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# The grievance-identity relationship: Understanding the role of identity processes and stigmatisation on Muslims' perceptions of terrorist grievances

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## Abstract

Believing that terrorist grievances are valid can strengthen terrorists' legitimacy. As countering terrorism is high on political agendas worldwide, understanding the antecedents of such beliefs in the general population may spotlight how support for terrorist groups can be validated. Using survey data from 800 Muslims living in Australia, this study discerns how stigmatisation and social identity processes are associated with Muslims' perceptions that Islamist terrorists have valid grievances. Findings suggest social identity moderates the effect of feeling stigmatised on believing terrorist grievances are valid. Specifically, strong national identification mitigates the positive association between feeling stigmatised and supporting Islamist grievances.

**Keywords**: social identity; stigmatisation; Muslims; politicised grievances; countering violent extremism

## Introduction

Countering violent extremism remains an international priority for security agencies (Harris-Hogan, Barrelle, & Zammit, 2016). Attacks since September 11th 2001 in particular have instilled widespread fear amongst citizens and generated concern within governments worldwide. Resultantly, Muslims have come under intense scrutiny from Western governments through efforts to prevent Islamist terrorism. While right-wing terrorist attacks have increased in recent years (see e.g., Dean, Bell, & Vakhitova, 2016), Islamist terror alerts and disproportionate scrutiny towards Muslims has arguably *stigmatised* Muslims (Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2013a, 2013b). This has been further perpetuated by non-Muslims' tendencies to associate Islam with terrorism, and suggestions that Muslim and Western values are incompatible (Murphy, Madon, & Cherney, 2018a).

Stigma has negative consequences for minority groups, including reducing one's sense of belonging in society (Lyons-Padilla, Gelfand, Mirahmadi, Farooq, & van Egmond, 2015). Stigma can decrease Muslims' identification with mainstream society and may lead some to condone Islamist grievances (Crenshaw, 1981; Ghatak & Prins, 2017). This paper examines the association between stigma and Australian Muslims' validation of terrorist grievances. It further tests how social identity processes interact with stigma to fuel or mitigate the validation of terrorists' grievances.

### *Support for terrorist grievances*

Islamist terrorist groups use grievance narratives to generate support for their cause (Al Raffie, 2012). Grievance narratives communicate the "ideology, values,

justifications, or core concerns to sympathisers, would-be members, and the greater public" (Braddock & Horgan, 2016, p. 381). Islamists' grievance narratives highlight injustices, persecution, victimisation and marginalisation fuelled by socio-political factors such as international conflicts and foreign policies (Cherney & Murphy, 2017). Perceptions that Muslims are inhibited from expressing their religiosity for fear of further scrutiny exacerbates Muslims' sense of injustice (Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, & Ulleberg, 2012). Many grievances and injustices are valid. Yet, by appealing to such grievances, terrorist groups can legitimise their use of violence (Crenshaw, 1981; Ghatak & Prins, 2017).

Sympathy for such grievances may not extend to condoning violence, but can bolster terrorists' legitimacy and undermine counterterrorism efforts (e.g., Murphy, Madon, & Cherney, 2018b). Support for terrorist grievances among the wider Muslim community may put disenfranchised Muslim youth at greater risk of radicalisation (Kamans, Gordijn, Oldenhuis, & Otten, 2009). Grievance narratives present a challenge for countering extremism, thus understanding the factors that lead people to accept them is critical. Few studies have empirically examined how grievances among Muslims are formed, countered or prevented. Studies often focus on drivers of support for terrorism itself (Cherney & Murphy, 2019).

Cherney and Murphy (2017) used various predictors to examine why some Muslims sympathise with Islamist terrorists' grievances. The study used survey data from Muslims living in Australia and found that the strongest predictor of believing terrorists have valid grievances was participants' beliefs regarding jihad. Participants who believed that jihad supports violence to achieve certain goals were most sympathetic to Islamists' grievances. The study also showed that strong national identification was associated with less sympathy for terrorist grievances. One factor that

Cherney and Murphy (2017) did not consider was how stigma could explain Muslims' beliefs that terrorist grievances are valid.

***Stigma as a possible Antecedent to Validating Terrorist Grievances***

Stigmatisation denotes the unfair association of certain groups of people with negative stereotypes (Link & Phelan, 2001). Stigma is contextual and based on a perceived attribute that devalues a person's social identity (Crocker et al., 1998; Goffman, 1963). A marker of stigma is group membership (e.g., Muslim). Muslims are often linked to terrorism by police, the media and the wider public (Cherney & Murphy, 2016; Victoroff, Adelman, & Matthews, 2012). Scrutiny from these groups can cause Muslims to feel stigmatised (Murphy et al., 2018b).

Muslim stigmatisation has become commonplace in Western nations, with Islamophobia and anti-Muslim attitudes rising since 9/11 (Akbarzadeh, 2016). Negative perceptions of Muslims have dominated political agendas, media discourses, and public sentiment, stemming from concerns that Muslims are a threat (Breen-Smyth, 2014). Within Australia, federal politicians have made repeated calls to ban Muslim immigration (Norman, 2016) and "capitalise on…the inability of Muslim migrants to integrate" (Taylor, 2011). Similarly, negative media portrayals have exacerbated anti-Muslim prejudice (Poynting & Perry, 2007). These attitudes can elicit stigma; thus some Muslims may come to view terrorist grievances as valid (Cherney & Murphy, 2017).

According to Piazza (2012), conditions are more conducive for grievances when individuals feel their group is disadvantaged, alienated or 'othered'. People who feel stigmatised may support terrorist grievances to highlight their disenfranchisement (Ghatak & Prins, 2017). However, the impact of stigma can depend on how much an individual identifies with the stigmatised group or the group imparting the stigma

(Sellers & Shelton, 2003), a fact which can be explained by Social Identity Theory (SIT).

### *Social Identity Theory: A framework for understanding terrorist grievances*

SIT explains how people respond to prejudice (Tajfel, 1982). SIT proposes that individuals assign themselves to groups based on perceived similarities or differences. Attachment to a group determines one's social identity salience. Individuals similar to oneself belong to the 'in-group', while others have an 'out-group' status (Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010). People feel a sense of belonging to in-groups, yet out-groups can be viewed as threatening (Tajfel, 1982). Hence, an individual's ability to nurture a specific self-identity hinges on others facilitating the individual's sense of belonging. Bradford, et al. (2014, p. 529) suggest that "people's identities develop in reflexive reaction to the opinion of others." This mirrors Cooley's (1922) concept of the *looking-glass self* which suggests one's identity is based on how others view them.

Individuals can also be members of various groups. Muslims' identities, for example, are diverse and often reflect varying cultures, ethnicities, races and ideologies (Brooks, 2018). Identification with different social groups helps explain how individuals respond to stigma (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Importantly, the strength of one's connection to a stigmatised group can explain why reactions to stigma may vary (Victoroff et al., 2012). Individuals who strongly identify with a minority group perceived as an 'out-group' may be more sensitive to hostility and feel more stigmatised (Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

As Muslims are often confronted by negative portrayals of their group, their degree of identification with that group may determine their feelings of stigma (Victoroff et al., 2012). Blackwood and colleagues (2013a, 2013b) examined airport

authorities' treatment of Scottish-Muslims, finding many felt treated as potential terror suspects during searches. Participants reported feeling angry and stigmatised as a Muslim, despite identifying as Scottish. Participants who felt threatened by authorities also empathised with grievances expressed by other disaffected Muslims (Blackwood et al., 2013b).

Prior studies about attitudes towards terrorism more broadly find an association between identity and support for terrorism. Tausch and colleagues (2009) measured national and religious identification among their sample of British Muslims. Findings revealed strong national identification predicted less support for terrorism. However, strong identification with Islam was not associated with perceptions of terrorism. In contrast, Zhirkov and colleagues (2014) found respondents who strongly identified as Muslim were more inclined to support terrorism. Examining survey responses from Muslims in Western Europe, Zhirkov et al. (2014) argued that support for terrorism might occur from perceived discrimination felt more acutely by those who identified strongly as Muslims.

These studies suggest identifying with the broader national group is important for preventing terrorist legitimisation (Tausch et al., 2009). However, urging minority groups to identify with their national group to the exclusion of their minority identity is likely to be counterproductive (Bilali, 2014) and ignores the role of others in shaping these identities. We argue that combining an individual's multiple identities may protect individuals from validating terrorist grievances.

### *Does adopting multiple identities protect against grievances?*

The notion of multiple identities refers to an individual's ability to nurture distinct social identities simultaneously (Glasford & Dovidio, 2011). Multiple identities

may enhance intergroup relations because identification with a broader social group gives individuals a sense of inclusion, while identification with one's minority group(s) ensures their minority identity is protected (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2009). However, an individual's ability to identify with numerous identities depends on accepting other group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As such, it is important to acknowledge the role of others in group identification.

Adopting multiple identities may also protect against intergroup stigma (Dovidio, Gaertner, Pearson, & Riek, 2005). Specifically, multiple identification relates to more positive inter-group evaluations (Velasco González, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008), which may mitigate the harms associated with stigma. Scholars conceptualise multiple identification in varying ways. For example, Dunn, et al. (2015, p. 12) argue that what they term *hyphenated identity* enables immigrants to "accentuate and de-emphasise origin and current national identities depending on context." In this sense, identifying with different groups facilitates a greater balance between an individual's differing identities and protection against identity threats. Similarly, Bhabha (2012) suggests *hybrid identification* enables individuals to nurture differences and potential conflicts in their cultures without assuming cultural hierarchy. Other researchers suggest that individuals do not necessarily need to identify strongly with their numerous identities. For example, Simon and Ruhs (2008) argue that one can hold multiple identities even when they identify with one identity more than others. Simon and Ruhs (2008) conceptualise dual identity as a person's simultaneous identification with two different types of identity (e.g., Muslim and Australian). Despite different operationalisations of multiple identities, studies highlight the positive outcomes associated with multiple identification (Klandermans, Van der Toorn, & Van Stekelenburg, 2008).

Research within Australia suggests Muslims often identify themselves as both Muslims and Australians (Dunn et al., 2015; Woodlock, 2011). For example, among a sample of Muslims living in Sydney, Dunn et al. (2015) explored the strength of Australian and Muslim identities and the impact of racism on Muslims' feelings of belonging, exclusion, and resilience. Participants reported feeling included, having a strong sense of Australian and Muslim identity, and supporting diversity. Similarly, in their study of Muslims living in New South Wales and Victoria, Woodlock (2011) reported that their Muslim participants held a strong dual identity as Australian and Muslim. Moreover, despite feeling their group was stigmatised, most participants felt included in Australia and were committed to uphold Australian laws and customs. While not unique to the Australian context (see e.g., Hopkins, 2011) these studies highlight the importance of multiple identification among minority groups.

Additionally, two studies have examined the relationship between dual identification and radicalisation. Lyons-Padilla et al. (2015) tested how national and religious identity predicted radicalisation. Using a sample of American-Muslims, the authors found individuals who neither identified with American culture nor their Muslim heritage were most likely to support radical interpretations of Islam (Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015). No significant association existed between dual identification and radical views or support for Islamist groups. Simon and colleagues (2013) also tested the utility of dual identification on sympathy for radicalism using a survey sample of Russian and Turkish migrants in Germany. Results showed that participants who identified strongly as German *and* Russian/Turkish (i.e., dual identification), but felt they had to rescind their Turkish/Russian identities to feel German, were most likely to

support radical action[1]. Participants who identified strongly as both German and Russian/Turk but felt they did *not* have to rescind their Russian/Turk identity were least likely to express sympathy for radical action.

Based on these findings, we see an unanswered question in the current literature: Can adopting multiple identities play a *protective* role in mitigating the likelihood of validating terrorist grievances for Muslims who feel more stigmatised? As previous research suggests, adopting a strong *dual identity* may protect minorities against intergroup biases (Dovidio et al., 2005; Dunn et al., 2015). This identity process is worthy of examination among Muslims who report feeling stigmatised (Breen-Smyth, 2014; Cherney & Murphy, 2016).

### *The Current Study*

The literature review highlights two important factors that might influence Muslims' belief that terrorist grievances are valid: (1) feeling stigmatised; and (2) social identification. While previous studies have focused on the association between stigmatisation and identity processes on attitudes to terrorism (Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015; Simon et al., 2013), the current study examines the association between stigmatisation and identity on support for terrorists' grievances (Braddock & Horgan, 2016). Moreover, the current study extends prior research by focusing on how stigmatisation and social identity interact to predict beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances. Specifically, how social identity moderates the influence of feeling stigmatised on Muslims' likelihood of seeing terrorist grievances as valid.

[1] The sympathy for radical action scale included items measuring the extent that participants understood when other people engaged in illegal or violent demonstrations; creating roadblocks; occupying homes or offices; destroying property; graffitiing political slogans; protests that culminated in clashes with police; or vigilantism (Simon, et al., 2013).

In predicting how social identity will interact with stigmatisation to influence the validation of terrorists grievances, we argue that individuals who identify more strongly with their minority identity will perceive negative treatment against their minority identity as stigmatising. Thus, we expect those who identify strongly as Muslims and feel more stigmatised will be more inclined to perceive terrorists' grievances as valid. However, if Muslims identify strongly with their national identity they will be less sensitive to stigmatisation and less inclined to believe terrorists have valid grievances.

We expect that dual identification as Muslim and Australian might mitigate feelings of stigma on Muslims' beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances because dual identity allows individuals to nurture their minority identities while identifying with the wider in-group. We propose seven hypotheses that test these relationships:

H1: A heightened feeling of stigma will be associated with heightened beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances.

H2: A strong Australian identity will be associated with diminished beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances.

H3: A strong Muslim identity will be associated with heightened beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances.

H4: A strong Australian identity will diminish the effect of stigma on beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances.

H5: A strong Muslim identity will aggravate the effect of stigma on beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances.

H6: The significant positive association between Muslim identity and perceptions that terrorists have valid grievances will be much weaker for those whose Australian identity is strong.

H7: Holding a strong dual identity as a Muslim and Australian will reduce the likelihood of perceiving that terrorists have valid grievances when the individual feels stigmatised.

## Methods

### *Participants and procedure*

This study analyses survey data from 800 Muslim residents across three Australian cities (Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne). The research was supported and funded by the Australian Research Council. The survey benchmarked Muslims' attitudes towards counter-terrorism policing and perceptions of law enforcement, the community, and the media. It measured identification with Australia and the Muslim faith, and Muslims' feelings of inclusion.

The survey was administered by a company specialising in recruiting research participants from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. A random-digit-dialling (RDD) approach was deemed inappropriate for recruiting the desired sample due to Australia's small Muslim population (n=<3%). Instead, an ethnic naming system was used to generate a sampling frame from the publicly available electronic telephone directory. To do this, a list of 525 Arabic and Muslim surnames (e.g., Ahmed, Mohammad) was compiled (for a full list of names, see Murphy, Cherney, & Barkworth, 2015). A list of 9,500 individuals with these surnames (3,500 participant records in Sydney and Melbourne, and 2,500 for Brisbane) was created and interviewers then used RDD to contact potential participants.[2]

[2] This recruitment method has limitations as it excludes participants without a home telephone or a publicly listed telephone number, or females who have changed their surnames. However, it can produce representative samples of hard to reach groups (Himmelfarb, et al., 1983).

Interviewers fluent in English and Arabic contacted potential participants by telephone and assessed their eligibility to participate by asking to speak to a household member over 18, whose birthdate was most imminent, and who was Muslim. Participants meeting these criteria were advised of the nature of the study and asked if they would be interested in participating in a face-to-face interview. For those who were eligible and agreed to participate, a suitable time and place was organised to complete an interview. The project called for 800 completed interviews. Thus, the final 800 participants who were interviewed (300 in Sydney; 300 in Melbourne; 200 in Brisbane) represented a 27% cooperation rate (i.e., those who participated (n=800) as a proportion of those who were contacted and eligible to participate in the study (n=2948)).

The final sample included 51% males and the average age of respondents was 34.9 years old (SD=15.51). Australian-born participants comprised over half of the sample (57.9%), and almost all respondents were Australian citizens (99%). Respondents reported having Lebanese (38%), Pakistani (11%), and Indonesian (10%) ancestry, followed by Iraqi (7%), Egyptian (5%) and Turkish (3%) ancestry. Almost half of respondents were married (46%), almost half were employed (44%) and approximately 20% had a tertiary degree or higher qualification. Just over two-thirds (69%) were Sunni Muslims, while 31% were Shia Muslims, which is representative of the majority Sunni Muslim population in Australia (Hassan, 2015). Almost one-quarter (23.4%) reported attending Mosque on a weekly basis.

### ***Measures***

#### *Dependent Variable*

The dependent variable draws on one item to measure Muslims' belief that terrorists have valid grievances. Prior research on attitudes towards terrorism has used

this item (Cherney & Murphy, 2017). This item asked participants to rate on a five-point Likert scale (e.g., 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) if they think that '*Terrorists sometimes have valid grievances'*. A higher score indicated a stronger belief that terrorists have valid grievances. While the use of the word 'sometimes' in this item may create a level of ambiguity, it was deliberately constructed to facilitate a moderate viewpoint. Including 'sometimes' denotes the contexts that participants may think terrorists have valid grievances. Not including 'sometimes' would risk seeing most participants select 1=strongly disagree. Table 2 shows that the item's mean score fell below the midpoint of the scale (M=2.28, SD=1.21) but it was accompanied by a large standard deviation, suggesting variation in participants' responses to the question.

*Independent Variable Scale construction*

Three multi-item scales were constructed to represent the key independent variables of interest: *Australian identity; Muslim identity;* and *stigmatisation* (see Table 1 for the wording of all items used to construct these scales). All items within these three scales were measured on a five-point Likert scale (e.g., 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).

*Identity*. Two types of social identity were measured: Australian identity and Muslim identity. Drawing on Murphy's (2013) Australian work, a 3-item Australian identity scale and a 3-item Muslim identity scale was constructed. The Australian identity scale measured Muslims' strength of Australian identity (i.e., national identity). The Muslim identity scale assessed Muslims' identification with Islam. A higher score on both scales indicated a stronger Australian or Muslim identity, respectively. We acknowledge that Australian and Muslim identity is multifaceted and elaborate on this limitation in the discussion of this paper. Mean scores on both identity measures

revealed strong identification with Australia and extremely strong identification as Muslim (see Table 2).

*Stigmatisation.* The stigmatisation scale was constructed from six variables designed to measure the extent that Muslims feel scrutinised by police, the media, or other community members in Australia because of their faith. Items were adapted from the work of Kazemi, et al. (2008). A higher score represented a heightened feeling of stigma. The mean score on this scale indicated that Muslims on average felt somewhat stigmatised (M=3.45; SD=0.94).

*Factor Analysis.* The construct validity of the three scales was determined using principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation, revealing three distinct factors (see Table 1). Factor 1 contained six items measuring stigmatisation, Factor 2 comprised three items measuring Muslim identity, and Factor 3 included three items measuring Australian identity. The three scales were constructed by calculating the mean score of the variables in each factor group. All scales had high internal reliability with Cronbach's Alpha scores above 0.8 (see Table 2).

[Table 1 here]

***Demographic Control variables***

Prior studies show various demographic factors can be associated with Muslims' attitudes towards terrorism (e.g., Cherney & Murphy, 2017; Fair & Shepherd, 2006). Thus, a range of socio-demographic variables were included as control variables in the current analysis. These included: age; gender (0 = male; 1 = female); marital status (0 = never married; 1 = has been married); religious denomination (0 = Shia; 1 = Sunni); country of birth (0 = overseas born; 1 = Australian born); mosque attendance (0 = frequent attendance, that is once a month or more; 1 = irregular attendance, that is

several times a year or less); educational attainment (ranging from 1 = no schooling to 7 = postgraduate qualifications); and annual income (ranging from 1 = less than $20,000 to 6 = $101,000-$120,000). Table 2 outlines the descriptive statistics for the four key measures and eight demographic control variables and presents the bivariate relationships between scales and control variables.

[Table 2 here]

**Results**

Ordinary Least Squares regression analysis was used to examine the relationships between the demographic and independent variables on Muslims' beliefs that terrorists sometimes have valid grievances. Variables were entered in blocks to ascertain the variance each block contributed to the model. Demographic variables were entered in Block 1. The stigmatisation, Australian identity and Muslim identity variables were entered in Block 2. In Block 3, three two-way interaction terms (stigmatisation x Australian identity; stigmatisation x Muslim identity; Australian identity x Muslim identity) were entered. Finally, a three-way interaction term (stigmatisation x Australian identity x Muslim identity) was entered in Block 4 (see Table 3). Variables were mean-centred prior to calculating the interaction terms.

[Table 3 here]

The demographic variables in Block 1 accounted for only 1.3% of the variance in beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances. Only religious sect was significantly associated with perceptions that terrorists have valid grievances. Specifically, Shia Muslims were less likely to perceive terrorists' grievances as valid when compared to Sunni Muslims ($\beta = -0.08$, $p<0.05$), which suggests a denomination difference in beliefs towards terrorist grievances. However, we interpret this finding cautiously as we

acknowledge the necessity to know denominational affiliations of terrorist groups in order to understand participants' support for such groups' grievances. While specific grievances may resonate more with Sunni or Shiite participants depending on their religious traditions (Cherney & Povey, 2013), conclusions cannot be drawn without more in-depth knowledge of the specific grievances that participants support.

In Block 2 ($R^2$ change = 0.22), stigmatisation (β = 0.21, p<0.001), Australian identity (β = -0.37, p<0.001) and Muslim identity (β = 0.12, p<0.001) contributed an additional 22% of variation to the model and were associated with heightened beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances. These findings suggest participants who felt more stigmatised were more likely to perceive that terrorists have valid grievances; so too were those who held a strong Muslim identity (Hypothesis 1 and 3 supported). Those who held a strong Australian identity were less likely to believe that terrorists had valid grievances (Hypothesis 2 supported). Religious denomination was again negatively and significantly associated with beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances at Block 2 (β = -0.07, p<0.05).

In Block 3 ($R^2$ change = 0.02), three interaction terms were added. The inclusion of all variables in Block 3 of the analysis accounted for 25.3% of the variance in Muslims' beliefs that terrorists sometimes have valid grievances. The stigmatisation x Australian identity (β = -0.16, p<0.01) and Australian identity x Muslim identity (β = -0.09, p<0.01) interaction effects were negative and significant (Hypothesis 4 and 6 supported). The stigmatisation x Muslim identity interaction term was non-significant (Hypothesis 5 not supported).

The significant interaction effect between Australian identity and stigmatisation is displayed graphically in Figure 1. Simple effects tests were conducted at -1 (low) and +1 (high) standard deviation of Australian identity to explore the nature of the

interaction effect further. Simple effects tests revealed that when Muslims identified weakly as Australian, the association between stigmatisation and beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances was much stronger ($\beta = 0.35$, $p<0.001$) than for those who identified strongly as Australian ($\beta = 0.14$, $p<0.001$). This interaction effect highlights the protective nature of holding a strong Australian identity, particularly when participants feel highly stigmatised (Hypothesis 4 supported).

The significant interaction between Australian identity and Muslim identity is displayed graphically in Figure 2. Simple effects tests revealed that when participants identified strongly as Australian, their strength of Muslim identity had no relationship with their belief that terrorists have valid grievances ($\beta = 0.01$, $p>0.05$). Even when participants identified strongly as Muslim, their beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances was reduced if they identified strongly as an Australian. However, for those who identified weakly as Australian, identifying strongly as a Muslim was associated with stronger beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances ($\beta = 0.19$, $p<0.001$; Hypothesis 6 supported). This finding similarly highlights that holding a strong Australian identity protects against developing beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances. The tenets of SIT can explain this finding. SIT postulates that individuals strive for their identities to be perceived positively by others, derive belonging and support from other in-group members, and adhere to "a system of roles, rules, norms, values and beliefs to guide behaviour" (Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009, p. 43). Resultantly, not perceiving that terrorists have valid grievances enables individuals to nurture these aspects of identification.

[Figure 1 here] [Figure 2 here]

Finally, a three-way interaction term was entered in Block 4 of the regression model ($R^2$ change = 0.005). This interaction term tested the relationship between three

independent variables: stigmatisation, Australian identity, and Muslim identity on perceptions that terrorists have valid grievances. The interaction was significant and negative ($\beta = -0.07$, $p<0.05$), suggesting that the Australian identity x stigmatisation interaction is further moderated by Muslim identity. Figure 3 depicts the three-way interaction effect graphically, showing that Muslims are most likely to believe terrorists have valid grievances when they feel stigmatised, identify weakly as Australian and identify strongly as Muslim. However, even when feeling highly stigmatised, high Muslim identifiers were unlikely to think terrorists have valid grievances if they also identified strongly as Australian. In fact, dual identity appears to protect against Muslims forming the view that terrorists have valid grievances (Hypothesis 7 supported).

[Figure 3 here]

**Discussion**

This study aimed to identify how stigma and social identity were associated with Muslims' beliefs that terrorists sometimes have valid grievances. Controlling for stigmatisation and both Australian and Muslim identity, we found demographic factors were not associated with participants' attitudes towards terrorists' grievances. Instead, the stigmatisation and social identity variables were primarily associated with Muslims' beliefs that terrorists sometimes have valid grievances.

Specifically, participants who felt stigmatised and those who identified strongly as Muslim were more likely to believe terrorists have valid grievances (support for Hypothesis 1 and 3, respectively). Those who identified more strongly as Australian, in contrast, were less likely to believe terrorists have valid grievances (Hypothesis 2 supported). This paper also examined the interactions between stigmatisation and the

social identity variables. First, the Australian identity by stigmatisation interaction was significant. Specifically, stigmatisation had a stronger positive association with beliefs that terrorists had valid grievances for those who identified weakly as Australian. For those who identified strongly as Australian, feeling highly stigmatised had a weaker effect on beliefs that terrorists have valid grievance (see Figure 1; Hypothesis 4 supported). Second, the Muslim identity x stigmatisation interaction effect was not significant (Hypothesis 5 not supported). Third, Figure 2 revealed a significant interaction between the Muslim identity and Australian identity variables. That is, Muslims who identified strongly with the Muslim faith, but weakly as Australian were most likely to think terrorists have valid grievances (Hypothesis 6 supported). Finally, strong dual identification mitigated Muslims' belief that terrorists have valid grievances (Hypothesis 7 supported). Importantly, participants who identified strongly as Muslim *and* Australian were the least likely to think that terrorists have valid grievances, even when they felt highly stigmatised (see Figure 3). Overall, these results suggest that psychological variables may better explain Muslims' views about terrorist grievances when compared to demographic characteristics.

### *Limitations of the current study*

This study contained some limitations which must be considered when interpreting the findings. First, we employed cross-sectional data, which means causal relationships between our tested variables cannot be determined. For example, it is unclear from the data if stigmatised Muslims are more likely to believe that terrorists have valid grievances, or if Muslims who think terrorists have valid grievances are more likely to feel stigmatised. Hence, only associations between key concepts can be made with such data. Longitudinal data is required to make claims about the causal relationships between our variables.

Second, our study examined beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances using a single-item indicator. While one prior study has used this measure (i.e., Cherney & Murphy, 2017), differing grievances may resonate with some people more than others. A one-item measure cannot capture different terrorist grievance narratives. Examining the extent of support for differing grievance narratives may spotlight how specific narratives gain traction and how they can be countered. Further, while our findings might imply that some Muslims sometimes sympathise with Islamist grievances, it is possible that had we asked non-Muslims if they 'sometimes' support the grievances of left-leaning political activists, a significant proportion may have agreed. Hence, we caution readers against interpreting our findings as implying that many Muslims condone Islamist grievances and terrorism.

Third, as the survey achieved a cooperation rate of 27%, self-selection biases may have affected the findings (Olson, 2006). The sample may not represent the views of all Muslims in Australia and may represent those who more strongly identify as Australian or whom are least likely to perceive that terrorists' grievances are valid. Those with more radical views about terrorism are less likely to have been represented.

### *Implications of the findings*

Despite these limitations, our study provides important insights into the association between social psychological processes and Muslims' attitudes towards terrorist grievances. Participants reported feeling somewhat stigmatised by authorities, the media and the public (see Table 2). This finding is concerning given the priority within many Western nations, including Australia, to enhance inclusion, equality, collective values and diversity (Bowen & Lundy, 2011). Scholars note that stigma may cause Muslims to alter their behaviours, such as avoiding discussing their faith or any topic related to terrorism for fear of drawing the attention of security agencies, or being

reluctant to engage with authorities (Blackwood et al., 2013a; Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2015; Cherney & Murphy, 2015). However, results suggest that bolstering a common national identity amongst minority groups who feel targeted and scrutinised by others may protect against sympathising with terrorist grievance narratives. Yet, enhancing such identification requires acknowledging the role of both Muslims *and* non-Muslims in shaping Muslims' identities.

This study found an association between strong Muslim identification and beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances. However, these results do not mean all Muslims who identify strongly with their faith will view Islamist terrorists' grievances as valid. This is because grievances can include economic, religious, political, racial, or social issues, which can impact anyone (Cherney & Murphy, 2019). Additionally, the interaction between Muslim identity and stigma was non-significant, which demonstrates the subjective and heterogeneous nature of Muslim identification. Scholars suggest individuals are more likely to react with hostility when they construct their identities in a politicised way (Simon & Ruhs, 2008). In other words, Muslims are more likely to validate terrorist grievances when they feel stigmatised if they define their identity to align with such grievance narratives (Tausch et al., 2009). Better understanding how Muslim identities are constructed may help explain their reactions to stigma.

In addition, the interaction between Australian and Muslim identities suggests that dual identities may protect against forming views that terrorist grievances are valid (Dunn et al., 2015). Dual identification as Muslim and Australian assists individuals to feel accepted while enabling them to express stigma experienced from a minority perspective. Thus, dual identification enables Muslims' grievances to be better heard by the majority (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2014). If those who feel disaffected perceive

they are genuinely heard, they may feel less aggrieved and less likely to endorse Islamist terrorist groups who provide alternate opportunities to express those grievances (Simon & Ruhs, 2008).

While these findings highlight the importance of identity in shaping Muslims' experiences, future research should examine the nuances of social identity. Social identity and the differentiation between in-groups and out-groups are context-dependent (Hogg, 2016). Thus, exploring the ways that Muslims define their multiple identities may better contextualise the extent that they are impacted by stigma and interpret terrorist grievances. Additionally, examining the complexity of Muslims' identification with different groups explains how they react to identity threats (Brewer & Pierce, 2005). Finally, a more thorough understanding of the heterogeneity of Muslims' identities may better inform resilience strategies, because their efficacy is arguably contingent on ensuring they acknowledge the diversity of citizens they seek to engage with (Grossman, 2014).

## Conclusion

Dean (2017) argued that social psychological approaches are key to better understanding attitudes towards terrorism. The current study supports Dean's argument, providing empirical evidence that identity processes present an important protective factor in reducing validation of terrorist grievances. Specifically, strong dual identification appears to reduce the negative impact of feeling stigmatised on beliefs that terrorists have valid grievances. The challenge for authorities and the public is to ensure Muslims feel welcome and included in the West, and that they continue to nurture an Australian identity along with their Muslim identity. Doing so will help to reframe the divisive *us vs. them* discourse into a more collective *we.*

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Figure 1. Significant interaction between stigmatisation and Australian identity on perceptions that terrorists sometimes have valid grievances.

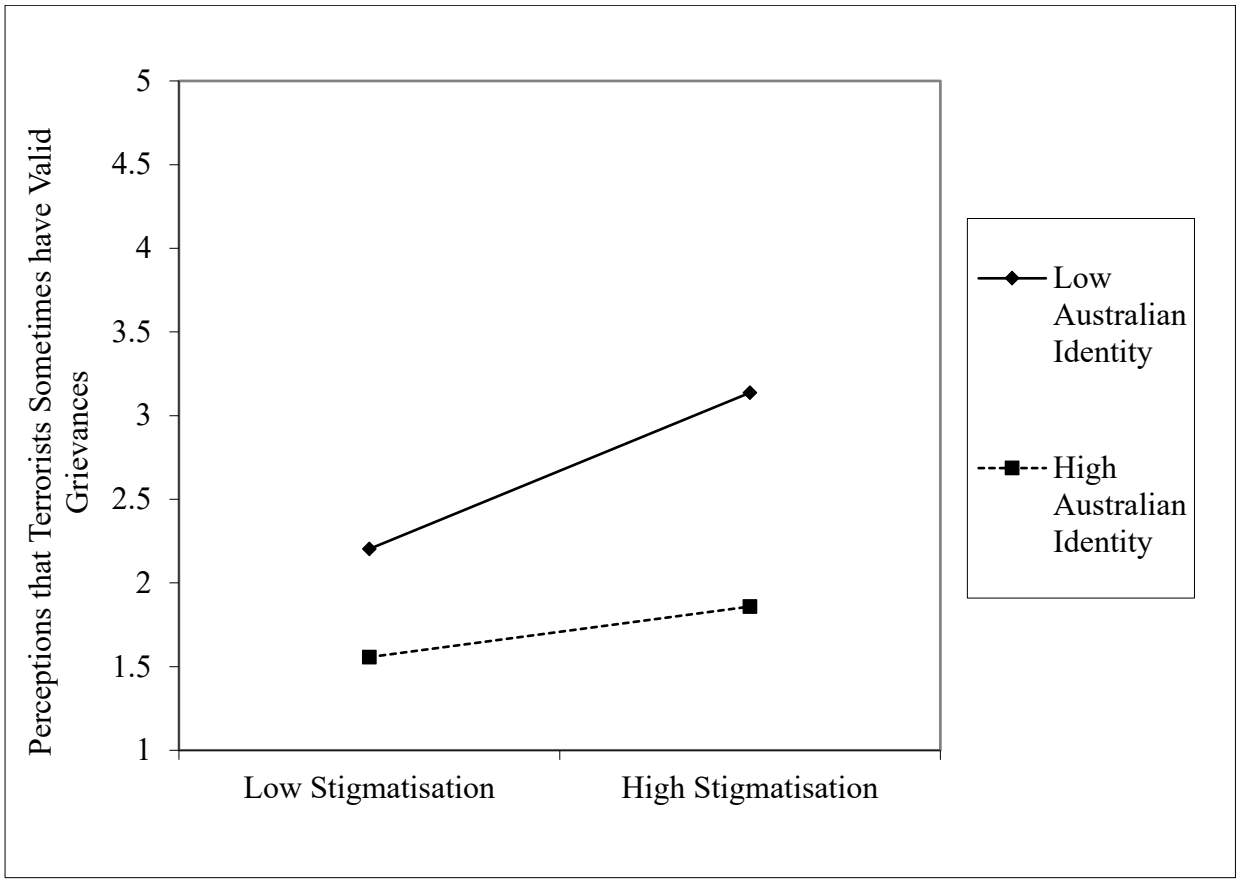

Figure 2. Significant interaction between Australian identity and Muslim identity on perceptions that terrorists sometimes have valid grievances.

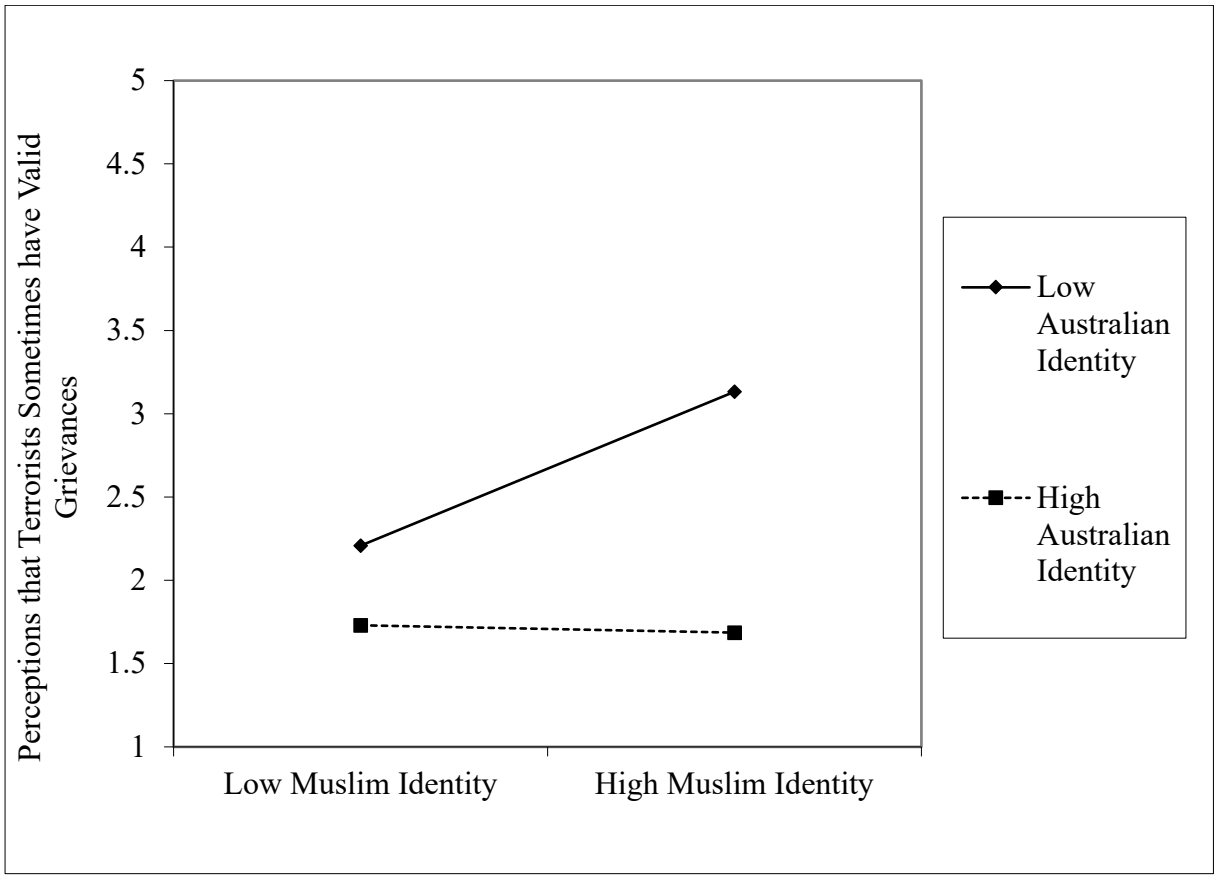

Figure 3. Significant three-way interaction between stigmatisation, Australian identity, and Muslim identity on perceptions that terrorists have valid grievances.

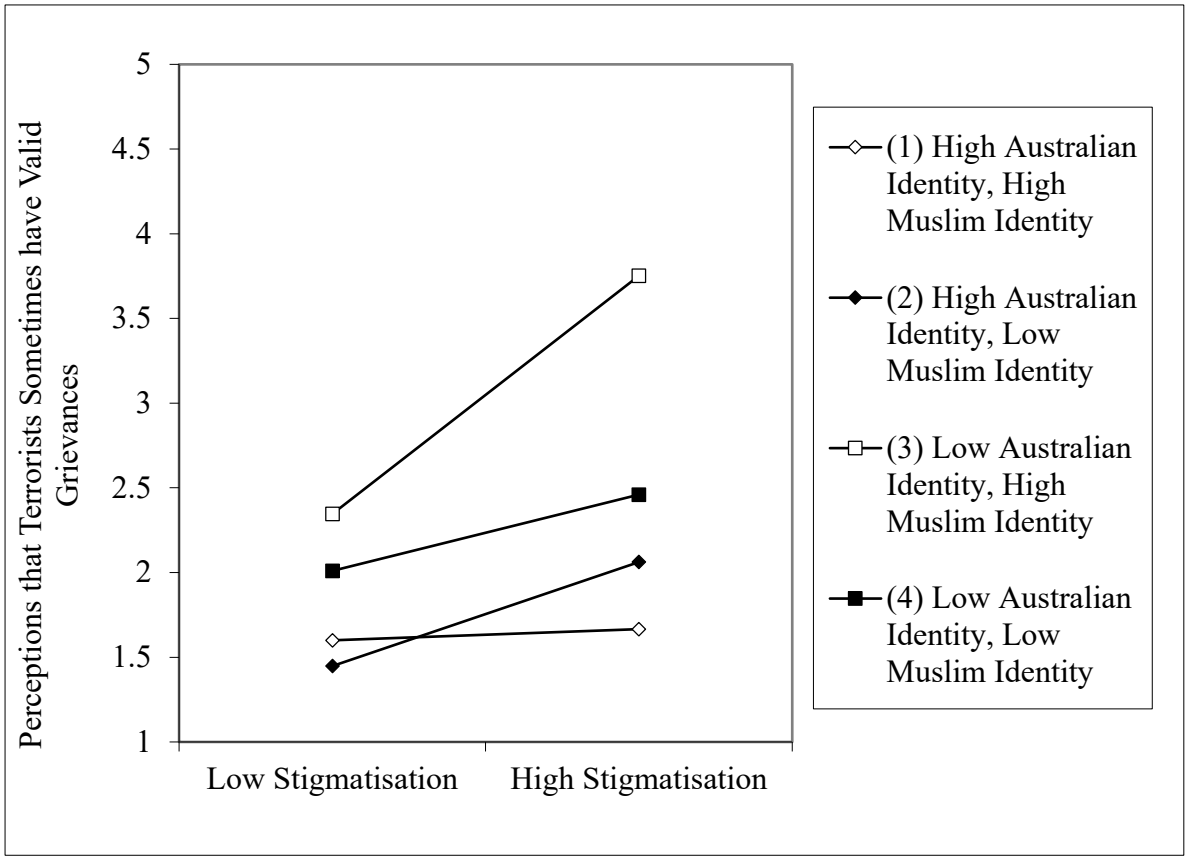

Table 1. PCA Factor Analysis distinguishing key variables of interest

| **Item** | **Factor** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **1** | **2** | **3** |
| **Stigmatisation** | | | |
| *I feel at risk of being accused of terrorist activities because of my faith* | .84 | | |
| *Others in my community feel at risk of being accused of terrorism because of their faith* | .82 | | |
| *I feel under more scrutiny by police and authorities because of my faith* | .77 | | |
| *I feel under more scrutiny by the media and public because of my faith* | .63 | | |
| *I sometimes feel police view me as a potential terrorist because of my faith* | .79 | | |
| *I sometimes feel the Australian public views me as a potential terrorist because of my faith* | .77 | | |
| **Muslim Identity** | | | |
| *I am proud to be Muslim* | | .77 | |
| *What Islam stands for is important to me* | | .91 | |
| *Being a Muslim is important to the way I think of myself as a person* | | .88 | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Australian Identity** | | | |
| *I am proud to be an Australian* | | | .77 |
| *I identify strongly with being Australian* | | | .88 |
| *Being an Australian is important to the way I think of myself as a person* | | | .83 |
| *Eigenvalues (before rotation)* | 5.57 | 2.74 | 2.14 |
| *Eigenvalues (after rotation)* | 32.78% | 16.11% | 12.58% |

Extraction method: Principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. Only factor loadings >0.40 are presented.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations for all control variables and scales

| | Items | *α* | *M* | *SD* | *%* | *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* | *6* | *7* | *8* | *9* | *10* | *11* | *12* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Age | 1 | | 34.89 | 15.51 | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Gender (0=male) | 1 | | N/A | N/A | 50.5[1] | 0.02 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Religious denomination (0=Shia) | 1 | | N/A | N/A | 30.6[1] | .08* | 0.02 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Country of Birth (0=overseas born) | 1 | | N/A | N/A | 42.1[1] | -.67** | 0.04 | -0.01 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Mosque Attendance (0=regular Mosque attendance) | 1 | | N/A | N/A | 76.8[1] | -0.04 | -.35** | -.08* | -0.01 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 6. Education | 1 | | 4.56 | 1.19 | | -.21** | .08* | -0.04 | .12** | -.15** | 1 | | | | | | |
| 7. Income | 1 | | 3.35 | 0.95 | | -.12** | .20** | -0.03 | .07* | -.12** | .48** | 1 | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8. Marital Status (0=never been married) | 1 | | N/A | N/A | 37.3[1] | .62** | -0.06 | 0.06 | -.50** | -0.02 | .07* | 0.03 | 1 | | | |
| 9. Terrorists sometimes have valid grievances | 1 | | 2.28 | 1.21 | | -0.04 | 0.05 | -.09* | 0.01 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.03 | -0.04 | 1 | | |
| 10. Australian ID | 3 | 0.85 | 3.83 | 0.84 | | -.07* | -.10** | 0.05 | .07* | -0.05 | .13** | .11** | -0.01 | -.40** | 1 | |
| 11. Muslim ID | 3 | 0.79 | 4.45 | 0.55 | | -0.02 | -0.02 | .11** | 0.01 | -.10** | 0.07 | 0.06 | -.10** | .10** | 0.07 | 1 |
| 12. Stigmatisation | 6 | 0.91 | 3.45 | 0.94 | | -0.02 | 0.05 | -0.06 | -0.04 | -.07* | 0.03 | .09* | 0.01 | .31** | -.23** | 0.04 | 1 |

Note: Scales were measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) Likert scale; higher scores indicated stronger agreement with the construct. [1]Reference categories for the dichotomous variables include: Gender – 0=male; Religion – 0=Shia; Country of Birth – 0=non-Australian born; Mosque attendance – 0=irregular attendance; Marital status – 0=unmarried; [2]*Educational attainment: reflected an average 12-year attainment level.* [3]*Income: reflected an average salary in the AUD$56,000-$60,000 range;* * indicates a significant relationship at $p<0.05$; ** indicates a significant relationship at $p<0.01$; *** indicates a significant relationship at $p<0.001$.

Table 3. *OLS Regression Predicting Beliefs that Terrorists sometimes have Valid Grievances*

| | **Block 1** | | **Block 2** | | **Block 3** | | **Block 4** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *B* (SE) | β | *B* (SE) | β | *B* (SE) | β | *B* (SE) | β |
| Age | -.002 (.00) | -0.029 | -0.002 (0.00) | -0.003 | -0.002 (0.00) | -0.03 | -0.002 (0.00) | -0.029 |
| Gender (0=male) | 0.123 (0.09) | 0.051 | 0.06 (0.08) | 0.002 | 0.000 (0.08) | 0.000 | 0.002 (0.08) | 0.001 |
| Religious Denomination (0=Shia) | -0.21 (0.09) | -0.08* | -0.165 (0.08) | -0.066* | -0.172 (0.08) | -0.066* | -0.167 (0.08) | -0.064* |
| Country of Birth (0=overseas born) | -0.083 (0.12) | -0.034 | 0.022 (0.10) | 0.01 | 0.027 (0.10) | 0.01 | 0.039 (0.10) | 0.016 |
| Irregular Mosque Attendance (0=regular Mosque attendance) | 0.075 (0.11) | 0.026 | 0.070 (0.10) | 0.024 | 0.071 (0.10) | 0.025 | 0.073 (0.10) | 0.026 |
| Educational Attainment | 0.003 (0.04) | 0.003 | 0.03 (0.04) | 0.03 | 0.029 (0.04) | 0.02 | 0.033 (0.04) | 0.032 |
| Income | 0.028 (0.05) | 0.022 | 0.039 (0.05) | 0.031 | 0.035 (0.05) | 0.028 | 0.031 (0.05) | 0.025 |
| Marital Status (0=never been married) | -0.083 (0.12) | -0.033 | -0.027 (0.11) | -0.011 | -0.029 (0.11) | -0.012 | -0.017 (0.10) | -0.007 |
| Stigmatisation | | | 0.273 (0.04) | 0.214*** | 0.309 (0.04) | 0.241*** | 0.317 (0.04) | 0.248*** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Australian ID | | -0.524 (0.05) | -0.365*** | -0.481 (0.05) | -0.335*** | -0.474 (0.05) | -0.330*** |
| Muslim ID | | 0.267 (0.07) | 0.119*** | 0.220 (0.07) | 0.10** | 0.173 (0.08) | 0.078* |
| Stigmatisation x Australian ID | | | | -0.158 (0.05) | -0.10** | -0.145 (0.05) | -0.093** |
| Stigmatisation x Muslim ID | | | | 0.044 (0.07) | 0.019 | 0.051 (0.07) | 0.022 |
| Australian ID x Muslim ID | | | | -0.242 (0.09) | -0.09** | -0.234 (0.09) | -0.091** |
| Stigmatisation x Australian ID x Muslim ID | | | | | | -0.188 (0.09) | -0.073* |
| $R^2$ | 0.013 | 0.233 | | 0.253 | | 0.257 | |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.003 | 0.222 | | 0.239 | | 0.243 | |
| $R^2$ change | 0.013 | 0.220 | | 0.020 | | 0.005 | |
| *F* Change | 1.267 | 75.327 | | 6.943 | | 4.927 | |