schooling) to 10 (graduate school) but was treated as a continuous variable for the data analysis. The remaining variables of gender, marital status and visible minority status were recoded as dichotomous variables. Gender was recoded as female = 1 and male = 0, while marital status was recoded as married/partner = 1 and not married/no partner = 0. Similarly, race/ethnicity was measured using respondents' self-identification as either white = 0 or visible minority = 1. Unfortunately, Statistics Canada provides few specifics regarding data on race/ethnicity which makes it difficult to measure this variable. For example, no comparisons can be made between differences in attitudes toward the police that might occur within groups that fall in the visible minority category (e.g. blacks, Asians). For an interesting examination of the history of collecting race statistics in Canada, see Haggerty (2001).

Finally, perceptions people had of their neighborhoods was measured using people's perceptions of crime as having decreased or remained the same in their neighborhoods in the past five years (coded as 0) versus crime having increased (coded as 1). Contact with the police was measured using respondents' answers to six questions. Respondents were asked to state either "yes" or "no" to whether they had contact with the police in the past year for a public information session, a traffic violation, being a victim of a crime, being a witness to a crime, being arrested for a crime, or for any other reason. Given that these variables were measured in such a way that they did not provide an opportunity to measure whether encounters with the police were negative or positive for the individual, it was decided that this variable would be best measured as simply having contact with the police. Thus, police contact was recoded as a dichotomous variable where having any police contact = 1 and no police contact = 0.

The sample is made up of $n = 11{,}607$ (45 percent) males and $n = 14{,}269$ (55 percent) females. Fifty-six percent ($n = 14{,}138$) of respondents were married or had a partner, while 44 percent ($n = 11{,}289$) were not married. Most people stated that they were white ($n = 22{,}405$, 90 percent), while a small proportion stated that they were a visible minority ($n = 2{,}356$, 10 percent). Also, most people thought that crime in their neighborhoods had remained the same or decreased in the past five years ($n = 23{,}136$, 89 percent) while $n = 2{,}729$ (11 percent) thought that it had increased. Finally, most people had not had any type of contact with the police ($n = 15{,}817$, 61 percent) but there were a substantial number of people who did ($n = 10{,}059$, 39 percent).

Data quality
Prior to undertaking the data analyses, the data were randomly divided into two sub-samples. One sub-sample was utilized as the "working data set" while the other was set aside for the purposes of validating the results. After analyses on the working data set were complete, the same data analyses were performed on the validation data set. Both sub-samples showed fairly consistent results, and therefore the results from

the entire data set are reported for the purposes of this study. Where there were minor differences found between variables in the working and validation data sets, a caution and brief description of the differences is provided where appropriate below. Despite a few minor inconsistencies, overall the results are considered reliable given that the findings were consistent across two random sets of data.

Findings

Before reporting the results obtained for the proposed model, a brief discussion is needed regarding significance levels. Because significance levels are substantially influenced by the size of the sample, Raftery (1995) suggests that when testing hypotheses we utilize p-value cutoffs for significance levels that more accurately reflect the size of the sample rather than the traditional $p \leq 0.05$ cutoff (which does not take into account sample size). Raftery also provides "grades of evidence" to judge the strength of p-values and t-values rather than simply reporting that a relationship was "significant" or was "not significant". To this end, extrapolating from the guidelines proposed by Raftery and the size of the sample in this data set, "significance" for this model will be set at $t = 3.15$, $p \leq 0.001$ (which connotes a significant but weak relationship). In addition to a weak relationship, Raftery's "grades of evidence" also includes the descriptors "positive", "strong", and "very strong" to connote increasing strength in the relationship. "Very strong" in the case of this study is denoted as $t = 4.50$, $p \leq 0.00001$.

The results of the theoretical model proposed in Figure 1 are presented in Table II. Examining the effects of age, gender, marital status, household income, education, and visible minority status on criminal victimization, we find that 4.7 percent ($r^2 = 0.047$) of the variation in criminal victimization is explained by these variables. However, the only significant variables were age ($t = -21.87$) and marital status ($t = -8.64$). The t-values suggest a very strong relationship between each of these variables and criminal victimization. It was found that for every one year increase in a person's age, criminal victimizations are expected to decrease by 0.011 units, controlling for all the other variables in the model. Also, those who are married (or have a partner) are expected to have 0.178 fewer criminal victimizations than those who have no partner. The direct effects of age ($\beta = -0.176$) and marital status ($\beta = -0.083$) are also quite substantial.

The above variables as well as criminal victimization, contact with the police, and perceptions of neighborhood were found to explain 17.5 percent ($r^2 = 0.175$) of the variation in satisfaction with safety. All of the variables were significant except for age and contact with the police. The variables gender ($t = -33.11$), income ($t = 8.67$), visible minority status ($t = -7.07$), criminal victimization ($t = -9.37$) and neighborhood perceptions ($t = -21.31$) all showed a very strong relationship with satisfaction with safety. The remaining variables of marital status and education show a positive ($t = -3.34$) and strong relationship ($t = 4.02$) (respectively) with satisfaction with safety.

Controlling for all the other variables in the model, we find that women rate their satisfaction with their level of safety 0.211 units lower than men, married people rate it 0.023 units lower than non-married people, those who perceive their neighborhoods as crime-ridden rate it 0.155 units lower than those who do not, and visible minorities rate it 0.082 units lower than whites. Interestingly, as income increases it has only a miniscule affect on satisfaction with safety according to the unstandardized regression coefficients, but when examining the betas the results show a substantial direct effect (0.083). Examining education, we find that for every year increase in education, it is

Dependent variable	Independent variable	t-value	Unstandardized coefficients	Standardized regression coefficients			
				Direct effect	Indirect (via Y1)	Effect (via Y2)	Total effect
Criminal victimization (Y1), $r^2 = 0.047$	Age	−21.87	−0.011*	−0.176			−0.176
	Gender	−2.60	−0.045	−0.022			−0.022
	Marital status	−8.64	−0.178*	−0.083			−0.083
	Income	1.84	0.000[a]	0.020			0.020
	Education	2.98	0.010	0.027			0.027
	Visible minority	−2.34	−0.079	−0.023			−0.023
Satisfaction with safety (Y2), $r^2 = 0.175$	Age	−2.10	−0.000[a]	−0.020	0.022		0.002
	Gender	−33.11	−0.211*	−0.296	0.003		−0.293
	Marital status	−3.34	−0.023*	−0.030	0.010		−0.020
	Income	8.67	0.000*[a]	0.083	−0.003		0.080
	Education	4.02	0.005*	0.039	−0.003		0.036
	Visible minority	−7.07	−0.082*	−0.064	0.003		−0.061
	Neighborhood perception	−21.31	−0.155*	−0.203			−0.203
	Contact with the police	−0.95	−0.006	−0.009			−0.009
	Criminal victimization	−9.37	−0.043*	−0.125			−0.125
Attitudes toward police (Y3) $r^2 = 0.103$	Age	12.00	0.004*	0.131	0.004	0.011	0.146
	Gender	10.43	0.111*	0.116	0.001	−0.057	0.060
	Marital status	0.10	0.001	0.001	−0.004	−0.004	−0.007
	Income	0.68	0.000[a]	0.008	−0.001	0.016	0.023
	Education	−1.40	−0.003	−0.016	−0.001	0.007	−0.010
	Visible minority	−3.23	−0.064*	−0.036	0.001	−0.012	−0.047
	Neighborhood perception	−9.77	−0.114*	−0.112		−0.040	−0.152
	Contact with the police	−0.14	−0.001	−0.002		−0.002	−0.004
	Criminal victimization	−7.26	−0.043*	−0.099		−0.024	−0.123
	Satisfaction with safety	14.51	0.259*	0.195			0.195

Notes: *$p \leq 0.001$; [a]0.000 is due to rounding

Table II.
Total, direct, and indirect effects of theoretical model

expected that a person's satisfaction with their safety will increase by 0.005 units (controlling for the other variables in the model). Finally, as the number of victimizations a person has experienced increases, their satisfaction with their safety is expected to decrease by 0.043 units (for each additional victimization), controlling for the other variables in the model.

Examining the beta coefficients for the model we find that the greatest total effect on satisfaction with safety is gender (-0.293) followed by perceptions of neighborhood (-0.203), criminal victimization (-0.125), income (0.080) and visible minority status (-0.061). The majority of each of these effects come from the direct effects on a person's satisfaction with their levels of safety. The indirect effects through criminal victimization to satisfaction with safety are miniscule with the possible exception of age (0.022) and marital status (0.010). However, age was found to be not significant and marital status, in addition to having a small indirect effect, also has a small direct effect (-0.030). Caution is recommended when interpreting the marital status variable because it was found to be not significant in both the working and validation data sets. Also, education was found to be not significant in the validation data set.

Finally, examining the effects of all of the above variables, including satisfaction with safety, on people's attitudes toward the police yielded an r^2 of 0.103 (or 10 percent of the variation in attitudes toward the police is explained by the variables in this model – this low r^2 is to be expected given that most people in Canada think that the police are doing a good job). However, the variables of marital status, income, education, and police contact were all found to be not significant. Caution is recommended when interpreting the visible minority variable because it produced a non-significant result in both the working and cross-validation files but a significant result when the entire data set was utilized (although it was a weak relationship; $t = -3.23$). The remaining variables in the model all produced very strong relationships with the variable attitudes toward the police when the other variables in the model were controlled (age: $t = 12.00$; gender: $t = 10.43$; neighborhood perception: $t = -9.77$; criminal victimization: $t = -7.26$; satisfaction with safety: $t = 14.51$).

Interpreting the unstandardized regression coefficients for the theoretical model we find that as age increases, attitudes toward the police are also expected to become more favorable, controlling for the other variables in the model. Put more specifically, for every one year increase in age, it is expected that there will be a 0.004 increase on the attitudes toward the police scale. Therefore, younger people are less supportive of the police than their older counterparts. However, this relationship is also partly mediated by the intervening variables of criminal victimization and satisfaction with safety (although these indirect effects are relatively minor). On average, we also find that females are more supportive of the police than males (or are expected to rate the police 0.111 higher on the attitudes toward police scale than males), controlling for the other variables in the model. Alternatively, visible minorities, on average, are expected to rate the police 0.064 lower than whites (controlling for the other variables) and thus are less supportive of the police than whites.

Examining the non-sociodemographic variables we find that on average, those who perceive crime in their neighborhoods to be high are expected to rate the police more poorly (0.114 times lower) than those who perceive relatively low levels of crime in their neighborhoods, controlling for the other variables in the model. Also, as the number of victimizations a person experiences increases, their opinions of the police become more

negative (or for every additional increase in victimization a person's opinion of the police is expected to decrease by 0.043 on the attitudes toward police scale) controlling for the other variables. Finally, as a person's satisfaction with their level of safety increases, individuals are expected to rate the police more favorably. That is, for every one unit increase in satisfaction with safety, there is expected to be a 0.259 increase on the attitudes toward the police scale (controlling for the other variables).

When we examine the total effects (β values) on attitudes toward the police (controlling for the other variables in the model) we find that satisfaction with safety (0.195) has the greatest total effect, but other important variables included neighborhood perceptions (-0.152), age (0.146), criminal victimization (-0.123), gender (0.060) and visible minority status (-0.047). The remaining variables had only minor effects on people's attitudes toward the police (see Table II for the remaining results). Also, indirect effects through criminal victimization and satisfaction with safety played only a minor role in helping to explain people's attitudes toward the police. The majority of the total effects come from the direct effects of the variables in the model. However, the indirect effects are present and thus, Figure 2 provides a summary of all the significant paths that were obtained from the theoretical model proposed above.

Discussion
The above findings add to the literature by providing an examination of the various factors that help to shape people's attitudes toward the police in Canada. Although several of the initial hypotheses developed from existing literature – predominantly from research conducted in the USA – were supported, this relationship looks very different now than when it was first proposed (see Figures 1 and 2 for a comparison). Overall, the factors that influence people's attitudes toward the police in Canada appear to largely be consistent with much of the research conducted in the USA, with a few exceptions. Below I discuss these exceptions (and consistencies) as they relate to existing literature as well as suggest strategies for improving police-community
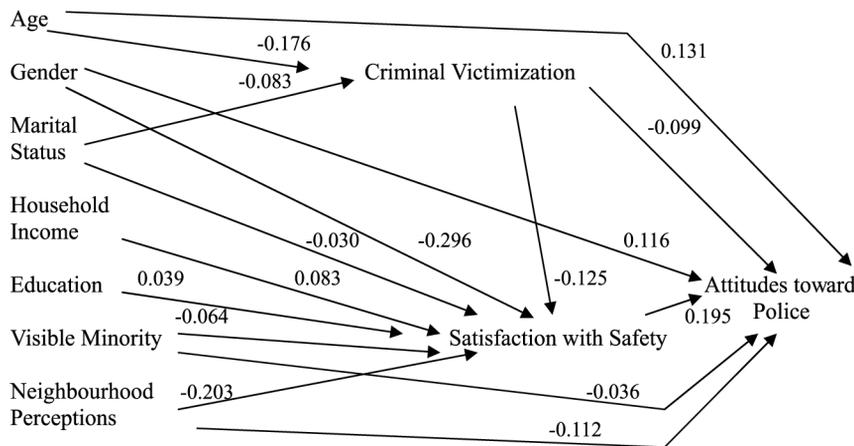
Notes: Not significant paths have been omitted to illustrate a more parsimonious model.
[1]The numbers in this figure are standardized regression coefficients (direct effects)

Figure 2.
Revised model

relations with groups who seem to consistently report negative attitudes toward the police.

Consistent with most of the literature on attitudes toward the police, young people, visible minorities, those who perceived their neighborhoods as having high levels of crime, those who had been victims of crime, and those who were not satisfied with their levels of safety were found to hold negative views of the police. However, there are several important distinctions that need to be emphasized between the results of this study and most other literature on attitudes toward the police. First, while there is much contradiction in the literature as to the influence of people's income, education, and gender on their attitudes toward the police, this study found that only gender was a significant determinant of people's attitudes. In this study, income and education held little relevance for determining attitudes once other variables were controlled, and thus the ambiguity found in the literature likely points to the unimportance of these variables in helping to understand attitudes toward the police. Alternatively, gender was a significant determinant of attitudes toward the police, in that males held more negative views of the police than females. Although others have also found this result (e.g. Cao *et al.*, 1996; Nofziger and Williams, 2005), it has not been extensively explored to date and more research needs to be conducted on the influence of gender on people's attitudes toward the police. However, this study's findings do suggest that an examination of how people's masculinities and femininities interact with the predominantly masculine domain of policing might be a rich research avenue to explore and may help to clear up some of the ambiguity found in the literature.

Second, the finding that visible minorities hold less favorable attitudes toward the police than whites was supported by this research which is consistent with much of the literature (e.g. Brown and Benedict, 2002; Schuck and Rosenbaum, 2005; Weitzer and Tuch, 2006). However, the variables of satisfaction with safety, perceptions of neighborhood, age, criminal victimization and gender all held more relative importance in determining respondents' attitudes toward the police than race/ethnicity. This suggests that this variable could be much less important in shaping attitudes toward the police in Canada than it is in the USA (e.g. Webb and Marshall, 1995; Weitzer and Tuch, 2006). This could partly be attributed to the historical prominence of racial tension in the USA in comparison to Canada. It could be also partly explained by the two countries' different policies towards immigration; whereas Canada tends to encourage other cultures to coexist within Canadian culture, the USA tends to promote becoming American as paramount over other cultures. However, given that this study was not a direct comparison between Canada and the USA and that the visible minority variable had some measurement deficiencies, more research is needed in order to fully explain possible racial differences in attitudes toward the police between people in Canada and the USA.

Third, despite the literature suggesting the importance of the variables of marital status – and to a greater extent – contact with the police, these variables were not found to influence people's attitudes toward the police in Canada. While marital status played a significant role in determining people's number of victimizations as well as their level of satisfaction with their safety, it failed to be a significant variable in explaining people's attitudes toward the police. Contact with the police, while a significant predictor of attitudes toward the police in most literature (Brown and Benedict, 2002), also failed to produce significant results. Although this could suggest that unlike in the USA, contact with the police in Canada is of little relevance, it is much

more likely that this finding was the result of the variable being unable to distinguish between positive and negative contact with the police, but more research is needed to determine whether this is the case.

Finally, this study differs from much of the literature in that it utilized path analysis to examine citizen attitudes toward the police. The findings suggest that criminal victimization and satisfaction with safety, while important variables to consider as mediating variables in determining attitudes toward the police did not produce overly large effects as mediating variables. However, it would be fruitful for future studies in the USA to consider the mediating effects of these variables to a greater extent so that a comparison can be made with these Canadian findings. Overall, despite differences in policing structures and different notions of policing (e.g. the USA's emphasis on minimal government versus Canada's emphasis on law and order), it would appear that the factors that affect people's attitudes toward the police in the USA and Canada are very similar.

Policy implications: improving police-community relations
The results of this research have important implications for police work in Canada given that Canadian police forces tend to emphasize "community policing" as their guiding philosophy (Caputo and Vallée, 2005; Seagrave, 1996, 1997). Several distinct groups of people (i.e. young people, visible minorities, males, those who have experienced criminal victimization, those dissatisfied with their levels of safety and those who perceive their neighborhoods as being high in crime) have emerged as having negative views of the police, which suggests that the police need to better focus their attention on improving relations with these groups. Below I suggest some strategies for improving relations between the aforementioned groups.

Age appeared as having one of the strongest effects on shaping people's attitudes toward the police in this research (with young people being more likely to report negative views toward the police than older people). Interestingly, young people have often been ignored in the research conducted on attitudes toward the police in exchange for a focus on adult opinion (Hurst and Frank, 2000). This is surprising given that young people are often the main focus of police attention (e.g. as offenders, victims) (Taylor *et al.*, 2001). The importance of young people having a positive view of the police as it pertains to effective community policing should not be understated. Young people have information that the police can utilize to perform their jobs more efficiently and effectively; however, young people are unlikely to be forthcoming with this information if they perceive the police negatively. Thus, if relations with young people are not improved, the success of community policing (with its emphasis on forming partnerships with community members; Herbert, 2001; Seagrave, 1996; Sims *et al.*, 2002) is called into question.

If youth-police relations are to be improved it will likely require that difficult changes be made to current policing practices so that policing strategies better reflect the guiding principles inherent in "community policing", such as shared police-community decision-making and building/strengthening police-community partnerships. In order to accomplish this I suggest that the police include young people in decisions concerning how youth are policed. Thus, instead of viewing youth as a "problem" or as a "trouble population", the police should view young people as competent citizens who are able to participate in decisions that affect them (Checkoway

et al., 2003). For example, partnerships could be formed between young people and the police that would allow both sides to see the situation from the other side's perspective and hopefully come to a consensus on issues affecting both groups. Allowing young people to participate in police decision-making and thus allowing youth to have a voice in decisions that affect them could help produce more effective community policing strategies and possibly safer communities. At the very least, conflict between young people and the police could be brought to the surface and discussed, which has been shown to be an essential ingredient in a variety of community development initiatives (see, for example, Crawford, 1995; Gilchrist, 2003) and by extension it could prove fruitful for community policing as well.

The challenge of improving relations amongst the above identified groups could be partly addressed if community policing better developed strategies that allowed for (and even actively sought out) a more diverse range of input concerning community policing strategies. What is likely needed is for police forces to create an atmosphere where all citizens (especially those who hold negative views of the police) feel comfortable approaching the police if they have concerns about their communities (as well as concerns over policing strategies). Although no easy task, this could be partly accomplished through more positive police-citizen interactions (Cordner, 1997). For example, rather than police only appearing in communities after crimes have occurred (and likely targeting some of the aforementioned groups), it might prove useful for police to engage in more neighborhood meetings and foot patrols. If citizens feel that their concerns will be taken seriously by the police, they might more readily attend community policing meetings, which may help them to overcome some of the fears and/or possible misconceptions that they have concerning crime and/or the police.

This paper's findings raise even larger questions concerning how community policing philosophies have been implemented thus far in Canada. Also, the fairly consistent results across much of the literature on attitudes toward the police as to who holds negative views of the police suggests that community policing has possibly been selective thus far in who is included as the "community". It seems that certain groups of people (e.g. young people) consistently report negative views of the police. This begs the question, are the police making an active attempt to work with these groups to improve relations? If not, this calls the legitimacy of the police into question as it raises concerns over whose interests are protected by "community policing" and who is being targeted by "community policing". We are left wondering who exactly is the "community" in "community policing"?

Limitations and future research

After finding that people's satisfaction with their levels of safety and their perceptions of their neighborhood play a large role in determining their attitudes toward the police, it is important to develop ratio level measures (or in the case of satisfaction with safety, better measures) of these concepts in order to better determine the mediating effects of these variables. One of the biggest limitations of this study was that no such neighborhood perception variable existed. Similarly, there is also a need for a more reliable measure of police contact. Optimally, this variable would be able to distinguish between positive and negative police contact, which would allow for a more robust understanding of police contact's role in determining citizen attitudes toward the police (Hurst and Frank, 2000; Nofziger and Williams, 2005).

Further, in order for race/ethnicity to be properly explored, it would be fruitful to develop variables that can distinguish between various racial/ethnic groups. For example, it could prove useful to determine whether certain visible minority groups have more negative views of the police than others or if some have more positive views of the police than whites. There is also some suggestion in the literature that there are interaction effects between age, gender and race (Weitzer and Tuch, 2006) that are important to understanding attitudes toward the police. However, given the limited utility of the visible minority variable in this study I was unable to fully test these interactions, but this should be examined in future research. Also, given that the indirect effects are relatively small in this model, the use of path analysis in future research concerning attitudes toward the police might be of little utility. However, more research is needed given some of the limitations of the measures utilized in this path analysis.

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