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Kids, Cops, Parents and Teachers: Exploring Juvenile Attitudes Toward Authority Figures

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ABSTRACT

While a great deal of research concerning the attitudes of adults toward police exists, fewer studies exploring the attitudes of juveniles have been completed Using self report data gathered from middle and high school students enrolled in a public school in the Southeastern United States as a data base, we explore juvenile attitudes toward the police as they relate to other authority figures in the lives of juveniles, specifically teachers and parents. Second, we explore which variables are significant predictors of juvenile attitudes toward the police. We find that students' attitudes toward the police are significantly and positively correlated with their feelings towards their parents and their teachers. Additionally, significant correlations are found between the students' attitudes toward the police and a number of other variables of interest. Subcultural theory was employed to provide a context for the results.

KEYWORDS: juvenile attitudes; police; authority figures; subcultural theory.

A good deal of research has explored public perceptions of the police. However, most studies have focused exclusively on the attitudes of adults. Comparatively little research has been done concerning juvenile attitudes toward the police. Even less literature exists that employs a theoretical context in order to better understand juvenile attitudes toward the police and other authority figures in their lives. In fact, one can safely say that juvenile attitudes toward police and other authority figures are a relatively unexplored area of criminal justice research. Only within the last few years have researchers expanded the literature and started to make concerted efforts in examining the complexity of this subject (see, for example, Amorso and Ware 1983; Hurst and Frank 2000; Levy 2001; Taylor et al. 2001; Williams 1999).

With respect to juvenile attitudes toward the police, the limited research on this topic has produced conflicting results. A number of studies have concluded that, unlike adults, juveniles generally hold less favorable attitudes toward police, claiming that children not only distrust police, but they have a lack of understanding or a misperception of the role of police in society (Brown and Benedict 2002; Hurst and Frank 2000; Reisig and Giacomazzi 1998; Reisig and Parks 2000; Taylor et al. 2001; Webb and Marshall 1995; Williams 1999). Some studies also found that youth usually feel that the police use too much force and are typically unhappy with the way they are treated by the police (Brown and Benedict 2002). Other researchers reported that juveniles felt that the police unnecessarily harassed them and that police were slow to intervene or assist when needed (Williams, 1999). Additionally, youth tend to blame police for worsening conditions in their neighborhoods (Hurst and Frank 2000).

Other researchers have found that juveniles have positive attitudes toward the police and other forms of authority (Amorso and Ware 1983; Levy 2001; Murray and Thompson 1985; Rigby et al. 1987). Amorso and Ware (1983) reported that the youth in their study consistently agreed with positive statements about the police. Additionally, the students in this study also felt that police did their job well, were criticized too often, and did not receive community support.

Furthermore, there is no solid consensus on the relationship between perceptions of police and attitudes

toward parent and teachers. The common belief among researchers is that juveniles exhibit a generally similar attitude towards all authority figures, both personal and impersonal (Amorso and Ware 1983; Brown and Benedict 2002; Levy 2001; Rigby et al. 1987). However, Amorso and Ware (1983) outlined problems in conceptualization, historical sampling, lack of empirical tests, and mixed findings that weaken the argument of the generality of attitudes toward authority figures. The amount of research available and the negative results of empirical tests prevent us from safely drawing conclusions.

The purpose of the present study is to advance our knowledge concerning juvenile attitudes toward authority figures, with special emphasis on their perceptions of the police. Using self report data gathered from middle and high school students enrolled in a public school in the Southeastern United States as a data base, we will explore juvenile attitudes toward the police as they relate to other authority figures in their lives, specifically teachers and parents. We will explore which variables are significant predictors of juvenile attitudes toward the police. In order to better understand the results, we will use subcultural theory to explain our findings.

Juvenile Attitudes and the Police

Researchers have examined a number of different factors to better understand the attitudes that juveniles have toward the police. The most common variable examined in recent studies is the effect of race (Hurst et al. 2000; Hurst and Frank 2000; Janeksela 1999; Jones-Brown 2000; Leiber et al. 1998; Taylor et al. 2001). Results of these studies have been mixed. While most researchers have reported that minorities tend to have less favorable views of the police, a number of studies have found that minorities have more favorable views of the police than do white youths (Brown and Benedict 2002; Sims et al. 2002).

Other contributing factors to the attitudes of youths toward the police that have been explored include gender, contact with police, neighborhood context, and fear of crime. Studies have failed to show if gender consistently contributes to differences in attitudes toward police (Brown and Benedict 2002; Griffiths and Winfree 1982; Taylor et al. 2001). Those that found a difference have difficulty explaining that difference.

The quality of the contacts juveniles have had with the police have generally been linked to less favorable attitudes (Griffiths and Winfree 1982; Hurst and Frank 2000; Janeksela 1999; Jones-Brown 2000; Leiber et al. 1998). This variable has included personal contact, which included both personal interaction and eyewitness accounts, as well as vicarious contact, such as hearing about unpleasant and undesirable police interaction from other people. Researchers have found that negative police contact exerts a much greater effect on attitudes than positive police contact. Additionally, neighborhood context has proven significant as a contributing factor (Leiber et al. 1998; Reisig and Parks 2000; Taylor et al. 2001) as has fear of crime (Sims et al. 2002; Willams 1999). Adolescents tend to blame fear of crime and victimization, as well as worsening neighborhood conditions, on the police and their inability to control crime in their neighborhood.

Theoretical Context

Relatively little research concerning juvenile attitudes toward the police has been theoretically driven (Janeksela 1999; Lieber et al. 1998). In one such study, Leiber, Nalla, and Farnworth (1998) employed subcultural theory to better understand the phenomenon. Subcultural theory is based on the classic works of Cohen (1955), Miller (1958), and Cloward and Ohlin (1960). In his analysis of juvenile gangs, Cohen concluded that these groups of largely male adolescents had developed a distinct culture, one that emphasized very different norms, values, and expectations than the dominant culture. This new subculture arose when youths, especially those from lower-socioeconomic status families, struggled to succeed. When compared to their middle class peers, lower class, minority youths were at a disadvantage in competitive environments such as schools. Because these youths were unsuccessful in measuring up to middle class standards, they sought to establish a new culture in which they could find success and elevate their status. According to Cohen, this new subculture rejected middle class values such as academic achievement, courtesy, and delayed gratification. As summarized by Akers and Sellers (2004:167), "If polite classroom behavior and making good grades will gain greater standing in the eyes of the teachers, then classroom disruption and disdain for academic achievement will gain greater standing in the delinquent subculture."

Miller (1958) advanced the work of Cohen and identified a number of values or what he called "focal concerns" of the lower class culture. These focal concerns included such elements as trouble, toughness, smartness, excitement, fate, and, most importantly for this analysis, autonomy. For Miller, lower class autonomy was marked by a resentment of authority and rules, which were often based on middle class values. Thus, youths who were members of a delinquent subculture would reject and resent symbols of social control, such as the police and other authority figures. According to this view, one would expect to find a correlation between feelings toward teachers, parents, and the police. Youths who voiced negative opinions about their teachers would express similar feelings toward the other symbols of authoritative, coercive control in their lives.

Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1960) added an additional component to the groundwork established by Cohen and Miller which was the type of environment in which the youths reside. Drawing on social disorganization theory (Shaw and McKay 1942), Cloward and Ohlin agreed that boys from lower socioeconomic classes experience the greatest amounts of personal frustration and strain when competing with middle class youths in competitive environments. Lower class boys would therefore be involved in higher levels of delinquency than youths from middle and upper socioeconomic classes. This is especially true among minority youths. However, Cloward and Ohlin also considered that just as some neighborhoods do not provide legitimate opportunities for youths, not all neighborhoods provide illegitimate opportunities for crime and delinquency. Different types of subcultures would ultimately develop based on the opportunities available to the youths.

In areas marked by extreme social disorganization, a specific type of "conflict" subculture would be most likely to develop. Since both legitimate and illegitimate pathways to success are blocked in these areas, the strain is especially intense. In these types of communities, few authoritative controls will be placed on the youths. Adult role models will be few and far between; adults that the youths do encounter will be viewed as powerless and met with disrespect (Akers and Sellers 2004; Vold, Bernard and Snipes 2002). Success and status in these neighborhoods are derived by the ability of the youth to be tough and violent. Boys growing up in these neighborhoods would be rewarded for fighting and other violent predatory acts against other residents.

A number of more contemporary researchers have applied tenets of subculture theory to a variety of settings. Elijah Anderson (1999), in an ethnographic study of inner city street life in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, discussed two opposing cultural orientations that influence the behavior of residents: the culture of decency and street culture. While the culture of decency is based on adherence to middle class values, the code of the street exists as a direct negative mirror image of the values held by "decent" residents. The issue of respect is central to the Code of the Street, as one's reputation is viewed as a valuable—if not the only—asset that one may control. The Code includes rules for the display of respectful behavior, as well as punishments for those who engage in insolent actions. The subcultural norms of the street culture regulate the use of violence, aggression, and street crime. Individuals who subscribed to the values of the Code of the Street are more likely to engage in violent behaviors (Brezina, Agnew, Cullen, and Wright 2004).

Similarly, Jacobs and Wright (1999) explored the impact of street culture on an individuals' decision to engage in armed robbery. During in-depth interviews with 86 active robbers in St. Louis, Missouri, a common theme that arose was a strong adherence to the street culture, which was defined by Jacobs and Wright (1999:165) in the following manner: "Street culture subsumes a number of powerful conduct norms, including but not limited to the hedonistic pursuit of sensory stimulation, disdain for conventional living, lack of future orientation, and persistent eschewal of responsibility." Involvement in street culture was reported to be an important intervening variable that shaped and directed the robber's perceived need for fast cash.

The influence and evolution of subcultural beliefs among urban crack dealers have also been explored. Jacobs (1999), in an ethnographic study of young African American crack dealers working the streets in St. Louis, Missouri, discussed the limited legitimate opportunities available for these frustrated inner city adolescents. Crack dealing became a lucrative choice for the minority youths, who faced added burdens of racism and social isolation. In this environment, subcultural norms evolve that protect the reputation and status of the dealer.

Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore the differences in attitudes that juveniles report toward their teachers, parents (or parent figures), and the police. Based on subcultural theory, we would expect that juvenile attitudes toward the police, teachers, and parents would be strongly correlated. Youths who adopt values consistent with a delinquent subculture would be more likely to voice negative opinions toward a variety of authority figures.

Further, subucultural theory suggests that juvenile attitudes toward the police and other authority figures would be influenced by social class (lower class youths would be less supportive), gender and race (males and minorities would report less favorable attitudes), and scholastic success. Students who are less successful in school would be more likely to adopt subcultural values, including negative feelings toward symbols of authority. Additionally, we suspect that students who report contacts with the police as a result of their suspected involvement in delinquent behaviors would also report lower evaluations of the police and other authority figures due to their willingness to engage in deviant acts, which is an indicator of commitment to the delinquent subculture. We also predict that students who have little confidence in the police to perform their jobs effectively (a rough measure of the youths' respect for the authority of the police) would also report lower evaluations. Finally, we suspect that juveniles who reside in neighborhoods they perceive to be unsafe

would report lower evaluations of the police and other authority figures.

METHODS

School and Community Demographics

A survey was administered to students attending a middle school and a high school in a small city in the Southeastern United States in November 1998. According to 2000 Census figures, the city had a population of 69,371 residents. The city was 92.7 percent white, 2.7 percent African American, and 4.6 percent of other races. Approximately 4.2 percent of the residents indicated their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino. When compared to the rest of the state, this particular city reported lower median incomes, lower levels of owner-occupied housing, and higher numbers of elderly residents. The median income of the residents was $32,217, which was below the state median of $38,819. With respect to owner-occupied housing, 57 percent of the residents of this city owned their own homes, compared to the state-wide figure of 60.8 percent. While 17.6 percent of the residents of the state were age 65 and up, 30 percent of the residents of this city were classified as elderly.

The middle school consisted of grades 6 to 8 and had a total enrollment of 1,234 students as of October, 1988. The student body was 48 percent female. At the time of the administration of this survey, the county in which this city is located was still under a desegregation order in which African American students were bused into the middle and high schools in order to maintain the required racial balance. Therefore, the racial composition of the schools did not reflect the city demographics. With respect to race, 79.0 percent of the middle school students were white, 15.2 percent were African American, 2.9 percent were Hispanic, and 2.8 percent were classified as Asian, American Indian, or multiracial. Approximately 40 percent of the middle school students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, a rough measure of community economic status.

The high school included grades 9 to 12 and had a total enrollment of 1,923 students as of October, 1988. The student body was 51 percent female. With respect to race, 82.9 percent of the students were white, 10.6 percent were African American, 3.5 percent were Hispanic, and 3.0 percent were classified as Asian, American Indian, or multiracial. While the district does not maintain records regarding eligibility for free or reduced price lunch for high school students, the school did report a graduation rate of 45.8 percent for the 1998-1999 school year.

The Sample

A passive parental consent procedure was used and students were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary. This survey was constructed to evaluate the effectiveness of a juvenile curfew ordinance that was initiated as part of a Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grant awarded to the city's police department.

In the middle school, the survey was administered in a Social Studies class that was required for all students. Two researchers surveyed the 45 Social Studies classes among the three grades. One researcher read the survey questions aloud while the other circulated among the students to provide assistance to those requiring further clarification and to keep the students on task. A total of 1,029 surveys were completed in the middle school, which represented 83.3 percent of the student enrollment.

The survey was conducted differently for the high school due to scheduling issues related to vocational/technical training that was available to the students. The researchers were unable to visit all 60 classes conducted during the third period, which was identified by the principal as the period during which almost all students would be attending class. Therefore, 30 classes were randomly selected in which to administer the survey. A total of 625 surveys were completed and usable from the high school sample, which reflected 33 percent of the student enrollment.

The final sample included a total of 1,654 respondents. The sample was evenly split between male and female respondents. The sample was predominantly Caucasian (77%), while African Americans comprised 12 percent of the population. Another 11 percent of the students were classified as other (for purposes of analysis, race was dichotomized into Caucasian or minority). The mean age of the respondents was 13.79 years (S.D. = 1.99 years).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Analysis.

Measure	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Mean feelings towards parents	1.00	6.00	4.31	1.13
Mean feelings towards teachers	1.00	4.00	2.75	0.57
Mean feelings towards police	1.00	4.00	2.50	0.80
Perception of Safety	1.00	4.00	2.18	0.93
Fear of Police	4.00	16.00	9.93	2.79
Social Class	0.29	9.33	1.39	0.59
Grade Point Average	1.00	5.00	2.10	0.96

The results of this study should be generalized with caution, particularly because of the desegregation order that was in place during the time of the survey administration. This order was lifted in 2003. Any possible impact of the busing situation on the climate of the individual schools is difficult to ascertain. Comparisons with results of similar surveys of Southern schools with similar demographics may be more valid.

Operationalization of Variables

Feelings toward Parents

In order to measure the perceptions that the juveniles held toward their parents, students were asked to rate their attitudes toward each mother/father figure on the following items: I can talk to him/her about anything; he/she always trusts me; I can always ask him/her for advice; he/she always praises me when I do well; and I want to be the kind of person he/she is. Students were asked to indicate which number best represented their attitude, on a scale from 1 to 6, with higher scores indicating more favorable attitudes. The 10 items were scaled into a single measure of parent perception and converted to a mean score (Cronbach's Alpha = .8767, *n* = 1,421).[1] Similar to the strategy adopted by Taylor et al. (2001) and Jackson (2002), summative scaled measures for our dependent variables were converted to the mean. This transformation was done in order to allow for easier interpretation by maintaining a consistent score with the individual items. Summary statistics for the variables are reported in Table 1.

Feelings toward Teachers

To measure the students' attitudes toward their teachers, the students were asked how much they agreed/disagreed with the following statements: My teachers don't respect my opinions; teachers embarrass you when you're wrong; I respect teachers more than they respect me; and most of my teachers like me (reverse coded). Lower scores indicate less favorable attitudes. Responses for these four items were scaled and converted to a mean score (Alpha = .5633, n = 1,518)[2] resulting in a single measure of teacher perception.

Feelings toward the Police

Students were asked how much they agreed/disagreed with the following statements regarding the police: Police officers are honest; most police officers are friendly; police officers are respectful toward people like me; police officers do a good job. Lower scores indicate less favorable attitudes toward the police. Responses to the 4 items were combined into a single measure of police perception and converted to the mean (Alpha = .8760, n = 1,587).

Other Variables of Interest

To measure the student's perception of neighborhood safety, they were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: I feel safe being alone outside in my neighborhood at night. Lower scores indicate greater feelings of personal safety.

Since the initial purpose of the survey was to measure the effectiveness of a truancy/juvenile curfew effort, students had also been asked whether or not they had been picked up by the local police for skipping school or for breaking curfew laws during their years of attendance at their current school. Only 15 percent (n=251) indicated that they had been picked up for either of these violations.

A rough measure of social class was also included in the survey. Students were asked how many people lived in their home and how many bedrooms were in their home. We then divided the number of residents by the number of bedrooms in the home. Based on this scale,

Table 2. Bivariate Pearson's Correlations.

Variable	Feelings			Police	Social	Fear of	Safe	Grades	Age	Race
	Police	Teachers	Parents	Contact	Class	Police	Outside			
Feelings										
Teachers	.336*									
Parents	.346*	.238*								
Police Contact	-.295*	-.179*	-.158*							
Social Class	.069*	.036	-.037	.014						
Fear of Police	-.462*	-.174*	-.223*	.191*	-.088⌉					
Safe Outside	.083*	-.066⌉	-.029	-.029	.178*	-.146*				
Grades	-.239*	-.234*	-.184*	.217*	.034	.115*	.035			
Age	-.298*	-.015	-.150*	.083*	-.131*	.269*	-.257*	.117*		
Race	-.054⌉	-.038	-.050	-.026	.106*	-.082*	.115*	.073*	-.045	
Gender	.079*	.080*	-.053	-.066*	.069*	-.159*	.104*	-.159*	-.038	.031

Notes: Race was coded 1 for Caucasian, 2 for minority; Gender was coded 1 for male, 2 for female; two-tailed significance levels, ⌉ p<.05; *p<.001

Table 3. T-Test Results.

Authority Figure	Mean	S.D.	Test Value for Indifference	T-Value
Police	2.50	0.80	2.50	-0.06
Teachers	2.76	0.57	2.50	17.40**
Parents	4.32	1.13	3.50	27.28**

**p<.001

higher values on this variable indicate lower levels of socioeconomic status.

The survey also included a measure of academic performance. Students were asked what kind of grades they received in school: mostly A's, mostly B's, etc. Lower scores on this variable indicate higher grades.

Finally, as a measure of respect for the competency of the police in the performance of their duties, the students were also asked whether or not they would get caught by the police if they engaged in a number of common delinquent behaviors, including skipping school, stealing something worth $50 or less, hitting someone with the idea of hurting them, or using marijuana. Responses to the four items were combined into one measure of police effectiveness (alpha = .714). Lower values indicated a stronger fear of getting caught by the police if they had engaged in the behavior in question.

RESULTS

The first research question explored whether or not there were statistically significant correlations between attitudes toward police, teachers, and parents. As can be seen in Table 2, the students' attitudes toward the police were significantly and positively correlated with their feelings toward their parents and their teachers. Additionally, significant correlations were also found between the students' attitudes toward the police and a number of other variables of interest. Higher evaluations of the police were found among the students who experienced fewer police contacts, had greater feelings of neighborhood safety, received higher grades, and were younger and Caucasian. Interestingly, social class had an inverse relationship with evaluations of the police. Additionally, students who reported a greater likelihood of getting caught by the police for engaging in various acts of delinquency were more likely to report positive feelings towards the police.

We also explored whether or not the youths viewed the police more positively or negatively than other authority figures in their lives. A t-test was used to compare the values reported by the students toward the police, their teachers, and their parents and a value of indifference. For example, students rated their feelings toward the police on a 4-point scale. If the students had strong, positive feelings toward the police then the mean score would be closer to a value of 4. Similarly, if the students reported strong negative feelings toward the police, then the mean score would be closer to a value of 1. The test value of indifference for both attitudes toward the police and teachers was 2.50. Since the scale to measure the students' perception of their parents was different, the test value of indifference was 3.50. Results are reported in Table 3.

As can be seen in Table 3, the students were generally apathetic toward the police. The mean attitude measure was not significantly different from the test value for indifference. In contrast, the students held generally positive feelings toward their teachers as well as their parents.

Finally, we explored significant predictors of juvenile attitudes toward the police. In this analysis, OLS regression was used to identify significant independent variables. Results of this analysis are presented in Table 4. Even when controlling for the various independent variables including race,

Table 4. Regression Results: Predicting Mean Feelings Towards Police.

Variable	b	S.E.	β	T-value
Constant	3.15	.25		12.84
Gender	1.69 E-02	.04	.01	.42
Age	-5.95 E-02	.01	-.15	-5.60**
Grades	-7.51 E-02	.02	-.09	-3.43**
Social Class	4.01 E-02	.03	.03	1.29
Race	-.10	.05	-.05	-2.04*
Feelings toward Teachers	.24	.04	.17	6.77**
Feelings towards Parents	.13	.02	.18	6.98**
Police Contact	-.37	.06	-.17	-6.52**
Fear of Police	-.33	.03	-.28	-10.50**
Neighborhood Safety	1.10 E-02	.02	.01	.49

R^2 = .37, F =62, 88, *p<.05, **p<.001

neighborhood safety, and police contacts, feelings toward teachers and parents were still significant predictors of attitudes toward police. When all of the independent variables were included, the model explained 37 percent of the variance in juveniles' attitudes toward the police ($F=62.88$, $p<.05$).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore juvenile attitudes toward the police, especially as they compared to the attitudes held toward parents and teachers. The youth in our sample had generally positive attitudes toward their parents and teachers, but held indifferent attitudes toward the police. Our results indicate that juveniles do, in fact, view the police differently than they view other authority figures. However, feelings toward parents and teachers were significant predictors of attitudes toward police. Youths who reported more positive feelings about their parents and teachers also reported positive feelings toward the police. This finding lends support to findings of previous studies regarding the significance of attitudes toward parents and teachers.

In a previous study, Amorso and Ware (1983) found a positive correlation between attitudes toward parents and attitudes toward police. However, they discovered that attitudes toward teachers were better predictors of attitudes toward police. They also found that attitudes toward police were more positive than attitudes toward teachers, but less positive than attitudes toward parents. The results of their study support the notion of generalized attitudes toward authority, but do not suggest that attitudes toward police are derived from attitudes toward parents.

In other studies, Rigby et al. (1987) determined that juveniles had similar attitudes about both personal and impersonal authority figures. Amorso and Ware (1986) also found that perceptions of home environment contributed significantly to their attitudes toward authority. Brown and Benedict (2002), citing studies by Clark and Wenninger (1964), and Krause (1975), stated that favorable attitudes toward parents and teachers interrelated positively with favorable attitudes toward the police. Brown and Benedict (2002) also concluded that juveniles who viewed illegal behaviors and delinquency in a positive light would subsequently view police negatively.

The results of our study lend support to a subcultural framework for better understanding the attitudes of youths toward the police and other authority figures in their lives. As predicted by subcultural theory, the attitudes held by youths were generally consistent for police, teachers, and parents. As feelings toward parents and teachers declined, so did attitudes toward the police. It is also not surprising that the students' perceptions of the police were at a level of relative indifference. Unlike the regular and personal contact that students have with their parents and teachers, few students have contacts with the police. This relatively infrequent contact may not engender a strong response, either positive or negative, towards the police.

We examined other variables that would help us better predict juveniles' attitudes toward the police. These variables included age, gender, academic performance, social class, race, police contact, likelihood of being caught or picked up by the police, and neighborhood safety. Feelings toward police became more negative as the age of the children increased. This finding contradicts the majority of previous studies that found attitudes toward the police improve with age (see Brown and Benedict 2002; Hurst and Frank 2000; Reisig and Giacomazzi 1998; Reisig and Parks 2000; Webb and Marshall 1995). However, many of these other studies deal with samples of people age 18 and older and argue that adults hold more positive attitudes toward police than juveniles. One possible explanation is that attitudes steadily decline through teenage years and then begin to improve upon graduation of high school and commencement of an "adult" life. This is purely a speculation and requires further research on the effects of age as a variable before conclusions may be drawn.

Based on subcultural theory, we would expect that gender would be related to evaluations of the police and other authority figures. In this view, boys are under much greater pressure than girls to adopt and conform to values and norms of the delinquent subculture. Therefore, we would expect girls to evaluate the police, teachers, and parents at a higher level than their male peers. Additionally, since we expect girls to be involved to a lesser extent than boys in a delinquent subculture, we would also expect girls to report higher grades and fewer police contacts. Results for gender were mixed. Based on the bivariate correlations, girls reported higher positive attitudes toward the police and their teachers, but not their parents. Girls were also more likely to report fewer police contacts and higher grades than did the boys. However, while significant bivariate correlations were found between gender and a number of key variables, gender was not significant in the multivariate model.

The results related to our police contact variable should be viewed with prudence, however, as we used only two measures of police contact (if the child had ever been picked up for truancy or for a curfew violation). Future studies may explore other varieties of police contact to include formal, informal, and vicarious forms of contact (see Hurst and Frank 2000).

The results concerning the relationships between the other variables of interest and attitudes toward authority figures can also be better understood using the subcultural theoretical context. Based on subcultural

theory, we would expect juveniles with a greater commitment to a delinquent subculture to report lower evaluations of authority figures. In an examination of the bivariate correlations, higher grades, fewer police contacts for truancy and curfew violations, and respect for the abilities of the police were all consistent, significant correlates with positive attitudes toward authority figures. Additionally, in the multivariate model, grades, race, feelings toward teachers and parents, police contacts, and fear of the police all remained significant predictors of attitudes toward the police and all were consistent in the direction expected by subcultural theory.

Interestingly, social class was not consistently related to the evaluations of authority figures, nor was the measure a significant predictor in the multivariate model. It may be that our measure was too poor an estimate. Future research may wish to employ a better measure of social class.

Neighborhood safety was not consistently related to the youths' evaluations of authority figures. One would expect that in highly disorganized communities the students would report higher levels of fear. According to Cloward and Ohlin (1960), these socially disorganized areas would breed conflict oriented subcultures which were based on violence. In our study, students who reported higher levels of fear reported significantly higher evaluations of the police, but lower evaluations of their teachers. While it may very well be that neighborhood safety was unrelated to the students' perceptions of authority figures, this result may be due in part to our relatively poor measure of neighborhood safety. The result may have been different if we had used more questions related to the quality of life in the youths' neighborhoods, or if we had employed an external measure, such as calls for service or other police data.

An additional variable that produced noteworthy results measured juveniles' opinions of the likelihood of being caught by police if they skipped school, stole something, hit someone, or used marijuana. Youth who reported more positive attitudes toward police were more likely to say that the police would catch them if they committed crimes. This relationship was of interest in that juveniles who held positive opinions toward the police were also more respectful/fearful of their abilities to apprehend criminals. This finding was also consistent with subcultural theory. Since youths who adopt a subcultural orientation would be more likely to view the police negatively, they would also view police as powerless and incompetent.

CONCLUSION

Our findings supported our prediction that juveniles' attitudes toward parents and teachers would accurately forecast attitudes toward police. We feel that understanding juvenile attitudes toward police is a very vital, yet often neglected, area of crime reduction strategy in our country. If law enforcement agents better understood the causes and nature of juvenile attitudes toward police, they may be able to positively influence the outcome of interactions with youths more often and, subsequently, reduce the disproportionate amount of juveniles involved in the criminal justice system. To illustrate the problem, in 1999, law enforcement agencies in the U.S. made 2.5 million arrests of persons under the age of 18 (Snyder 2001). The same year, one of every six arrests made by law enforcement agencies involved a juvenile (Snyder 2001). Between 1983 and 1992, the adult arrest rate for murder had risen only nine percent, while the corresponding juvenile rate increased by 128 percent (Funk and Polsby 1998). Clearly, juvenile crime and its cause is a critical area of criminology research.

Furthermore, understanding juvenile attitudes toward police can lead to greater success with programs such as community policing which rely heavily on improved relationships between law enforcement and the public. After all, as most of the current studies suggest, attitudes developed early in life often persist into adulthood (Jones-Brown 2000). It would be difficult to dispute the notion that improved relations between police and citizens, coupled with increased knowledge about the role of law enforcement in communities, would have a great impact on reducing the level of crime. Simply stated, the bottom line is that understanding the nature of juvenile attitudes toward police will help reduce crime.

ENDNOTES

1. While the argument could be made to include separate measures of feelings towards mother/mother figure and feelings toward father/father figure, in this sample there were no appreciable differences between the correlations between the 10 items for both parent figures than the 5 items measuring feelings towards the mother (Alpha = .84, n = 1,564) and the 5 items measuring the feelings towards the father (Alpha = .87, n = 1,472).

2. The reliability coefficient for this scale was much lower than the alpha values for the other scaled measures. Principal component factor analysis revealed a single factor solution with eigen values ranging from 0.57 to 0.75.

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