The Alleged "Ferguson Effect" and Police Willingness to Engage in Community Partnership

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Abstract

In response to increasing violent crime rates in several U.S. cities over the past year, some have pointed the finger of blame at de-policing, a result of the so-called "Ferguson Effect." While the Ferguson Effect on crime rates remains an open question, there may also be a Ferguson Effect on other aspects of police officers' jobs such as willingness to partner with community members. This study used data from a cross-sectional survey of 567 deputies at an agency in the southeastern U.S. to accomplish two objectives: (1) to determine whether the Ferguson Effect is associated with de-policing in the form of decreased willingness to engage in community partnership, and (2) to determine whether such an effect persists upon accounting for perceived organizational justice and self-legitimacy. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression equations revealed that the Ferguson Effect (as operationalized by reduced motivation stemming from recent negative publicity) was associated with less willingness to engage in community partnership (b = -.10; 95% CI = -.16, -.05). However, upon accounting for organizational justice and self-legitimacy, the Ferguson Effect was rendered insignificant (b = .01; 95% CI = -.05, .07). The findings suggest that officers who have confidence in their authority or perceive their agency as fair are more willing to partner with the community to solve problems, regardless of the effects of negative publicity.

Keywords: Ferguson Effect, community partnership, organizational justice, self-legitimacy

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After an unprecedented decline in crime experienced in the U.S. over the past 25 years or so, alarm bells warning of an impending crime wave have started (Mac Donald, 2015; Martinez 2015; Sutton, 2015). Such a trend appears to materialize from time to time. Recall in the mid-1990s when DiIulio (1995) predicted a crime epidemic fueled by an uprising cohort of teenage super-predators. Although such proselytization gained widespread media and political attention, the predictions failed to materialize and DiIulio himself later acknowledged his false forecast. This time around, however, an apparent violent crime increase in several major U.S. cities has led some to point the finger of blame at the so-called "Ferguson Effect"—in reference to the deadly police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO that triggered public protest and negative international media attention. The Ferguson incident was followed by a string of highly publicized police-involved deaths of unarmed African Americans in cities such as Baltimore (MD) and North Charleston (SC). These events have placed police and community race relations at the center of public policy debates once again—perhaps to a greater degree than what was seen in the early 1990s after the Rodney King beating (Weitzer, 2015). The Ferguson Effect hypothesis suggests that officers are conscious of the negative publicity surrounding their profession, understand that their actions could be recorded by the public at any given time, and become less willing to do their job as a way to avoid being accused of racial profiling or excessive force. In turn, this de-policing leads to increases in crime.

At this point, however, the Ferguson Effect has only been supported by anecdotal evidence and guesswork. Although the Ferguson Effect on crime rates is an empirical question awaiting research scrutiny, early indicators suggest that observing such a relationship is unlikely (Rosenfeld, 2015; Zimring, 2015). Indeed, such a Ferguson Effect on violent crime rates would

be quite large if de-policing has become so widespread that officers are less likely to enforce laws concerning murder, rape, robbery, and the like. Importantly, however, lack of empirical evidence to date regarding the Ferguson Effect on crime rates does not necessarily imply that the phenomenon is not real. Rather, if de-policing has occurred post-Ferguson it may manifest in areas of police work not directly observable in indicators such as the violent crime rate. For example, working with the community to address local problems is an integral component of policing. However, the relentless negative coverage of incidents such as Ferguson in news outlets and on social media presents a social climate whereby the legitimacy of law enforcement (i.e., regardless of the jurisdiction of the incident) is being challenged. It is likely that such a situation may make it difficult for some officers to be motivated to work in law enforcement and, as a consequence, be less willing to engage in community partnership. Evidence of such a Ferguson Effect would undoubtedly have important public safety consequences.

Accordingly, the present study analyzed data from a sample of sheriff's deputies in a southeastern metropolitan county to determine whether respondents' perceptions of negative publicity in recent months are associated with their attitudes about working with the community to solve problems. More specifically, we addressed the following question: does the "Ferguson Effect"—as indicated by reduced motivation stemming from negative publicity—influence deputies' willingness to engage in community partnership? We used theoretically-informed measures that tap into respondents' perceptions of recent negative publicity and their willingness to work with the community and a series of multivariate regression equations to address this question. Additionally, we argue that any direct association that might be observed between the Ferguson Effect and willingness to partner with the community could be a spurious result of failing to account for other theoretically important concepts. Recent work, for example, has

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shown a link between perceived organizational justice, self-legitimacy, and beneficial outcomes within police agencies (e.g., commitment to organizational goals; see Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Tankebe & Meško, 2015). As such, we controlled for these potential confounding effects in our models. The broader purpose of this study was to provide empirical evidence concerning the de-policing and Ferguson Effect debate. In our mind, the consequences of such effects—whether they exist and we fail to act, or whether imagined and we make hasty policy decisions—are far too serious to rely on conjecture alone.

The Ferguson Effect

Law enforcement within the U.S. is facing an apparent legitimacy crisis. Beginning in the summer of 2014, a string of highly publicized events involving the deaths of African Americans at the hands of the police led to incessant media attention. The first incident occurred in Staten Island, NY, where Eric Garner—an unarmed African American—died after being put into a choke hold by NYPD officers. Cellphone video of the incident quickly hit social media in which Garner can be heard several times claiming "I can't breathe." However, the event simply served as kindling until the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, in August 2014. No video captured the shooting of Brown, who was stopped by Ferguson police after fitting the description of a robbery suspect. Importantly, however, witnesses in the area claimed that Brown had his arms raised in the air when he was shot by Officer Darren Wilson (who was later found to have been justified in his use of force). The Ferguson incident resulted in civil unrest that lasted weeks and reinvigorated a debate with a long history in the U.S.—police relationships with African American communities and excessive use of force. Furthermore, Ferguson revealed that the Garner case was not an isolated event, and both tragedies stayed in the news for many months sparking protest in various cities and international media coverage.

Numerous similar incidents followed such as the death of Freddie Gray while in police custody in Baltimore and a North Charleston police officer shooting and killing Walter Scott. Intense protests followed in the Baltimore case which involved violence directed at the community and officers. Interestingly, however, no violent protests occurred in North Charleston after cellphone video emerged showing Officer Michael Slager (currently awaiting trial for murder) shooting an unarmed Scott in the back five times (eight shots were fired). The story told in each of these incidents was the same—police had killed an unarmed African American and were being accused of excessive use of force and racially biased law enforcement tactics. The media coverage, public protest, and political attention—even from President Obama—concerning police race relations and use of force has consistently led to one conclusion: a nontrivial portion of the public wants change in law enforcement. Simply put, many Americans (particularly those in marginalized communities) appear to be challenging the legitimacy of law enforcement as it pertains to the use of force and interactions with African Americans. Importantly, this trend is not idiosyncratic to the U.S. Similar undercurrents of discontent regarding police actions have resulted in wide-spread negative media attention and public protest in England (e.g., police shooting of Mark Duggan), Australia (e.g., death of Mulrunji Doomadgee while in police custody), and Israel (the police beating of Ethiopian-Jewish soldier Damas Pakada), to name a few.

The ease with which citizens can use cellphones to record the police, coupled with the widespread use of social media, have made it easier than ever to scrutinize officer actions. In many ways, the use of social media has made high profile incidents such as Ferguson a national-level police issue rather than one constrained to the jurisdictional bounds of the city itself. As a result, high profile citizen deaths at the hands of the police have caused such widespread

negative attention that some argue it is causing police officers to withdraw from their duties in order to avoid being accused of excessive force or racial profiling—a phenomenon referred to as the "Ferguson Effect." For instance, an article by *CNN* recently claimed that a police slowdown whereby officers were showing less initiative and talking to community members less frequently was responsible for a surge in violence in Baltimore (although no data were presented to support this claim; Martinez, 2015). Sutton (2015), a retired police officer, recently echoed this sentiment in a *New York Post* article. He suggested that when the media and public makes officers out to be "the enemy because of personal or political agendas…you will create a perfect storm that leads to de-policing." The Ferguson Effect argument has also begun to pop up in academic circles. Mac Donald (2015)—a fellow at the Manhattan Institute which is a conservative think tank— recently penned an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* where she examined cities throughout the U.S. and argued that large crime rate increases were symptomatic of an impending national crime wave. Again, the Ferguson Effect was pinpointed as the cause. Given some of the methodological concerns in her approach, scholars have cautioned against drawing firm conclusions (Rosenfeld, 2015).

Although to date the Ferguson Effect argument is largely being peddled through social media and policy advocates, it appears to be an important issue. Indeed, the search term "Ferguson Effect" yields about 84.5 million hits on Google. Research has also suggested that highly publicized mass killings, suicides, and other violent events tend to fuel other violence through a social contagion effect (Gould et al., 2003; Phillips, 1974; Towers et al., 2015). This provides partial theoretical rationale for a potential Ferguson Effect on crime rates (i.e., social media induced social contagion of violence). Clearly this is an important issue, and empirical research is the necessary next step in the debate. The Ferguson Effect proposes a testable

research hypothesis—negative publicity surrounding law enforcement is associated with officers being less willing to perform their everyday duties. The supposed result is increased crime rates. Highly regarded academics, however, have already raised serious concerns with this Ferguson Effect argument. Zimring (2015), for instance, offered a simple conclusion to Mac Donald's (2015) propositions: "There are real increases in violence in Baltimore, Maryland in recent weeks and perhaps in St. Louis, but making that into a national crime wave deserves an Olympic medal for jumping to conclusions." Rosenfeld (2015) recently published the only empirical evidence to date regarding the Ferguson Effect by focusing on crime rates in St. Louis. According to his analysis "We can conclude with reasonable certainty that the events in Ferguson were *not* responsible for the steep rise in homicide in St. Louis" (Rosenfeld, 2015, p. 3, emphasis added).

Simply put, criminologists do not seem to be buying into the Ferguson Effect, "at least not yet," as Rosenfeld (2015, p. 3) concludes. However, perhaps more academic attention regarding the Ferguson Effect beyond Rosenfeld's report has yet to emerge because most discussion focuses on its relationship with increased crime rates. There is good reason to believe that such an effect may be difficult to observe. After all, the explanation of crime rates has been notoriously complex (Blumstein & Wallman, 2006; Levitt, 2004; Zimring, 2006). Does this necessarily imply that the Ferguson Effect is not a phenomenon capable of further empirical study? We do not believe so. We agree with Rosenfeld (2015, p. 4) who suggested that "In the absence of credible and comprehensive evidence, sounding alarm bells over a 'Ferguson effect' or any other putative cause will not help." In short, the debate surrounding the Ferguson Effect appears ready for empirical scrutiny rather than academic jabbing on social media.

Doing so will require attention to several issues. First, we need to consider how to operationalize the Ferguson Effect. One way to do so is to explore trends in crime rates before and after events such as the death of Michael Brown—an approach such as the one used by Rosenfeld. This is a sophisticated strategy capable of exploring aggregate-level crime rate changes. Building upon Rosenfeld's research, we argue that individual-level perceptions of the unremitting media drumbeat surrounding law enforcement may diminish officers' motivation on the job. In short, some officers may feel that being a cop is a no-win situation—if nothing they do pleases the public how can they be motivated to police? Thus, it may be possible to operationalize the Ferguson Effect within officer surveys by asking them about the degree to which they feel recent negative publicity has harmed their motivation. Second, we need to consider the possibility that the Ferguson Effect may manifest in areas of policing not immediately associated with official indicators like the crime rate. In particular, community partnership is vital to successful policing strategies. The extent to which officers are willing to partner with community members therefore has an important relationship with beneficial outcomes for the community (e.g., lower crime rates, reduced feelings of fear, community pride). For those officers who feel less motivated to be cops as a result of recent negative press, we may expect them to be less willing to engage in community partnership. The only way to determine whether such a Ferguson Effect exists is to ask officers themselves.

Officer Willingness to Engage in Community Partnership

Policing involves more than law enforcement—a key component of police work is engaging in community partnerships to address local problems. In fact, the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015) recommended, among other things, increased community engagement as a way of improving policing and restoring trust and legitimacy in the eyes of the

public. Academic research has long realized the value of police-community partnership. Rosenbaum, Lurigio, and Davis (1998), for example, demonstrated that community partnerships enhance the ability of the police to solve problems, especially complex issues that would be difficult for either group to address alone. Such partnership is also crucial to the development of informal social control within a community which, ultimately, leads to safer neighborhoods (Reisig, 2010; see also, Kochel, 2012). Research also reveals that strong police-community partnerships can increase citizen satisfaction with the police, reduce fear of crime, and increase police accountability (Mastrofski & Greene, 1994; Moore, 1992; Skogan, 1994). For example, an important study by Reisig and Parks (2004) revealed that citizens who have favorable evaluations of police partnerships report fewer disorder-related problems in their community and indicate higher levels of perceived safety. Reisig (2007) also showed that residents who perceive the police as procedurally fair are more willing to participate in crime prevention programs. In short, police-community partnership is important for both the policing function and the communities the police serve.

An important question arises from this line of inquiry: what factors contribute to officers' willingness to engage in community partnership? Little empirical evidence exists capable of providing an answer. Some research has explored the correlates of officer "buy-in" to strategies such as community policing (Jenkins, 2015; Novak, Alarid, & Lucas, 2003). While important, this line of research does not provide much theoretical insight regarding the reasons why officers are more or less likely to work with the public to solve local problems. A review of the police organizational behavior literature, however, reveals that there are at least two theoretically-informed concepts that may be important predictors of officers' willingness to engage in

community partnership. It is necessary to consider these factors if we wish to have confidence in any observed Ferguson Effect.

Organizational Justice

The first likely candidate as a correlate of willingness to partner with the community is officer perceptions of organizational justice. The broader business management literature has clearly demonstrated that employees who evaluate their employer or supervisor as more fair are more likely to engage in a wide range of organizational citizenship behaviors such as increased productivity (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Hg, 2001; Lind & Tyler, 1988). Especially important to the present study, this line of research also has shown that organizations and supervisors who are rated as fairer are likely to gain greater commitment to organizational goals among their employees. Organizational justice is typically comprised of three components (see, e.g., Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). The first component is distributive justice which concerns the extent to which employees feel that outcomes (e.g., promotions or salary increases) are fairly distributed within the organization. On the other hand, procedural justice focuses on the processes used to reach such decisions—the extent to which supervisors are unbiased, explain the reasons behind their decisions, and allow employees a voice in the decision-making process. The final component—interactional justice—centers on the extent to which supervisors are polite, honest, and respectful when interacting with their subordinates.

The organizational justice framework has received a growing amount of attention from police researchers in recent years. Bradford and colleagues (2013), for example, revealed that greater perceived organizational justice among officers was associated with increased identification with their agency and compliance with procedures (see also, Tyler, Callahan, &

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Frost, 2007; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). Relatedly, Bradford and Quinton (2014) demonstrated that perceived organizational justice was associated with greater commitment to agency goals and less cynicism among officers. This is an important finding because officers who are less cynical are perhaps also less likely to withdraw from the public as a result of the alleged Ferguson Effect. In another study, Myhill and Bradford (2013) demonstrated that officers with higher evaluations of organizational justice had more favorable perceptions of community policing (e.g., "Police community support officers have a very important role to play in policing"). This is a particularly important finding for the present study because it suggests that organizational justice may be a key correlate of willingness to engage in community partnership. Relatedly, officers have more favorable attitudes toward the public when they feel their agency treats them with organizational justice (Myhill & Bradford, 2013). Research has even shown that commitment to procedural justice during citizen interactions is partially a product of officers' perceptions of organizational justice (Tankebe, 2014b). Importantly, research has also shown that organizational justice is associated with *self-legitimacy* (discussed later) among officers (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Tankebe, 2014b; Tankebe & Meško, 2015).

Working with the community to solve crime and disorder problems has been a key feature of U.S. law enforcement agencies for the better part of 25 years and is nearly a universal organizational goal (see, Reisig, 2010). Therefore, based on the extant literature, we would expect officers who perceive their agency to be organizationally just to be more committed to such practices—that is, more willing to engage in community partnership. Accounting for this potential relationship is important because it may confound the link between the Ferguson Effect and officers' willingness to partner with the community. In other words, the robust organizational justice effect observed in the literature to date gives us reason to believe that it

may outpace the predictive ability of a Ferguson Effect. After all, treatment by one's supervisors may be more salient than negative publicity regarding other agencies in the U.S.

Self-legitimacy

The second potential predictor of willingness to partner with the community is officers' sense of self-legitimacy. Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) recently argued that power-holders such as the police must convince themselves that their power is legitimate before claiming legitimacy among citizens (see also, Herbert, 2006; Weber, 1978). This concept—termed self-legitimacy—refers to "power-holders' recognition of, or confidence in, their own individual entitlement to power" (Tankebe, 2014a, p. 3). Scholars have already linked self-legitimacy to a number of desirable officer behaviors, including organizational commitment (Tankebe, 2010), support for procedural fairness (Bradford & Quinton, 2014), and greater restraint in the decision to use force against citizens (Tankebe & Meško, 2015). Tankebe and Meško (2015) also showed that officers with a greater sense of self-legitimacy exhibited higher levels of motivation. This finding suggests that when exploring officer motivation it is important to account for self-legitimacy. Simply put, officers who have greater confidence in their own authority are more likely to be committed to agency goals and motivated to perform their duties. In this way, we may also expect those officers with a greater sense of self-legitimacy to be more willing to engage in community partnership than their counterparts. To date, no studies have explored this potential relationship. At the very least we need to account for such perceptions when attempting to explore issues such as the Ferguson Effect.

The Current Focus

The Ferguson Effect has gained widespread media attention and has recently drawn the interests of scholars. Most of the attention thus far (including from the research community) has

centered on crime rates. In this study, we focus on an issue potentially more proximate to officers' perceptions of and reactions to recent negative publicity. Specifically, might events such as those in Ferguson, and the negative publicity that followed, be far-reaching enough to impact officer motivation and their willingness to collaborate with the community to solve problems? Does such a Ferguson Effect withstand the potential confounding influence of theoretically relevant variables such as organizational justice and self-legitimacy? The current study attempts to answer these questions. The overarching goal of this study is to begin providing empirical evidence concerning the supposed Ferguson Effect so that we no longer have to rely on what may simply be fearmongering in the media.

Method

Data

The current study used data from a survey of deputies at a mid-sized sheriff's department located in a southeastern U.S. metropolitan area. The agency serves a jurisdiction of approximately 393,000 residents. In 2013, the jurisdiction had about 508 violent crimes and 2,224 property crimes per 100,000 residents. An online-based survey was administered during February 2015. All sworn deputies in the agency were asked to participate by completing the questionnaire on a password-protected website. Deputies were encouraged to participate in the study by informing them that their identities would remain anonymous, data would be reported in the aggregate, and only researchers at the local university responsible for conducting the study would have access to the raw data. Furthermore, the study received endorsement from the agency's Deputy Advisory Council which is a group of respected department employees (both sworn and civilian) who represent the interests of their colleagues at routine meetings with command staff. This process resulted in an 85% response rate (N = 567). The sample closely

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mirrors the agency's deputy population in terms of gender, age, and race. Multiple imputation with chained equations (10 imputations) was used to handle a small amount of missing data (less than 2% of cells in the database) which is available in the Stata 13 *mi impute* suite (Carlin et al., 2008; McKnight et al., 2007).

Independent Variables

      The "Ferguson Effect." Our key independent variable—*Ferguson Effect*—captured deputies' perceptions regarding how recent negative publicity surrounding law enforcement has affected them. Deputies were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) with five items. Specifically, deputies were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed that over the past 6 months negative publicity surrounding law enforcement has "made it more difficult for you to be motivated at work," "caused you to be less proactive on the job than you were in the past," "caused you to be more apprehensive about using force even though it may be necessary," "negatively impacted the way you do your job," and "made it less enjoyable to have a career in law enforcement." It is important to note that Garner's death in Staten Island and Brown's death in Ferguson occurred approximately 6 months prior to survey administration. Principal components analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was used to assess the degree to which the items loaded together. The results provided evidence that the five items loaded on a single component ($\lambda = 3.27$; loadings $> .70$). The items also demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$; see, e.g., Cortina, 1993) and, as such, were summed into an index. Higher scores on the scale reflect officers' sentiment that recent negative publicity surrounding law enforcement has had an adverse impact on their jobs. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for variables used in this study.

Potential Confounders

Organizational justice. Consistent with previous research, we measured deputies'

evaluations of their agency's organizational justice with a series of survey items that tapped into

key aspects of the construct (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). All

questions were measured on the same 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly*

agree). First, distributive justice perceptions were assessed with statements such as "Command

staff treats employees the same regardless of their gender" and "Command staff treats employees

the same regardless of their race or ethnicity." Second, perceptions of agency procedural justice

were captured by asking respondents their level of agreement with statements such as

"Command staff clearly explains the reasons for their decisions" and "Command staff considers

employees' viewpoints." Third, interactional justice was measured with items such as

"Generally, command staff treats employees with respect" and "Command staff treats employees

with kindness and consideration" (a complete list of the items is available in the Appendix). A

single component was observed in a PCA ($\lambda = 10.75$; loadings > .64) and the items had strong

internal consistency ($\alpha = .96$). Accordingly, the items were combined into an additive scale with

higher scores representing greater perceived organizational justice.

Self-legitimacy. Based on our review of the relevant literature, another variable that may

be related to deputies' willingness to engage in community partnership is self-legitimacy. To

measure this construct respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed (1 =

strongly disagree to 5 = *strongly agree*) with the following statements: "I have confidence in the

authority vested in me as a law enforcement officer," "As a law enforcement officer, I believe I

occupy a position of special importance in society," "I believe people should always do what I

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tell them as long as my orders are lawful," "I am confident I have enough authority to do my job well," and "I believe law enforcement is capable of providing security for all citizens of Midlands (pseudonym) County." These items were adopted from previous literature (Tankebe, 2014a) and, as expected, loaded on a single component ($\lambda = 2.32$; loadings > .56) and evidenced adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = .71$). The items were combined into a summated scale with higher scores representing a greater sense of self-legitimacy.

Dependent Variable

We operationalized the outcome variable of interest—*willingness to engage in community partnership*—as an additive scale comprised of items tapping into deputies' attitudes regarding the extent to which they believe working with the community is an important and routine part of police work. Specifically, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) with the following statements: "Law enforcement and community members must work together to solve local problems," "Collaborating with community members is an important aspect of law enforcement," "Working with the community to solve problems is an effective means of providing services to this county," "I routinely collaborate with community members in my daily duties," and "I feel my job positively impacts the community." PCA revealed that the items loaded on one component ($\lambda = 3.01$; loadings > .61) and Cronbach's alpha showed the items had strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$). Accordingly, the items were summed into a scale with higher scores indicating greater willingness to engage in community partnership.

Statistical Controls

We also included several variables in the multivariate models as statistical controls in order to maximize the potential of producing unbiased estimates. Respondent *age* was measured

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categorically (1=21 to 30, 2=31 to 40, 3=41 to 50, and 4=51 or older). Dummy variables were used to account for respondent gender (1 = *male*), race (1 = *minority*), education (1 = *four-year degree or higher*), rank (1 = *deputy*), law enforcement experience (1 = *more than 15 years*), and military background (1 = *yes*).

Analytic Strategy

To examine whether deputies' perceptions of the Ferguson Effect are associated with less willingness to partner with the community, we estimated a series of multivariate equations using ordinary least squares regression. First, we estimated the Ferguson Effect on willingness to engage in community partnership, net of statistical controls. This provided a preliminary answer to our research question but the model was naïve to the potential confounding influence of other salient theoretical variables. Accordingly, the second step of the analysis involved an examination of whether organizational justice and self-legitimacy predicted deputies' willingness to partner with the community. This was an important stage of the analysis because it helped shed light on the sources of police perceptions regarding community engagement—to date, a largely unexplored topic. Finally, we incorporated each of the aforementioned variables into a single regression model. This allowed us to provide a robust assessment of the degree to which the Ferguson Effect influences officers' willingness to engage in community partnership. In short, the equation provided answers to the question of whether the supposed Ferguson Effect withstands the influence of other theoretically meaningful predictor variables.

Several diagnostic tests provided evidence that collinearity was not a concern in the multivariate models. For one, the bivariate correlations between the independent variables were not strong enough to indicate harmful collinearity (r < |.53|). Additionally, all variance inflation

factors fell below 1.68 and condition indices fell below 30, well within acceptable ranges (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Results

Model 1 in Table 2 is concerned with whether the Ferguson Effect is associated with willingness to engage in community partnership among this sample of deputies. The measure of joint association (F-test = 2.44, $p < .01$) is statistically significant, which indicates the equation provides a better prediction of the dependent variable than a constant-only model. Deputies who report being less motivated as a result of negative publicity surrounding law enforcement in the six months leading up to the survey indicated less willingness to partner with the community (b = -.10). More formally, the standardized partial regression coefficient (β; not reported in Table 2) indicates that each one unit increase in the Ferguson Effect corresponded with a .19 standard deviation reduction in the community partnership scale. This suggests that the Ferguson Effect had a moderate, negative relationship with deputies' willingness to partner with the community. To this point, the results conformed to our expectations; however, prior to reaching any conclusions, more rigorous tests were required.

[Table 2 about here]

Models 2 and 3 in Table 2 examined the independent effects of organizational justice (see Model 2) and self-legitimacy (see Model 3) on willingness to engage in community partnership. The results demonstrated that the organizational justice scale had a positive and statistically significant effect on the community partnership scale (b = .07). Consistent with and extending prior research, deputies who believed their department distributes outcomes to employees fairly, behaves in a procedurally fair manner when dealing with deputies, and treats employees with respect and dignity, tended to express greater willingness to collaborate with the community.

Similarly, the association between self-legitimacy and the community partnership scale was statistically significant and in the expected direction ($b = .51$). Deputies in this sample who were more confident in their authority as law enforcement officers also tended to support the idea of police-community partnership. Overall, the findings from Models 2 and 3 are in line with prior empirical evidence garnered from samples drawn from different law enforcement agencies and cultural contexts. Importantly, however, the results add to the literature by suggesting that organizational justice and self-legitimacy are important predictors of law enforcement officer willingness to partner with the community—relationships yet to be directly observed to date.

The final regression equation (Model 4, Table 2) explored the simultaneous impact of the Ferguson Effect, organizational justice, and self-legitimacy on the community partnership scale, net of statistical controls. Several important findings emerged from this model. First, the equation accounted for a sizable amount of variation in deputies' willingness to engage in community partnership (Adjusted $R^2 = .32$). Second, and most importantly, the association between the Ferguson Effect and willingness to partner with the community was no longer statistically significant upon accounting for the confounding influence of organizational justice and self-legitimacy. The inclusion of these variables into the equation reduced the magnitude of the Ferguson Effect by about 110%. The test for equality of regression coefficients (Clogg, Petkova, & Shihadeh, 1992) revealed that this reduction was statistically significant (z-test = -2.59, $p < .01$). This finding demonstrated that the relationship between the Ferguson Effect and deputies' willingness to engage in community partnership was completely accounted for by organizational justice and self-legitimacy. A comparison of the standardized partial regression coefficients showed that self-legitimacy had the *strongest effect* on willingness to engage in

community partnership (β = .50). In fact, this effect was more than twice as large as the

organizational justice scale (β = .19). This finding is discussed in more detail below.

Discussion

Police in the U.S. appear to be facing a legitimacy crisis as a result of the hysteria over

highly publicized deadly force incidents in several cities during the last year. Some

commentators and scholars have alleged that the "Ferguson Effect" has resulted in de-policing,

and in turn, higher crime rates (Mac Donald, 2015; Sutton, 2015). Yet to date, only one empirical

study is capable of speaking to this effect (Rosenfeld, 2015), and the results are generally not

supportive of the idea. Does this mean that a Ferguson Effect is absent in policing? We believe

not. A related and equally important question is whether or not there has been a Ferguson Effect

on other aspects of policing—namely, engagement in community partnership. The present study

aimed to fill this research gap. With this paper, we sought a better understanding of whether de-

policing is actually occurring in response to bad press. We explored the notion that perceptions

concerning negative publicity could be associated with officers' lack of willingness to partner

with the community to solve problems. The results indicate that there appears to be a relationship

between reduced motivation as a result of negative publicity and willingness to partner with the

community. But this effect was washed away once we accounted for deputies' perceptions of

organizational justice and self-legitimacy. With these results in mind, a number of issues warrant

further discussion.

Given the widespread public and police attention to this issue, we begin with the practical

implications of our findings. Yes, it appears that officers in our sample have been affected by

negative "Ferguson-type" press. Some officers indicated being less motivated to perform their

duties. This is important from a managerial standpoint because feelings such as these need to be

subverted if possible. It is also important to note that this effect was observed in an agency largely removed from high profile events such as Ferguson (indeed, Ferguson is nearly 800 miles away from the department surveyed for this study). But for the most part, our findings suggest that the Ferguson Effect fear mongering may need to stop (at least for now). After we accounted for perceptions of organizational justice and self-legitimacy, the Ferguson Effect was no longer significant. Thus, our data reveal that reduced motivation due to negative publicity may be counteracted if supervisors ensure fairness among subordinates. Little actions can go a long way. Fair treatment from supervisors sends the message to officers that "we are here for you" regardless of how much the public or the media tries to sully law enforcement. Prior literature has already demonstrated that organizational justice increases commitment to agency goals. In our sample, officers who perceived fair treatment from their organization were more likely to engage in community partnerships. In addition, we saw that self-legitimacy mattered. Confidence in one's authority as a police officer appears to protect against the negative effects of media coverage of high profile incidents like Ferguson. Again, management can help here because prior research has shown that organizational justice is associated with self-legitimacy—even after controlling for the effects of negative publicity (Nix & Wolfe, 2015). So in the end, high profile events like Ferguson appear to have impacted deputies' motivation in this sample. But the Ferguson Effect does not appear to have led to less willingness to partner with the community. Rather, those deputies who were less willing to engage in community partnership seemed to do so because they had low self-legitimacy or perceived a lack of organizational justice in their agency. In other words, officers with these perceptions may also be more sensitive to the negative press.

We now turn to the theoretical implications of our results. First, we advanced the literature by showing that community engagement is shaped by several important factors not yet revealed in prior research. First, reduced motivation as a result of negative publicity appears to matter. This suggests that the police care about what the media and its consumers (i.e., the public) think of them. Their willingness to work with the community is in turn shaped by these attitudes. Second, in line with a growing literature, organizational justice influences willingness to partner with the community. Studies have consistently shown that organizational justice increases commitment to agency goals, and our study takes this a step further by demonstrating that it is associated with commitment to a crucial aspect of police work—community partnership. Finally, self-legitimacy matters, which is important because it shows yet another beneficial outcome associated with a concept that is quickly gaining attention from the research community. As Tankebe and Meško (2015, p. 264) argue, officers with greater levels of self-legitimacy "approximate Muir's (1977) professional officers" (see also, Bottoms & Tankebe, 2013). Our results seem to support this idea—officers with more confidence in their authority engage in professional behaviors such as partnering with the community. From a theoretical standpoint, it is important to reiterate that organizational justice and self-legitimacy had the largest effect sizes. Thus, community engagement is a function of officers' confidence in their authority and how fairly they believe they are treated by supervisors. These attitudes appear to confound the influence of other factors such as the supposed Ferguson Effect.

While we were able to explore the Ferguson Effect in important ways, there were several things we could not do. First, our data were cross-sectional and came from a single agency. Although we had an excellent response rate and survey administration was timely to address this particular research question, longitudinal research is needed to dig deeper into the causal

mechanisms that potentially underlie the Ferguson Effect—particularly because we are dealing with officers' perceptions. Additionally, we need to explore such issues among different agencies, and ideally, with larger scale data collection efforts. One question that naturally arises from this discussion is whether any potential Ferguson Effect is more pronounced in agencies that are geographically closer to highly publicized deadly force incidents. This of course would be costly but it would nonetheless help build upon our findings. Second, we did not explore the Ferguson Effect as it has been discussed thus far in the media and among scholars. That is, we did not examine its impact on crime rates. While we explored an important outcome with potentially important public health consequences, further work needs to be done to see if a Ferguson Effect on crime rates exists—particularly at an aggregate level using multiple time points.

In the end, it is too soon to blame crime increases in a handful of cities on a Ferguson Effect—especially given that crime has been trending downward for over two decades. We simply do not have empirical evidence to support such a claim. The one study that does explore the issue does not support the Ferguson Effect hypothesis (Rosenfeld, 2015). We are often quick to ask how events such as Ferguson affect citizens, but rarely do we consider whether these events are harmful to the police. This is perhaps an equally important question. Regardless of whether the media or citizens challenge the legitimacy of the police, it is unlikely that the police will stop responding to violent crime. What is perhaps more conceivable is that they may be less willing to put in the "extra effort" in the form of working with the community to solve problems. Our study supported this idea initially. However, the data demonstrated that organizational justice and self-legitimacy were the key correlates of willingness to engage in community partnership. This is encouraging for police agencies because it reveals that when supervisors are

fair and cultivate confidence among officers, they can minimize the harmful effects of negative

publicity. This is important because it can help sustain community engagement, which ultimately

will help reduce crime in the community. Indeed, achieving such results makes communities

safer in the long term.

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Appendix

Organizational Justice Measures

My agency's policies are designed to generate standards so that decisions can be made with consistency.

My agency's policies are designed to allow employees to have a voice in agency decisions (e.g., assignment changes, discipline).

My agency's performance evaluation system is fair.

My agency's investigation of civilian complaints is fair.

I understand clearly what type of behavior will result in discipline within my agency.

Landing a good assignment in my agency is based on whom you know (reverse coded).

If you work hard, you can get ahead at Midlands County.

As an organization, my agency can be trusted to do what is right for the community.

I trust the direction that my department's command staff is taking our agency.

I feel confident about top management's skills.

Command staff considers Midlands County employees' viewpoints.

Command staff treats Midlands County employees with kindness and consideration.

Command staff treats Midlands County employees the same regardless of their gender.

Command staff treats Midlands County employees the same regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Command staff clearly explains the reasons for their decisions.

Command staff clearly explains the reasons the agency makes policy changes.

Generally, command staff treats Midlands County employees with respect.

I trust that command staff makes decisions that have the agency's best interest in mind.

Note: Response categories ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). "Midlands County" is a pseudonym.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics

	M	S.D.	Min	Max
Community partnership	17.38	2.61	4	20
Ferguson Effect	12.86	4.79	5	25
Organizational justice	63.87	13.54	18	90
Self-legitimacy	20.47	2.89	5	25
Age	2.53	1.03	1	4
Male	0.76	—	0	1
Minority	0.31	—	0	1
Four-year degree	0.57	—	0	1
Deputy[a]	0.69	—	0	1
Experience ≥ 15 years	0.37	—	0	1
Military	0.39	—	0	1

[a] "Mid-level supervisor" is the reference category.

Table 2

The "Ferguson Effect" and Willingness to Engage in Community Partnership

Variables	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3				Model 4			
	b(SE)	95% CI	t	p	b(SE)	95% CI	t	p	b(SE)	95% CI	t	p	b(SE)	95% CI	t	p
Ferguson Effect	-.10 (.03)	-.16, -.05	-3.75	.001	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.01 (.03)	-.05, .07	.34	.74
Organizational justice	—	—	—	—	.07 (.01)	.04, .09	5.70	.001	—	—	—	—	.04 (.01)	.01, .06	2.73	.01
Self-legitimacy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.51 (.06)	.40, .63	8.58	.001	.46 (.07)	.32, .60	6.61	.001
Age	-.17 (.16)	-.48, .14	-1.08	.28	-.10 (.15)	-.40, .21	-.63	.53	-.15 (.14)	-.43, .14	-1.00	.32	-.12 (.15)	-.40, .17	-.79	.43
Male	.19 (.35)	-.50, .87	.54	.59	.18 (.34)	-.48, .84	.55	.58	.00 (.29)	-.57, .56	-.02	.99	-.01 (.29)	-.58, .55	-.05	.96
Minority	.17 (.30)	-.42, .76	.58	.56	.41 (.29)	-.15, .97	1.43	.15	-.05 (.25)	-.55, .45	-.20	.84	.08 (.25)	-.41, .57	.33	.74
Four-year degree	.20 (.30)	-.39, .79	.67	.50	.20 (.29)	-.37, .76	.68	.50	-.07 (.25)	-.55, .42	-.27	.79	-.01 (.24)	-.49, .47	-.02	.98
Deputy	.00 (.29)	-.57, .57	.00	1.00	-.01 (.29)	-.57, .56	-.03	.98	.03 (.25)	-.45, .52	.13	.89	-.02 (.25)	-.50, .46	-.08	.94
Patrol	.19 (.28)	-.36, .73	.67	.51	.45 (.27)	-.07, .98	1.69	.09	.12 (.25)	-.38, .62	.48	.63	.29 (.25)	-.20, .79	1.18	.24
Experience ≥ 15 years	-.01 (.32)	-.63, .61	-.05	.96	-.01 (.30)	-.61, .58	-.05	.93	.35 (.28)	-.21, .90	1.23	.22	.29 (.28)	-.28, .84	1.02	.31
Military	.32 (.31)	-.28, .93	1.05	.30	.31 (.30)	-.28, .90	1.04	.30	-.05 (.25)	-.55, .44	-.21	.83	-.01 (.25)	-.50, .49	-.03	.97
Intercept	18.66(.60)	17.47, 19.85	30.94	.001	12.58 (1.05)	10.52, 14.65	11.98	.001	7.06 (1.33)	4.44, 9.68	5.30	.001	5.56 (1.91)	1.81, 9.32	2.91	.004
F-test		2.44				5.01				9.18				9.56		
Adjusted R²		.02				.11				.29				.32		

Note: All models are estimated using ordinary least-squares regression. Entries are unstandardized partial regression coefficients (*b*) and robust *SEs* in parentheses.

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