Confidence and Trust in Police: How Sexual Identity Difference Shapes Perceptions of Police

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Abstract

Previous research indicates that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex ('LGBTI') community and the heterosexual community vary in their perceptions of police. This study examines variations in the levels of perceptions of police in both communities, and determines whether or not an individual's sexual identity helps to shape perceptions of police legitimacy and levels of trust in the police. Using a face-to-face survey, data were collected from 365 participants. The results show that respondents who identified themselves as LGBTI report more negative opinions than heterosexual participants regarding: police trust and police legitimacy; procedural justice; treatment quality from police; and respect from police. The research reported in this article indicates that sexual identity does impact on perceptions of policing, and can help to determine whether LGBTI people perceive the police to be legitimate. The findings have implications for theories of trust, and also build upon previous literature examining perceptions of police legitimacy.

Introduction

The public's trust and confidence in the police is considered the *cornerstone* for public cooperation and the basis for police legitimacy in a democratic society (Rosenbaum et al 2005). Yet failure to effectively address the lack of trust and confidence in the police by minority groups (who may perceive that they are discriminated against by the police) may encourage minority groups to hold negative and biased opinions towards police officers. Many minority groups may purposely avoid police engagement, thereby undermining cooperation (Tyler 1990). Trust in the police (and police trustworthiness) conveys the extent to which individuals perceive that the police are motivated to be sincerely helpful and caring, to give priority to the best interests of the community, and are honest and open (in terms of citizen involvement) (Tyler 1990). However, many minority groups, such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex ('LGBTI')[1] community, mistrust the police, fearing that they might incur abuse from the police, and possible victimisation at the hands of police officers (Comstock 1989).

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[1]   Although other Australian states and cities have different terms for the LGBTI community (such as 'gay and lesbian' or 'queer') the terminology used in this research to identify members of this diverse community is based on the Australian Human Rights Commission's (2012) definition.

In most Australian states, the police code of conduct maintains that police officers are expected to perform their duties in such a manner that the public has confidence and trust in the integrity, objectivity and impartiality of the police service (Enders and Dupont 2001). Yet many minority groups within Australia argue that they are subject to policing techniques that are not implemented towards other members of society and are subject to biased-based policing, which results in confrontational interaction and a lack of mutual trust (Ioimo et al 2007). In both the United States and Australia, numerous minority groups distinguished by differences in racial status and sexual orientation complain that they are targeted by police agencies who specifically implement discriminatory policing techniques, which are directed towards minorities and diverse communities (Wolff and Cokely 2007). For example, previous Australian qualitative research by Dalton (2007) documented practices of police entrapment of gay men in 'beats' (places where men meet for sexual purposes), where gay men were incited to disclose and act upon their desires, thereby exposing themselves to criminal sanction. In addition, qualitative research by Johnson (2010) determined how the moral decision-making of police officers (often guided by their subjective perceptions) determined the scope and application of the law towards male homosexuality and consensual sex in public places. Further, the discretionary exercise of police power regarding 'hate' crime (typically defined internationally as evidence of prejudice based on gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or disability) and the failure to protect some minority groups from it, while also targeting them for other crimes, may influence why minority groups fail to trust police.

Wolff and Cokely (2007) indicated that many LGBTI people feel that they will not receive an appropriate response from police officers, and that the treatment they will receive will be less than neutral, trustworthy and dignified. Yet when the police are viewed as possessing legitimate authority, the public is more likely to hold positive attitudes toward police officers, cooperate with law enforcement, and engage with the police; particularly if people feel that they will be treated in a procedurally fair manner (Cherney 1997; Hinds and Murphy 2007; Tyler 2004; Sunshine and Tyler 2003).

Using survey data collected from a convenience sample of Australian citizens frequenting two venues that are openly welcoming to both heterosexual and LGBTI patrons, the present study examines differences in police trust between members of the LGBTI and heterosexual communities. To answer two research questions — 'How does an individual's sexual identity (an individual's sexual orientation or how he or she defines his or her individual sexuality) influence perceptions of policing?' and 'Does sexual identity help to shape perceptions of police legitimacy and levels of trust in the police?'[2] — the article begins with a review of the extant literature. It then describes the research method, sample, and analytic approach. Finally, the findings from the research are presented, which indicate that respondents who identified themselves as LGBTI report more negative perceptions of police overall than respondents who identified themselves as heterosexual.

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[2]   Although transgender and intersex people have traditionally been included within wider lesbian, gay and bisexual communities due to their marginalised status, it should be noted that people who express gender diversity (such as transgender and intersex people) may have significantly different perceptions of police than people whose identities are solely based on differences in sexuality. However, many transgender and intersex people also express non-heterosexual sexualities, regardless of their gender identity (Shankle 2006). Therefore, it was deemed appropriate that all members of the LGBTI community be included in this study, since it is examining how sexual identity impacts on perceptions of policing.

Background literature

Previous literature examining the relationship between the police and the public indicates that the level of trust people have in the police is a reflection of police action and police engagement (Skogan 2005, 2006; Tyler 1990; Tyler and Fagan 2008). The police can either increase or reduce public trust in policing as a result of their actions and the levels of engagement they have with the public. Yet it has been repeatedly shown that there is a wide gap between the levels of trust and confidence found among minority groups and the police, with many minority groups mistrusting the police. Numerous studies have indicated that there is a wide gap between the levels of trust and confidence that many minority groups have in the police (and in policing procedures), with the majority of white, middle-class people expressing more confidence in the police than other members of society who may be from ethnic or other social groups (Garofalo 1977; Huang and Vaughn 1996; Schuman et al 1997).

'Trust' is the belief that a person occupying a specific role (such as a police officer) will perform that role in a manner consistent with the socially defined *normative* expectations associated with that role. For example, a police officer will be trusted when a person believes that the officer will behave in a manner consistent with the *actual* role of the police officer. In Australia, this means police officers conduct themselves and discharge their responsibilities with professionalism and integrity (Enders and Dupont 2001). If a police officer performs his or her duties in such a manner, the officer will be 'trusted' as a member of the police, since citizens do not simply grant officers trust. Instead, officers *earn* trust through their behaviours (Hawdon 2008). Trust is an important component of effective social control (Tyler 1990) because people who view government identities (such as the police) with greater legitimacy are more likely to cooperate with legal authorities. Yet previous research indicates that many minority groups feel disconnected from and distrust the police (Kennedy 1997; Tuch and Weitzer 1997; Weitzer 2002).

Minority perceptions of police legitimacy and trust

Previous research indicates that legitimacy is the *characteristic* of the police force that makes citizens feel that the actions of the police are justified (Tyler 1990; Sunshine and Tyler 2003). Police legitimacy has been shown to comprise of two constructs: trust and confidence in the police, and obligation to obey police directives. The key components of public perceptions of police legitimacy are trust (in the motives of police), perceptions of police neutrality, participation in decision-making, and being treated with dignity and respect (Cherney 1997; Hinds and Murphy 2007; Tyler 1990; Sunshine and Tyler 2003). Therefore, when the police are viewed as possessing legitimate authority, the public is more likely to hold positive attitudes toward police officers, to cooperate with law enforcement, and to engage with the police (Eck and Rosenbaum 1994; Weitzer 2000).

Discussions of public trust and confidence in the police often assume that the key to public feelings about the police, the courts and the legal system is the public's evaluation of the effectiveness of the performance of legal authorities (Tyler 1990). In the case of police officers, their ability (or inability) to engage in effective crime control is frequently seen as driving the valence of public evaluations. However, Australian studies examining the relationship between police and diverse communities state that many minority groups living in Australia have particularly problematic and poor relationships with police due to perceptions of over-policing of minority groups (Murphy and Cherney 2010), perceptions of

poor police neutrality (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009), and perceptions of differential policing techniques (Adelman et al 2003; Weitzer and Tuch 2005). It has been argued that differential policing has resulted in many LGBTI people being subject to police discretionary power (in relation to verbal and physical abuse) and incidents of police maltreatment (Barrientos et al 2010; Dworkin and Yi 2003).

Negative perceptions between police and minority groups can be harmful to the overall perception of police neutrality and, as such, can reduce public satisfaction and confidence in the police (Goodman-Delahunty 2010). The police should give precedence to building positive relationships with minority groups and constructing purposeful community engagement, which will alter minority group perceptions of the police and increase overall satisfaction and confidence in the force. Yet detractors of police procedure argue that the police 'do little' to reduce minority perceptions of alienation, dissatisfaction, deviance[3] and non-cooperation with the police (particularly within Australia) (Brunson and Miller 2006; Goodman-Delahunty 2010; Tyler and Huo 2002). However, many police organisations have implemented outreach programs to build relationships with different minority groups within the community and employ specific liaison officers (often working through designated liaison committees) to work with minorities such as the Asian, Indigenous, and Muslim communities. Nonetheless, police are often the first and primary contact with the justice system for most citizens, so police interaction with members of the public is pivotal in shaping people's expectations of, and cooperation and compliance with, the law.

In the past (particularly throughout the 20th century), few Australian minority groups had voluntary contact or were involved in community partnership programs with the police, as deviants of any sort (social, political, cultural or sexual) were increasingly subject to state persecution. This was particularly true of the members of diverse minority groups such as the LGBTI community, who, in comparison to other members of society, purposefully avoided contact with the police (Cook-Daniels 1998). This is not to suggest, however, that the relationship between the police in Australia and members of the LGBTI community has been static or that the police have not attempted to make significant changes in their policy and practices (for example, employing LGBTI police liaison officers and policing hate crimes). However, despite changes in the social, political and legal history of the relationship between police and LGBTI people,[4] the nature of the relationship in Australia remains problematic. This is due to the negative perceptions of differential policing practices mentioned earlier.

The impact of sexual identity on police trust

Perceptions of non-normative sexualities (such as those expressed by the LGBTI community) challenge mainstream models and practices of policing (Moran 2007). Yet the majority of policing models and practices implemented towards the community are based on a hetero-normative model of society and a white, masculine, heterosexual ethos (Myers et al 2004). Therefore, when police are confronted with a sexually diverse community, the breakdown in normative expectations of gendered behaviour (which is situated in the context of heterosexuality) may result in homophobic confrontations (Myers et al 2004).

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[3]   In this context, deviance refers to the past criminal status of homosexuality, which, despite decriminalisation, still predisposes some police to respond negatively to men they perceive to be gay (Dalton 2011).

[4]   For example, the transition of police hostility displayed at the initial 1978 Sydney Stonewall remembrance march to the patrolled supervision and inclusion of police in the current Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade.

However, it can be argued that the grouping of LGBTI sexual identity into a homogeneous analytic framework may actually contribute to the 'othering' of sexual identity associated with the LGBTI community by hetero-normative agencies, such as the police. An analysis of the large body of sociological work examining the appropriateness of grouping the LGBTI community into a sexually homogeneous conceptual and analytic framework is beyond the scope of this research paper. Grouped sexual identity (such as normative sexual identity: heterosexuality) and non-normative sexual identity (such as LGBTI sexual identity) is one of the salient identity markers that many cultures use to categorise and judge others (Skeggs 1999). Thus, for the purpose of this study, it was deemed appropriate to analyse LGBTI sexual identity as a homogeneous group.

Previous research by Burke (1994:192) examining police perceptions of homosexuality as deviance indicated that homosexuals are the social group most disliked and distrusted by police. Within Australia, there have been numerous documented cases of police homophobia (and verbal and physical harassment) directed towards LGBTI people as a result of mismanaged policing practice. Consequently, it is has been argued that such incidents of police homophobia are major contributing factors in the lack of trust and engagement between LGBTI people and the police (Tomsen and Mason 2001). LGBTI people have frequently been victimised by the police and their sexual identities devalued or outlawed (via legislation) due to police practice upholding or maintaining dominant societal norms. In addition, research indicates that dislike of LGBTI people translates into, and accounts for, much of the negative behaviour that is displayed towards them (Bernstein and Kostelac 2002). Certainly, this may be salient for both male and female police officers who have to engender stereotypically male status-dominant roles.

To build trust, there must be a relationship between individuals, and a relationship between individuals and organisations (Newton 2001). However, many people intentionally steer clear of contact with the police. As previously stated, many LGBTI people also avoid interaction with the police and consequently do not have reciprocal relationships with members of the police force. This is despite police involvement (or presence) at LGBTI community events to promote better relations (for example, the annual LGBTI Mardi Gras in New South Wales, and Picnic in the Park, part of the Feast Festival, in South Australia). For members of the LGBTI community and the police to gain each other's trust and cooperation, both groups must be willing to relinquish perceived stereotypes and learn about the other community (Dwyer 2009; Finneran and Stephenson 2013). Such reciprocity can go a long way towards changing perceptions and negative attitudes that each group has towards the other. When distrust occurs, however, it is harmful to relationships because it results in hostility and alienation (Govier 1998). Yet trust in the police is often difficult for LGBTI people because they frequently experience rejection and abuse from such authorities (Simpson 1994).

It is the intention of this research to fill in gaps within the extant literature regarding sexual identity and its impact on perceptions of the police, particularly in terms of difference between LGBTI and heterosexual perceptions of trust in the police, and the impact such difference may have on perceptions of legitimacy of the police force. Building on previous work by Goldsmith (2005), this research examines how sexual identity impacts on the perceptions of trust in police, perceptions of procedural justice, perceptions of treatment quality by police, and perceived levels of respect from police, which in turn *form* the basis of trust in police and perceptions of police legitimacy. Therefore, the concepts of trust in police, procedural justice, treatment quality by police, and respect from police contribute to the theoretical framework used in this research. The conceptual terms are outlined below.

Trust in police

According to Tyler and Huo (2002), trust is the perception of the benevolence in the motives and intentions of another. Such trust is an inference about the character of a person and the motivations that shape their behaviour. Thus if a person is believed to be honest and acts morally, then it is believed that they will be motivated by such character traits (Tyler and Huo 2002). Future behaviour is likely to be predicted from such an assessment, and levels of risk-taking and interaction with such persons can be adjusted so that desired outcomes can be obtained. It was determined therefore that it was important to measure trust in police in this research because minority groups (such as the LGBTI community) have been shown to vary in their levels of trust in the police and perceptions of police legitimacy.

Procedural justice

When people are treated fairly by legal authorities and as a result are willing to consent and cooperate with legal authorities, their judgments about the degree to which those authorities are using fair procedures develops positively (Tyler and Huo 2002). According to Tyler and Blader (2003), two key issues underlie an individual's judgment about procedural justice: a judgment about the quality of the decision-making and a judgment about the quality of his or her own treatment. It was determined that perceptions of procedural justice were important to measure in this research because minority groups differ in their perceived levels of police fairness and respect, and perceptions of neutral police treatment and decision-making, from other members of mainstream society.

Treatment quality

According to Tyler and Wakslak (2004), people who experience high-quality interpersonal treatment during interaction with police officers (such as politeness, respect and acknowledgment of their rights) are more likely to perceive the police as legitimate. Further, when an individual perceives that the police treat all people in a just and fair manner, that perception is pivotal in the extent to which that person may or may not trust the police. It was determined therefore that it was important to measure perceptions of treatment quality in this research because minority groups have been shown to vary in their experience of interpersonal treatment during police contact.

Respect from police

Tyler (1990) also indicates that one of the key issues in shaping public trust and confidence in the police is public perception regarding police interpersonal respect. It was determined that it was important to measure perceptions of respect from police in this research because minority groups have indicated that they are more reluctant than other people to interact and engage with the police as a result of perceptions of police disrespect.

Method

Procedure

A survey was administered over two consecutive nights (Friday and Saturday) to participants both standing outside of and waiting in line to enter two nightclubs situated in an inner-city area in one of the capital cities in Australia. Since the participants were waiting in line to enter a venue, it was determined that the use of a survey (rather than interviews) would be more appropriate (and time efficient) as a data collection tool (Groves et al 2013).

The surveys were administered by a team of six volunteers and each of the surveys given to the participants was identical. To avoid duplication of results, all respondents were asked if they had completed the survey prior to being approached. A self-report survey was utilised to examine participants' trust in the police, perceptions of procedural justice, treatment quality by police, respect from police, and self-esteem. Each of the participants took 10 minutes or less to complete the survey. There was no missing data in the returned surveys.

Site selection

For ethical reasons, each of the nightclubs and the area in which they are situated has been de-identified in this research. Each nightclub was chosen for its capacity to attract large numbers of patrons, and because it is known to openly welcome both LGBTI and heterosexual patrons, although both nightclubs are advertised as gay and lesbian venues. Both nightclubs are situated within the metropolitan area of the city approximately 2.3 kilometres apart and both nightclubs have been established within the LGBTI (and wider) community as entertainment venues for over 20 years. While it is not known whether both nightclubs have a history of police concern regarding problems with patron assaults (neither venue would disclose this information), both venues have maintained positive relationships with the police regarding patron intoxication and drug use and/or drug dealing, and both nightclubs are monitored by private security guards. Unlike nightclubs marketed to younger people (typically to patrons under 30 years of age), both venues attract a wide age-range of people, and neither is recognised by police as a trouble zone.

Participants

Using a non-proportional quota sampling technique to ensure that a minimum of 100 participants from both the LGBTI and heterosexual communities were represented in the study, 365 participants were recruited to participate in the research. Participants were selected on the basis of gender (both male and female) and on their intention to enter one of the nightclubs (by either standing in line to enter or waiting outside). Although many patrons refused to participate in the research, overall the research team received positive (and polite) reactions from both LGBTI and heterosexual patrons, and the acceptance rate to participate in the study was higher than expected.

While some patrons who attend nightclubs may be more predisposed to dislike the police due to the effects of intoxication, drug-taking and resultant incivility, there is no empirical research to suggest that patrons who frequent nightclubs will differ in their attitudes towards the police than patrons who frequent other social venues. It was anticipated that the convenience sample of visitors collected at the venues could provide results that would be suitable for the study.

Although members of the LGBTI community have differing lifestyles and sexual identities that may be problematic when linking LGBTI people together as a collective group, it was determined that identity associations could be made between LGBTI people since they are primarily interconnected by their notions of sexual identity that are different to normative heterosexual identities (Ghaziani 2011; Valocchi 2013). It was also recognised that collective grouping of LGBTI people would result in sample heterogeneity and therefore contribute some limitations to the study in terms of generalisability. However, it was anticipated that the results of this study would speak to the broader issues regarding confidence and trust in police; specifically, how sexual identity difference shapes an individual's perception of the police. Thus, for the purposes of categorising the sample, the research grouped LGBTI people together to capture diversity of experience regarding perceptions of police.

The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 74 years ($M = 35.32$, $SD = 12.03$) and the majority of the participants were male ($n = 197$; 54%); with females comprising 42.2% ($n = 154$) of participants; transgender male-to-female participants comprising 2.2% ($n = 8$); transgender female-to-male participants comprising 0.5% ($n = 2$); and intersex participants comprising 1.1% ($n = 4$). Since a non-proportional quota sampling technique was used in the recruitment process, 65.5% of the total participants ($N = 365$) identified as LGBTI ($n = 239$); and 34.5% of participants identified as heterosexual ($n = 126$). More than half of the participants were in a relationship ($n = 223$; 61.1%) and 12 participants (3.3%) identified as an Aboriginal Australian or Torres Strait Islander. The majority of the participants were Australian citizens ($n = 355$; 97.3%) and all of the participants in the study resided in the same capital city. Preliminary data analyses were conducted to examine for demographic differences between the two different venues where data were collected. The analyses (based on demographic features, such as gender, sexual identity, age range, and area of residency) indicated that there was no significant difference between the participants recruited from either venue. Therefore, it was determined that for all further analyses the two samples would be combined.

Measures

To answer two research questions — 'How does an individual's sexual identity (an individual's sexual orientation or how they define their individual sexuality) influence perceptions of policing?' and 'Does sexual identity helps to shape perceptions of police legitimacy and levels of trust in the police' — and to measure participants' trust in police, perceptions of procedural justice, and treatment quality by police, the participants were asked to respond to 18 items (six items per section) on a five-point Likert scale (1 = 'extremely likely' and 5 = 'extremely unlikely'). To measure respect from police, the participants were asked to respond to a set of four items with either a Yes or No response. All of the items included in the survey were adapted from previous studies that also analysed policing, legitimacy and ingroup/outgroup identity. For example, items used in the survey were adapted from the group-value model (Smith et al 1998); legitimacy measures (Murphy et al 2008; Sunshine and Tyler 2003); respect from police scale (Tyler and Wakslak 2004); generalized group attitude scale (Duckitt et al 2005); and the Community Capacity Survey (Wickes et al 2011).

Some of the representative questions included:

- During contact with police officers in their professional capacity, how likely is it that you would not trust the police?

- During contact with police officers in their professional capacity, how likely is it that you would be treated equally or with fairness?

- During contact with police officers in their professional capacity, how unlikely is it that the police will treat you politely?

- Do you believe that most members of the police would respect you as a person?

A composite trust in police score, procedural justice score, treatment quality score and *respect from police* score was calculated by summing across each of the items within each scale. All of the scales had *good* internal consistency: trust in police scale α = .79; procedural justice scale α = .75; and treatment quality scale α = .94. A composite *respect from police* score was also calculated by summing across each Yes and No response. The respect from police scale had *acceptable* internal consistency: α = .72. Some of the items in

the *trust in police scale* and *procedural justice scale* were reverse coded to prevent response bias.

Results

Gender and sexual identity

There was an unequal distribution of sexual identity across each gender group, with more LGBTI males ($n = 170$) than heterosexual males ($n = 29$), and more heterosexual females ($n = 97$) than LGBTI females ($n = 69$).

Trust in police, treatment quality, procedural justice, respect from police and gender, age, and ethnicity

The differential influences of gender, age and ethnicity on perceptions of trust in police, perceptions of procedural quality, perceptions of treatment quality from the police, and perceptions of respect from the police suggested the need for careful analysis. Indeed, previous research examining perceptions of policing have focused primarily on gender, age and ethnicity (Rice and Piquero, 2005). To examine the relationship between trust in police, procedural justice, treatment quality and respect from police, and gender, age and ethnicity, a series of Mann-Whitney U tests was performed.

The results of the Mann-Whitney U tests indicated that there was a significant association between gender, and age, and trust and legitimacy in police, treatment quality, procedural justice, and respect from police. The results of the Mann-Whitney U tests also indicated that there was a significant association between ethnicity, and trust and legitimacy in police, treatment quality, and respect from police (see Table 1). It was decided therefore that gender, age and ethnicity would be included in further analyses. To examine the relationship between *sexual identity*, and gender, age and ethnicity a factorial MANOVA was performed. This was to determine the impact of sexual identity on the participant's perceptions of trust and legitimacy in police, perceptions of treatment quality from police, perceptions of procedural justice (when interacting with police), and perceptions of respect from police, although by using a parametric multivariate test with a convenient sample, assumptions about the populations from which the sample was drawn are not necessarily generalisable to the wider public.

Table 1: Mann-Whitney U test results evaluating trust and legitimacy in police, treatment quality, procedural justice, respect from police and gender, age, and ethnicity

Participants			Trust and legitimacy			Treatment quality			Procedural justice			Respect from police	
	n	*Md*	*U*	*Z*	*Md*	*U*	*Z*	*Md*	*U*	*Z*	*Md*	*U*	*Z*
Gender			13295	-3.22**		21235	4.71***		14012.5	-2.5*		22938	6.53***
Male	199	18			19			17			5		
Female	166	16			22			16			7		
Age			11981	-4.64***		21453.5	4.78***		11904.5	-4.72***		22204.5	5.64***
18–38	187	18			18			17			6		
39–74	178	16			22			15			7		
Ethnicity			1000	-3.12**		3183.5	2.97**		1502	-1.72		3264.5	3.26**
Ind	12	22.5			14.5			18.5			5		
N/Ind	353	17			21			16			6		

$N = 365$; *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$ Note: Ind = Indigenous; N/Ind = Non-Indigenous

The independent variables were sexual identity (LGBTI/heterosexual), gender, age, and ethnicity. Preliminary assumption testing indicated that no serious violations were noted. A significant main effect was found for sexual identity ($F_{(4, 341)} = 15.84$, $p < .001$, Wilks' Lambda = .84, $\eta_p^2 = .16$) on the combined dependent variables. When the results were considered separately, the differences to reach statistical significance, using a Bonferroni adjustment alpha level of .025 (to reduce the chance of a Type 1 error), were between sexual identity and perceptions of procedural justice ($F_{(1, 344)} = 6.32$, $p < .05$); sexual identity and perceptions of treatment quality from police ($F_{(1, 344)} = 21.67$, $p < .001$); sexual identity and participant's perceptions of trust and legitimacy in police ($F_{(1, 344)} = 22.84$, $p <.001$); and sexual identity and perceptions of respect from police ($F_{(1, 344)} = 42.49$, $p <.001$).

Procedural justice

An inspection of the mean scores indicated that heterosexual males (M = 15.24, SD = 2.69) and heterosexual females (M = 14.73, SD = 3.16) reported more positive perceptions of procedural justice than LGBTI males (M = 17.56, SD = 4.76) and LGBTI females (M = 17.57, SD = 3.66) (a minimum score of six indicating positive perceptions of procedural justice and a maximum score of 30 indicating negative perceptions of procedural justice).

Treatment quality

Heterosexual males (M = 23.59, SD = 3.26) and heterosexual females (M = 23.72, SD = 2.95) reported more positive perceptions of treatment quality from police than LGBTI males (M = 16.48, SD = 6.89) and LGBTI females (M = 16.91, SD = 6.15) (a minimum score of six indicating negative treatment quality from police and a maximum score of 30 indicating positive treatment quality from police).

Trust and legitimacy

Heterosexual males (M = 15.07, SD = 2.87) and heterosexual females (M = 14.47, SD = 3.60) reported more positive perceptions of trust and legitimacy in police than LGBTI males (M = 18.56, SD = 4.24) and LGBTI females (M = 19.41, SD = 3.99) (with a minimum score of six indicating trust in the police and a maximum score of 30 indicating distrust in the police).

Respect from police

Heterosexual males (M = 7.28, SD = .84) and heterosexual females (M = 7.34, SD = .79) reported more positive perceptions of respect from police than LGBTI males (M = 5.44, SD = 1.27) and LGBTI females (M = 5.77, SD = 1.30) (with a minimum score of four indicating negative perceptions of respect from police and a maximum score of eight indicating positive perceptions of respect from police). The mean scores and standard deviation for these results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean scores and standard deviation for measures of trust and legitimacy in police, procedural justice, treatment quality, and respect from police grouped by sexuality and gender

	Sexuality														
Variable	**LGBTI**								**Heterosexual**							
	Trust and legitimacy		Procedural justice		Treatment quality		Respect police		Trust and legitimacy		Procedural justice		Treatment quality		Respect police	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Gender																
Male	18.56	4.24	17.56	4.76	16.48	6.89	5.44	1.27	15.07	2.87	15.24	2.69	23.59	3.26	7.28	.84
Female	19.41	3.99	17.57	3.66	16.91	6.15	5.77	1.30	14.47	3.60	14.73	3.16	23.72	2.95	7.34	.79

N = 365

Discussion

The goal of this study was to explore whether a person's sexual identity impacts on his or her perceptions of police legitimacy and levels of trust in the police. The results indicate that difference in sexual identity (either LGBTI or heterosexual sexual identity) does impact on perceptions of police legitimacy and levels of trust in the police. For example, when perceptions of police trust, procedural justice, treatment quality by police, and levels of respect from police were taken into account (while also controlling for the gender, age, and ethnicity of the respondents), the effect of an individual's sexual identity remained significant as a predictor. This was for either: negative perceptions of police legitimacy and levels of trust in the police (LGBTI people); or positive perceptions of police legitimacy and levels of trust in the police (heterosexual people). However, before discussing possible theoretical explanations for the pattern of these results, it is important to acknowledge the methodological limitations of the present study.

First, this study utilises cross-sectional survey data which may pose significant challenges if conclusions about the causal relationships that may exist between variables are drawn. For example, in this article it is suggested that perceptions of police trust, perceptions of procedural justice, perceptions of treatment quality by police, and perceived levels of respect from police shape beliefs about the police, which in turn influence willingness to engage with the police. Yet it is also reasonable to conclude from the data that people who are unwilling to engage with the police are also more likely to make negative comments about their perceptions of the police. Thus, when using cross-sectional data, the exact causal direction between variables may remain unclear. A longitudinal dataset following up the same people over time to examine how their beliefs and attitudes toward certain issues may change would go some way to addressing this issue. Similarly, it is proposed that qualitative research might also assist in uncovering the processes and experiences (that is, contextual conditions) that influence perceptions of police.

Second, the sample of respondents who identified as male and heterosexual, and the sample of respondents who identified as Indigenous LGBTI, were only represented by a small sample. Future research should attempt to select and survey a large representative group of both LGBTI and heterosexual people in Australia to examine whether the results presented here can be replicated.

Third, by using a parametric multivariate test with a convenient sample, assumptions about the populations from which the sample was drawn are not necessarily generalisable to the heterosexual wider public. However, it is reasonable to assume that the perceptions of police by LGBTI people in this sample may reflect those of the wider LGBTI community. For example, Finn and McNeil (1987) and Herek (1989) state that the 'lived experience' (referring to first-hand accounts and impressions of living as a member of a minority group) of LBGTI people in one area is often reflective of the lived experience of LGBTI people in other areas, especially with institutions of power. Even with these limitations, however, the findings of the present study provide researchers and the police with insights into how LGBTI and heterosexual people in Australia perceive police trust, procedural justice, treatment quality by police, and levels of respect from police.

Findings from the present study indicate that gender and age shape perceptions of procedural justice, treatment quality from police, trust and legitimacy in the police, and respect from police, but note that ethnicity did not completely determine how a person would evaluate each of these variables. For example, the findings indicate that ethnicity does influence differences in perceptions of treatment quality from police, trust and

legitimacy in the police and respect from police, with Indigenous people having more negative perceptions of trust and legitimacy in police than non-Indigenous people, and non-Indigenous people having more positive perceptions of treatment quality from police and perceived levels respect from police than Indigenous people. However, ethnicity did not indicate difference in perceptions of procedural justice for either Indigenous or non-Indigenous people, with both groups evenly balanced in their negative perceptions of it. Examples of difference in ethnicity and its influence have been noted (Sunshine and Tyler 2003; Tyler and Huo 2002) and the findings in this study support previous research, indicating that ethnicity does impact on both negative and positive perceptions of police.

Sexual identity and perceptions of police

Findings from the present study also suggest that LGBTI Australians do hold different views to heterosexual Australians about police trust. The impact of sexual identity upon perceptions of procedural justice, treatment quality from police, trust and legitimacy in the police and respect from police indicated that sexual identity (over and above a person's gender, age, and ethnicity) can shape the public's view about police legitimacy and trust in the police. Specifically, as a group, respondents who identified themselves as LGBTI were more likely to hold lower opinions regarding police trust and police legitimacy than heterosexual participants. They were also less likely to put their trust in the processes of procedural justice than heterosexual participants; less likely to have positive perceptions of treatment quality by police than heterosexual participants; and *more* likely to have negative perceptions regarding police respect towards their community than heterosexual participants.

These results may be due to the negative perceptions of police that many LGBTI people hold, as previous research has indicated that LGBTI people are consistently regulated by police as non-heteronormative and deviant (Dwyer 2009). Negative perceptions of the police and negative interactions between LGBTI people and the police have been noted in numerous pieces of research (Dworkin and Yi 2003; Dwyer 2009; Wolff and Cokely 2007). Many sociological researchers highlight the contextual issues that mediate problematic interactions between LGBTI people and the police, which impact on their levels of trust in the police. Indeed, recruits to most Australian police organisations have predominantly been working-class males (Baker 2001), who have historically held inflexible notions about sexual identity, associating non-heteronormative sexual identity with inappropriate and illegal behaviour (Dwyer 2009). Thus, such a predisposition to negative perceptions of the police regarding police legitimacy and trust in police is not unexpected, although research has not focused on sexual identity and its impact on perceptions of police trust and legitimacy until now.

Conclusion

Public cooperation with the police is typically determined by a commonly held public belief that the police are a legitimate authority (Murphy and Cherney 2010). Therefore, if the police lack legitimacy in the eyes of the public (and particularly those of minority groups), they will find it difficult to elicit voluntary cooperation and build public confidence (Murphy and Cherney 2010).

The results reported in this article highlight the fact that police in Australia can more effectively encourage cooperation from minority groups such as the LGBTI community if they are seen to have greater legitimacy. They also support the conclusion that if the police

are perceived as treating people in a more positive manner, and are also perceived to be more respectful towards the public, then the image of the police as legitimate actors can be built upon and maintained. Crime (in all its diversity) would be more effectively combatted if more LGBTI people could have greater trust and confidence in the police.

Although evaluations of just, fair, ethical and professional policing form the basis of trust in the police (and the resultant legitimacy of the police force), the results of this study indicate that the impact of an individual's sexual identity influences negative perceptions of police legitimacy. Sexual identity also influences levels of trust in the police for LGBTI people, and positive perceptions of police legitimacy and levels of trust in the police for heterosexual people. Additionally, sexual identity contributes to perceptions of treatment an individual may expect when interacting with the police. Therefore, LGBTI individuals who have less trust and confidence and respect for police are less likely than heterosexual people to seek contact with or engage with police officers. This has potential ramifications, as LGBTI victims of crime may be reluctant to report these crimes to police, and crimes against LGBTI people may remain undetected and unpunished.

The results of this study also indicate that there are significant differences between LGBTI and heterosexual participants' perceptions of procedural justice, perceptions of treatment quality from police, perceptions of trust and legitimacy in the police and perceptions of respect from police. For example, LGBTI people are more likely to hold lower opinions regarding police trust and police legitimacy than heterosexual participants, and are also less likely to put their trust in the processes of procedural justice. Therefore, LGBTI witnesses of crime or people with information that might assist police to solve crime may not come forward. As such, some degree of crime will remain invisible and immune from punishment.

LGBTI people are also less likely to have positive perceptions of treatment quality by police than heterosexual participants, and are more likely to have negative perceptions regarding police respect towards their community.[5] Yet the paradox is that the LGBTI community is part of the wider community, and the lack of positive perceptions of police will thwart efforts by police organisations to police the public effectively. So, in a sense, everyone in society is affected by these negative perceptions.

The research outlined in this article indicates that sexual identity impacts on perceptions of policing and perceptions of trust in the police, and can help to determine whether the police are seen as legitimate. There is little doubt that sexual identity has a strong impact on perceptions of police legitimacy and it is recommended that future research regarding sexual identity and its influence on perceptions of police legitimacy be considered.

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[5]   Note that poor perceptions of police may also be a result of negative relational meanings and values that are enmeshed in the structure of cultural capital (Moore 2004) and/or through negative vicarious experience resulting in collective memory; particularly when LGBTI people have a legacy of negative past treatment. This will need to be investigated further in future studies.

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