

## ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: THE RELATIONSHIP OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES TO THE AMOUNT AND PERSISTENCE OF ATTITUDE CHANGE TOWARD THE LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT AFTER THE RODNEY KING INCIDENT

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Tuch and Weitzer (1997) examined racial differences in attitude persistence and change in attitudes toward the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) after the 1991 Rodney King incident. This thesis extends Tuch and Weitzer's research by examining whether parallel changes would be found for the demographic variables of age, gender and education, with greater change hypothesized for younger, female and less educated respondents. Using Chi-square and Logit analysis of successive survey responses from seven points in time between 1988 and 1994, attitudes toward the LAPD were again found to decline significantly immediately after the Rodney King incident, only to begin reverting towards original levels over time. Hypothesized differences by the three predictors were largely not confirmed, although older people did tend to show slightly less initial attitude change.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES TO THE AMOUNT AND  
PERSISTENCE OF ATTITUDE CHANGE TOWARD THE LOS ANGELES POLICE  
DEPARTMENT AFTER THE RODNEY KING INCIDENT

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
2004

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables .....	iii
List of Figures .....	iv
Chapter I: Theoretical Rationale .....	1
Past Research on Attitudes toward the Police.....	3
Race .....	3
Age .....	4
Gender .....	5
Education .....	5
Past Research on Attitude Change .....	6
Age .....	6
Gender .....	7
Education .....	8
Persistence of Attitude Change .....	8
Attitude Change Theories and the Rodney King Incident .....	13
Message-Based Persuasion Theories .....	13
Social Influence Theories .....	17
Hypotheses .....	20
Chapter II: Data and Methods .....	21
Dependent Variable.....	21
Independent Variables.....	21
Assumptions and Limitations .....	22
Analysis.....	23
Chapter III: Results.....	24
Age.....	25
Gender.....	28
Education.....	29
Controlling for Race.....	31
Conclusions.....	35
References .....	40

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 – Chi-square and Logit analysis for Race.....	25
Table 2 – Chi-square and Logit analysis for Age.....	27
Table 3 – Chi-square and Logit analysis for Gender.....	29
Table 4 – Chi-square and Logit analysis for Education.....	30
Table 5 – Chi-square and Logit analysis for Age controlling for Whites .....	32
Table 6 – Chi-square and Logit analysis for Gender controlling for Whites .....	33
Table 7 – Chi-square and Logit analysis for Education controlling for Whites .....	34

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – Approval of the LAPD over time.....	24
Figure 2 – Approval of the LAPD over time by Race.....	25
Figure 3 – Approval of the LAPD over time by Age.....	26
Figure 4 – Approval of the LAPD over time by Gender.....	28
Figure 5 – Approval of the LAPD over time by Education .....	30
Figure 6 – Approval of the LAPD by Age for Whites .....	32
Figure 7 – Approval of the LAPD by Gender for Whites.....	33
Figure 8 – Approval of the LAPD by Education for Whites .....	34

## **CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL RATIONALE**

On March 3, 1991, the Los Angeles Police Department pursued motorist Rodney King for numerous traffic violations. During his arrest, several members of the Los Angeles Police Department severely beat Mr. King while over 20 other officers stood by and watched. He sustained significant injuries that required hospitalization.

Unbeknownst to these officers, a witness captured the beating on videotape and later sold it to a local television station. As a result, this incident quickly became a national news event, with the actual tape of the beating repeatedly broadcasted. Within a few weeks, over 90% of the nation was aware of what had occurred (Gallup Poll, March 14-17, 1991) and public outrage spread throughout the country.

The four officers involved in the beating of Rodney King were subsequently indicted on criminal charges and tried in a nearby jurisdiction due to fears of obtaining a biased jury in Los Angeles. However, on April 29, 1992, the officers were acquitted of these charges. This highly controversial verdict sparked widespread rioting in Los Angeles for several days. During these riots, over 40 people were killed, 2,000 injured, and an estimated \$1 billion in property damages occurred.

Police brutality in Los Angeles was by no means non-existent before the Rodney King incident. Between 1987 and 1990, over 4,000 complaints of misconduct were filed against the LAPD. The Rodney King incident was the first instance of gross police brutality videotaped as it occurred and then repeatedly presented to a national audience. Even after these events concluded, society was reminded of this incident for years to come as related stories and incidents occurred.

As might have been expected, Tuch and Weitzer (1997) found that this incident negatively affected attitudes toward the police. They also discovered that attitude change was greater for blacks than whites, with Latinos falling in between the two. However, over time these changes eventually reversed though they had greater longevity for blacks and Latinos than for whites.

Although Tuch and Weitzer's research examines the effect of race on attitudes toward the police, they fail to address how other variables that have been shown to affect attitudes toward the police affected attitudes during this incident. This paper will expand upon their research by examining how age, gender, and education affected attitude change for the Rodney King incident. In doing so, this paper will contribute to the existing body of research on the persistence of attitude change by examining how attitudes change after a highly publicized event occurs.

The following discussion will review research conducted on attitudes toward the police, focusing on the variables of age, gender and education. Then the ways these variables may influence the process of attitude change will be examined. A discussion of persistence of attitude change will follow in the context of theories of attitude change. The discussion will conclude by addressing how certain aspects of the Rodney King incident may have been influential in changing attitudes by linking them to relevant theories of attitude change.

## **Past Research on Attitudes toward the Police**

Generally, most studies on attitudes toward the police have shown widespread satisfaction with the police. However, differences among groups do occur. Past research on attitudes toward police has examined individual level variables and contextual level variables. Individual level variables focus on attributes, such as race and gender, while contextual level variables focus on factors, such as neighborhood culture, past experiences with police, prior victimizations, and experiences with police programs (Webb and Marshall 1995). The following section will provide a review of previous research on the relationship between the individual level variables of race, age, gender and education and attitudes toward police.

### **Race**

One of the most important indicators of satisfaction with the police is an individual's race. Consistent with Tuch and Weitzer (1997), the majority of studies on attitudes toward the police and race have shown that whites tend to have a more positive evaluation of the police than blacks, with Hispanic's ratings typically falling in between (Weitzer and Tuch 1999; Hagan and Albonetti 1982; Cheurprakobkit, 2000). There are many explanations for these differences. For example, blacks may have a lower evaluation of the police because blacks are more likely to be victims of violent crime and police abuse. Blacks have also been found to be considerably more likely to perceive criminal injustice (Hagan and Albonetti 1982), perhaps since they are more likely to have negative interactions with the police (Murty, Roebuck and Smith 1990).



Conflict theory provides one of the most compelling explanations for race differences in attitudes toward the police. In conflict theory, criminal justice institutions, such as the police, are related to the structure of inequality within society (Weitzer and Tuch 1999). Therefore, minorities see police as the instrument of a government that supports the majority's interests. As a result, blacks tend to perceive more criminal injustice than whites do.

In an interesting reversal of roles, Webb and Marshall (1995) discovered that in Detroit, blacks actually held more favorable attitudes toward the police than did whites. The conflict theory explanation of attitude differences between whites and blacks applies to this situation. In Detroit, blacks held many of the top political and business leadership positions within the community, possibly bolstering the attitudes of blacks toward the police and reducing those of whites.

### Age

Past research on age and attitudes toward police has shown that older people are more likely to say positive things about the police than younger ones (Kusow, Wilson and Martin 1997; Hagan and Albonetti 1982; Reisig and Correia 1997; Hurst and Frank 2000). Younger age groups tend to have fewer responsibilities and may view the police as an obstacle restricting their freedoms (Reisig and Giacomazzi 1998). The young also tend to have experiences that are more negative with the police than older cohorts are. However, Peek, Lowe and Austin (1978) found that among blacks, both younger and older age groups rated the police relatively low.

## Gender

Decker's (1981) review of the literature on attitudes toward the police found gender to be an unimportant factor. However, recent research has found that women tend to have more favorable attitudes toward the police than men do (Huang and Vaughn 1996; Hurst and Frank 2000; Austin and Vogel 1995; Webb and Marshall 1995, Reisig and Correia 1997). Several explanations exist for these differences. First, men typically have greater involvement with the criminal justice system, both as offenders and victims (Eschholz 2002). Women also typically receive better and more polite treatment from the police (Friedrich 1977), which may bolster their attitudes toward the police as well.

While women tend to have more favorable attitudes toward the police, they are also more likely to oppose the use of force by police (Blumenthal et al. 1972; Arthur 1993). In one study, Smith (1984) examined how men and women differed in their approval of the use of violence. He compared approval ratings between men and women across a wide range of topics: foreign affairs, social control, interpersonal relations, and law enforcement. He discovered that men had greater approval ratings for the use of violence and that these differences remained relatively stable over time.

## Education

Research on the educational level of an individual and their attitude towards the police has shown inconsistent results. While Hindelang (1974) discovered no relationship between education and attitudes toward the police, Murty et al. (1990) found that educated individuals were more likely to rate the police higher than those with less education. However, other studies (Gamson and McEvoy 1970; Peek, Lowe and Alston

1981) discovered that highly educated whites rated the police less positively than less educated groups. Perhaps for some, higher levels of education may be associated with power and prestige, which would produce evaluations of the police that are more favorable. For others, education may open their eyes to social injustices, resulting in lower evaluations.

### **Past Research on Attitude Change and Age/Gender/Education**

Since these variables may affect an individual's attitude towards the police, it is important to examine how they may also affect attitude change. The following section will provide an overview of research on how these variables may influence the process of attitude change.

#### Age

Attitudes for older individuals have been found to be more stable than for younger ones (Alwin, Cohen and Newcomb 1991). Several explanations exist for this difference. One explanation is that as people grow older, they may become less susceptible to influence (Glenn 1980). Older cohorts may be more resistant to change because they have long held beliefs that are more difficult to influence. (Eagly and Chaiken 1993) On the other hand, attitudes of younger cohorts may be less stable because of more exposures to challenges to their beliefs (Tyler and Schuller 1991). For example, post-secondary education often provides students with new experiences with others of different backgrounds. However, contrary to most of the research in this area, Tyler and Schuller (1991) discovered that older age groups exhibited as much attitude change as younger

groups, suggesting that perhaps people are open to attitude change throughout their lives.

### Gender

A review of the literature on sex differences (Eagly 1978) discovered that little evidence exists supporting the claim that women are more easily influenced than males, except during in-group pressure conformity situations. However, studies that focus on cultural differences between men and women found differences as well. These studies suggest that these differences occur due to society's expectations for women to conform to societal rules being greater than for men (Hovland and Janis 1959). Several other explanations for these gender differences exist as well. For example, during this period men created the majority of the experimental materials used in these studies, possibly providing a source for differences (McGuire 1968). Differences also occur when a male investigator conducts a study (Cooper 1979). Perhaps, male investigators may be more effective in gaining compliance from females than female investigators.

Recent research on gender and attitude change has found that small gender differences exist as well. A variety of explanations for these differences exists. Some studies suggest that women may be more interested in social harmony than men (Eagly and Wood 1991). Others suggest that the nature of the topic may be influential as well. For example, a topic particularly important to women, such as women's rights, may be more influential for women than men. Arguments within the message may appear stronger to one gender than the other as well. Another study also found that women have a lower threshold for elaborating on message cues. As a result, these cues may be more influential for women than for men (Meyers-Levy et al., 1991).

## Education

An individual's educational level may also affect their susceptibility to attitude change. Intelligence is often thought to have a linear relationship with persuasion; the more intelligent an individual is the less likely persuasion will occur (McGuire 1968). According to Eagly and Warren (1976), however, more intelligent people understand complex messages better, and as a result, persuasion by complex messages is more likely. However, they also suggest that more intelligent individuals may be less open to persuasion by others because of greater confidence in their own critical abilities. In their research, they discovered that intelligence showed a slight positive relationship to attitude change when messages contained complex arguments, but when the message was not supported a stronger negative relationship exists. While education is often used to measure intelligence, the two are not directly related. An individual's educational level is also partially a measure of their socioeconomic status.

## **The Persistence of Attitude Change**

So an attitude changes, what happens next? While the causes of and conditions for attitude change has been extensively examined, the persistence of attitude change is perhaps one of the least studied but most important aspects of attitude change. Why try to change an attitude if that change will not last? Unfortunately, experiments on the persistence of attitude change require the researcher to wait a period of time and then re-evaluate the attitude. This often requires greater financial resources in addition to an increased time commitment for the researchers themselves.

Although research on the temporal persistence of attitude change is rare, two literatures have explored attitude persistence, associative interference and the sleeper effect (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Both of these literatures explain attitude persistence through cognitive linkages. In associative interference, an individual's memory for an attitude may interfere with or become confused with memories of other attitudes (Baumgardner et al. 1983). Most experiments in this area focus on proactive and retroactive interference. Proactive interference is the disruption of memories by pre-existing memories, while retroactive interference is the disruption of memories formed earlier by newer memories.

According to the sleeper effect (Hovland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield 1949), positive or negative cues attached to an individual's memory may dissociate over time. Hovland discovered that a delayed attitude change in the direction advocated by a non-credible source actually occurs. Early studies on this effect found that while attitude change produced by a credible source decayed over time, attitude change produced by a non-credible source actually increased to the same level of that produced by the credible source. This phenomenon may occur due to the subject's dissociating the message content from the source. Further examination of this effect determined that while it is customary for a decrease in attitude change to occur from credible sources, it is rare that a delayed increase occurs from non-credible sources (Pratkanis et al. 1988).

Hovland's reinforcement theory also addresses attitude persistence. According to this theory, persistence is dependent upon the retention of the informational content of the persuasive message and the incentives that may exist for its acceptance. If someone

cannot remember the arguments of the persuasive message or if the reward or sanction for supporting the new attitude no longer exists, the motivation to continue supporting the persuasive message declines. In addition, the long-term effectiveness of persuasive messages depends upon the amount of resistance they can provide to future competing influences.

A comprehensive review of experimental work on the persistence of attitude change concluded that most of these studies tended to find little persistence of attitude change (Cook and Flay 1978). In fact, most research on the persistence of attitude change over time has shown a pattern of returning to previous attitudes. After about 4-6 weeks, the amount of attitude change retained may be from 1/3 to 2/3 of original change (Watts and McGuire 1964). This especially occurs in cases when the persuasive message occurs only once. For example, in a study of college students who watched five different television documentaries, only one documentary continued to have significant attitude change effects after 4 weeks (Fitzsimmons and Osburn 1968).

However, increased persistence of attitude change occurs in several different situations during laboratory experiments. For example, re-exposure to a persuasive message tends to strengthen and prolong any previous attitude change (Cook and Insko 1968; Ronis et. al. 1977). Increased persistence also occurs when individuals are led to believe that they may have to later explain or justify their attitudes to others (Boninger et al. 1990; Chaiken 1980), when an individual is given the opportunity to create their own arguments and when increased time is given to think about a message (Elms 1966; Watts 1967). In addition, message repetition also may increase the persistence of attitude

change (Johnson and Watkins 1971). Perhaps one of the most significant ways to increase the persistence of attitude change is by repeatedly pairing a cue of the message with the attitude object over time so the cue becomes relatively accessible (Haugtvedt et al. 1994).

The persistence of attitude change is of particular importance to research in the area of inter-group conflict. Not only is it important to find ways to reduce inter-group conflict, it is of equal importance that such changes in attitudes persist over time. During Muzafer Sherif's (1958) famous Robbers Cave Study on inter-group conflict, he discovered that a number of measures, such as disseminating positive information about the other group and the presentation of a common enemy, initially changed attitudes, bringing the two groups of boys closer together. However, without continued support, these attitude changes did not persist over time and quickly reverted to their previous levels.

Most research on attitude change occurs in experimental settings where it is easier to manipulate and control variables. However, lab environments are different from real world situations and the ability to generalize from the lab to the real world is often unclear. Significant problems also occur in the examination of attitude change using surveys. For example, the existence of before and after data is often problematic since the majority of survey research that focuses on significant events does not exist until after the event has occurred.



Some studies, such as the General Social Survey, are able to overcome this problem by repeatedly asking the same questions every time the survey occurs, allowing the researcher to examine before and after effects. In one such study, Parker (1995) discovered that positive evaluations of attitudes toward the President trust in the federal government, and assessments of personal finances increased significantly at the onset of the Gulf War. However, these effects were short-lived as well and returned to previous levels within 10 months after the conflict.

Tuch and Weitzer (1997) also recognized that few studies attempt to examine how real world events may affect attitudes longitudinally. While a significant amount of research on attitudes toward the police exists, these studies fail to examine how these attitudes may change after significant events occur. Tuch and Weitzer conducted a descriptive analysis of how three highly publicized police brutality cases, one of which was the Rodney King incident, affected attitudes toward the police. They determined that attitudes toward the police were negatively affected by these highly publicized brutality cases. In addition, Tuch and Weitzer examined how these attitudes differed between races. They discovered that attitude change was greater for blacks than whites, with Latinos falling in between the two. Over time, these attitudes eventually returned to their previous levels, but had greater longevity for blacks and Latinos than for whites. While race is an influential factor in attitudes towards the police, research has shown that other variables may be important as well. This paper will expand on Tuch and Weitzer's

research by examining how age, gender and education influenced attitudes over time toward the LAPD after the Rodney King incident.

### **Attitude Change Theories and the Rodney King Incident**

It is important to understand how the Rodney King incident may have influenced attitudes toward the police to change. This section will link relevant theories of attitude change to the Rodney King incident. Research on attitude change has typically fallen into two main areas. The first area, message-based persuasion theories, focuses on the individual and the attributes of the message. Research in this area tends to present arguments to the individual in situations that have little social interaction. The second area of interest, social influence theories, recognizes that attitudes form and change through social interactions and are intrinsic parts of everyday life. Research in this area emphasizes information regarding the source's position in society and often consists of interactions between participants. While it is often difficult to determine why an attitude changes, it is most likely due to a combination of these factors.

#### **Message-based Persuasion Theories**

From early on, researchers have recognized that attitude change depends on various individual and situational factors and their work generally focused on those of message-based persuasion theories. The work of Carl Hovland and his associates has been extremely influential in the field of message-based persuasion. During World War II, they conducted numerous studies on propaganda and military indoctrination,

examining how different variables affected attitude change and how learning processes may be responsible for these changes. They emphasized the connection between the stimulus and response, as well as the concept of reinforcement. They believed that attitude change results from learning produced through reinforcement and their research in the field of persuasive communications continues to be influential today. Hovland's work provides several different explanations for why attitudes may have changed because of the Rodney King incident.

According to Hovland, three important events must occur before attitudes can change (Hovland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield 1949). First, the individual must attend to the persuasive message. In other words, an individual must be paying attention to the message for influence to occur. The videotape of the Rodney King beating broadcast repeatedly across all the major newscasts, discussed over the radio, and written about allowing a significant number of people to learn about this incident. The individual then must also be able to comprehend the arguments of the message itself. This tape clearly shows the police striking King with their batons while he was on the ground making it difficult not to understand what was happening. Finally, the individual must accept the persuasive message, which is ultimately dependent upon reinforcements. These reinforcements can be arguments within the message or expected rewards or punishments. The public outcry against the LAPD after this incident may provide the source for Hovland's reinforcements of expected rewards or punishments through social

influence. Hovland ultimately believed that learning would only occur if there is thinking about the new attitude and if incentives exist for accepting it.

Much of the research conducted by Hovland and his associates also concentrated on variables within the stimulus event that may affect attitude change. They examined various aspects of variables such as the source of the message, the content of the message, and characteristics of the audience to determine how they may affect persuasive messages.

Research on source credibility has shown that a positive relationship often exists between the credibility of a source and the amount of attitude change that occurs. The tape of the King incident was filmed by a bystander who just happened to be in the right place at the right time, providing a highly credible source. Source credibility is composed of two aspects: expertness and trustworthiness, with expertness tending to have more influence than trustworthiness (Hass 1981). Expertness is usually associated with the perceived knowledge, intelligence, prestige, or occupation of the source and trustworthiness is the source's perceived truthfulness. This tape also provided an opportunity to view the events as they actually occurred, enhancing the perceived truthfulness of the newscasters reporting the story. A highly credible source also tends to produce more attitude change than one that is less credible (McGuire 1985). In addition, the effectiveness of the message increases when an audience is aware of the source's credentials before the message. Source credibility is also usually dependent upon the relevance to the subject at hand. However, Aronson and Golden (1962) discovered that

sometimes a high status source could increase the persuasiveness of the argument in irrelevant areas.

The ability to influence the audience is also dependent on how involved the audience is with the issue (Johnson and Scileppi 1969). This event may affect certain sub-groups of the population more than others. For example, individuals who reside in Los Angeles are more of a stakeholder in this situation and as a result, they are likely to be more influenced by it. In addition, because Rodney King was a black man beaten by the police, blacks may also have more of an interest in this event.

The power of the source over the audience is also important in attitude change. A charismatic or shocking source will have greater influence than one that is monotone or boring. This tape provides dramatic images of the LAPD severely beating King while he is on the ground and not fighting back. As the saying goes, “A picture is worth a thousand words.”

Attitude change may have also occurred from this incident because of the publicity it received long after the event concluded. Message repetition provides more opportunities for the examination of arguments, which can be beneficial as long as these messages do not become monotonous (Gorn and Goldberg 1980; Cacioppo and Petty 1989). As general knowledge about a topic increases, individuals become more able and motivated to think about issue-relevant information (Wood, Rhodes and Biek 1995).

## Social Influence Theories

Social interaction theories also help explain why attitudes changed after the Rodney King incident. These theories typically focus on the underlying motives of attitude change and the role of social influence on such changes. While social influence affects individuals in different ways, it was an influential source of attitude change after the incident. This event was the news of the time, resulting in widespread public outcry. Everyone was talking about it.

For the last 40 years, the central theme of these theories has been the dual-motive scheme. This theory emphasizes the effects of informational and normative influence. Informational influence occurs when an individual accepts information from others as evidence about reality. For example, the news media provided detailed coverage of this event and of the public's reaction to it. The information provided by this coverage helped shape the public's view. Normative influence occurs when an individual conforms to the positive expectations of another person, group, or even themselves. Since this was a highly publicized event, attitude change may have occurred in response to the negative social stigma associated with supporting the LAPD. Recent theories on motives have recognized that normative concerns for favorable evaluations of the self, internal consistency and the preservation of satisfactory relations with others motivate attitude change (Wood 2000).

While these social interaction theories have traditionally thought that informational and normative motives affect attitudes independently, contemporary

research suggests that this is not necessarily the case. For the Rodney King incident, the information provided by the extensive news coverage and the desire to conform to other's expectations probably operated jointly in influencing attitude change. For example, a person's motivation and ability to make their own evaluations of the information affect the amount of social influence that may occur (Baron, Vandello and Brunzman 1996). When presented with a judgment stimulus without enough time to identify the correct answer, highly motivated people tended to rely on other's judgments. On the other hand, moderately motivated individuals tended to rely on other's judgment regardless of their ability to identify the answer. In addition to other's judgments, other cues are important in social influence as well. For example, Zarnoth and Sniezek (1997) discovered that those who are more confident during group settings have more influence over others than those who are not.

Researchers are also often interested in the consistency between public and private settings. They first thought that in public settings, individuals believe that others, such as fellow participants, are aware of their responses and that in private settings individuals believe that others are unaware of their responses. Early research typically thought that attitudes that are consistent in both private and public settings are internalized responses that required thoughtful processing of the message, while an individual whose responses differ in private and public settings has succumbed to normative pressures. However, Allport (1935) recognized that social influence can be "actual, imagined, or implied" and may affect individuals in both public and private settings. For example, social motives

for agreement affect both attitudes in private as well as attitudes in public settings (Bond and Smith 1996). An individual's motivations can also extend and generalize into unrelated contexts and can have extended consequences for subsequent motivational processing (Hardin and Higgins 1996). For example, in an experiment that falsely accused participants of a negligent act while typing data in a computer, when participants were unsure of their innocence because they were typing too quickly, they accepted a witness's account of their actions and falsely confessed to the act. In fact, many of these individual's later admitted that they had committed the negligent act and actually created details about the event (Kassin and Keichel 1996).

Both message-based persuasion and social influence theories provide explanations for why attitude may have changed in response to the Rodney King incident and why this attitude change may persist. These theories also help us understand why differences between groups may occur. For example, a larger social stigma may be attached to blacks who have favorable attitudes toward the police after the Rodney King incident than for whites, resulting in blacks having lower approval ratings than whites and greater persistence of attitude changes. These theories will be useful in predicting how the variables of age, gender and education will influence attitude change and persistence.



## **Hypotheses**

The literature on age and attitude change suggests that older individuals change their attitudes less than younger individuals do. Thus, we expect that (1) older people will be less apt to change their opinions of police in response to the Rodney King incident, and (2) among people who do change their attitudes in response to this incident, the persistence of this change will be greater among older individuals.

For gender, the research on attitude change suggests that women are more susceptible to influence. In addition, women are more likely to oppose the use of force by police. Thus, we expect that (1) women will be more likely to change their opinions in response to the Rodney King incident, and that (2) among people who do change their attitudes in response to this incident, the persistence of this change will be greater among women.

Since research on education and attitudes toward the police has shown conflicting results, it is difficult to come to a clear hypothesis of how individuals will respond to the Rodney King incident. Previous researchers have suggested that higher educated individuals may be more aware of social injustices and thus evaluate police lower than others would. This may be true; however, those with lower levels of education are likely to be aware of these injustices as well. Therefore, we are uncertain as to how education will affect attitude change.

## **CHAPTER II: DATA AND METHODS**

The data utilized for this analysis is secondary polling data collected by the Los Angeles Times between 1988 and 1993. Each of these polls interviewed residents of the city of Los Angeles over the age of 18 using random-digit dialing techniques. Our results were weighted to conform to census data on characteristics such as sex, age, race and household size to obtain proper proportions for the city of Los Angeles as a whole. These weights were provided in the original data sets and range from 0.02 to 18.70.

### **Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable, attitude toward the police, was derived from a single question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way the Los Angeles Police Department is handling its job? Each of the studies utilized asked this question.

### **Independent Variables**

The independent variables were selected on grounds of theoretical and prior research and include the age, gender, and educational level of the respondent. While age groups can be specified in a number of ways, the categories utilized in this paper were limited by inconsistencies in the coding of the original data sets. The categories utilized in this paper allow us to classify age across studies uniformly. The variables are coded as follows:

Race: White, Black and Hispanic

Age: 18-23, 24-30, 31-45, 46-64, and 65+

Gender: Male and Female

Education: High School or less, Some College/Technical School, College Graduate, and Graduate Level +

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

Unfortunately, a gap exists in the LA Times series between the 1988 and the 1991 polls making an analysis of the impact of the King episode in 1991 potentially problematic. To gauge the importance of this problem, various other data on attitudes toward the police between 1988 and 1991 were examined. In the other studies, attitudes towards police during this period remained relatively stable, suggesting that attitudes toward the LAPD were constant in the three years leading up to the King episode (See Appendix 2).

Several other areas of concern exist as well. These studies are cross-sectional, providing data from independent random samples of the population of Los Angeles. Ideally, I would like to have a panel, tracking the attitudes of specific individuals over time. Since the data are cross-sectional, the length of time between studies is potentially problematic. For example, respondents in the later studies may not have been residents of Los Angeles during the initial studies. However, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2001), between 1990 and 2000, the population of Los Angeles increased by only about 6%. Thus, this is not likely to be a major threat to inference.

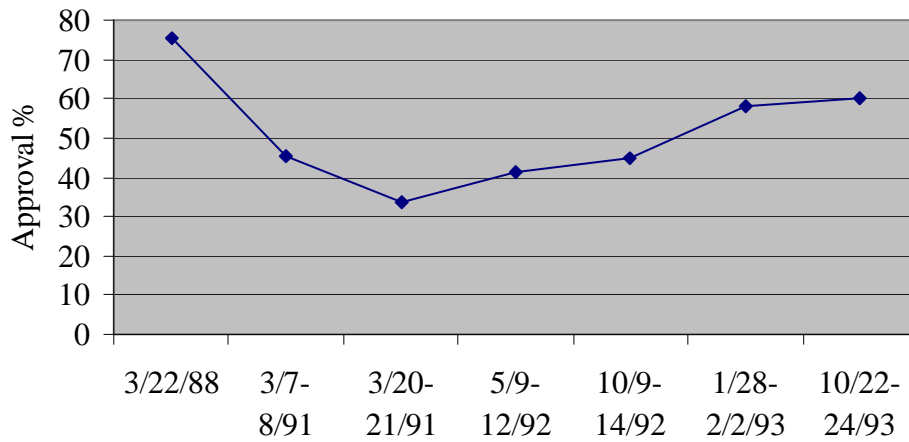
## **Analysis**

For this study, the attitudes toward the LAPD will first be analyzed using chi-squared tests of association in terms of gender, age, and education to determine if these variables correspond with previous research on attitudes toward the police. It will then be determined if attitudes changed because of the Rodney King incident and if such changes persist. The impact of time on approval for each of these variables will be analyzed as well using logit analysis. This will determine if the effect of time is the same for the categories within each of the variables on approval. In other words, does time affect men and women's approval of the police the same.

### **CHAPTER III: RESULTS**

Tuch and Weitzer's (1997) study found that the Rodney King incident negatively affected attitudes toward the police.

Figure 1 - Approval of the LAPD over time



They also discovered that attitude change was greater for blacks than whites, with Latinos falling in between the two (see Figure 2). However, over time these changes eventually reversed though they had greater longevity for blacks and Latinos than for whites.

Figure 2 - Approval of the LAPD over time by Race

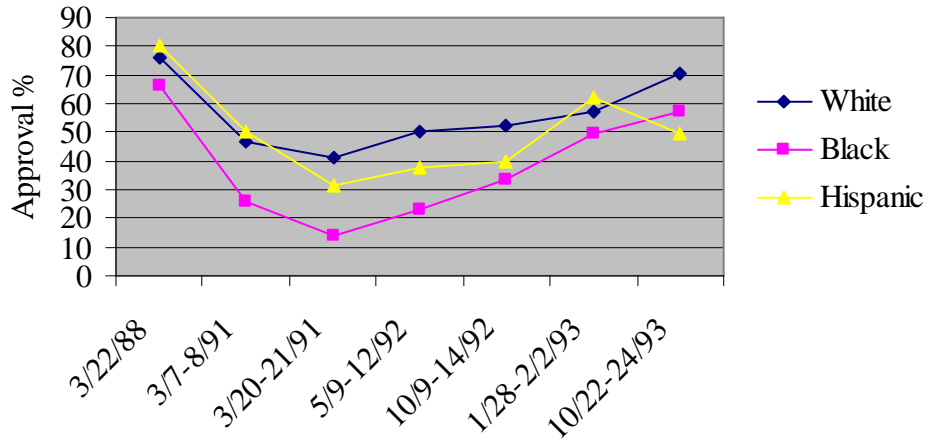


Table 1 - Chi-square and Logit analysis for Race

Percent Approve by Date and Race

	Study # 148 3/22/88	Study # 245 3/7-8/91	Study # 247 3/20-21/91	Study # 281 5/9-12/92	Study # 300 10/9-14/92	Study # 306 1/28-2/2/93	Study # 325 10/22-24/93
White	76.0% (325)	46.7% (289)	41.3% (368)	50.1% (567)	52.2% (563)	57.4% (658)	70.4% (531)
Black	66.0% (103)	25.6% (86)	14.0% (114)	23.1% (199)	33.3% (174)	49.8% (203)	57.3% (157)
Hispanic	80.1% (141)	50.4% (240)	31.3% (313)	37.9% (472)	39.9% (479)	61.8% (539)	49.2% (433)
Chi-square:	6.61	16.27	30.14	47.47	26.49	8.91	45.71
2 df, p=:	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00

Association between Approval and Time

White	Chi-Square = 151.96, df=6, p<0.000
Black	Chi-Square = 123.77, df=6, p<0.000
Hispanic	Chi-Square = 166.97, df=6, p<0.000

Difference between races in the association between Approval and Time:

Likelihood ratio Chi-Square = 75.61, df=12, p = 0.00

## Age

Previous research on age and attitudes toward the police suggests that older individuals will have a higher evaluation of the police. This was not the case for this

analysis. In the pre-incident study (March 22, 1988), all of the age categories had approval ratings of the LAPD at around 80% except for those ages 31-45. Over time, the groups with the highest approval ratings fluctuate amongst the age categories. Differences between age groups occurred for every study except for the one immediately after the Rodney King incident (see Table 2). In addition, a significant association exists between study and attitudes toward the LAPD for each age group, suggesting that this incident affected each age group. It was also found that attitudes toward the LAPD did not change in a similar fashion for each age group over time.

Figure 3 - Approval of the LAPD over time by Age

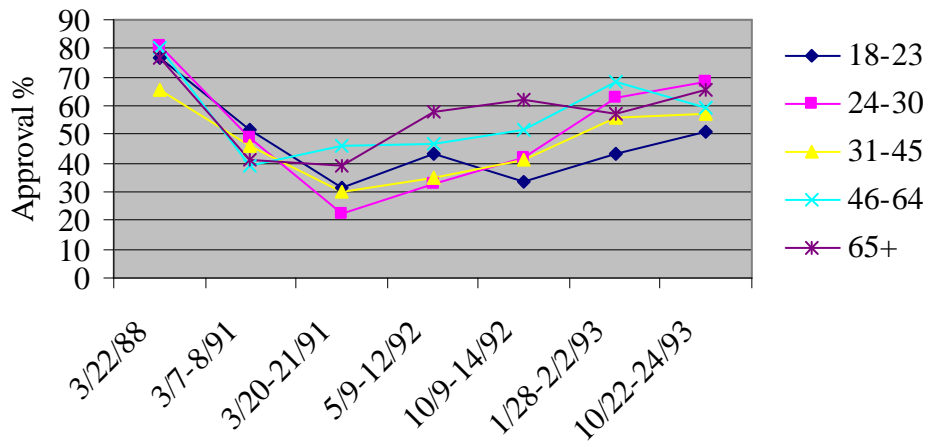


Table 2 - Chi-square and Logit analysis for Age

Percent Approve by Date and Age

	Study # 148 3/22/88	Study # 245 3/7-8/91	Study # 247 3/20-21/91	Study # 281 5/9-12/92	Study # 300 10/9-14/92	Study # 306 1/28-2/2/93	Study # 325 10/22-24/93
18-23	76.7% (90)	51.4% (111)	31.5% (149)	43.5% (193)	33.3% (165)	43.4% (189)	51.1% (141)
24-30	81.1% (106)	48.7% (115)	22.0% (132)	32.7% (217)	42.2% (249)	62.5% (267)	68.4% (244)
31-45	65.3% (150)	45.7% (184)	29.7% (229)	34.6% (410)	41.4% (430)	55.6% (453)	56.9% (364)
46-64	80.5% (149)	39.0% (136)	46.2% (156)	46.5% (256)	51.8% (247)	68.4% (275)	59.6% (213)
65+	76.4% (72)	41.2% (68)	39.1% (128)	57.9% (159)	62.1% (124)	57.0% (214)	65.4% (159)
Chi-square:	12.25	5.24	22.31	34.51	31.15	31.6	15.36
4 df, p=:	0.02	n.s.	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Association between Approval and Time

18-23:	Chi-Square = 60.92, df=6, p<0.000
24-30:	Chi-Square = 163.17, df=6, p<0.000
31-45:	Chi-Square = 105.74, df=6, p<0.000
46-64:	Chi-Square = 88.57, df=6, p<0.000
65+:	Chi-Square = 40.32, df=6, p<0.000

Difference between Age groups in the association between Approval and Time:

Likelihood ratio Chi-Square = 95.36, df=24, p = 0.00

Approval ratings dropped dramatically for all age categories after the incident, with the greatest decline for the 24-30 age category. By March 21, 1991, this group's approval rating of the LAPD dropped to 27% of their original rating. As predicted in our hypothesis, older age groups were less apt to change their opinions in response to this incident. The 46-64 and the 65+ age groups declined the least, dropping to 57% and 51% of their original ratings. The greatest returns toward pre-incident levels were observed by those in the 24-30, the 31-45 and the 65+ age categories with returns of approximately 85% of their original ratings over time. Interestingly, the 65+ age group returned towards original approval ratings much quicker than the other age groups with a return of 75% of their original rating by May 9, 1992. The age group with the smallest return towards their



original rating was those 18-23. They only had a return of 66% of their original approval rating. These results refute our original hypothesis that the persistence of attitude change will be greatest among older individuals.

### **Gender**

Previous research on attitudes toward the police suggests that women typically have higher evaluations of the police than men. Differences in attitudes toward the police between men and women were found in four of the seven Los Angeles Times studies: March 7-8, 1991, May 9-12, 1992, October 9-14, 1992 and October 22-24, 1993. In addition, significant associations exist between study and attitudes toward the LAPD for men and women. Although differences between men and women in several of the studies were discovered, men and women's attitudes changed in a similar fashion over time, suggesting that this incident affected attitudes toward the LAPD the same over time.

Figure 4 - Approval of the LAPD over time by Gender

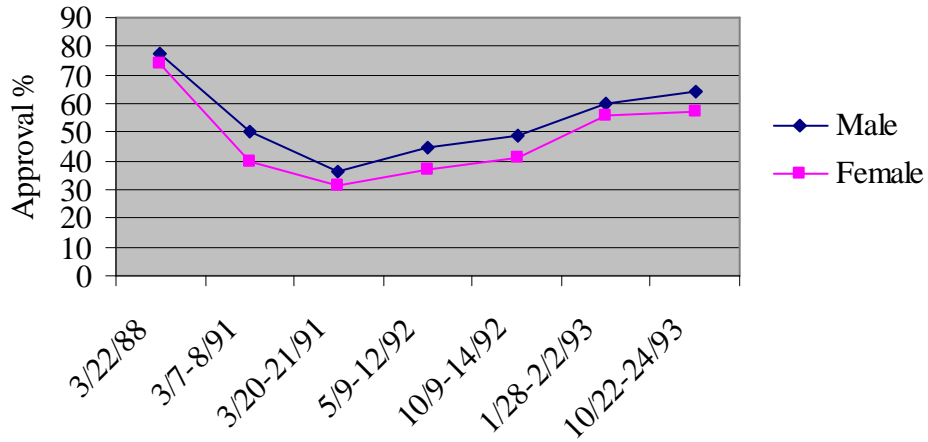


Table 3 - Chi-square and Logit analysis for Gender

Percent Approve by Date and Gender

	Study #	Study #	Study #	Study #	Study #	Study #	Study #
	148	245	247	281	300	306	325
	3/22/88	3/7-8/91	3/20-21/91	5/9-12/92	10/9-14/92	1/28-2/2/93	10/22-24/93
Men	77.3% (264)	50.2% (315)	36.0% (381)	45.0% (618)	48.5% (584)	60.1% (730)	64.0% (533)
Women	73.8% (305)	39.9% (301)	31.2% (414)	37.1% (620)	41.3% (632)	55.6% (669)	57.0% (589)
Chi-square:	0.94	6.59	1.98	7.83	6.3	2.94	5.62
ldf, p=:	n.s.	0.01	n.s.	0.01	0.01	n.s.	0.02

Association between Approval and Time

Men: Chi-Square = 168.85, df=6, p<0.000

Women: Chi-Square = 210.46, df=6, p<0.000

Difference between Men and Women in the association between Approval and Time:

Likelihood ratio Chi-Square = 2.03, df=6, p = 0.92

After the Rodney King incident, attitudes toward the LAPD for both men and women declined dramatically from pre-incident levels. By March 21, 1991, men's approval ratings dropped to 36% and women's to 31%. Since no statistical differences between men and women exist in both the pre-incident study and the March 20-21, 1991 study, which had the lowest approval ratings for men and women, our hypothesis that

women would be more likely to change their opinions in response to this incident is not supported. In addition, since attitudes for men and women changed in a similar fashion over time, our second hypothesis that the persistence of attitude change will be greater among women is also not supported.

**Education**

Previous research on attitudes toward the police show conflicting results between education and attitudes toward the police. In the first four Los Angeles Times studies, no relationship was found between attitudes toward the LAPD and educational levels. However, relations emerge in the last three studies. For each of the educational categories, a significant association between study and attitudes toward the LAPD occurred as well and attitudes changed differently for educational levels over time.

Figure 5 - Approval of the LAPD over time by Education

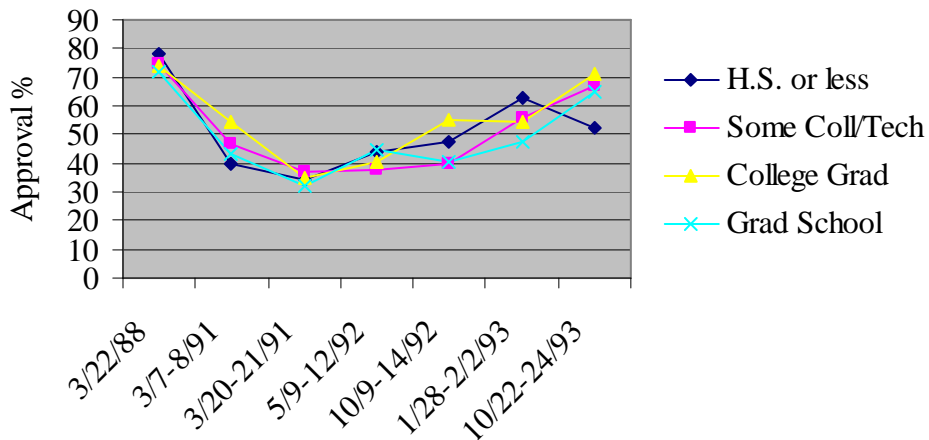


Table 4 - Chi-square and Logit analysis for Education

Percent Approve by Date and Education

	Study # 148 3/22/88	Study # 245 3/7-8/91	Study # 247 3/20-21/91	Study # 281 5/9-12/92	Study # 300 10/9-14/92	Study # 306 1/28-2/2/93	Study # 325 10/22-24/93
H.S or less	78.0% (177)	39.8% (196)	34.0% (141)	43.7% (373)	47.5% (322)	62.6% (696)	52.4% (529)
Some Coll/ Tech Sch.	74.9% (203)	46.9% (226)	36.7% (150)	37.4% (449)	39.8% (450)	55.5% (371)	67.2% (314)
College Grad	73.9% (111)	54.2% (96)	34.9% (63)	40.3% (201)	55.1% (214)	54.4% (180)	71.4% (147)
Graduate Sch	71.8% (78)	43.3% (97)	32.0% (440)	44.9% (214)	40.4% (230)	47.1% (153)	64.6% (130)
Chi-square:	1.09	5.77	1.17	4.77	16.57	15.55	28.80
3 df, p=:	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	0.00	0.00	0.00

Association between Approval and Time

High School or less:	Chi-Square = 121.67, df=6, p<0.000
Some College/Tech School:	Chi-Square = 149.87, df=6, p<0.000
College Graduate:	Chi-Square = 59.90, df=6, p<0.000
Graduate School:	Chi-Square = 75.63, df=6, p<0.000

Difference between Education levels in the association between Approval and Time:  
Likelihood ratio Chi-Square = 65.05, df=18, p = 0.00

Approval ratings initially declined for each educational level, only to begin to revert towards their original levels over time. While educational After the Rodney King incident, educational group had declines to similar levels, all educational levels were close to returning to previous levels by the last Los Angeles Times study except for those with a high school education or less.

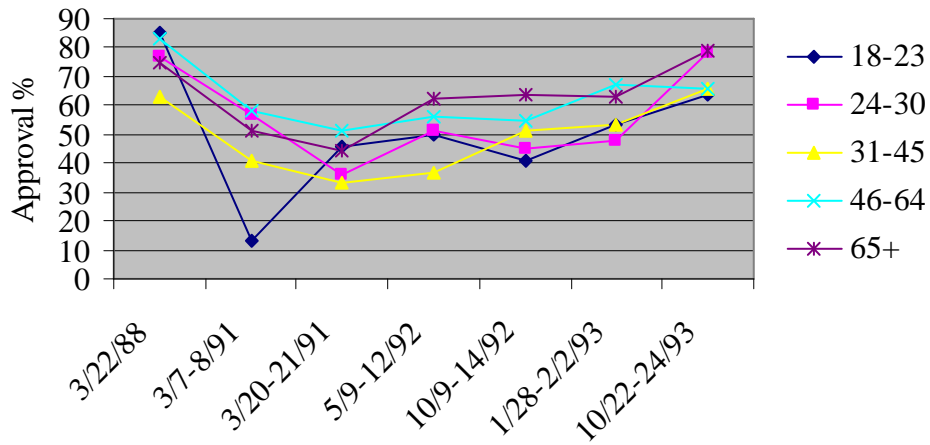
**Controlling for Race**

Since race is a significant factor in attitudes toward the police, the above analysis was repeated for whites. While we would like to control for blacks and Hispanics, not enough cases exist in many of the categories to conduct a proper analysis. Overall, the results are similar to previous findings, an initial decline in attitudes towards the police

after the Rodney King incident followed by an eventual return towards original ratings over time. In most categories, by controlling for whites, the approval percentages increased as would be expected given that the approval percentages for blacks and/or Hispanics are lower than for whites.

The findings controlling for whites are similar to our previous analysis for both age and gender (see figures 6 & 7 and tables 5 & 6).

Figure 6 - Approval of the LAPD by Age for Whites



**Table 5 - Chi-square and Logit analysis for Age controlling for Whites**

Percent Approve by Date and Age

	Study # 148 3/22/1988	Study # 245 3/7-8/91	Study # 247 3/20-21/91	Study # 281 5/9-12/92	Study # 300 10/9-14/92	Study # 306 1/28-2/2/93	Study # 325 10/22-24/93
18-23	85.0% (40)	13.0% (23)	45.5% (33)	50.0% (32)	41.1% (56)	53.2% (47)	63.8% (47)
24-30	76.7% (43)	56.5% (46)	36.2% (47)	50.6% (83)	44.9% (83)	47.6% (105)	78.4% (88)
31-45	63.2% (87)	41.3% (109)	32.7% (110)	36.8% (174)	51.4% (174)	52.5% (217)	66.1% (174)
46-64	83.2% (101)	57.6% (66)	50.6% (85)	55.5% (164)	54.9% (153)	67.4% (144)	66.4% (119)
65+	74.5% (55)	51.1% (45)	43.5% (92)	62.3% (114)	64.3% (84)	63.4% (145)	79.2% (101)
Chi-square:	12.4	17.02	7.29	21.02	10.07	14.57	9.93
4 df, p=:	0.02	0.00	n.s.	0.00	0.04	0.01	0.04

Association between Approval and Time

18-23:	Chi-Square = 37.40, df=6, p<0.000
24-30:	Chi-Square = 41.10, df=6, p<0.000
31-45:	Chi-Square = 53.34, df=6, p<0.000
46-64:	Chi-Square = 33.42, df=6, p<0.000
65+:	Chi-Square = 32.41, df=6, p<0.000

Difference between Age groups in the association between Approval and Time:

Likelihood ratio Chi-Square = 46.35, df=24, p = 0.00

**Figure 7 - Approval of the LAPD by Gender for Whites**

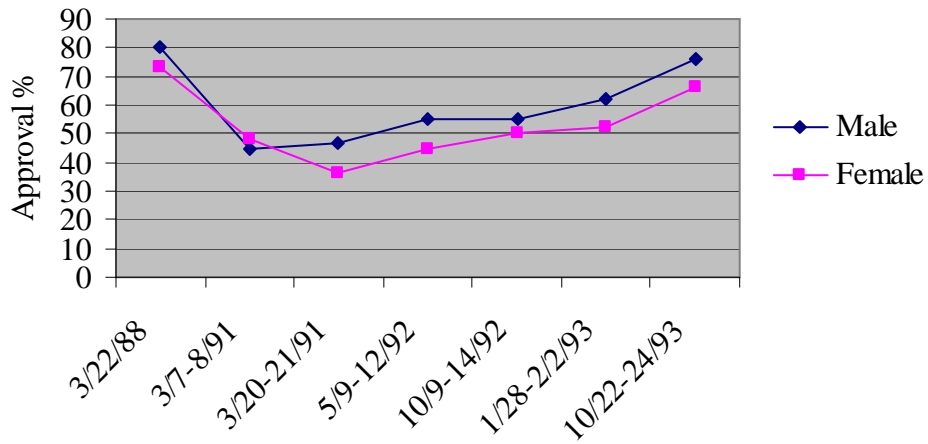


Table 6 - Chi-square and Logit analysis for Gender controlling for Whites

Percent Approve by Date and Gender

	Study # 148 3/22/1988	Study # 245 3/7-8/91	Study # 247 3/20-21/91	Study # 281 5/9-12/92	Study # 300 10/9-14/92	Study # 306 1/28-2/2/93	Study # 325 10/22-24/93
Men	80.0% (150)	45.2% (146)	46.6% (189)	54.8% (283)	54.7% (278)	62.3% (332)	75.5% (257)
Women	72.6% (175)	48.3% (143)	35.8% (179)	45.1% (284)	50.0% (284)	52.3% (327)	65.7% (274)
Chi-square:	2.44	0.27	4.43	5.34	1.23	6.81	6.1
1df, p=:	n.s.	n.s.	0.04	0.02	n.s.	0.01	0.01

Association between Approval and Time

Men: Chi-Square = 85.53, df=6, p<0.000

Women: Chi-Square = 75.53, df=6, p<0.000

Difference between Men and Women in the association between Approval and Time:

Likelihood ratio Chi-Square = 5.85, df=6, p = 0.44

For education, all the differences between educational levels disappeared when controlling for whites. No difference exists between educational level and attitudes toward the LAPD in any of the studies. However, unlike our original analysis, attitudes changed in a similar fashion for educational levels over time.

Figure 8 - Approval of the LAPD by Education for Whites

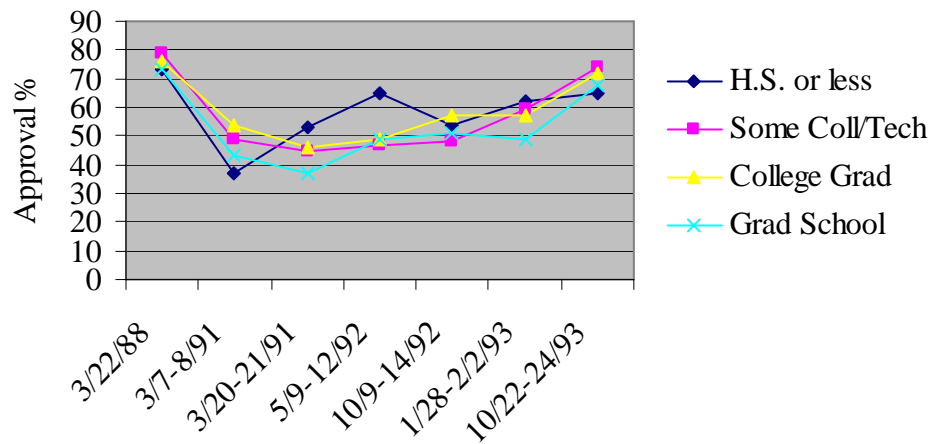


Table 7 - Chi-square and Logit analysis for Education controlling for Whites

Percent Approve by Date and Education

	Study # 148 3/22/88	Study # 245 3/7-8/91	Study # 247 3/20-21/91	Study # 281 5/9-12/92	Study # 300 10/9-14/92	Study # 306 1/28-2/2/93	Study # 325 10/22-24/93
H.S or less	72.5% (51)	36.7% (49)	52.5% (40)	64.6% (65)	53.8% (91)	61.5% (187)	64.6% (130)
Some Coll/ Tech Sch.	79.2% (125)	49.1% (110)	45.1% (71)	46.9% (194)	48.4% (192)	59.3% (209)	74.3% (183)
College Grad	75.9% (87)	53.6% (69)	46.3% (41)	49.3% (134)	57.4% (136)	56.5% (138)	72.3% (112)
Graduate Sch	73.0% (63)	42.6% (61)	36.7% (215)	48.8% (172)	51.4% (144)	49.2% (124)	68.2% (107)
Chi-square:	1.35	3.94	4.76	6.42	2.67	5.06	3.87
3 df, p=:	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

Association between Approval and Time

High School or less: Chi-Square = 18.61, df=6, p<0.005

Some College/Tech School: Chi-Square = 68.69, df=6, p<0.000

College Graduate: Chi-Square = 27.78, df=6, p<0.000

Graduate School: Chi-Square = 44.24, df=6, p<0.000

Difference between Education levels in the association between Approval and Time:

Likelihood ratio Chi-Square = 21.24, df=18, p = 0.27

## Conclusions

This paper analyzes the role of background characteristics in how a high profile police brutality case affects both attitude change toward the police and the persistence of that attitude change over time.

Our hypothesis that older age groups would be less apt to change their attitudes in response to this incident was supported. However, our hypothesis that attitude change would be more apt to persist among older individuals was refuted. It has been suggested that older cohorts are more resistant to change because they have long held beliefs that are more difficult to influence. Perhaps since these beliefs are long held, any attitude change



that occurs is short lived unless a compelling justification exists for attitude change to persist.

Contrary to our hypotheses that women would be more likely to change their attitudes toward the LAPD in response to this incident and that their attitude change would be more likely to persist, gender had no effect on attitude change or the persistence of attitude change. Men and women had similar ratings toward the police throughout the Los Angeles studies and changed over time in a similar fashion.

We also examined the relationship between attitude change and education and found that approval ratings for each educational category initially declined to similar levels after the Rodney King incident, with relations emerging in the last three studies. Attitudes also changed differently for educational levels over time. However, restricting the analysis to whites, these differences disappeared, suggesting that the original results were due to the link between education and minority status.

Overall, then there is only limited evidence that age, educational levels and gender affect attitude change and the persistence of attitude change. Indeed, what is most striking about the results is the extent to which the changes among subgroups parallel each other. While it is difficult to determine how or why changes occurred, it is most likely through the mechanisms of both message-based persuasion and social influence. The beating of Rodney King was a highly publicized event and a topic of discussion long after it concluded. As related events continued to occur; such as the Los Angeles riots and the trial of the LAPD officers, individuals were reminded of what transpired during

this incident (see appendix 1 for a time line of related events). This reinforced the attitude change that occurred. These periodic reminders provide one explanation for why the persistence of attitude change lasted long after the incident occurred. This research supports previous findings that suggest that message repetition increases the persistence of attitude change.

According to Hovland's reinforcement theory, persistence is dependent upon the retention of the informational content of the message and the incentives that may exist for its acceptance. These incentives often manifest themselves in the form of social approval. The widespread public outrage towards the actions of the police after this incident was a powerful incentive that influenced many people. People have an innate desire for social approval, which influences individuals to conform to the positive expectations of others. The similarity of these attitude changes across background characteristics suggests that these processes are quite general in their effect.

## **Appendix 1 - Time line of LAPD studies and of events related to the Rodney King incident**

### **March 20, 1988 - Study #148**

March 3, 1991 - Beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles Police Department

### **March 7-9, 1991- Study #245**

March 15, 1991 - Four police officers arraigned on charges of assault and use of excessive force

### **March 21-22, 1991 - Study #247**

March 26, 1991 - Officers pleaded not guilty

March 5, 1992 - Trial begins in another jurisdiction

April 29, 1992 - Jury acquits the four police officers and riots ensue

May 2, 1992 - Justice Department announces that a federal grand jury will investigate allegations of civil rights violations by the four police officers

### **May 9- 12, 1992 - Study #281**

May 12, 1992 - Four black males “the LA four” were arrested for beating Reginald Denny, a white truck driver, during the riots

May 30, 1992 - Willie Williams, an African-American, sworn in as LAPD police chief

August 4, 1992 - The four LAPD officers were arraigned and indicted on federal charges of civil rights violations

September 12, 1992 – White supremacist groups and counter demonstrators faced off at Simi Valley Courthouse

October 1992 – Sgt. Stacy Koon’s book “Presumed Guilty: The Tragedy of the Rodney King Affair” was published.

### **October 9-14, 1992 - Study #300**

### **January 28 - February 2, 1993 - Study #306**

February 3, 1993 – Jury selection for the civil trial in the Rodney King incident begins

February 25, 1993 – Civil trial begins

March 9, 1993 – Rodney King takes the stand for the first time and states that he drank a beer the night of the incident

April 17, 1993 - Two of the four officers were convicted

July, 1993 - A black man was tried and convicted for beating a white man during the LA riots on April 29, 1992. He received the maximum sentence allowed by law, 10 years

August 4, 1993 - The two officers convicted were sentenced and received 30 months in prison

### **October 22-24, 1993 - Study #325**

## **Appendix 2 – Data supporting the gap in attitudes toward the police between 1988 and 1991**

### **Reported Confidence in the police to protect from violent crime - 1989 & 1990**

Question: "How much confidence do you have in the ability of the police to protect you from violent crime -- A great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all?"

	<u>A great deal</u>	<u>Quite a lot</u>	<u>Not very much</u>	<u>None at all</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
1989	14%	34%	42%	8%	2%
1990	17%	35%	46%	(a)	2%

(a) - Less than 0.5%

Source: The Gallup Poll

### **Attitudes toward a police officer striking an adult male citizen - 1988-1990**

Question: "Are there any situations you can imagine in which you would approve of a policeman striking an adult male citizen?"

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
1988	73%	23%
1989	70%	24%
1990	70%	25%

Source: National Opinion Research Center, "General Social Surveys"

### **Attitudes toward a police officer striking someone who was attempting to escape from custody - 1988-1990**

Question: "Are there any situations you can imagine in which you would approve of a policeman striking someone who was attempting to escape from custody?"

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
1988	77%	18%
1989	76%	19%
1990	74%	21%

Source: National Opinion Research Center, "General Social Surveys"

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