



## **The Threat of Appearing Racist: Stereotype Threat and Support for Coercion Among Australian Police Officers**

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**The threat of appearing racist: Stereotype threat and support for coercion among  
Australian police officers**

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### **Abstract**

Recent research in the United States (U.S.) has argued that the threat of confirming the 'racist cop' stereotype may paradoxically increase the propensity for coercive policing by depressing officers' self-legitimacy. The current study aimed to assess the influence of the threat of the 'racist cop' stereotype on officers' self-legitimacy and their attitudes towards force in an Australian policing jurisdiction. An online survey was completed by 306 frontline officers in Queensland, Australia. Structural equation modelling was used to assess the influence of stereotype threat on officers' attitudes towards force, and the extent to which this is mediated by perceptions of self-legitimacy. The findings confirmed previous findings, with increased officer perceptions of stereotype threat associated with increased support for coercive policing, mediated by reduced self-legitimacy. The findings are discussed with reference to how the validity and salience of the 'racist cop' stereotype can be diminished.

**KEYWORDS:** police coercion, use of force, stereotype threat, self-legitimacy, racism

### **The threat of appearing racist: Stereotype threat and support for coercion among Australian police officers**

Experiences of racially or ethnically biased policing practices have been reported across most Western democracies, including the U.S. (Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Richardson & Goff, 2015), the U.K. (Hallsworth, 2006), European countries (Miller et al., 2008), and Australia (Sivasbramaniam & Goodman-Delahunty, 2008). These experiences have given rise to accusations of police racism across a number of jurisdictions including Australia, often based on perceptions that police disproportionately target and use coercive tactics towards racial and ethnic minority groups (Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Cunneen, 2006; Hallsworth, 2006; Mellor, 2003; Miller et al., 2008; Souhami, 2014). Accusations of police racism have been a salient feature of the recent Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in 2020, which spread beyond the U.S. to the U.K., Europe, Australia, and elsewhere. While the existence of racist beliefs amongst police has received limited empirical examination, there is reason to be skeptical that racial animus can fully account for racial disparities within policing (Hallsworth, 2006; Smith & Alpert, 2007; Souhami, 2014). The persistence of reports of racially and ethnically disproportionate policing suggests that there are likely a range of structural and systemic factors contributing to experiences of police bias (Goff, 2016; Hallsworth, 2006; Smith & Alpert, 2007; Souhami, 2014; Swencionis & Goff, 2017).

Critically, recent U.S. research suggests that the pervasiveness of the stereotype of the racist police officer may increase the propensity for coercive behavior amongst police officers, irrespective of whether officers hold racist beliefs (Trinkner et al., 2019). This concept, referred to as stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), describes how group stereotypes can influence the behavior of individuals in a way that undermines their performance and leads to stereotype-congruent behaviors (Pennington et al., 2016). In the U.S., the threat of confirming the ‘racist cop’ stereotype is associated with lower police self-legitimacy, which is associated in turn with more positive attitudes towards the use of coercion (Trinkner et al., 2019). However, it is not clear whether this effect is an artefact of the U.S. policing context or has broader implications for police coercion outside the U.S. To examine whether this type of stereotype threat is relevant outside the U.S. context, the current study seeks to replicate Trinkner et al.’s (2019) analyses with a survey of Australian police officers.

#### **Stereotype Threat in Policing**

Stereotype threat occurs when a person is concerned about confirming or being evaluated in terms of a negative stereotype attached to a valued group in a behavioral domain (Pennington et al., 2016; Steele, 1997; Steele et al., 2002). Ironically, such concerns have been shown to lead to stereotype congruent behavior e.g., a woman failing a math test when she fears being perceived to be poor at math (see review by Pennington et al., 2016). Stereotype threats attack people’s self-concepts; the more important the domain/group is to their self-concept, the more threatening the negative stereotype (Goff et al., 2008). In response to stereotype threat, individuals will often distance themselves from the threatened identity, either temporarily or chronically in response to the pervasiveness of the threat (Steele, 1997; Steele et al., 2002).

Within the policing context, Goff and his colleagues (Goff & Martin, 2012; Goff et al., 2012; Trinkner & Goff, 2016; Trinkner et al., 2019) have explored the threat associated with the ‘racist cop’ stereotype, one of the most pervasive and enduring stereotypes of law enforcement in the U.S. (Cochran & Warren, 2012). Echoing the general findings from the stereotype threat

literature, officers' concerns about appearing racist are associated with racial disparities in officers' use of force (Goff & Martin, 2012; Goff et al., 2012). Importantly, these associations emerged regardless of officers' race and independent of officers' racial biases.

To explain the ostensible contradiction between concerns over appearing racist and racially disparate behavior, Richardson and Goff (2014) hypothesized that this type of stereotype threat undermines officers' confidence in their moral authority. Such authority is a key component of policing (Bradford & Quinton, 2014). The 'racist cop' stereotype threat threatens officers' identity as legitimate agents of the law. Given that officers are trained to maintain control in encounters with civilians, Richardson and Goff (2014) argue that they will be more likely to resort to coercive force when they cannot rely on their moral authority. On their account, racial disparities emerge because this stereotype threat is more likely to be salient when interacting with minority communities compared to non-minority communities.

More recently, Trinkner et al. (2019) integrated Richardson and Goff's (2014) argument with criminological work on officers' self-legitimacy. Self-legitimacy refers to officers' confidence in their normative authority as agents of the state, the sense that their special position and powers are justifiable within the normative and legal order of society (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012; Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Tankebe, 2014). In this respect, it aligns to the concept of confidence in one's moral authority that is at the center of Richardson and Goff's (2014) explanation. According to Trinkner et al. (2019) the 'racist cop' stereotype represents a chronic threat to self-legitimacy given its pervasiveness. Over time, concerns over appearing racist undermine officers' self-legitimacy as they distance themselves from their identity as representatives of the just and equitable legal order that is the cornerstone of their normative authority in a democratic state.

Police self-legitimacy research indicates that lower perceptions of self-legitimacy are associated with an increased propensity for coercive policing and/or reduced support for democratic policing approaches, such as community policing and procedurally just policing (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Jonathan-Zamir & Harpaz, 2018; Tankebe & Mesko, 2014; Trinkner et al., 2019). In this respect, greater concerns with appearing racist should also be associated with more support for coercive policing via lower self-legitimacy. Indeed, Trinkner et al. (2019) found support for their hypothesized mediational chain in a large survey of urban police officers in the US. However, it is not clear whether stereotype threat, and its association with increased support for coercive policing, via reduced officer self-legitimacy, are a product of the unique U.S. policing context, or whether stereotype threat may also be a useful concept for understanding drivers of coercive policing in other jurisdictions, such as Australia.

### **Police and racial and ethnic minorities in Australia**

In examining the impacts of the 'racist cop' stereotype in Australia, it is important to understand the context for relations between police and minority racial and ethnic groups. Australia is a multi-cultural society which ostensibly values cultural diversity (Murphy & Cherney, 2011) with approximately 26% of Australian residents born overseas (ABS, 2018). The most common origins of migrants are North-West Europe, South-East and North-East Asia, and Southern and Central Asia (ABS, 2018). Additionally, Indigenous Australians comprise approximately 3% of the population (ABS, 2018).

Despite only comprising a small proportion of the contemporary Australian population, Indigenous Australians have the most contentious relationship with police in Australia, in part

due to the role that police played in post-colonial regulation of Indigenous people (Hollinsworth, 1998; Shepherd, 2014; Thorpe, 1987). Indigenous people in Australia have experienced a long history of significant structural racism and state-sanctioned brutality since colonization of Australia in 1778, and were only counted as people in the Census for the first time in 1967 (Mellor, 2003; Shepherd, 2014; Thorpe, 1987). Police enforced much of the legislation that was deeply harmful to Indigenous people throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including forced assimilation, dispossession from land, and removal of children, experiences that have led collectively to enduring intergenerational mistrust of police (Shepherd, 2014). These experiences have contributed to entrenched socio-economic disadvantage for Indigenous Australians (AIHW, 2017), along with a marked over-representation in the criminal justice system (Allard et al., 2020).

There have been concerns about disproportionate targeting of Indigenous Australians through proactive police stops or the overuse of formal or coercive police responses (Cunneen, 2006; Thorpe, 1987), alongside long-standing concerns about unexplained deaths of Indigenous people in custody (Beacroft et al., 2011; Cunneen, 2006). Over the past 30 years, Australia has undertaken reforms across a range of state criminal justice agencies regarding the treatment of Indigenous Australians, most notably the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody established in 1987. However, the belief that police hold racist beliefs and target Indigenous people persists, among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Mellor, 2003; Sivasubramaniam & Goodman-Delahunty, 2008).

Other racial and ethnic minority groups in Australia have also reported experiences of biased treatment by police, such as African, Middle-Eastern, and Vietnamese Australians (Meredyth et al., 2010; Murphy & Cherney, 2011; Shepherd, 2014; Sivasubramaniam & Goodman-Delahunty, 2008; White, 2009). These communities have received negative attention from government and the media related to perceived concentrations of criminal activity, alleged failures to assimilate, and potential threats of terrorist activity (Meredyth et al., 2010; Murphy & Cherney, 2011; White, 2009). Perceptions of trust in police have also been found to be lower amongst some minority ethnic and racial groups in Australia (Meredyth et al., 2010; Murphy & Mazerolle, 2018; Sargeant et al., 2014).

Irrespective of the drivers of disproportionate policing, the belief that police discriminate persists and is widespread (Sivasubramaniam & Goodman-Delahunty, 2008). The belief that police officers are racist is likely to reduce trust in, and cooperation with, police among minority communities (Murphy and Cherney, 2011; Sivasubramaniam & Goodman-Delahunty, 2008), leading to greater police-community tensions. However, the recent work in the U.S. on stereotype threat discussed above indicates another way in which beliefs that officers are racist can negatively affect police–community relations.

### **Current study**

This study aims to examine whether officers' experience of stereotype threat is associated with increased support for coercive policing, by reducing their self-legitimacy, in the Australian policing context. This study essentially aims to replicate the mediational chain found in the Trinkner et al. (2019) study, to determine whether the threat of the 'racist cop' stereotype on officer self-legitimacy is relevant to understanding drivers of coercive policing in other policing contexts where similar stereotypes exist, namely Australia. While there may be some similarities surrounding the policing of minority racial and ethnic groups in the U.S., Australia has a notably different context in terms of its minority racial and ethnic populations,

with differences in historical relationships, geographic distribution, and size (McCarthy et al., 2018; Murphy & Cherney, 2010). This study hypothesizes that officers' concerns about confirming the 'racist cop' stereotype will be associated with lower self-legitimacy amongst Australian police officers, and that lower self-legitimacy will be associated with more positive attitudes towards coercive policing and negative attitudes towards non-coercive policing, consistent with previous U.S. research (Trinkner et al., 2019).

## Method

### Setting

This study was set in Queensland (QLD), a state with an approximate population of 5.01 million in 2018 (ABS, 2018). QLD is large geographically (1.73 million km<sup>2</sup>) and diverse demographically. Queensland Police Service (QPS) is the state-wide police agency that provides policing services across this jurisdiction. QPS is organized into Regions, Districts, and Divisions, with Divisions being the smallest geographic jurisdiction (there are 336 Divisions in total in QLD).

### Data

This study drew on an online survey of frontline police officers, which was fielded to for four weeks across June and July 2017. In order to understand the influence of stereotype threat on officers who were operating in communities with high potential for resident conflict or tension, a total of forty Divisions<sup>1</sup> from communities that had either high levels of violent crime and/or high levels of socio-economic disadvantage (two key drivers of concentrated use of coercive policing tactics; McCarthy et al., 2018), were purposively selected for participation in the survey. An invitation to participate in the survey was circulated by District command in the relevant Divisions, along with information that the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Explicit consent from officers was obtained at the start of the online survey. Ethics approval for the survey was obtained through Griffith University. The survey collected basic demographic information about officers including their age, gender and years of experience, and the cultural and ethnic groups they most identified with. The survey also asked officers a series of questions related to their experiences policing in their Division, including questions related to stereotype threat, self-legitimacy, and coercive policing practices. A fuller description of the survey method is available in McCarthy et al. (2020).

### Measures

Individual items for each measured variable are displayed in Table 2, aside from the procedural justice items which can be found in the supplemental appendix.<sup>2</sup> A five-item measure was used to measure stereotype threat. Drawn from Trinkner et al. (2019), it was designed to assess officers' concerns over appearing racist when interacting with community members. Each item used a 5-point bipolar response scale (1: Strongly agree; 5: Strongly disagree).

To measure self-legitimacy, we used a seven-item measure which included items adapted from prior work (Tankebe, 2014; Tankebe & Mesko, 2014; Trinkner, Tyler, & Goff, 2016). Items assessed officers' perceptions that they occupied a special role in society as agents of the law and their confidence in the normative authority imbued within that role. Each item used a 5-point unipolar response scale (1: A great deal; 5: Not at all).

Following prior work (Trinkner et al., 2019), we measured support for coercive policing in two ways. First, officers completed a five-item measure assessing their support for the use of physical force when interacting with the public, with items drawn from the U.S. National Law Enforcement Applied Research and Data Platform (Rosenbaum et al., 2011). Each item used a 5-point unipolar response scale (1: Strongly agree; 5: Strongly disagree).

Second, following Trinkner et al. (2019), a sixteen-item scale was used to assess officers' endorsement of procedurally just policing. As they noted, procedurally just policing has been positioned as the antithesis of coercion given its focus on promoting voluntary compliance without the use of physical force (Schulhofer et al. 2011); thus it is an alternative way to assess support for coercive policing. For this measure, items were selected that represented key components of procedurally fair behavior: respect (e.g., When interacting with community residents, how important is it for people to be treated with respect, regardless of their respect for police?), benevolence (e.g., When interacting with community residents, how important is it to show them that you care about their problem?), voice (e.g., When interacting with community residents, how important is it for you, as a police officer, to let community residents talk, even if they are complaining about their problems?), neutrality (e.g., When interacting with community residents, how important is it to be impartial with them?), and accountability (e.g., How necessary is it to stop and explain when people ask why they are being treated the way they are?). Each item used a 5-point unipolar response scale (1: Not at all important/necessary; 5: Extremely important/necessary).

We also included multiple control variables to the models to provide a more robust test of the relations among stereotype threat, self-legitimacy, and coercive policing, ensuring that these key relationships are independent of officer demographic characteristics. Officer age, gender and experience have previously been found to influence self-legitimacy (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Trinkner et al. 2019), while officer age, gender and race/ethnicity have been found to predict officer attitudes towards use of force (McCarthy et al., 2020; Trinkner et al., 2019). Thus, officer age, gender, experience as a police officer, and whether they identified as Australian as their primary cultural identity, were included as controls in the analysis. Response options for each variable are presented in Table 1.

## Sample

While 40 Divisions were originally selected, a number of District commanders also sent the online survey invitation to Divisions within their District that were contiguous with the chosen Divisions. The additional survey responses were retained in the sample. In total, 309 officers from 52 Divisions completed the online surveys. Three survey responses contained missing data on key variables and were therefore excluded from the sample. As the survey link was distributed by local area command, the number of officers who received an invitation to participate was not able to be tracked. In addition, actual officer numbers in each Division was obtained prior to survey distribution for target Divisions only. However, taking into account the number of responses from officers within the target Divisions (N=274), compared to the number of general duties and investigative officers estimated in the targeted Divisions<sup>3</sup>, and accounting for the proportion of officers that would have been on leave or redeployed elsewhere during survey fieldwork (13%), it was estimated that up to 1884 officers in the targeted Divisions could have received the survey invitation, resulting in an estimated response rate of 15%.



## Results

At the start of our analysis, all items discussed above were recoded (when necessary) so that higher scores reflected a greater amount of the measured construct. Table 1 displays the sample characteristics and descriptive statistics for the measures. Over half the sample (63.0%) of officers were aged between 26 and 45, which aligns well to the QPS officer population, with 60% aged between 25 and 44 years (QPS, 2017). The gender split of the sample also aligns with the general population of QPS officers, with the sample comprising 77.5% male respondents compared to 74% of all QPS sworn officers (QPS, 2017). The sample were relatively experienced with just over half (52.6%) having 11 or more years of experience as an officer. The overwhelming majority of the officers in the sample identified Australian as being one of their primary cultural identities (88.9%).

We used structural equation modelling to test our hypotheses with Amos version 25.<sup>4</sup> The model we tested is displayed in the supplementary appendix. Stereotype threat, self-legitimacy, support for using force, and procedural justice endorsement were entered as latent variables. With the exception of procedural justice endorsement, individual items were entered as indicators of their hypothesized latent variable. For procedural justice endorsement, we used parceling to reduce the complexity of the model. In this instance, parceling was appropriate because our primary research interest was assessing the structural relations among the identified latent variables rather than the modelling of measurement at an item level (Little et al., 2002). To guide the construction of parcels, the procedural justice items were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring and promax rotation. Three factors emerged. The first factor represented a combination of the respect, benevolence, and voice items. The second factor was composed of the accountability items, while the third factor was composed of the neutrality items. Items for each factor were averaged to create a parcel. Each parcel was then entered as an indicator for the procedural justice latent variable.<sup>5</sup>

The latent variables were positioned so that self-legitimacy mediated the relationship between stereotype threat and the two outcomes (force support and procedural justice endorsement). Force support and procedural justice endorsement were allowed to correlate to account for extraneous variables associated with both but not included in the model. In addition to the latent variables, we also included the control variables as observed predictors of self-legitimacy, force support, and procedural justice.<sup>6</sup> The model was estimated using maximum likelihood estimation. All cases had complete data. To assess mediation, indirect effects were calculated using bootstrapped standard errors (5000 samples) and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals to account for non-normality (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Factor loadings for the latent variables and overall model fit statistics are presented in Table 2. Overall model fit was within acceptable parameters and each item loaded on its respective latent variable. Parameter estimates from the structural portion of the model are shown in Table 3.<sup>7</sup> The model accounted for 13% of the variability in self-legitimacy. As expected, officers that reported greater stereotype threat also reported lower levels of self-legitimacy ( $\beta = -.28$ ). Additionally, officers that identified as Australian had higher self-legitimacy than those that did not identify as Australian ( $\beta = .15$ ).

In terms of procedural justice endorsement, 24% of its variance was accounted for by the model. Self-legitimacy ( $\beta = .33$ ) showed a strong positive association with endorsement as expected, while stereotype threat was unrelated ( $\beta = -.06$ ). More specifically, higher officer self-legitimacy was associated with greater support for procedurally just policing. Officers that

identified as Australian were less likely to endorse procedurally just policing than those who did not identify ( $\beta = -.18$ ), and women were more likely to endorse than men ( $\beta = -.15$ ).

The model accounted for 9% of the variance in support for using force. Age showed the strongest association ( $\beta = -.20$ ) with older officers offering less support for using force than younger officers. Consistent with our hypotheses, the greater officers' self-legitimacy, the less likely they were to support a more forceful approach when interacting with residents ( $\beta = -.16$ ). Stereotype threat was not significantly associated with force support ( $\beta = .11$ ).

Finally, stereotype threat had a significant indirect effect on procedural justice endorsement via officers' self-legitimacy ( $\beta = -.09$ ,  $b = -.04$ , 95% CI [-.09, -.02], SE = .02,  $p = .001$ ) accounting for nearly 65% of the total effect. Stereotype threat also had a significant indirect effect on force support ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $b = .03$ , 95% CI [.004, .07], SE = .02,  $p = .02$ ) accounting for nearly 30% of the total effect. This indicates that self-legitimacy fully mediates the relation between stereotype threat and coercive policing given that stereotype threat did not maintain significant direct associations with either outcome.<sup>8</sup>

## Discussion

The findings of the current study are consistent with recent U.S. research by Trinkner et al. (2019) that found concerns with confirming the stereotype of being racist undermines police officers' perceptions of self-legitimacy and is associated with greater support for more coercive policing responses and reduced support for procedural justice policing. That these findings are robust across U.S. and Australian policing jurisdictions suggests that this source of identity threat for police officers generalizes, at least across Western democracies, where normative authority is a critical component of police self-legitimacy and where there are ongoing tensions between police and minority groups (Miller et al., 2008; Trinkner et al., 2019; Souhami, 2014). These findings further suggest that persistent negative or distrustful relationships between police and minority communities may foster a self-reinforcing process, whereby police feel their legitimate authority is threatened, and as such rely on more coercive powers to deal with these community members (Richardson & Goff, 2014; Trinkner et al., 2019). As a result, these communities have their negative perceptions of racial prejudice and distrust in police confirmed, which may contribute to greater non-compliance by residents (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003), leading to increases in coercive policing.

Our findings suggest that the experience of stereotype threat does not vary significantly according to individual officer characteristics, such as age, gender or cultural identity, which is consistent with the findings from the Trinkner et al. (2019) study. This would indicate that susceptibility to feeling threatened by the 'racist cop' stereotype is reasonably uniform across officers, including those with minority ethnic backgrounds. This suggests that chronic stereotype threat concerns formed through years of exposure to the stereotype during frontline experience and perhaps also more pervasively through popular culture, may generate reasonably stable impacts on police officers, irrespective of their individual backgrounds or characteristics. The finding that officers of non-Australian ethnicity had lower self-legitimacy is interesting, and may be in part be a product of the unique challenges that officers from racial or ethnic minority backgrounds in Australia may face, such as being ostracized by their own community for joining the police or having to suppress their cultural identity to conform to policing culture (Shepherd, 2014). That non-Australian officers were more likely to endorse procedural justice than Australian officers is harder to explain, with no consistent evidence to date that officer race or ethnicity predicts use of procedural justice responses (McCluskey &

Reisig, 2017). Further research is needed to illuminate this finding. Additionally, the influence of contextual factors on the experience of stereotype threat, such as the ethnic or racial composition of the communities in which officers work or more acute situational factors related to encounters with minority ethnic or racial communities, need to be explored further.

These findings on the influence of the ‘racist cop’ stereotype on police coercion raises an important question as to how the effects of this stereotype can be interrupted. Dismantling the stereotype involves reducing perceptions of police bias, which appear to be relatively widespread among Australian racial and ethnic minorities (Sivasubramaniam & Goodman-Delahunty, 2008; White, 2009). Naturally, reducing actual racial and ethnic disparities would assist this, and is a worthwhile longer-term societal goal. In the shorter term, incentivizing the use of procedural justice, particularly for officers in communities with significant ethnic and racial minority populations, could counteract perceptions of bias. Research suggests that when minority group members are dealt with in a procedurally just manner, that is politely and respectfully, with clear information provided on the purpose of proactive police stops, they are less likely to infer that they have been racially or ethnically targeted (Tyler & Wakslak, 2004). Procedurally just encounters with police have been found to improve public perceptions of police legitimacy (Mazerolle et al., 2013; Tyler & Wakslak, 2004), including among Australian minority groups (Murphy & Cherney, 2011). Thus, greater use of procedural justice approaches should reduce inferences of racial or ethnic bias by police and increase perceptions of police legitimacy. A key source of police self-legitimacy is officer perceptions of the degree of legitimacy the public accords them (Gau & Paoline, 2019), so increased public perceptions of legitimacy should bolster police self-legitimacy. Policing approaches that can increase police self-legitimacy should counter the influence of stereotype threat on police coercion, as this study, in line with other work, suggests that increased police self-legitimacy is associated with reduced coercive policing (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Tankebe, 2014; Trinkner et al., 2019).

In communities where relationships between police and residents are hostile, encounters are more likely to elicit identity threats, thereby increasing the use of negative stereotypes (Bohm et al., 2018; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Intergroup contact under conditions of cooperative working, equal status and institutional support can both reduce intergroup bias and concerns about being stereotyped (Allport, 1954; Brewer, 1996; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Recent Australian research has found that the use of Community Oriented Policing (COP) – involving the formation of cooperative partnerships with communities to address collaboratively identified crime priorities - was associated with a reduced propensity for coercive policing in socially challenged areas (McCarthy et al., 2019; McCarthy, et al., 2020). Reduced officer perceptions of social distance from the community was one pathway through which COP influenced increased approval for non-coercive responses (McCarthy et al., 2020). The Australian government has recently committed to reducing the marked disparities in criminal justice system involvement for Indigenous people,<sup>9</sup> so it is timely to consider how policing approaches can be modified to enable more collaborative, problem-solving partnerships between officers and Indigenous communities.

There are a number of study limitations that should be acknowledged. First, this study was limited to examining officers’ support for coercive policing responses, rather than their actual use of coercive tactics. Future work could usefully examine officers’ coercive behavior, especially as it relates to the mediational role of self-legitimacy. Second, the online survey had a modest response rate (15%), though previous research suggests that low survey response rates are not necessarily indicative of nonresponse bias (Nix et al., 2017), and the demographic distribution of our sample was representative of the QPS workforce (QPS, 2017). Third, the

use of cross-sectional survey data also limits the inferences that can be made about the temporal order and causal nature of the relationships between self-legitimacy, stereotype threat, and attitudes towards police coercion examined in this study. Lastly, our modelling approach was not robustly able to determine the influence of minority community presence or contact with officers on the experience of stereotype threat. More detailed measures of minority community contact, and the use of a hierarchical modelling framework, could enable relations among stereotype threat, self-legitimacy, and coercion in relation to specific minority groups to be tested more thoroughly.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that officers' concerns with appearing racist and the influence of this on self-legitimacy and coercion is robust across U.S. and Australian contexts. The findings highlight the detrimental effects of this stereotype on the propensity for coercive policing, and suggest that dismantling this stereotype, and by extension the behaviors that produce it, would benefit both police and the communities they serve. Greater use of procedural justice and closer collaborative partnerships between police and communities may assist in reducing concerns with racism in encounters between police and residents.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> While forty Divisions were originally chosen for participation, officers from a total of 52 Divisions ended up submitting survey responses.

<sup>2</sup> Available online at [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Molly\\_Mccarthy14](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Molly_Mccarthy14)

<sup>3</sup> Investigative officers are attached to Districts rather than Divisions, so their distribution has to be estimated.

<sup>4</sup> All analyses discussed but not presented are available in the supplemental appendix.

<sup>5</sup> We recognize that there are multiple methods to create parcels. We explored several other specifications, available in the supplemental appendix. In all cases, results were substantively identical to those presented here.

<sup>6</sup> We assessed the prediction of officers' experience of stereotype threat by control variables, as this would influence model specification. Analyses showed no significant associations between stereotype threat and the controls. As such, stereotype threat and controls were included as concurrent predictors of dependent variables.

<sup>7</sup> Estimated correlations among the exogenous predictors are available in the supplemental appendix, along with summary data for replication purposes.

<sup>8</sup> We ran an additional model that also included multiple division-level characteristics: violent crime rate, property crime rate, drug crime rate, percentage of the population that were born in a non-English speaking country, and the percentage of the population that were Indigenous. None of these additional variables predicted self-legitimacy, procedural justice endorsement, or support for using force. Moreover, including these controls did not substantively change the relations among our primary variables of interest. However, we note that the influence of community-level factors requires further exploration through a hierarchical modelling framework. This model can be seen in the supplementary appendix.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/adults-are-not-overrepresented-criminal-justice-system>

Table 1 – (Observed) Descriptive statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	$\alpha$	% (N)
Stereotype threat	2.37	.99	1.00	5.00	.88	100.0 (306)
Self-legitimacy	4.19	.54	2.00	5.00	.74	100.0 (306)
Force support	2.78	.72	1.00	4.80	.77	100.0 (306)
Procedural justice endorsement	3.81	.54	1.94	5.00	.92	100.0 (306)
Officer characteristics						
Age	4.48	1.83	1.00	8.00	--	
18-25						4.6 (14)
26-30						13.1 (40)
31-35						15.0 (46)
36-40						15.7 (48)
41-45						19.0 (58)
46-50						17.6 (54)
51-55						11.4 (35)
56-60						3.6 (11)
Experience	4.76	1.69	1.00	7.00	--	
<12 months						2.0 (6)
1-2 years						4.9 (15)
3-5 years						21.6 (66)
6-10 years						19.0 (58)
11-15 years						16.3 (50)
16-20 years						11.8 (36)
>20 years						24.5 (75)
Australian <sup>†</sup>	.89	.31	0 (no)	1 (yes)	--	
Australian ethnicity						88.9 (272)
Non-Australian ethnicity						11.1 (34)
Gender <sup>†</sup>	.77	.42	0 (woman)	1 (man)	--	
Male						77.5 (237)
Female						22.5 (69)

Note: Scale descriptive statistics reflect an average of the scale items.

<sup>†</sup> Binary variable

Table 2 – Factor loadings and model fit from structural equation model.

	Factor Loadings
<b>Stereotype Threat</b>	
I worry that people may think of me as racist because I am a police officer.	.84
I worry that people I deal with on the job might misinterpret something I say as racist.	.81
I worry that being a police officer makes it harder for me to be friendly with people from racial or ethnic minority groups.	.68
I worry that being a police officer influences what people who are racial or ethnic minority group members think of me.	.77
I worry about whether I come across as racist when I deal with people from racial or ethnic minority groups.	.76
<b>Self-Legitimacy</b>	
How much do you, as a police officer, feel that you represent the values of the public in the areas where you work?	.53
How confident are you in using the authority that has been given to you as a police officer?	.50
How confident are you, as a police officer, that you have enough authority to do your job well?	.61
How much do you believe that, as a police officer, you occupy a position of special importance in society?	.59
How confident are you that, in your role as a police officer, you are effective in contributing to crime prevention and community safety?	.66
How much do you believe that people should always do what you tell them to do, as long as your orders are lawful?	.44
How confident are you, as a police officer, that you are capable of providing security for all citizens residing in the communities you currently serve?	.50
<b>Force Support</b>	
Police officers should use physical force more often to get citizens to comply.	.66
Members of the public will have more confidence in police if officers use a tough, physical approach on the street.	.84
Sometimes forceful police actions are very educational for members of the public.	.60
If officers don't show that they are physically tough, they will be seen as weak.	.61
A tough, physical approach should be used less on the street.	.43
<b>Procedural Justice Endorsement</b>	
Parcel 1	.88
Parcel 2	.60
Parcel 3	.57
<b>Model Fit</b>	
$\chi^2$	435.33
$\chi^2$ (df)	228
$\chi^2$ significance	.000
SRMR	.06
CFI	.91
RMSEA	.055
RMSEA 90% CI	.047, .062
RMSEA pclose	.162

Table 3 – Parameter estimates from structural equation model.

	Self-Legitimacy			Procedural Justice			Force Support		
				Endorsement					
	$\beta$	b	SE	$\beta$	b	SE	$\beta$	b	SE
Self-legitimacy	--	--	--	.33***	.37	.09	-.16*	-.23	.11
Stereotype threat	-.28***	-.12	.03	-.06	-.03	.03	.11	.07	.04
Age	-.12	-.03	.02	.15	.04	.03	-.20*	-.07	.03
Experience	.19	.05	.03	.17	.05	.03	.02	.01	.04
Australian	.15 *	.21	.10	-.18*	-.29	.10	.09	.20	.13
Gender	.02	.02	.07	-.15*	-.18	.07	.07	.12	.10
Indirect effect <sup>†</sup>	--	--	--	-.09**	-.04	.02	.04*	.03	.02
$R^2$		.13			.24			.09	

Note: Australian: 1 = Identified as Australian; Gender: 1 = man

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

<sup>†</sup> Association between stereotype threat and each outcome via self-legitimacy