The Impact of Negative Publicity on Police Self-Legitimacy

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Abstract

High-profile events involving police use of force in various cities throughout the US and internationally have garnered enormous media coverage and demonstrated the importance of police-community relations. To date little empirical attention has focused on how such events may negatively impact police officers. Using survey data from 567 officers, this study considers whether perceptions of negative publicity are adversely related to officers' sense of self-legitimacy (i.e., the confidence they have in their authority). Findings revealed officers who felt less motivated as a result of negative publicity expressed less self-legitimacy. However, the degree to which officers felt their job had become more dangerous as a result of negative publicity was not significantly related to self-legitimacy. These findings increase our understanding of the sources of self-legitimacy and reveal that negative publicity surrounding law enforcement presents a unique challenge to officers' confidence in their authority, which can have important implications for the community.

Keywords: police self-legitimacy, negative publicity, organizational justice, dialogic model

Recent events in Ferguson, Staten Island, North Charleston, and Baltimore have proved important from a police-community relations standpoint. Of particular concern in the US is the number of times in recent months that white police officers have been accused of using excessive or deadly force against unarmed African-American citizens. The deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Walter Scott, and Freddie Gray (to name a few) have sparked national debate, protests, and more recently, rioting in Baltimore. Such occurrences are not new in the US. High profile events such as the beating of Rodney King and shooting of Amadou Diallo occurred more than two decades ago and challenged police-community relations in a manner similar to that seen today. Such events are also not unique to the US. In London, for example, public protests took place in 2011 in response to the police shooting of Mark Duggan. The 2004 death of Mulrunji Doomadgee while in police custody sparked widespread media attention and public riots in Queensland. In May of 2015, civil unrest occurred in Tel Aviv in response to a video showing the police beating of an Ethiopian-Jewish soldier. Instances such as these—and the outrage that ensues—garner an enormous amount of national (and international) media coverage. Continued allegations of racial profiling and police brutality have the potential to undermine citizens' perceptions of police legitimacy (Tyler, 1990; Tyler & Wakslak, 2004). This is significant because when citizens do not view the police as a legitimate authority, they are less likely to comply with officer orders and the law more generally (Tyler & Huo, 2002). And as we saw in Baltimore, extreme discontent with police actions can lead to violence against officers.

The problem, however, is that little attention to date has been given to how such events may negatively impact police officers themselves. Growing research reveals that citizens' perceptions of the police can impact officers' sense of *self-legitimacy* (i.e., the confidence they have in their authority as a law enforcement officer; see Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Tankebe &

Meško, 2015). This notion of self-legitimacy is an important concept that may prove useful in explaining variation in officer behavior (see Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012). For example, recent studies suggest that officers with a greater sense of self-legitimacy are more committed to their organization (Tankebe, 2010), more likely to embrace the concepts of procedural justice (Bradford & Quinton, 2014), and less quick to threaten citizens with force (Tankebe & Meško, 2015). In short, officers who view their own authority as legitimate tend to engage in behaviors that are beneficial for their organization and the larger community. Research tends to focus on the role that officers' relationships with supervisors and colleagues play in shaping their sense of self-legitimacy. An additional line of inquiry focuses on how citizen perceptions of police can influence self-legitimacy. This research typically uses survey questions regarding the extent to which officers feel the public generally supports or cooperates with the police (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Tankebe & Meško, 2015). While important, the body of work to date has yet to explore other sources of self-legitimacy, such as negative publicity stemming from large-scale events like those mentioned earlier. Such an investigation would prove useful in terms of theory and police practice because negative publicity may be viewed by the police as an indication of a lack of public support. Bottoms and Tankebe's (2012) dialogic model of legitimacy, for example, offers a theoretical explanation for why events like these could influence the claims to legitimacy that police officers ultimately make. On a more practical level, determining whether the effects of negative publicity on self-legitimacy remain after accounting for other known predictors of the concept (e.g., perceived organizational justice) is an important question for police agencies. If such negative publicity matters, police executives and supervisors need to know what measures they may be able to take to maintain their officers' self-legitimacy.

The current study moves this line of literature forward by considering whether negative publicity has an effect on officers' sense of self-legitimacy. We accomplished this using survey data ($N = 567$) from a sheriff's department in a metropolitan city in the southeastern US. A series of multivariate regression equations were estimated to determine whether perceptions of negative publicity were associated with deputies' self-legitimacy and to rule out the potential confounding influence of other correlates of the concept such as evaluations of organizational justice and relationships with colleagues. The overarching purpose of this study was to determine whether considering officers' perceptions of negative publicity improves our understanding of the sources of self-legitimacy. The findings of this study provide valuable insight regarding a crucial component of the dialogic model—police self-legitimacy—which was derived from Weber's early conceptualizations of power-holder legitimacy. More generally, the results shed light on practical implications for the police both within the US and internationally.

Police Self-Legitimacy

According to Bottoms and Tankebe (2012), legitimacy is an ongoing dialogue between two parties: power-holders and audiences. Power-holders first make a claim to legitimacy, and the audience, in turn, responds to that claim. Power-holders interpret the audience's response and might then elect to alter their claim to legitimacy accordingly. With respect to police legitimacy, research has largely focused on the sources and consequences of legitimacy *in the eyes of the public* (i.e., the audience) (Gau & Brunson, 2009; Gau, Corsaro, Stewart, & Brunson, 2012; Jackson, Bradford, Stanko, & Hohl, 2012; Kochel, 2012; Kochel, Parks, & Mastrofski, 2013; Murphy & Cherney, 2012; Reisig, Bratton, & Gertz, 2007; Reisig, Tankebe, & Meško, 2014; Tyler, 1990; Tyler & Huo, 2002; Wolfe, Nix, Kaminski, & Rojek, *in press*). Yet power-holders must convince themselves that their power is legitimate *before* claiming legitimacy among

citizens (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2013; Herbert, 2006; Weber, 1946, 1978). That is, they must have confidence in their authority so that they can claim to have legitimate power over citizens.

Indeed, power-holders have a need to "persuade themselves that their fates are deserved and therefore rightful" (Kronman, 1983, p. 41; see also Weber, 1946). It is not enough to simply have power. Rather, power-holders need to convince themselves that their power is *rightfully* held. Importantly, this need is not solely in the interest of securing cooperation from citizens but also to satisfy their desire to view themselves as entitled to the power they hold. Thus, police officers carry with them their own set of ideas about what makes their authority justified, which in turn affects their claims to legitimacy. Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) build upon Weber's concept by arguing that legality (i.e., rightful power) is an important, but not sufficient condition of power-holder legitimacy. They suggest that power-holders, such as the police, might also need to be assured that the legitimacy claims they make are in line with society's shared values and beliefs. This concept of *self-legitimacy* is nicely defined by Tankebe (2014, p. 3) as "power-holders' recognition of, or confidence in, their own individual entitlement to power." Police self-legitimacy is of particular interest to the present study.

Self-legitimacy is important to the police because it has been shown to explain key differences in officer behavior. For example, Tankebe and Meško (2015) presented officers with a hypothetical scenario involving a drunk and agitated citizen and asked them how they would gain control of the situation. The results indicated that officers with a greater sense of self-legitimacy were more apt to issue verbal warnings for the offender to discontinue the behavior as opposed to threatening to use force. In addition to willingness to use force, Tankebe and Meško linked greater self-legitimacy to organizational commitment in the form of extra effort. In particular, officers who were more confident in their authority were more inclined to volunteer to

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participate in activities not required by the agency and offer assistance to supervisors without being asked to do so. Furthermore, Bradford and Quinton (2014) demonstrated that higher levels of self-legitimacy were associated with greater commitment to using fair procedures when interacting with citizens. In other words, officers were more likely to treat citizens with procedural justice when they had a greater sense of self-legitimacy. This is an especially important finding given the body of research indicating that citizens are more likely to perceive the police as a legitimate authority when officers exercise their authority in procedurally fair manners (Jackson et al., 2012; Tyler, 1990; Tyler & Huo, 2002).

The beneficial outcomes of self-legitimacy thus raise an important question: What instills a greater sense of self-legitimacy in police officers? Tankebe (2014, p. 5) suggests that "direct interactions with others provide information about confidence in self-legitimacy" but, to date, only a few studies have explored the issue. This limited, yet growing, line of research indicates that interactions with three primary groups—supervisors, colleagues, and the public—may influence police self-legitimacy. Each source will discussed in the following section.

Sources of Police Self-Legitimacy

Organizational justice. Within the business management literature, organizational justice theory suggests that greater distributive, procedural, and interactional justice on the part of supervisors is associated with a variety of beneficial outcomes such as increased productivity and greater organizational commitment (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Hg, 2001; Lind & Tyler, 1988). Distributive justice concerns the perceived fairness of outcomes. For example, employees place emphasis on the extent to which supervisors appear to fairly distribute outcomes such as salary increases and promotions across the organization. Procedural justice, on the other hand, focuses on the *process* used to determine outcomes. Lind

and Tyler (1988) demonstrated that employees are often more concerned with the fairness of processes than the favorability of outcomes. Even when faced with an undesirable outcome such as a pay cut, employees may still feel committed to the organization if they believe the decision to reduce pay was arrived at through fair procedures. Supervisors are seen as more procedurally fair when they are unbiased, explain the reasons for their decisions, and allow employees a voice in the decision-making process. Finally, interactional justice is concerned with the politeness, honesty, and respect shown by supervisors when interacting with employees (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). Collectively, these concepts take the form of organizational justice, which typically leads to beneficial organizational outcomes (Colquitt et al., 2001).

Scholars have recently begun applying the organizational justice framework to the study of police attitudes and behaviors. Research has linked greater perceived organizational justice among officers to increased identification with the organization, compliance with procedures and supervisors' orders, and favorable perceptions of community policing (Bradford, Quinton, Myhill, & Porter, 2013). Studies have also demonstrated a positive relationship between organizational justice perceptions and favorable attitudes toward the public (Myhill & Bradford, 2012), commitment to procedural justice during citizen interactions (Tankebe, 2014), and lower levels of misconduct (Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). Importantly, recent studies have also found that officers who perceive greater organizational justice tend to have higher levels of self-legitimacy (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Tankebe, 2014; Tankebe & Meško, 2015). Bradford and Quinton (2014), for example, found that organizational justice was associated with greater commitment to agency goals and less cynicism among officers in the Durham Constabulary, each of which in turn influenced officers' sense of self-legitimacy. Similarly, Tankebe (2014) found that fair treatment by supervisors remained a significant predictor of self-legitimacy among Ghanian

officers even after accounting for variation in relationships with colleagues and attitudes toward citizens. Tankebe and Meško (2015) also demonstrated that procedural justice on the part of supervisors was as important as relations with colleagues and perceived audience legitimacy in terms of generating a sense of self-legitimacy. When officers feel they are treated with respect, receive outcomes similar to their colleagues, and experience fair procedures by their supervisors, they are more likely to identify with their organization because they feel supported and enabled by it (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Bradford et al., 2013). Feelings such as these serve important psychological functions among police officers which may be crucial in terms of generating self-legitimacy. For example, a belief that the agency enables its officers to perform their duties (i.e., without having to fear being unfairly singled out for discipline or treated disrespectfully by supervisors) can potentially improve officers' confidence in their own authority and role as a law enforcement officer. Thus, organizational justice appears to be at least one source of police self-legitimacy.

Relationships with colleagues. A second potential source of self-legitimacy is the quality of relationships officers have with their colleagues. Barker's (2001) concentric model of self-legitimacy suggests that the quality of such relationships should matter somewhat less than treatment by superiors. Yet, Tankebe (2014, p. 8) points out that among frontline police officers, "legitimation is upwards to supervisors, sideways to their colleagues, and downwards to citizens." Indeed, officers interact with their peers much more regularly than they do with their supervisors. The police subculture literature suggests police officers develop an "us versus them" (i.e., citizens and supervisors) mentality that results in a high degree of group solidarity (Chan, 1996; Waddington, 1999). Social capital among officers working on the street might, therefore, be a key predictor of self-legitimacy. Officers who trust, respect, and enjoy working with their

fellow brothers and sisters in blue may have more confidence in their own authority, because regardless of how they are treated by members of the community or their supervisors, they still have the support of their peers who work alongside them on the streets. The few studies that have empirically tested the relationship between peer relationships and self-legitimacy provide mixed support: Tankebe (2014) found that only treatment by supervisors influenced self-legitimacy, while Tankebe and Meško (2015) found that peer relationships were equally as important as supervisor treatment in terms of predicting officers' sense of self-legitimacy. So, at best, peer relationships only partially explain police self-legitimacy.

Public support. A third prospective source of police self-legitimacy is perceived support from the public. According to the dialogic model of legitimacy, officers routinely engage in legitimacy dialogues with citizens who either comply with their directives or challenge their legitimacy claims (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012). Tyler (2011) suggests that each of these dialogues represent teachable moments for both citizens, who will make judgments about how fairly they have been treated (Tyler, 1990; Tyler & Huo, 2002), and police officers, who will interpret citizens' responses to their legitimacy claims (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012). Thus, it seems likely that perceived support from the public would factor into officers' sense of self-legitimacy. Yet, the limited body of research testing this notion is mixed. Bradford and Quinton (2014) found that officers who agreed with the statements "The public agree with the tactics we use" and "The public think we go about the job in the right way" had significantly higher levels of self-legitimacy. Similarly, officers who felt the public is generally cooperative also had a significantly greater sense of self-legitimacy. Tankebe and Meško (2015) demonstrated that perceived audience legitimacy (i.e., the degree to which officers believe the public views them as legitimate) was significantly and positively associated with self-legitimacy. However, Tankebe

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(2014) found that upon accounting for perceived procedural fairness by supervisors, relationships with citizens were no longer significantly associated with self-legitimacy. Supervisor treatment may influence officers' sense of self-legitimacy more so than the public's attitudes toward the police because the former is more psychologically salient and the latter can be avoided (i.e., officers can choose to avoid certain citizens who do not support the police but they may find it more difficult to escape the influence of their supervisors). Thus, public support may prove to have an important relationship with self-legitimacy but more research is certainly required before conclusions can be drawn.

An Unexplored Source of Self-Legitimacy: Negative Publicity

Although this line of research is still in its infancy, the literature clearly demonstrates that the sources of police self-legitimacy are complex. An important question stemming from the notion of public support is whether or not negative publicity can influence an officer's sense of self-legitimacy. Indeed, many of the changes in the philosophies of American policing throughout the last several decades were instigated by public outrage over the behavior of officers (e.g., police riots during the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago). More recently, the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Eric Garner in Staten Island, Walter Scott in North Charleston, and Freddie Gray in Baltimore have garnered widespread media coverage and sparked tension between police and the public (e.g., Baltimore experienced rioting in April 2015 and the governor of Maryland ultimately declared a state of emergency). And as previously mentioned, this is not solely a US phenomenon. Police in other countries, such as England, Australia, and Israel (to name a few) have faced similar public outrage in recent years. Might negative publicity such as this carry implications for officers' sense of self-legitimacy?

Bottoms and Tankebe's (2012) dialogic model would seem to suggest that officers' self-legitimacy may be weakened if such negative publicity is seen by the police as an indication of lack of public support. The emerging research on public support reviewed earlier provides preliminary evidence regarding this potential effect. As Bottoms and Tankebe (2012, p.152) note, "power-holders cannot and should not be expected to carry out their daily work with reference only to current public opinion." The citizen response to police legitimacy claims is certainly important to the discussion of self-legitimacy, but it is not the only way that officers obtain confidence in their authority. One way that negative publicity could influence self-legitimacy is by being an indicator of public nonsupport. Our concern here, however, is more fundamental. Negative publicity and the constant criticism of officers' occupation may lead them to feel less motivated on the job. Or, officers may even start to view their job as more dangerous because the negative media attention (e.g., coverage of riots) communicates to them that the public is willingly defiant of their authority. We examine these aspects of the potential negative publicity effect in the current study: Is the extent to which officers feel negative publicity has hindered their motivation to do their job or made the job more dangerous adversely associated with their sense of self-legitimacy? Previous research has shown that self-legitimacy predicts work motivation (Tankebe & Meško, 2015). However, we argue that widespread negative publicity surrounding law enforcement can also harm officers' perceptions of their job, and ultimately influence confidence in their own authority. After all, if negative publicity has made an officer less motivated to be a cop, we should also expect them to be less confident in their own legitimacy as an authority figure. Indeed, Tankebe (2014, p. 5), reminds us that "practically and theoretically, the problem of understanding the conditions associated with producing and nourishing police confidence in self-legitimacy is of immense importance. However, empirically,

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not much is known about those conditions." Accordingly, we see this question as important in developing our understanding of the multifaceted sources of self-legitimacy.

Even if so, can fair treatment by supervisors and quality relationships with colleagues wash out the impact of negative publicity on self-legitimacy? Based on Barker's (2001) concentric model of self-legitimacy, we might expect national media coverage (if it plays any role) to be less important than other sources of officer self-legitimacy because it is less proximate to individual officers and their daily activities. Yet in today's world of social media, negative press is seemingly inescapable and may resonate strongly with officers now more than ever. To date this remains a largely unanswered empirical question. Diminished self-legitimacy due in part to negative press could result in less effective police forces. That is, officers who have less confidence in their authority may be less proactive, less willing to engage in problem solving with the community, or perhaps more apt to use force in situations where it may not be necessary. Relatedly, officers with less confidence in their authority may be less inclined to emphasize procedural justice during citizen interactions (see Bradford & Quinton, 2014). This carries significant implications given the abundance of studies that indicate procedural justice is key to being perceived as legitimate by the public (Jackson et al., 2012; Mazerolle et al., 2013; Nix, Wolfe, Rojek, & Kaminski, 2015; Tyler, 1990; Tyler & Huo, 2002). For these reasons it is necessary to explore whether negative publicity that harms motivation or increases sense of danger is inversely associated with officers' sense of self-legitimacy.

The Current Study

The purpose of the current study was to move the literature on self-legitimacy forward in several ways. For starters, this was the first study of its kind carried out using a US sample. This is important given the historical differences between policing in the US and in Slovenia or

England, for example (countries where most self-legitimacy research has been conducted to date). Second, this was the first study that has considered whether negative publicity is linked with officers' self-legitimacy. The majority of research concerned with policing and the media has focused on how negative press affects citizens' attitudes toward the police (Chermak, McGarrell, & Gruenewald, 2005; Dowler, 2002; Lawrence, 2000; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Our survey was administered during a tumultuous period in American policing—shortly after the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. This allowed us to gauge officer perceptions of negative publicity at a time when it was arguably the most widespread in recent decades. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to test whether officers who feel that negative publicity surrounding law enforcement has reduced their motivation or increased the danger of the job have less confidence in their own authority. The broader purpose of doing so was to provide a more layered understanding of the sources of police self-legitimacy. Importantly, the analyses presented below estimated the negative publicity effect after removing the potential confounding influence of organizational justice evaluations and officers' relationships with their colleagues.

Methods

Data

Data for the present study were drawn from a survey carried out in February 2015 at a sheriff's department located in a metropolitan city in the southeastern US that serves a population of approximately 393,000 residents.[1] The questionnaire was administered online at a password-secure website and all employees were asked to participate. A total of 567 sworn

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[1] Note that the deaths of Walter Scott in North Charleston and the riots that ensued in Baltimore after Freddie Gray's funeral occurred after the data collection period had ended. However, media attention surrounding the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson and Eric Garner in Staten Island occurred within the six months prior to the survey.

deputies completed the survey, representing an 85.1% response rate. Completion of the survey

was encouraged by informing the deputies that their identities would remain anonymous,

analysis of the data would only be done in the aggregate by researchers at a local university, and

the study was supported by the agency's Deputy Advisory Council—a group of deputies who

represent the interests of their colleagues and is highly respected throughout the department. As

is common in survey research, some respondents did not answer every item on the questionnaire,

resulting in a small amount of missing data. Multiple imputation with chained equations (MICE;

10 imputations) was used to handle missing data which is available in the Stata 13 *mi impute*

suite (Andridge & Little, 2010; Fuller & Kim, 2005; Gmel, 2001).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable examined in the current study was *self-legitimacy*. Respondents

were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with five 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 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

this county" (Tankebe, 2014). Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=*strongly*

disagree, 2=*disagree*, 3=*neutral*, 4=*agree*, 5=*strongly agree*). Principal components analysis

(PCA) with varimax rotation was used to explore the extent to which the items clustered

together. The results indicated that the items loaded onto a single component ($\lambda = 2.33$; loadings

> 0.57) and Cronbach's alpha revealed acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .71$; see, e.g.,

Cortina, 1993). As such, the items were used to create a summated scale ranging from 5 to 25,

with higher scores indicating a greater sense of self-legitimacy. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for all variables used in the analyses.

[Table 1 about here]

Independent Variables

Negative publicity. Nine items were used to capture the extent to which respondents believe negative publicity has impacted them. For example, 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," and "made it more dangerous to be a law enforcement officer." Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*). A complete list of items is presented with the results of a PCA in Table 2. The PCA demonstrated that the nine items loaded onto two distinct components: one pertaining to *motivation* (λ = 4.58, component loadings > 0.61) and the other pertaining to *danger* on the job (λ = 1.10, component loadings > 0.62). Therefore, the empirical evidence suggested that the items used to capture negative publicity were tapping into meaningful constructs, each demonstrating strong internal consistency (*motivation*: α = 0.88; *danger*: α = 0.70). Therefore, two summated scales were used to measure negative publicity: *negative publicity-motivation* where higher scores indicated officers feel less motivated to do their job as a result of negative publicity and *negative publicity-danger* where higher scores reflected a belief among officers that their job has become more dangerous or difficult as a result of negative publicity. The descriptive statistics revealed that the average respondent is "neutral" regarding whether negative publicity has resulted in less motivation (M = 14.80) but, still, a sizable portion of the sample indicated that they have become less motivated over the previous 6 months. Also, the sample, on

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average, believed that policing has gotten more dangerous in the 6 months leading up to the survey (M = 10.76).

[Table 2 about here]

Organizational justice. Eighteen items were used to capture the three aspects of organizational justice (i.e., distributive, procedural, and interactional), and all were measured on the same 5-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*). Distributive justice was measured by asking respondents their level of agreement 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." Procedural justice was measured 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." Finally, interactional justice was measured by asking respondents the extent to which they agreed with statements such as "Generally, command staff treats employees with respect" and "Command staff treats employees with kindness and consideration" (a complete list of items is available in Appendix A). These items were consistent with those used in prior organizational justice research (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). PCA revealed that the items loaded onto a single component (λ = 10.75, factor loadings > 0.65). The items also demonstrated strong internal consistency (α = .96) and, as such, were combined into an additive scale, with higher scores representing greater perceived organizational justice.

Relationship with colleagues. To capture relationships with colleagues, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the following statement: "I enjoy working with my colleagues at this agency." Responses were captured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*) and coded so higher scores indicated that the

respondent has a good working relationship with his/her colleagues. Although a one-item indicator is not ideal, the item was consistent with prior research that estimates the effect of officers' relationships with colleagues on self-legitimacy. Indeed, the item was correlated in the expected direction with self-legitimacy ($r = 0.26$) and, therefore, had predictive validity.

Controls

In order to provide unbiased estimates of the effects of negative publicity, organizational justice, and relationship with colleagues on levels of self-legitimacy, several demographic control variables were included in the model specification. To help maintain respondent anonymity, *age* was measured categorically (1=21 to 30, 2=31 to 40, 3=41 to 50, and 4=51 or older). Gender (1=*male*), race (1=*minority*), and education (1=*four-year degree or higher*) were dummy coded. Rank (1=*deputy*), experience (1=*more than 15 years*), and military background (1=*yes*) were also accounted for with binary indicators.

Analytic Strategy

The multivariate analyses presented below proceeded in four steps. First, we estimated a regression equation whereby the dependent variable—self-legitimacy—was regressed onto the two negative publicity variables and statistical controls. This step provided a preliminary answer to our key research question—are officers' perceptions of negative publicity surrounding law enforcement associated with their sense of self-legitimacy? Second, we regressed self-legitimacy onto the organizational justice scale and control variables. Third, we estimated the effect of officers' relationships with colleagues on self-legitimacy, net of statistical controls. Our attention in the second and third steps focused on the predictive validity of our data—did the data support the findings of prior research revealing that organizational justice and relationships with colleagues are key predictors of police self-legitimacy? Finally, the negative publicity,

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organizational justice, and relationship with colleagues variables are included in the same model. Here, our concern was with whether the effect of negative publicity on self-legitimacy persisted after the inclusion of the potential confounders (i.e., other correlates of self-legitimacy).

Ordinary least squares regression (OLS) was used to estimate all equations because the outcome variable of interest approximated normality (skewness = -0.78). Several diagnostic procedures were performed to assess whether collinearity was a problem in the multivariate models. None of the bivariate correlations between the independent variables were strong enough (r < |0.60|) to indicate harmful collinearity. The degree of collinearity between the predictor variables also fell within acceptable ranges (mean VIF = 1.44 for Model 4 in Table 3).

Results

Model 1 in Table 3 focused on whether perceptions of negative publicity surrounding law enforcement were associated with self-legitimacy in this sample of deputies. Note that the measure of joint association (F-test = 3.85, $p < .01$) was statistically significant which indicates the equation provided better prediction of the dependent variable than a constant-only model. With respect to the impact of negative publicity on self-legitimacy, the results revealed that only one of the scales reached statistical significance. Officers who felt less motivated to do their job as a result of negative publicity had a weaker sense of self-legitimacy ($b = -.170$, $p < .01$). More formally, the standardized partial regression coefficient (β) indicated that each one unit increase in the negative publicity-motivation scale corresponded with a .326 standard deviation reduction in the self-legitimacy scale. This suggests that lack of motivation stemming from negative publicity had a moderate, negative relationship with self-legitimacy among deputies in this sample. Importantly, however, the degree to which respondents believed their job had become more dangerous as a result of negative publicity did not appear to influence their sense of self-

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legitimacy. The potential reasons for these findings will be explored in greater detail later. To this point, the role of negative publicity in impacting officers' self-legitimacy partially conformed to our expectations and squared well with past research (Bradford & Quinton; 2014; Tankebe, 2014; Tankebe & Meško, 2015). Prior to reaching any conclusions, however, more rigorous tests were required.

[Table 3 about here]

Models 2 and 3 in Table 3 examined the independent effects of organizational justice (see Model 2) and relationship with colleagues (see Model 3) on self-legitimacy. The results demonstrated that the organizational justice scale had a positive and statistically significant relationship with self-legitimacy ($b = .074$, $p < .01$). Consistent with 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 view themselves as having greater legitimacy as law enforcement officers. Similarly, the association between the relationship with colleagues item and self-legitimacy was statistically significant and in the expected direction ($b = 1.063$, $p < .01$). Deputies in this sample who enjoy working with their colleagues also tended to have a greater sense of self-legitimacy. 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. At a minimum, these results bolster confidence in the quality of the data used in this study and the reported findings. In short, the data demonstrated predictive validity.

The final regression equation (Model 4, Table 3) explored the simultaneous effects of negative publicity, organizational justice, and relationship with colleagues on the self-legitimacy scale. Several important findings emerged from this model. First, the equation accounted for a

moderate amount of variation in deputies' sense of self-legitimacy (Adjusted R^2 = .16). Second, and most importantly, the negative publicity-motivation association with self-legitimacy (b = -.080, $p < .05$) remained statistically significant after accounting for the potential confounding influence of organizational justice and relationship with colleagues. The inclusion of these other correlates of self-legitimacy into the equation reduced the magnitude of the negative publicity-motivation effect by about 53%. The test for equality of regression coefficients (Clogg, Petkova, & Shihadeh, 1992), however, revealed that this reduction was not statistically significant at the .05 level (z-test = 1.743, p = .08). At the least, this finding demonstrated that the influence of negative publicity on deputies' sense of self-legitimacy is partially attenuated by organizational justice and relationship with peers. A comparison of the standardized partial regression coefficients showed that organizational justice had the *strongest effect* on self-legitimacy (β = .284). In fact, this effect was nearly two times larger than the negative publicity-motivation scale (β = -.154). At the same time, however, the findings revealed that the negative publicity-motivation scale had a nontrivial relationship with self-legitimacy after controlling for known correlates of the construct and several demographic variables.

Given that empirical attention concerning officer self-legitimacy is a growing line of inquiry, it was also worth reviewing the results from the rest of Model 4. Two estimates for the control variables achieved statistical significance: four-year degree (b = .590, $p < .05$) and military (b = .756, $p < .01$). Simply put, deputies with more education or prior military experience tended to view themselves as a more legitimate authority figure than their counterparts did.

Discussion

Police-community relations have long been a topic of public discussion and research attention. Recent high-profile events in the US have renewed a national debate concerning law enforcement practices. These incidents have ushered in an incredible amount of negative publicity for law enforcement. This attention has transcended the specific jurisdictional boundaries where the events occurred and appear to represent a general undercurrent of discontent with US policing. A similar trend has also been observed recently in countries outside of the US. While most coverage focuses on community perceptions, little if any attention is ever devoted toward understanding how such widespread negative publicity can impact individual officers' orientations toward their job and confidence in their authority. Self-legitimacy research offers a platform for considering this effect. Our study sought to address a research question that has both theoretical and practical implications: is negative publicity surrounding the police associated with officers' sense of self-legitimacy? The results of our study provide a simple answer—yes. Those officers who were less motivated to do their job as a result of negative publicity were significantly less likely to view themselves as legitimate authority figures. This effect was observed after controlling for other known predictors of self-legitimacy— organizational justice and officers' relationships with their colleagues. With this finding in mind, several issues warrant further discussion.

First, the primary contribution this study provides the literature is the finding that negative publicity, which hinders officer motivation, is associated with lower self-legitimacy. This result expands on a growing literature, revealing that negative publicity—even if focused on events far removed from an officer's jurisdiction—is associated with a lack of confidence in law enforcement authority. This effect was strong enough to withstand the influence of other known correlates of self-legitimacy. Future research should explore this notion in further detail. For

example, should we expect *positive* press on a national level to be associated with higher levels of self-legitimacy? Does negative press surrounding a controversial event have a stronger impact on self-legitimacy among those officers in the specific jurisdiction in which the incident occurred compared to officers from surrounding or distant agencies? Do the police believe that continuous negative publicity is an indication that the public views them as less legitimate or trustworthy? And, if so, what effect does this have on police self-legitimacy? Our hope is that the findings from the current analysis will motivate additional work in this area.

This finding is also important on a more practical level. Serious events spark controversy and renew criticism of policing. However, it is irresponsible for researchers (and the public) to ignore how such negative publicity can diminish officers' sense of self-legitimacy. This is important because research suggests that self-legitimacy is associated with a number of beneficial behaviors for law enforcement agencies and the public more generally. Officers with greater confidence in their authority are more likely to identify with their agency and its goals (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Tankebe, 2010), support the idea of interacting with citizens in a procedurally fair manner (Bradford & Quinton, 2014), and—perhaps most relevant to the current debate surrounding the police—be more restrained in the decision to use force (Tankebe & Meško, 2015). Thus, officers with lower self-legitimacy may de-identify with their agency and its goals (e.g., community-oriented policing) and, in turn, withdraw from interacting with community members and other effective policing strategies (see, e.g., Wolfe & Nix, *in press*). It is not an overstatement to conclude that this situation—sometimes referred to as "de-policing"— could ultimately compromise public safety.

Second, our descriptive statistics suggested that a sizable portion of our sample believes that negative publicity has made it more dangerous and difficult to work in law enforcement.

However, this sentiment did not impact respondents' feelings of self-legitimacy. There are a number of conceivable explanations for this finding. For starters, it could be the case that greater negative publicity and public outrage make officers more likely to adopt an "us versus them" mentality (Chan, 1996; Waddington, 1999). As such, the increased danger associated with the job may not threaten the confidence officers have in their authority because of the solidarity that exists among them and their colleagues. Or, perhaps officers believe negative press makes the job more dangerous, but they remain confident in their authority because they have been adequately trained to handle themselves in dangerous situations that may require some degree of force. It is also possible that negative publicity that results in lack of motivation may simply cause some officers to withdraw from the job such that any perceived increase in danger becomes irrelevant to their self-evaluations—if they "police less," the danger of the job becomes less salient. Our data provide preliminary support for this possibility because the negative publicity-motivation and negative publicity-danger scales are correlated ($r = .49$) but only motivation is associated with self-legitimacy (see Appendix B). Finally, maybe the results observed in this study are what we would expect to find. Negative publicity that impacts one's motivation may be directly tied to self-legitimacy because the concept is motivational in nature and the issues that spark such events are perhaps viewed as largely out of officers' control. Thus, high-profile, controversial incidents may trigger feelings of helplessness among officers and diminish their sense of self-legitimacy. Conversely, negative publicity that makes the job more dangerous or difficult may not impact self-legitimacy because it is associated with issues that officers believe they can directly control (e.g., officer safety, controlling a situation). Clearly, more research is required to shed light on these relationships.

And, while we were able to explore the relationships we specified in important ways, there were several things we could not do that represent opportunities for future research. We rely on cross-sectional survey data so it is not possible to speak to the causality of the observed relationships. It is worth noting, however, that the majority of self-legitimacy research conducted to date is also limited in this regard (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Tankebe, 2014; Tankebe & Meško, 2015). One avenue that needs to be explored in greater detail is the possibility that a reciprocal relationship exists between supposed predictors of self-legitimacy and the construct itself. For example, it is quite possible that self-legitimacy influences perceptions of negative publicity. Officers who are less confident in their authority may be more inclined to indicate that negative publicity has caused them to feel less motivated on the job. As discussed earlier, preliminary evidence supports this possibility by revealing that self-legitimacy is positively associated with work motivation (Tankebe & Meško, 2015). It is worth noting, however, that the relationship we explored—the effect of negative publicity on self-legitimacy—has important theoretical implications and was appropriate given the nature or our variables. Recall that the survey items dealt with whether deputies felt less motivated or perceived more danger as a result of the negative publicity *during the 6 months leading up to the survey*. Deputies' sense of self-legitimacy, on the other hand, was captured during the time of the survey. Longitudinal data will be necessary to explore if negative publicity *changes* police self-legitimacy and whether, over time, officer confidence in their own authority shapes their sensitivity to negative press concerning law enforcement.

Relatedly, future research can build upon our findings by exploring whether officers who perceive negative publicity as an indicator of public nonsupport (or mistrust) have less confidence in their authority. Although we captured an important indicator of public support with

our negative publicity items, our study is unable to speak to the direct effect of perceived public support on officers' self-legitimacy. Furthermore, it is important to note that the negative publicity effect may actually have at least two distinct paths—negative media attention may reduce officer motivation (as explored in this study) or cause officers to believe that the public does not support or trust them. If so, this raises an important question: is reduced motivation stemming from negative publicity associated with self-legitimacy after taking into account officers' perceptions regarding the degree to which negative media attention has caused public support to decline? When combined with the present findings, research on such issues would contribute to our understanding of the complex sources of self-legitimacy. Again, longitudinal data will be ideal for exploring possibilities such as these.

Finally, the results also raise an important question. Can the effects of negative publicity be counteracted by police agencies? For instance, could executives or supervisors attempt to motivate their officers in a way that minimizes the effects of negative discussions among the media and public? Indeed, a crucially important finding from our study that should not be overlooked is that officer perceptions of organizational justice was the strongest predictor of their self-legitimacy (i.e., such perceptions had larger standardized effects than negative publicity or relationships with colleagues). This suggests that agencies (and supervisors) that strive to maintain organizational fairness perceptions in the eyes of their officers may still cultivate employees with greater confidence in their own authority. Such practices may be especially important when faced with legitimacy crises that stem from public discontent over high-profile incidents. Simply put, *our findings underscore that organizational justice is key to officers' sense of self-legitimacy*. Criminologists may also be interested in determining whether the effects of organizational justice could diminish the influence of negative publicity on self-legitimacy.

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Further tests (not reported in text) conducted on the current sample, however, revealed that there were no statistically significant interaction effects between negative publicity and organizational justice. Another important finding that emerged from this study is that officers with a four-year college degree and those with military experience were more likely to feel confident in their authority as law enforcement officers. Perhaps, then, agencies could strive to recruit such officers as they may be less likely to experience reduced feelings of self-legitimacy due to negative publicity. Relatedly, it is plausible that police agencies could implement training for officers concerning coping with the stress that can result from exposure to negative publicity. Such training could focus on how public outcry and media attention is a necessary component of democratic policing and provide strategies for remaining confident in their authority despite momentary public discontent. Future work that builds off our findings would help lend important information to police practitioners aiming to prevent reductions in officer confidence driven by negative national publicity.

In the end, police self-legitimacy is a complex construct that has complex sources. While research has documented the role of organizational (e.g., organizational justice), relational (e.g., relationships with colleagues), and perceptual (e.g., public support) sources of self-legitimacy, other sources such as negative publicity have yet to be explored in much detail to date. In fact, most media and research attention surrounding police-community relations focuses on how the police negatively impact citizens and communities. For example, after rioting ensued in Baltimore following Freddie Gray's funeral, several news outlets criticized the police for being too passive (Frizell, 2015). Yet, the police are also expected to allow citizens to exercise their first amendment right to peaceful protest. It would appear that these are no-win situations for the police. Additionally, negative press typically fails to appreciate that there are plenty of good cops

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and law enforcement is a vital component to order in society. In our mind, it is important to take a step back from obviously unfortunate incidents and see how such issues may impact law enforcement officers themselves. Unfortunately, it appears that such negative publicity has a deleterious relationship with officers' sense of self-legitimacy. This is bad for law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. The present results contribute to the growing body of work on self-legitimacy and the dialogic model of legitimacy more generally. Police self-legitimacy is a key part of the police-citizen dialogue. Our hope is that this study will spark further research that explores the sources of self-legitimacy and builds on our efforts by examining the consequences of increased or decreased confidence in officers' own authority. After all, officers who lack self-legitimacy may not be best equipped to ensure community safety. Research may also find, however, that a certain level of self-legitimacy could prove counterproductive—very high levels of confidence may result in poor decision making, excessive force, or the sidestepping of laws. Therefore, self-legitimacy is more than theoretically important—it speaks directly to the public's well-being.

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Appendix A

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 this agency.

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 employees' viewpoints.

Command staff treats employees with kindness and consideration.

Command staff treats employees the same regardless of their gender.

Command staff treats 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 employees with respect.

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

Appendix B: Bivariate Correlations

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	Self-legitimacy	1.00												
2	NP-motivation	-.26	1.00											
3	NP-danger	-.02	.49	1.00										
4	Organizational justice	.35	-.52	-.26	1.00									
5	Relationship with colleagues	.27	-.33	-.03	.50	1.00								
6	Age	.03	-.12	-.15	.05	.06	1.00							
7	Male	.09	-.07	-.07	.06	.02	.17	1.00						
8	Minority	.06	-.03	-.12	-.12	-.10	.16	-.06	1.00					
9	Four-year degree	.05	.10	.04	-.06	.06	-.11	-.05	-.04	1.00				
10	Deputy	-.02	-.06	-.05	-.02	-.09	-.29	-.08	.02	.02	1.00			
11	Patrol	.00	.12	.01	-.21	-.10	-.23	.08	-.05	-.04	.09	1.00		
12	15 years in LE	-.02	-.15	-.13	.09	.07	.60	.12	-.02	-.06	-.34	-.27	1.00	
13	Military	.11	.01	-.05	-.08	-.06	.15	.27	.13	-.15	-.08	.14	.06	1.00

Note: NP = Negative publicity.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	M	S.D.	Min	Max
Self-legitimacy	20.54	2.88	5	25
Negative publicity-motivation	14.80	5.43	6	30
Negative publicity-danger	10.76	2.53	3	15
Organizational justice	64.75	13.85	18	90
Relationship with colleagues	4.19	0.76	1	5
Age	2.63	1.05	1	4
Male	0.77	--	0	1
Minority	0.30	--	0	1
Four-year degree	0.58	--	0	1
Deputy	0.61	--	0	1
Patrol	0.39	--	0	1
15 years in LE	0.43	--	0	1
Military	0.38	--	0	1

Table 2. Principle-components analysis of negative publicity scale items

Survey Items	Component Loadings	
Over the past 6 months, negative publicity surrounding law enforcement has:	1	2
1. Made it more difficult to do your job.	.42	**.62**
2. Made it more dangerous to be a law enforcement officer.	.10	**.84**
3. Forced some US law enforcement agencies to make policy changes that ultimately threaten officer safety.	.21	**.76**
4. Made it more difficult for you to be motivated at work.	**.80**	.29
5. Caused you to be less proactive on the job than you were in the past.	**.82**	.18
6. Caused you to be more apprehensive about using force even though it may be necessary.	**.61**	.30
7. Caused you to be *less* likely to want to work with community members to solve local problems.	**.76**	.04
8. Negatively impacted the way you do your job.	**.77**	.27
9. Made it less enjoyable to have a career in law enforcement.	**.67**	.43
Eigenvalue	4.58	1.10

Table 3. The effect of negative publicity on police self-legitimacy

	Self-legitimacy											
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	b	SE	β	b	SE	β	b	SE	β	b	SE	β
NP-motivation	-.170**	.036	-.326	--	--	--	--	--	--	-.080*	.037	-.154
NP-danger	.107	.075	.097	--	--	--	--	--	--	.119	.068	.108
Org. justice	--	--	--	.074**	.012	.357	--	--	--	.059**	.015	.284
Relationship w/colleagues	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.063**	.220	.283	.387	.263	.104
Age	.010	.174	.004	-.022	.165	-.008	-.043	.168	-.016	.026	.167	.010
Male	.341	.364	.049	.210	.349	.030	.347	.357	.050	.250	.351	.036
Minority	.276	.335	.045	.586	.308	.094	.530	.323	.085	.590	.323	.096
Four-year degree	.598*	.283	.104	.466	.245	.080	.228	.280	.039	.590*	.279	.102
Deputy	-.232	.291	-.040	-.026	.287	-.004	.112	.290	.019	-.089	.279	-.015
Patrol	.011	.286	.002	.364	.257	.061	.065	.267	.011	.348	.268	.060
15 years in LE	-.446	.380	-.078	-.380	.347	-.065	-.271	.353	-.047	-.356	.357	-.062
Military	.649*	.293	.112	.805**	.291	.136	.681*	.286	.116	.756**	.289	.130
Intercept	21.361**	.856	--	14.978**	.989	--	15.499**	1.009	--	14.101**	1.535	--
F Test	3.85**			6.70**			4.29**			6.37**		
Adjusted R^2	.08			.13			.08			.16		

Note: NP = negative publicity. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$