Race, social identity, and perceptions of police bias

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Abstract

Research consistently finds that people from ethnic or racial minority backgrounds tend to view police more negatively than those from non-minority backgrounds. Some studies, however, have questioned such findings by showing that race-based effects disappear once other factors are considered. For example, Weitzer (1999) showed that racial minorities from middle class neighborhoods tend to view police just as favorably as non-minorities. Using survey data collected from 1204 Australian citizens, the present study examines how social identity processes impact on people's views of police. We find that social identity is a more important predictor of attitudes toward police than race/ethnicity. These findings have implications for policing research and for police practice.

Throughout history there has been a complex discourse between police and individuals belonging to ethnic and racial minority groups (Bird, 1992; Weitzer, 2010). While ethnic and racial factors have certainly been attributed to a noticeable negative attitude towards police, it has been shown that other factors such as socio-economic status, gender, age, policing practices across neighborhoods and cities, and where people live can explain a great deal of the variation in minority attitudes of police (Weitzer, 2010). It is therefore necessary to delve deeper than appearance alone in order to reveal what causes such negative attitudes toward police. The present study examines whether one's strength of identification with different groups in society, rather than their ethnicity or race, predicts their attitudes toward police.

Racial Minority Views of Police

Many studies have examined the effects of race and ethnicity on attitudes towards police, with many showing a significant correlation between one's race/ethnicity and negative attitudes toward police (e.g., Brown & Benedict, 2002; Murphy & Cherney, 2011; Tyler & Huo, 2002; Warren, 2011; Weitzer, 1999; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999). For example, research from the United States has shown that African-Americans and Hispanics are more likely to feel marginalized by police or are more likely to negatively evaluate police conduct than Whites. Weitzer (1999) demonstrated this when he examined the attitudes of minority groups for three types of police misconduct: street stops, verbal abuse and excessive force. For each, the African-American respondents were more likely to report negative attitudes towards police than White respondents. These findings are not unique to the United States. Research from around the world also consistently finds that racial minorities tend to be more negative in their assessments of police (e.g., Murphy & Cherney, 2011; Pickering, McCulloch, & Wright-Neville, 2008; Van Craen, 2012; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2009).

While the findings in general show that racial minorities tend to hold more negative views of police, other studies have questioned the conclusion that negative attitudes toward police can be explained by race alone. In a review of the literature, Weitzer (2010) suggested that non-racial factors might actually explain more of the variation in negative evaluations of police. For example, Weitzer (2010) noted how different groups within a specific racial group in America have been found to hold different views of police. Specifically, Puerto Ricans tend to be more critical of police than other Hispanic groups. Weitzer suggested that this might have something to do with the higher rates of poverty and deprivation experienced by Puerto Ricans relative to other Hispanic groups living in America. Weitzer also put forward the argument that different minority groups differ considerably in the degree to which they are “politically, culturally, and economically integrated into any given society and in their historical treatment by major institutions” (Weitzer, 2010, p119). He suggests their ‘mode of incorporation’ into a society influences how different minority groups feel about their place in society and how they are treated by, and react to, the police. For example, Muslims and Africans in Western nations typically experience greater forms of structural and cultural marginality than populations migrating from Anglo-saxon countries, and they also often attract greater attention from police (Weitzer, 2010). This in turn can result in individuals from these groups sharing their negative experiences with others in their community, further ingraining ‘in-group’ discourses that police are biased against them. In fact, Warren (2011) revealed that vicarious experience was very important for shaping racial minority members’ views of police.

Other studies have pointed to the influence of various attitudes and beliefs on people’s evaluations of police. In one study Lurigio, Greenleaf and Flexon (2009) found that youths’ positive attitudes for factors such as school and attitudes towards authority figures eliminated many race-based effects on attitudes toward police that had been noted in previous studies.

Research has also consistently revealed that race effects are often eliminated when people's perceptions of police fairness are taken into account. If people believe the police are more procedurally fair when dealing with the public (i.e., treat citizens with respect and fairness, are neutral in decision making, and provide people an opportunity to voice an opinion), then they are more likely to evaluate the police favorably, even after controlling for race (see Tyler & Huo, 2002; Murphy & Cherney, 2011).

What is also clear from the literature is that 'place' and 'context' matters when explaining people's views of police. Findings reported by Weitzer (1999) reveal that African-Americans who live in middle-class neighborhoods are less likely to report a negative experience or attitude towards police when compared to those dwelling in lower-class neighborhoods. A number of empirical studies also show how whites and blacks living in disadvantaged neighborhoods express similar levels of dissatisfaction with police (see Weitzer, 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999). These findings are echoed by Reiss (1971), who suggests that 'class' determines levels of perceived police bias. Like Weitzer (2010), Reiss suggests that the socio-economic deprivation of lower class individuals leads to greater alienation by police, including the higher likelihood of police abuse and misconduct being apparent in the areas they inhabit. Hence, it has been argued that people in different locales defined by their low socio-economic status are more likely to report negative attributions towards police, regardless of their race.

One particularly noteworthy observation made by Weitzer (2010, p129) was that in some societies, "citizens' orientations toward the police are heavily shaped by their loyalty to, or estrangement from, the State". This observation suggests that if people hold the State as responsible for their status or marginalization within society, then the strength of one's identification with the State may have a substantial impact upon their subsequent perceptions of police. This is because the police are important representatives of the State. The

suggestion that identification with the State may influence people's negative evaluations of police is supported by empirical findings from the procedural justice literature. Researchers have shown that when people identify strongly with the State they are more likely to view police as legitimate and entitled to be obeyed (e.g., Bradford, 2014; Bradford, Murphy & Jackson, 2014; Huo, 2003; Huo & Tyler, 2002; Murphy, 2013; Murphy & Cherney, 2011). This identity perspective raises some interesting predictions for how racial minority groups might view police and it sets the agenda for the current study.

Social identity and its relation to attitude formation

Social identity is the process of exploring and making meaning out of belonging to a particular group. In order to examine whether social identification is important for explaining why and how some racial minority group members view police, it is necessary to first identify the way in which people from racial or ethnic minority groups may see themselves.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)—drawn from social psychology—will be used as the theoretical framework guiding our arguments and analysis. It puts forward the idea that all societies contain groups, with people choosing to align themselves with one or various groups. One of the main arguments put forward by Social Identity Theory is that people categorize themselves in relation to 'in-groups' and 'out-groups'. An 'in-group' represents a group of people who identify with the same social categories as the individual, or who share a social identity based around certain shared traits, norms, or attitudes. An 'out-group', in contrast, is a group of people who share a different set of traits, norms, or attitudes to the in-group member.

To illustrate, a Lebanese immigrant living in America might be more likely to identify with their Lebanese cultural group rather than with the broader Anglo-Saxon American majority group. This is because the Lebanese 'in-group' is familiar to the immigrant and

shares the same history and many of the same values and norms the immigrant is used to. As a result of this identification process (or *self-categorization*), the individual will continue to uphold that subgroup's discourse, and will be more likely to associate with others who identify similarly. The broader White American cultural group, however, will be viewed as the 'out-group' because their values and norms are foreign and perhaps different to those espoused by the Lebanese immigrant. This might be further exacerbated if the State—who represents the norms and values of the dominant social group—has done a poor job in making the individual or their group feel valued and accepted into society. From this example, we can see that the Lebanese in-group forms part of a subordinate group nested within the overarching superordinate level group, which is the nation state of America.

Through this process of identification (or self-categorizing) with their chosen ethnic group, the Lebanese immigrant will be more likely to accept the in-group discourse, and will form biases in relation to out-group discourses that may conflict with this view. After this initial stage of identification and attitude-formation, the behavior of the individual is influenced heavily by these group-based attitudes, which are then reinforced by the social group. This results in a cyclical pattern of behavior-formation, whereby the group's discourses and behaviors influence the individual's own beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, these behaviors and attitudes can be affected by vicarious or personal experiences as a member of the ethnic group. A similar pattern of self-categorizing as a member of the in-group versus the out-group can also occur with racial minorities who are not immigrants but who instead have lived in a country for generations. The point is that group-based attitudes can be developed and reinforced within groups.

According to Social Identity Theory, then, individuals who identify more strongly with their own in-group (i.e., the subordinate minority group in our Lebanese example) will

be more likely to adopt the in-group's attitudes and beliefs with regards to police bias, and will be more likely to reject the out-group's discourse that conflicts with their own.

A more concise example would manifest itself in a person's initial confrontation with police. Suppose that an individual identifies as belonging to an ethnic minority group and is confronted by an unpleasant interaction with a police officer. If the individual were to tell their peers and family about the negative confrontation with police, the in-group's social mechanisms might immediately skew to the negative with regards to police in general, creating a shared vicarious experience where members of the minority group will be more inclined to believe that all police are against them. In contrast, a non-minority group member is largely aligned with the norms and values of the police and what the police represent. If the non-minority group member were to be confronted by rude police behavior, their perceptions about police in general might be less likely to change, given the overarching premise that the police discourse is 'on their side'. They might chalk the negative experience up to a 'one off' experience.

Social identification processes have indeed been shown to play a significant role in people's perceptions of police, with stronger ethnic identification being related to a heightened sense of discrimination (see Lee, Piquero & Steinberg, 2010). Lee et al (2010), for example, showed that African American juvenile offenders who strongly identified themselves as African-American were significantly more likely to view police critically. A growing number of studies in the procedural justice literature have also shown that social identity is important in predicting people's evaluations of police, with those identifying more strongly with their racial subgroup being more critical of police, and those identifying more strongly with the State being more likely to view police favorably (see Bradford, 2014; Bradford et al, 2014; Huo, 2003; Lee et al. 2010; Murphy, 2013; Murphy & Cherney, 2011). Importantly, some of these cited studies also show that people are more receptive to

procedural justice policing if they identify strongly with the State. Given the police are important representatives of the State, it follows that procedural justice policing may be more important to those who identify strongly with the State because such treatment by police conveys to people that they are valued members of the superordinate social group (Huo, 2003; Tyler & Lind, 1992).

One final point is worth mentioning before we move to introduce the current study. People may hold multiple affiliations with different groups. One could report that they are from an ethnic minority background (e.g., Lebanese), but they may identify weakly with that group. Instead, they may identify more strongly with America; their American identity trumps their Lebanese identity. The opposite may also hold true. For some, their Lebanese background may be more important to their sense of identity than being American. And for others, both groups may be equally important to their sense of self.

The Present Study

The present study examines both race/ethnicity as a sociological construct and social identity as a psychological construct as predictors of negative attitudes towards police. This will be accomplished using survey data from a representative national sample of Australians. We examine how racial minorities in Australia view police for two reasons. First, Weitzer (2010) argues that more race-based policing research should be conducted in non-US jurisdictions. Second, and more importantly, Australia has only accepted wide-scale immigration from non-Anglo-Saxon countries since 1973. This makes it an interesting context in which to examine the relative importance of race versus social identity on attitude formation. Given that wide-scale immigration from non-Anglo-Saxon countries has only existed for 40 years in Australia, it ensures that the historical legacy of oppression of particular ethnic groups (of which Weitzer (2010) argues is important for understanding negative evaluations of police

among some minority groups in America) does not unduly influence our findings for some of our minority group members but not others.¹

What makes the current study innovative is that it takes from the social psychological literature a major psychological construct (i.e., social identity) that has been found to reliably predict people's attitudes toward different groups in society and combines it with a more traditional sociological construct (i.e., race/ethnicity) that has been used in the criminological literature to predict people's attitudes toward police. This differs from previous studies in that the focus is not solely upon phenotypical skin color or ancestry as a determinant of ethnic affiliation. Based on the review of literature presented above, the following four hypotheses will be tested:

H1) Respondents from an ethnic minority background will be *more* critical of police than those from an Anglo-Saxon background.

H2) Respondents who identify more strongly with the superordinate nation state of Australia will be *more* likely to view police favorably than those who identify weakly with the superordinate nation state of Australia.

H3) Respondents who identify strongly with an ethnic minority subordinate group will be *less* likely to view police favorably than those who identify weakly with an ethnic minority subordinate group.

H4) Identification processes will operate similarly across both minority and non-minority group members when predicting their views of police.

Methodology

Participants and Procedure

¹ Indigenous Australians have experienced significant oppression since white settlement in Australia occurred in 1788. However, they comprise only about 3% of the current population, making it difficult to examine this group in isolation using a general population survey.

A stratified random national sample of 2088 citizens selected from the Australian electoral roll were invited to participate in a study of policing and crime in their community (stratification was based on State of residence). As voting is compulsory in Australia, and registration on the electoral roll is required by law, the electoral roll provides a representative sampling pool of Australian citizens aged 18 and over.

The survey process involved mailing a survey package to those selected. The package contained a questionnaire booklet containing approximately 360 questions, the required informed consent documentation, as well as a reply-paid envelope. Each questionnaire was also coded with a unique identifier number to ensure the confidentiality of the participant and to allow for future correspondence and follow-up of non-responders. Non-responders were contacted via mail on three separate occasions over the course of three months, before being deemed non-responsive. A total of 1,204 useable questionnaires were received, representing a raw response rate of 57.7%. However, several recipients ($N = 268$) were either unable to be contacted, were incapable of completing the survey due to travel or illness, or had died. Adjusting for these factors, an adjusted response rate of 64.9% was recorded.

Relative to population statistics, it was found that males ($N = 547$) were slightly underrepresented in comparison to females ($N = 655$) by 3.23% against Australian census data. Furthermore, those who were under the age of 45 ($N = 398$) were underrepresented in comparison to those over the age of 45 ($N = 810$). The sample also slightly overrepresented those with a post-secondary degree. This represents a standard profile of mail-based survey participants in studies conducted in Australia (see Murphy, Murphy & Mearns, 2010).

Survey Instruments

Attitudes Toward Police

For the present study we examined the following concepts. Perceptions of: a) police power; b) police legitimacy; c) police use of procedural fairness; d) police use of distributive fairness; e) perceived treatment received by police during a recent contact; and f) disengagement from police. These scales were all measured using 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) Likert scales.

The ‘police power’ scale gauged respondents’ level of support for police being given more power in the community (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.77$). ‘Police legitimacy’ assessed respondent’s levels of confidence in police and their willingness to obey directives ($\alpha = 0.73$). The ‘procedural fairness’ scale measured respondents’ general perceptions about whether police are fair and respectful when dealing with members of the public ($\alpha = 0.85$). The ‘distributive fairness’ scale assessed perceptions of equal distribution of police services across the community ($\alpha = 0.79$). The ‘treatment’ variable assessed whether respondents felt they had personally received procedural fairness from police in a recent encounter ($\alpha = 0.94$). The ‘disengagement’ scale measured the level of disengagement respondents displayed toward the law and police ($\alpha = 0.70$). Higher scores on the disengagement scale indicated greater levels of disengagement. Higher scores on the other five measures indicated more favorable assessments of police. All items used in these scales are presented in the Appendix.

Social Identity

Social identification with both the *superordinate*- and *subordinate*-level group in society (i.e., the nation vs one’s own ethnicity/race) was assessed. These two identity scales were assessed using a five-point Likert scale (1 = ‘strongly disagree’ to 5 = ‘strongly agree’), and both were measured with two items ($\alpha = .63$ and $\alpha = .83$, respectively). Higher scores reflected greater levels of social identification with the respective social group. Importantly, the bi-variate correlation between these two identity scales was insignificant ($r = -0.01$),

suggesting that identification with one group was not contingent on identification with the other.

Ethnic Minority Status

In much of the US-based literature, ethnic/racial minority groups are often examined in separate groups based on race. It is not uncommon to see researchers comparing how White participants view police in comparison to African-Americans or Hispanics. The racial composition of Australia is extremely heterogeneous, with few dominant ethnic minority groups. A combination of this heterogeneity and an inadequate survey sample size makes creating distinct racial groups from an Australian general population sample difficult. Hence, to ascertain whether a respondent belonged to an ethnic or racial minority group, five separate questions from the survey were utilized: 1) country of individual's birth; 2) country of father's birth; 3) country of mother's birth; 4) ancestry (allowing for up to two ancestries to be listed); and 5) language spoken at home. Minority status was applied if the individual reported being from a non-Anglo Saxon background. If a participant indicated that their country of birth was *not* Australia, however their country of origin was an Anglo-Saxon country (e.g., United Kingdom or France), then the individual was categorized as belonging to the Anglo-Saxon majority group (coded as 0). Overseas-born participants who reported coming from countries such as China or India were coded as being an ethnic or racial minority (coded as 1). If an individual's country of origin was Australia, but their ancestry was reported as non-Anglo Saxon (e.g., Egypt, China, India), then the individual was also allocated into the ethnic minority category (coded as 1). This dichotomy created the 'ethnic minority status' variable. Within the overall sample, the ethnic minority group comprised 19% ($N = 223$) of the total subject pool, while the Anglo-Saxon majority group comprised 81% of the sample ($N = 981$).

Control variables

Finally, various control variables were also measured. The control variables were: number of contacts with police in preceding 12 months, age, gender (0=female; 1=male), educational attainment (1=no formal schooling to 10=postgraduate degree), household income (\$AUS), home ownership (0=renting; 1=own home/mortgage), marital status (0=unmarried; 1=married), employment status (0=unemployed; 1=employed), number of children living at home, number of people living in the household, and perceived magnitude of crime problem in one's neighborhood (1=very low to 5=very high scale).

Results

T-tests: Are ethnic minorities more critical of police?

To assess whether the ethnic minority group respondents were more critical of police as a whole than the non-minority respondents, a series of independent groups t-tests were conducted on the six attitude scales. Table 1 shows significant differences for five of the six scales, with the minority group being more critical of police than the non-minority group. Specifically, minorities were less likely to see police as being procedurally or distributively fair, were less likely to experience procedural fairness during a personal encounter with police, and were less likely to see police as legitimate. Minorities were also more likely to report higher levels of disengagement. Table 1 also confirms that the minority group was more likely than the majority group to identify strongly with their ethnic/racial subordinate group. There was no statistical difference between the two groups in their level of identification with Australia; all respondents reported strong identification with Australia. Importantly, there was no significant difference in the number of personal contacts with police between minority and non-minority respondents.

[insert Table 1 here]

Regression Analyses: Predicting Attitudes Towards Police

Table 1 demonstrates that ethnic minorities in Australia are generally more critical of police. This confirms other international research. However, ethnicity was examined in isolation in Table 1. In order to examine whether ethnicity continued to predict negative attitudes about police when other known predictors were also considered, a series of six hierarchical regressions were performed. In each of the six regression models the ethnic minority status variable and various control variables were entered in Step 1 to predict attitudes to police. The two social identity scales were added in Step 2 to examine how social identity processes influenced attitudes over and above the control variables. Step 3 then inserted two interaction terms: the first between ethnicity and superordinate identity; the second between ethnicity and subordinate identity. These interactions were analysed to ascertain whether identity processes influence people's attitudes about police similarly for both minority and non-minority group respondents. Table 2 presents the results predicting perceptions of procedural fairness, perceived treatment, and distributive fairness, while Table 3 presents the results predicting police power, police legitimacy and disengagement. For the legitimacy regression we also inserted the general procedural justice variable at Step 3 as a predictor of legitimacy, followed by the two interaction terms at Step 4. We did this because prior research has shown procedural fairness to be a strong predictor of people's evaluations of police legitimacy.

[insert Table 2 here]

[insert Table 3 here]

Table 2 and 3 reveal some interesting findings. With respect to the control variables, older respondents were more likely to believe police use procedural fairness in general and were more likely to endorse granting police greater powers. Younger respondents were also more disengaged than older respondents. Age had no effect on perceptions of police

legitimacy, distributive fairness or perceptions of procedural justice during a police encounter. There was a gender effect on procedural fairness, treatment, distributive fairness, power and disengagement, whereby women were more likely than men to think police were procedurally fair and feel they received procedural fairness during a recent interaction with police. Women were also more likely to view police as distributively fair and were more likely to endorse giving police greater powers. Women were also less likely to be disengaged than men.

Interestingly, measures of socio-economic status had mixed results. Income level, home ownership status and employment status had no effect on any of the attitudinal variables. Yet education level did have some significant effects. Those with more education were more likely to view police as distributing their services unfairly in the community, and were less likely to believe police use procedural justice. More educated respondents were also less likely to endorse police being given more power. Prior contact with police did not predict attitudes toward police, but those who felt their neighborhood was characterized by more crime were more likely to condone giving police more power.

When taking into account all other control variables in the model, ethnicity only continued to predict three of the dependent variables. Minority group members were less likely than majority group members to view police as distributing their services equally across the population, they were less likely to view police as legitimate, and they were more disengaged.

The two social identity scales were added into each of the six models at Step 2. As can be seen in both Table 2 and 3, the superordinate identity scale predicted all six attitude scales. Respondents who identified more strongly with the superordinate group (i.e., Australia) were more likely to view police as procedurally and distributively fair, were more

likely to feel police had treated them fairly in a recent encounter, were more likely to condone granting police more power, were more likely to view police as legitimate, and were less likely to be disengaged. The subordinate identity scale, in contrast, only had significant effects on two of the dependant variables. Not surprisingly, those respondents who identified strongly with a subordinate ethnic group were less likely to see police as distributing their services fairly across the population, and they reported being more disengaged than those who identified weakly with their subordinate group. Importantly, superordinate identity was found to be more important than either ethnicity or subordinate identity for predicting attitudes toward police. Taken together our findings suggest that social identification is more important than race for predicting negative attitudes toward police (at least in an Australian context).

Table 3 also shows that procedural justice is a strong predictor of police legitimacy; those who felt the police are more procedurally fair are also more likely to view police as legitimate. This supports prior research. Even with this strong relationship, however, we still found that the superordinate identity scale was a significant predictor of legitimacy, explaining about 10% of the unique variation in legitimacy.

In Step 3 we introduced interaction terms between identity and ethnicity. None of the interactions between superordinate identity and ethnicity were significant, suggesting that superordinate identity processes did not operate differently across ethnic minority and non-minority group respondents. However, two of the subordinate identity by ethnicity interaction effects did reach significance (significant effects on treatment and disengagement). The significant interaction terms suggest that subordinate identity mattered a great deal more to ethnic minority group members when predicting their level of disengagement and when predicting how they viewed the treatment they received during a police encounter. In

general, however, it appears that social identity processes tend to operate similarly across the two different groups.

Discussion

The present study examined how both ethnicity and social identity processes impact upon people's attitudes to police. Before discussing the findings we should first note a number of limitations inherent in our research. While the limitations are not fatal to the outcomes of this study, they should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, the sampling frame for our study was taken from the Australian electoral roll. This limits our sample to those who are Australian citizens. While 19% of our respondents identified as belonging to an ethnic minority group, their attitudes toward police may have been tempered by their citizenship status. Had we incorporated a sample of non-citizens we may have obtained different results, with ethnicity and subordinate identity perhaps contributing more prominently to attitude formation. Second, when examining the ancestral background of our minority group members it was revealed that they came from many different racial and ethnic backgrounds. As a result of this heterogeneity and the limited sample size ($N=223$), the ethnic minority group had to be considered as one group. Such an approach prevents our ability to explore differences in attitudes across different ethnic/racial minority groups.

We should also acknowledge the relatively low R^2 values in several of our regression models. These values indicate that other factors not included in our models are important for predicting people's attitudes toward police. In the procedural justice literature, for example, authors have typically found that procedural fairness is a very strong predictor of police legitimacy and our findings in Table 3 support this. In fact, our R^2 value increased from 0.14 to 0.40 when we included the procedural fairness variable into our model, suggesting existing attitudes may be more important than identity for predicting evaluations of police. Despite

these limitations, our study does have a number of interesting findings that have implications for both research and for police practice more generally.

Summary of Findings

Past research has tended to find that race/ethnicity is a significant contributor of people's views of police. In our study, we also found that people from an ethnic minority background were significantly more critical of police than those from a non-minority background, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. However, the present study also found that social identity was a significant predictor of people's attitudes of police. Controlling for the race/ethnicity of the respondent, as well as other background factors, we found that those who identified more strongly with Australia and Australian culture were significantly more likely to see police favorably across the attitude variables examined, providing confirmation of Hypothesis 2. With regards to the subordinate identity variable, the effects were mixed. While we found that a stronger subordinate identity predicted lower perceptions distributive fairness and greater levels of disengagement, the strength of the effects were weaker than for the superordinate identity variable. These findings partially support Hypothesis 3; strong identification with an ethnic subgroup in society can be related to more negative evaluations of police, but the results are less reliable.

What is of particular interest is the finding that social identity appeared to be more important in predicting people's views of police than ethnicity/race. While there is no denying that race effects are certainly present in forming one's attitudes toward police, Tables 2 and 3 indicate that ethnicity alone is not sufficient to predict negative attitudes. In fact, when other factors are taken into account, race tends to play little role in predicting Australian's attitudes toward police. In our study superordinate identification appears to be the more reliable indicator of how people will view police. Importantly, our interaction

effects also revealed that superordinate and subordinate identity processes tend to operate similarly across both minority and non-minority groups (general support for Hypothesis 4).

Implications of the Findings

So what can our findings tell us about research on police-race relations and for policing practice more generally? First, our results call into question the conclusion that racial and ethnic minority group members will always be more critical of police. Our findings are therefore not dissimilar to those reported by Weitzer (1999, 2010) and Weitzer and Tuch (1999), who found that race failed to predict Americans' attitudes of police when socio-economic status, location, or contextual factors were taken into account.

Our findings specifically point to the value of researchers considering how individuals from ethnic and racial minority backgrounds *see* themselves within society. We would argue that simply considering ethnicity or race in isolation obscures the potential contribution of identity-related factors to attitude formation. As noted in the Introduction, an ethnic minority group member may certainly see themselves as a member of a minority group, but they might also see themselves as part of the larger group in which they live. What may be more important to them is their sense of identity with the superordinate level group. For such an individual, their race/ethnicity may become less relevant to their attitude formation. Part of their discourse of being an Australian might therefore encourage them to align themselves with the norms and values of Australian society, which includes aligning themselves with the objectives of important institutions of social control (i.e., police).

As was discussed earlier, Social Identity Theory provides a framework for making predictions about how different groups in society form opinions that align with their own identity group. The theory suggests that individuals who identify more strongly with an in-group are more likely to adopt the in-group's attitudes and beliefs. If those attitudes involve

the belief that police are on their side, then an individual will be more likely to share a similar view. If the in-group views police as inherently biased, then the individual may view police as biased. Hence, it depends upon which group the individual identifies most closely with. In our study it appeared that people were more likely to identify strongly with Australia than they were with their own subordinate ethnic group. Given that police are important representatives of the norms and values of a society, it follows that those who identify more strongly with the dominant group in society will be more likely to ascribe positive sentiment towards its important representatives.

However, one of our key findings does deserve further attention. Why is it that superordinate identity was more important in our sample than subordinate identity? Given past research has shown ethnic and racial minority groups to be more critical of police, we might have expected the subordinate identity variable to be a stronger predictor of negative attitudes than the superordinate identity variable (see Lee et al, 2010). We found the opposite. One possible explanation is simple. All of the respondents in our sample were Australian citizens. Hence, seeing oneself primarily as an Australian may have figured more prominently in our sample. Had we used a sample of non-citizens or new immigrants our results may have been different, with subordinate group identification becoming more important. A second explanation relates to the value we place on multiculturalism in Australia. This explanation is more speculative and would require empirical testing to validate. Despite only opening up its immigration policies to non-white immigrants since 1973, Australia is a country that now places great value on multiculturalism. Hence, the culture and values that those from a non-Anglo Saxon background bring to Australia is embraced. The philosophy of acceptance of differences may lead minorities living in Australia to view being Australian as a positive thing. Identifying strongly with Australia might therefore be held up as something to take pride in. While identification with one's own

ethnic group might still be important to some, our findings suggest that a subordinate group identity is not as important to people in Australia as their superordinate identity (see low mean scores for the subordinate identity scale in Table 1). Whether these findings can be replicated beyond Australia remains to be seen.

What is clear from the present study is that identification with the superordinate nation state of Australia is important for fostering positive attitudes toward police, and that this process works similarly across both minority and non-minority groups. The question that arises from such a finding is: can police officers do anything to promote a stronger sense of national or superordinate identity among minority groups who may not identify strongly with their country and its values? The answer is yes. Recent research suggests that authorities can influence one's national identity if they use procedural justice during encounters with members of the public. Using longitudinal survey data, Bradford et al (2014) were able to demonstrate that police use of procedural justice could enhance respondents' sense of Australian identity. Bradford et al (2014) argued that the way in which police treat citizens can be particularly influential in communicating to people the extent of their inclusion within the "collectivity". They noted that fair treatment communicates to people that police respect them and see them as worthwhile members of the community, "thus promoting identification by generating a positive sense of the individual's place in society" (Bradford et al., 2014, p528). Hence, the 'mode of incorporation' used by authorities in their dealings with ethnic/racial minority groups is important (see Weitzer, 2010)

Despite acknowledging the importance of police using procedural justice to build a stronger national identity, we should not be naïve enough to believe that procedural justice policing can be used in all situations. Police can find themselves in situations where there may be little choice but to use an aggressive response. Such a response is likely to be perceived by some as racially motivated. The violent clashes in Australia in 2012 between

police and young Muslim men demonstrates how ethnic community leaders can work with police to promote identification with police and with a country's values. Muslim leaders were quick to side with police to condemn the violent actions of crowds protesting against a controversial film. The quick and firm response by the leaders quelled the Muslim community's sentiment that the police were behaving in a racist manner. One Melbourne Imam stated, "young Muslims have to remember they are Australians first and Muslims second, before acting violently against police or their community. Before everything we are Australian" (Gosper, 2012). By working more closely with ethnic community leaders to promote identification with a nation, and a sense that ethnic minority groups are equally valued and will be treated with respect, the police in turn will be able to be more effective in building positive national identities and positive sentiment toward police.

To conclude, our Australian study has shown that social identity processes are important, in fact more important than race, in shaping people's attitudes toward police. This is important because police are unable to change someone's racial background but they are able to work with minorities to influence how they identify themselves in society.

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Appendix

The survey items used to construct the scales are presented below (*denotes reverse coding of an item prior to forming scales).

Procedural Fairness

- Police treat people as if they can be trusted to do the right thing
- Police make decisions based upon facts, not their personal biases or opinions
- The police usually give an honest explanation for their decisions
- Police respect people's rights when decisions are made
- Police treat everyone equally

Perceived Treatment (only relevant for those who had contact with police in preceding 12 months – N=443)

Thinking about your most recent contact with police:

- were the police professional?
- were the police polite/respectful/courteous
- were the police approachable/friendly?
- were the police helpful?
- were the police fair?
- did the police use clear simple language?

Distributive Fairness

- Police sometimes give people from specific ethnic backgrounds less help than they give others.*
- Police are sometimes more likely to detain people from specific ethnic backgrounds

than people from an Anglo-Saxon background.*

- Police provide better service to the rich than to the average citizen.*

Police Power

- If we give enough power to the police, they will be able to effectively control crime.
- Police should be allowed to hold a person suspected of a serious crime until they get enough evidence to officially charge them.
- Police should have the power to do whatever they think is needed to fight crime.
- Police should have the right to stop and question people in the street.
- Police have too much power*

Police Legitimacy

- I respect police
- I have confidence in police
- On the whole, police officers are honest
- I question the legitimacy of the police's authority over me*
- Most police are dishonest*
- I feel a moral obligation to obey police
- People should accept the decisions of the police even if they think they are wrong

Disengagement

- If I find out I am not obeying the law, I'm not going to lose any sleep over it.
- I personally don't think there is much that can happen to me if I choose to disobey the law.
- I don't care if I'm not doing the right thing by police.

- I personally don't think there is much the police can do to make me obey the law if I don't want to

Superordinate Identity

- Do you see yourself firstly and mainly as a member of the Australian community?
- Is it important for you to be seen by others as a member of the Australian community?

Subordinate Identity

- Do you see yourself firstly and mainly as a member of your racial/ethnic group?
- Is it important to you to be seen by others as a member of your racial/ethnic group?

Table 1

Independent samples t-test to compare the mean attitudes of the ethnic minority group to the majority group

	<i>Minority Status (SD)</i>	
	Majority (81%)	Minority (19%)
<i>Police Power</i>	3.27 (.71)	3.27 (.67)
<i>Perceived Treatment</i>	3.91 (.64)	3.76 (.72)*
<i>Police Legitimacy</i>	3.87 (.50)	3.71 (.49)***
<i>Distributive Fairness</i>	3.08 (.76)	2.85 (.73)***
<i>Procedural Fairness</i>	3.35 (.62)	3.25 (.59)*
<i>Disengagement</i>	1.93 (.56)	2.09 (.63)***
<i>Superordinate identity</i>	4.06 (.66)	3.99 (.71)
<i>Subordinate identity</i>	2.23 (.83)	2.52 (.91)***
<i>Age</i>	57.41 (14.77)	50.51 (14.76)***
<i>Education</i>	5.86 (2.28)	6.27 (2.34)*
<i>Income (\$AUS)</i>	82.71 (52.18)	80.76 (50.32)
<i>Contact with police in past 12mths</i>	1.13 (9.88)	0.62 (1.12)
<i>No. of children at home</i>	0.46 (2.09)	0.65 (1.03)
<i>No. of people living in house</i>	1.96 (0.94)	2.28 (1.03)***
<i>Crime problem in neighborhood</i>	2.40 (0.79)	2.27 (0.90)*
<i>Gender (female)</i>	54%	56%
<i>Home ownership (own/mortgage)</i>	87%	84%
<i>Employment status (employed)</i>	55%	62%
<i>Marital status (married/defacto)</i>	75%	72%

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

Table 2

Regression models: Using control variables, ethnic minority status and social identity to predict perceptions of procedural fairness, perceived treatment and distributive fairness

Predictor	Dependent Variable								
	Procedural fairness			Perceived treatment			Distributive fairness		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Age	.15***	.14***	.14***	.07	.08	.06	-.00	.01	.01
Gender (0=female)	-.06	-.06	-.06	-.14**	-.14**	-.15**	-.10**	-.09**	-.09**
Income	-.04	-.04	-.04	-.01	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.03
Education Level	-.11**	-.08*	-.09**	-.04	-.04	-.03	-.10**	-.09**	-.09**
Prior police contact	.02	.02	.02	-.03	-.03	-.03	.01	.01	.01
Home ownership (0=no)	.06	.04	.04	.00	-.02	-.02	.04	.01	.02
Marital status (0=unmarried)	.07	.05	.05	.03	.02	.02	.07	.06	.06
Employment (0=unemployed)	.02	.01	.01	-.05	-.05	-.06	.08*	.08*	.08*
No. of children in house	.05	.05	.04	.02	.03	.03	.03	.04	.04

No. of people in house	.02	.02	.02	-.02	-.00	.00	-.03	-.02	-.02
Crime problem	-.01	-.00	-.00	-.05	-.03	-.04	.05	.05	.05
Ethnicity (0=majority)	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.04	-.03	-.04	-.10***	-.08*	-.06*
Superordinate ID	-	.21***	.20***	-	.14**	.12*	-	.17***	.20***
Subordinate ID	-	-.03	-.01	-	-.07	-.02	-	-.12***	-.12***
Super. id x ethnicity	-	-	.01	-	-	.06	-	-	-.06
Sub. id x ethnicity	-	-	-.04	-	-	-.13*	-	-	-.01
R ²	.06	.10	.10	.04	.06	.08	.05	.09	.09
F change	5.45***	23.62***	.72	1.26	4.93**	3.27*	3.95***	23.71***	1.57
df	1012	1010	1008	387	385	383	1012	1010	1008

Note: Predictor entries are standardized regression coefficients (β).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3

Regression models: Using control variables, ethnic minority status and social identity to predict perceptions of police power, police legitimacy and disengagement

Predictor	Dependent Variable									
	Police power			Police legitimacy				Disengagement		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Age	.12***	.09*	.09*	.08*	.07	-.01	-.01	-.06	-.08*	-.08*
Gender (0=female)	-.08*	-.07*	-.07*	-.06	-.05	-.02	-.02	.14***	.13***	.13***
Income	-.05	-.04	-.04	.03	.03	.06	-.06*	-.02	-.02	-.02
Education Level	-.26***	-.21***	-.21***	.03	.06	.11***	.11***	-.05	-.05	-.05
Prior police contact	-.03	-.04	-.04	.02	.01	.01	.01	-.04	-.04	-.04
Home ownership (0=no)	.04	.02	.02	.05	.03	.00	.00	-.04	-.01	-.01
Marital status (0=unmarried)	.07	.05	.05	.07*	.05	.02	.02	-.09*	-.07*	-.07
Employment (0=unemployed)	-.02	-.03	-.03	-.00	-.01	-.02	-.02	-.05	-.04	-.04
No. of children in house	.05	.04	.04	.03	.03	.00	.00	.05	.04	.04

No. of people in house	-.01	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.03	-.03	.05	.03	.03
Crime problem	.10***	.10***	.10***	-.05	-.05	-.05	-.05	.02	.00	.01
Ethnicity (0=majority)	.05	.05	.05	-.11***	-.09**	-.08***	-.09***	.08**	.05	.04
Superordinate ID	-	.31***	.31***	-	.30***	.19***	.18***	-	-.22***	.21***
Subordinate ID	-	.04	.03	-	-.06	-.04	-.03	-	.17***	.13***
Procedural fairness	-	-	-	-	-	.56***	.56***	-	-	-
Super. id x ethnicity	-	-	.00	-	-	-	.03	-	-	-.03
Sub. id x ethnicity	-	-	.03	-	-	-	-.01	-	-	.09*
R ²	.14	.23	.23	.04	.14	.42	.42	.05	.12	.13
F change	13.46***	63.07***	.42	3.73***	53.82***	489.81***	.66	4.34***	44.66***	3.71*
df	1029	1027	1025	1012	1010	1009	1007	1031	1029	1027

Note: Predictor entries are standardized regression coefficients (β).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$