

Closer and More Formidable: Threat and Police Identification Bias Appraisals of Civilians in Police Use of Force Encounters

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The Atlantic
The Killing of Kajieme Powell and
How It Divides Americans

VIDEO OF KAJIEME POWELL'S KILLING DIFFERS FROM POLICE
DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT

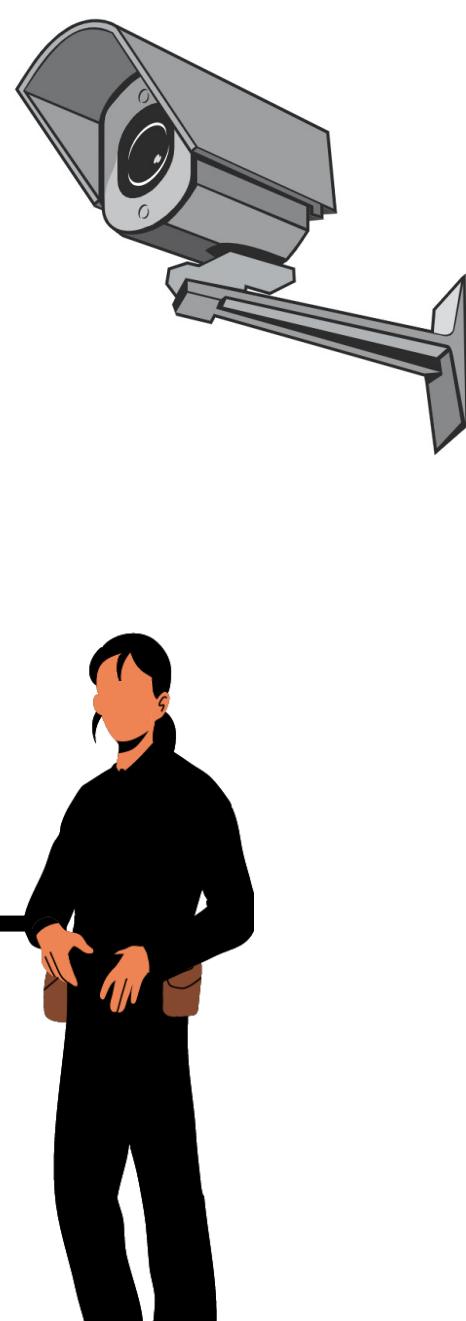
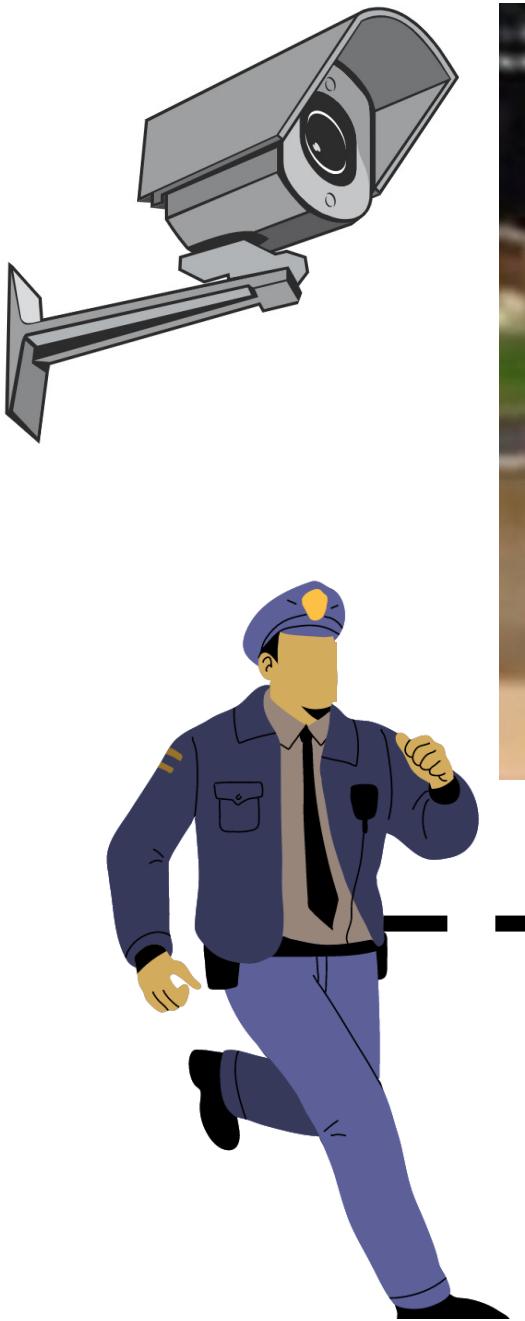
BBC

Kajieme Powell: St Louis police shooting video stirs debate



COLORLINES
Eyewitness Video of Kajieme
Powell Shooting Contradicts
Police Story

VANITY FAIR



(Granot et al. 2018; Sommers, 2015; Jones et al., 2018)

Threat distorts our perception of threatening stimuli

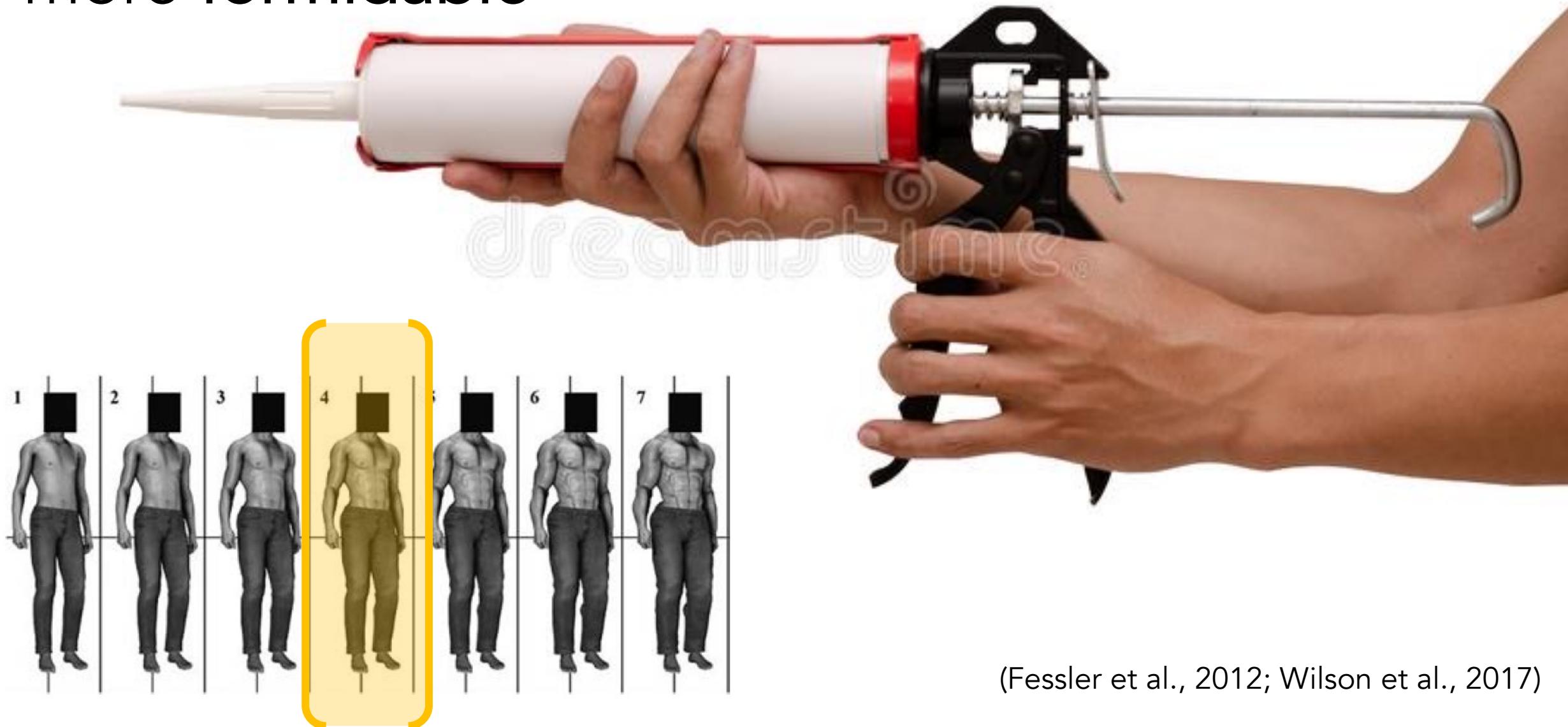


(Cole, Balcetis, & Dunning, 2013; Harber, Yeung, & Iacobelli, 2011; Teghtsoonian & Frost, 1982; Xiao & Bavel, 2012)

threatening people appear
more formidable

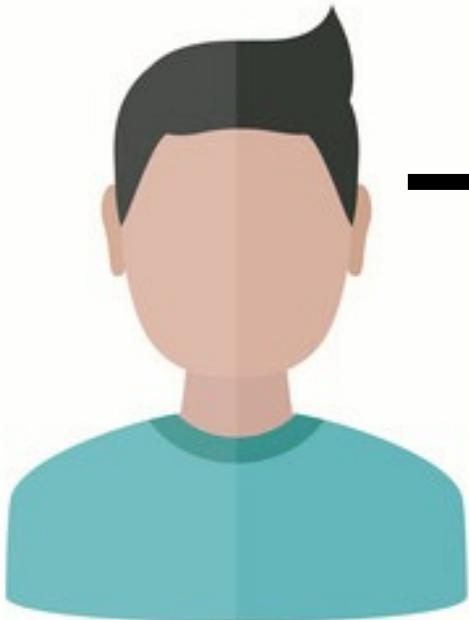


threatening people appear
more formidable



(Fessler et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2017)

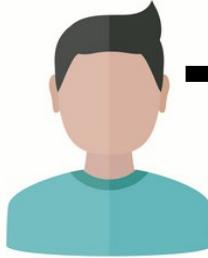
Attitudes toward police



Attitudes toward police

(Cardenas et al. 2020; Granot et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2017; Jones et al. 2018)

Threat posed by civilian



Distance Estimation

Formidability

Justifiability of Use of Force

Punishment



Williams
College



($N_{total} = 2822$)



osf.io/65asv

Study 1

Study 2

Study 3

Study 4a & b



Correlational Design ($N = 398$)
measured perceived threat

Experimental Design ($N_s = 1535$)
manipulated threat posed by civilian

Experimental Design ($N = 889$)
manipulated perceived distance

Study 3



Age: 26.8 years (9.25)

White: (76.4%)

Asian (5.8%)

Hispanic/Latino (5.19%)

Black/African American (4.07%)

Gender: 75.77% female

Study 4a

Experimental Design ($N_s = 1697$)
manipulated threat posed by civilian

Age: 39.52 (14.71)

White: (75.25%)

Black/African American (7.64%)

Asian (6.07%)

Hispanic/Latino (2.36%)

Gender: 59.28% female

Police Scales (PRE & POST)

Identification with the Police

IPS Scale
(8-items; $\alpha = .89 [.88, .90]$)

Fagan & Tyler (2008)

Police Legitimacy

Police Legitimacy Scale
(6-items; $\alpha = .95 [.95, .96]$)

Reynolds et al. (2018)

Support for the Police

Police Support Scale
(4-items; $\alpha = .87 [.86, .89]$)

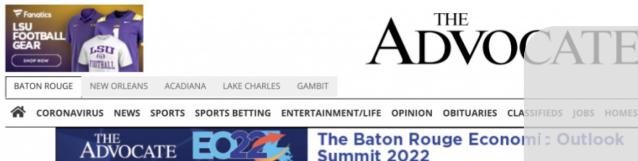
Adapted from Gallup
Poll

Police-Civilian Encounter

News Article

Low Threat

High Threat



Officer deploys Taser on woman

BY SHAUN MURRAY | STAFF WRITER DEC 22, 2019 - 2:39 PM 3 minutes to read



On Tuesday, a Baton Rouge police officer used her Taser to stun a woman wielding a knife, according to police.

Before the officer arrived, a male employee working in the building called 911 to report that an unidentified woman had been seen walking suspiciously around the office building. She had a

Dispatch also reported to police that the unidentified woman had a known history of violent assault with a weapon and larceny but no known history of mental illness. This information was communicated to the police officer via 911 dispatch.

"She had a knife and was swinging it around violently"

Officer deploys Taser on woman carrying a knife

BY SHAUN MURRAY | STAFF WRITER DEC 22, 2019 - 2:39 PM 3 minutes to read



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Dispatch also reported to police that the unidentified woman had a known history of violent assault with a weapon and larceny but no known history of mental illness. This information was communicated to the police officer via 911 dispatch.

"injured a pregnant woman"

Manipulation Check
 $t(793.63) = 31.35, p < .001$

Police-Civilian Encounter

News Article

Recorded Encounter



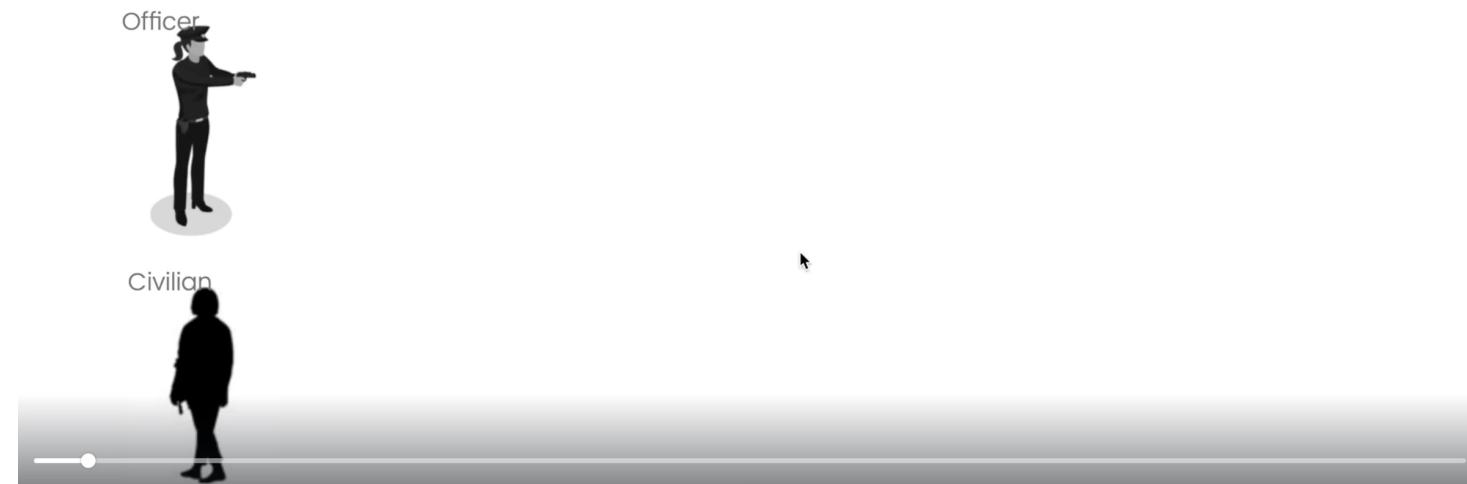
Distance Estimates

Physical Distance

Felt Distance

Visual Distance

...how far do you feel that the civilian was from the officer?



Feels very close

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Feels very far

Civilian Appraisals

Civilian Threat

Civilian Formidability

Formidability Scale (5-items; $\alpha = .62 [.58, .66]$)

Muscularity x 2



Weight

Strength

Height

Not at all strong

Very strong

O

O

O

O

O

O

Evaluating Use of Force

Justifiability

Punishment

1. The officer should be reprimanded or punished in some way.

strongly
disagree

1

2

3

4

5

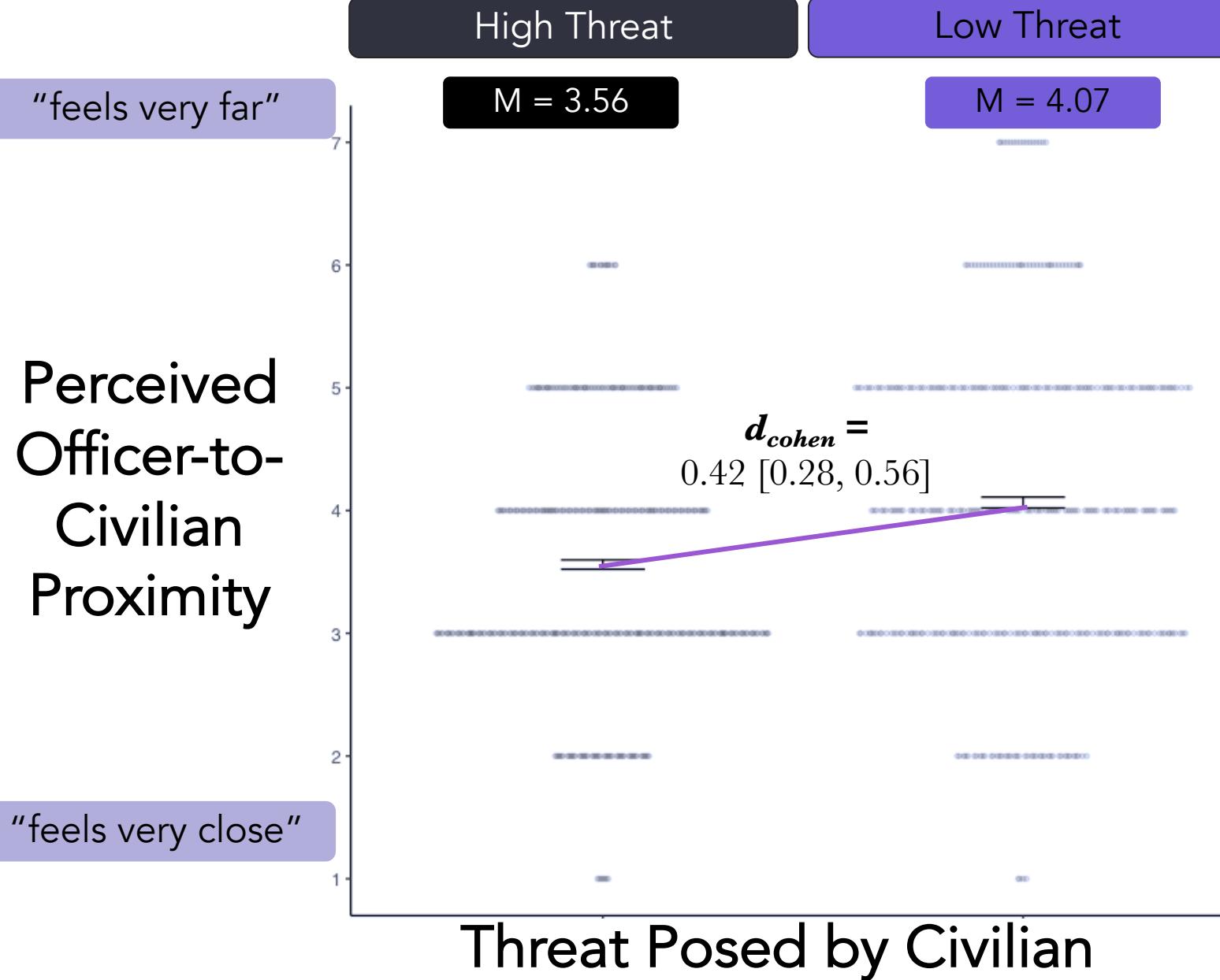
6

7

strongly agree

Results

*Error bars depict 95% CIs



Study 3
(Replicating Study 2)

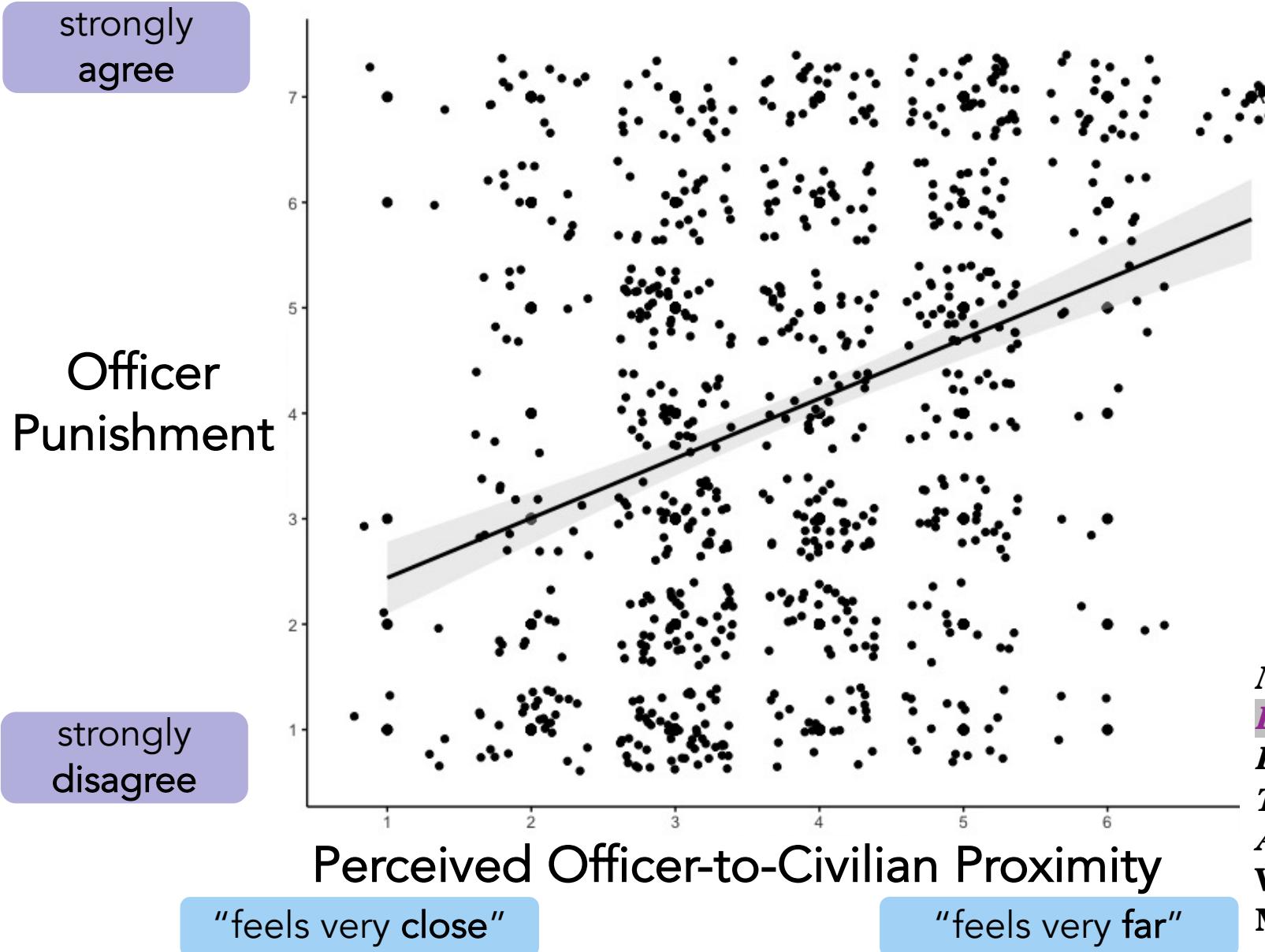
When the news portrayed the civilian as **highly threatening** (vs. nonthreatening), people felt she was standing **closer** to the officer.

Model Fit: $F(6, 799) = 9.02, p < .001, R^2 = .05$

Threat: $b = .50, t = -6.04, p < .001$

Police ID: $b = -0.09, t = -2.246, p = .025$

Covariates: Identification with the Police*, Political ideology, Race, Gender, Age



The closer people felt the civilian was standing to the officer, the less they agreed that the officer should be punished.

Model Fit: $F(6, 801) = 172.3, p < .001, R^2 = .56$

Felt Distance: $b = 0.29, t = 7.07, p < .001$

Police ID: $b = -0.41, t = 10.43, p < .001$

Threat: $b = 2.59, t = 25.91, p < .001$

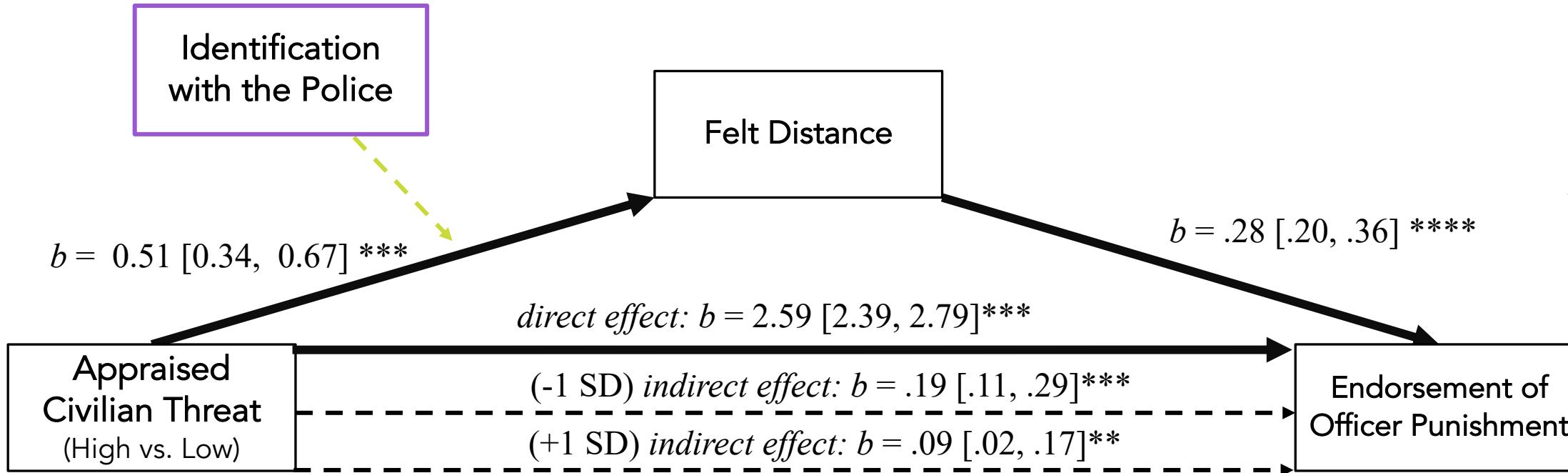
Age: $b = -0.02, t = -3.92, p < .001$

White vs. Non-White: $b = .25, t = 2.15, p = .038$

Male vs. NonMale: $b = -0.13, t = -1.08, p = .279$

When the news portrayed the civilian as more threatening, she was seen as standing closer to the officer, and the officer, in turn, was judged as less worthy of punishment.

IPS X Threat: $b = -.13 [-.27, -.003]^$*



Using mediation package (Tingley et al., 2014) in R to estimate indirect effect—10,000 bootstrapped simulations

When the news portrayed the civilian as highly threatening (vs. nonthreatening), people thought she was **stronger**, **taller**, more **muscular**, and **heavier**.

more formidable

Formidability

3

2

1

0

-1

-2

-3

M = 0.23

High Threat

M = -0.23

Low Threat

$$d_{cohen} = 0.66 [0.51, 0.80]$$

Threat Posed by Civilian



less formidable

*Error bars depict 95% CI

*formidability z-scored values shown

Model Fit: $F(6, 799) = 28.03, p < .001, R^2 = .17$

Threat: $b = -0.46, t = -9.68, p < .001$

Police ID: $b = 0.11, t = 5.31, p < .001$

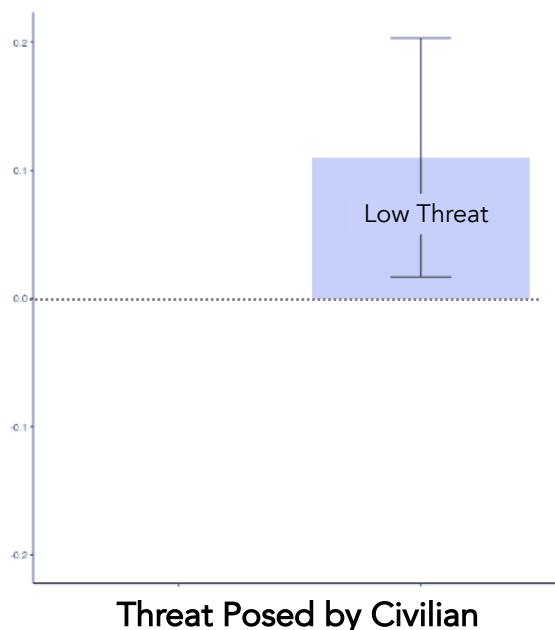
Male vs. Non-Male, $p = .057$

Age: $p = .004$

When the police tased a *nonthreatening* civilian people

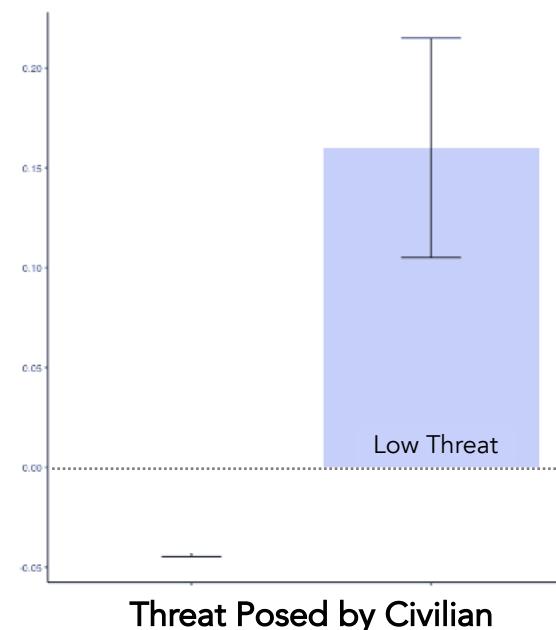
... supported
the police less

decreased

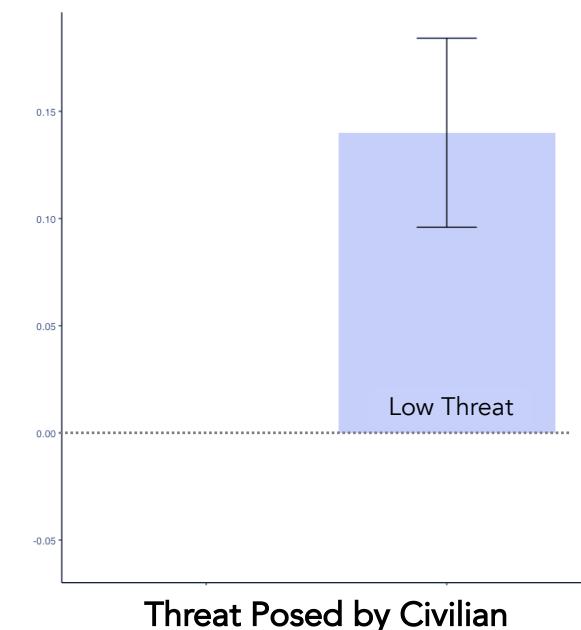


increased

...thought police
were less
legitimate



...identified with
the police less



Threat X Time: $b = 0.22, t(807) = 3.22^{***}$

$b = 0.16, t(804.9) = 4.44^{***}$

$b = 0.16, t(807) = 5.26^{***}$

*** $p < .001$

*Error bars depict 95% CI

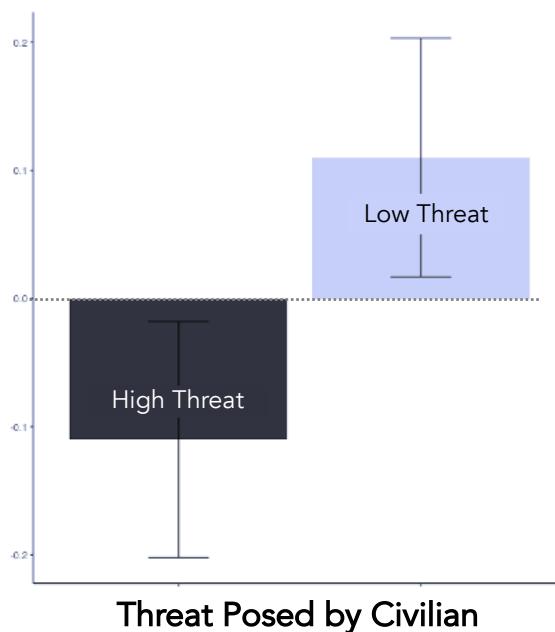
When the police tased a **threatening** civilian people

... supported police *more*

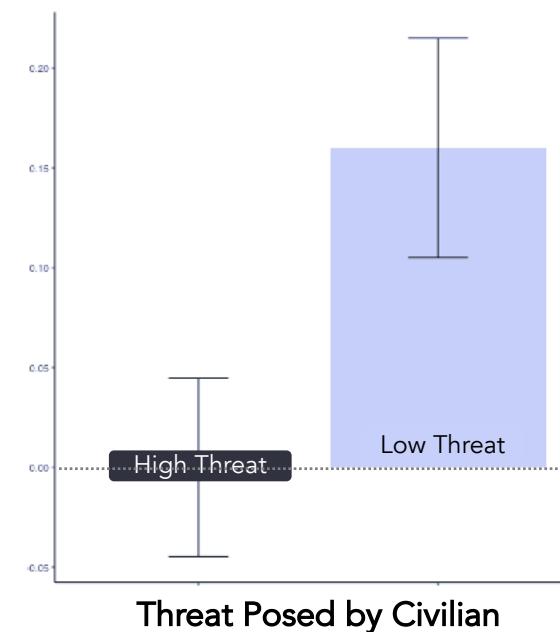
... did not think police were more or less legitimate

... did not identify more or less with police

decreased



increased



Threat X Time: $b = 0.22, t(807) = 3.22^{***}$

$b = 0.16, t(804.9) = 4.44^{***}$

$b = 0.16, t(807) = 5.26^{***}$

*** $p < .001$

*Error bars depict 95% CI

Study 2



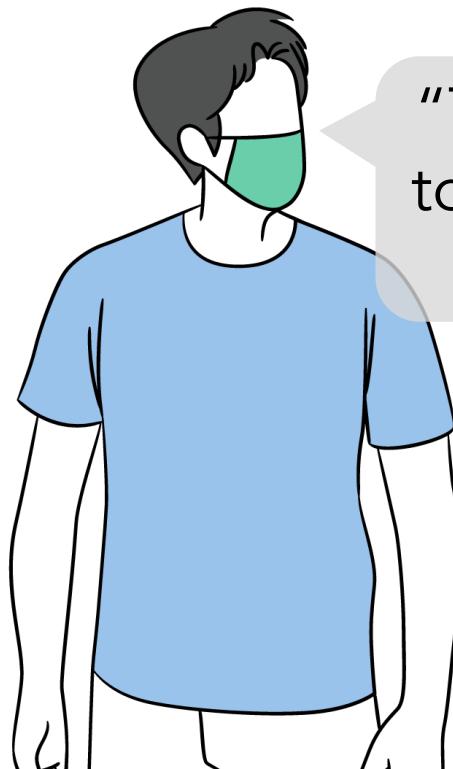
Police-Civilian Encounter

News Article

$N = 889$

Manipulation Check

$t(828.67) = 10.44, p < .001, d = .44$

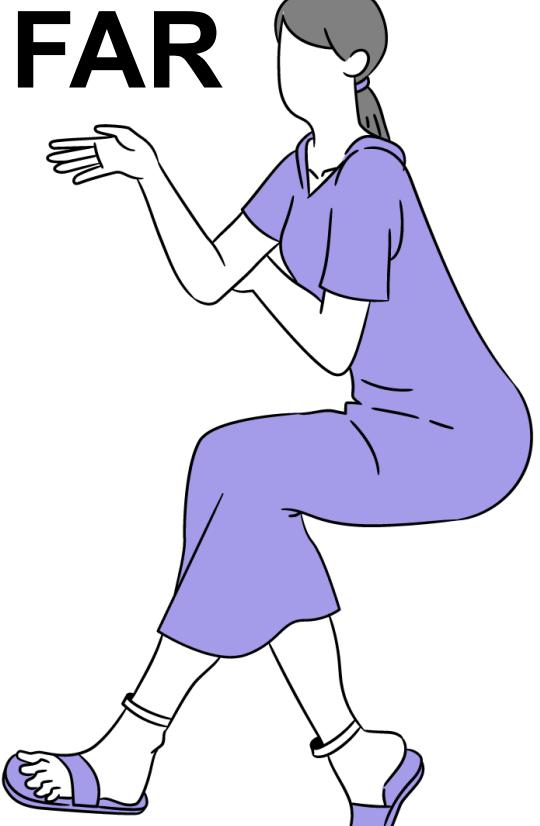


NEAR

"The woman standing really close
to the police officer . . . maybe like
5 or 6 feet away"

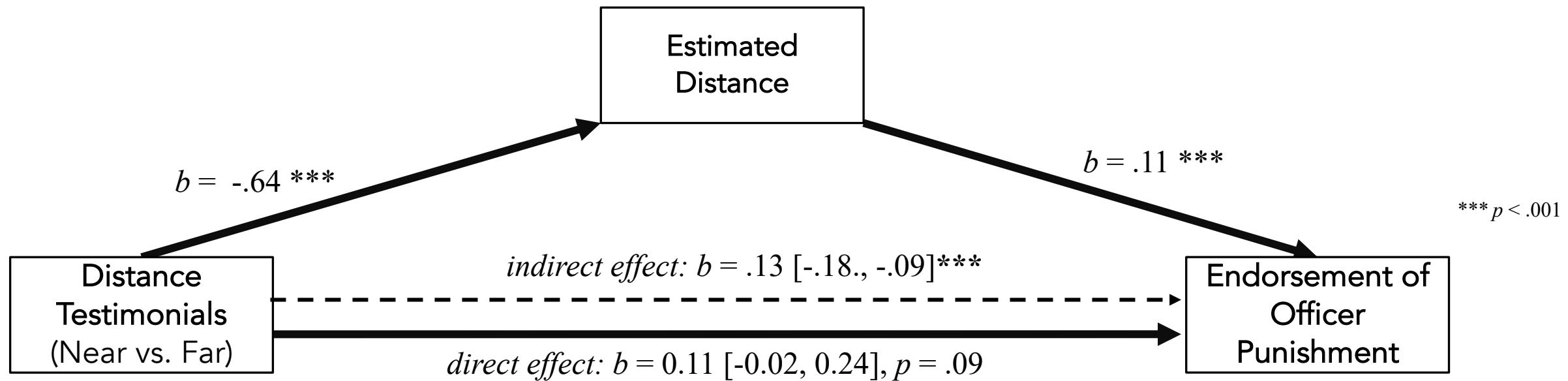
Recorded Encounter

"That woman was standing real
far from the officer,
maybe like 10 to 11 feet away
when she got Tased"



FAR

When the news portrayed the civilian as **near** (vs. far) to the officer, people perceived her as standing **closer to the officer**, and, in turn, judged the officer as **less worthy of punishment**.



Using mediation package (Tingley et al., 2014) in R to estimate indirect effect—10,000 bootstrapped simulations

Non-visual cues bias what people see in police encounters involving use of force.

What people see is, in turn, associated with judgments of whether officers should be punished.

Thank you! Questions?

Research Assistants

McKenzie Stoker, Rosalba Linares, Sophie Haase, Emma Draper, Yi-Chen Wu, Jonathan Dixon, Nikki Prascak

Grant funding agencies

Williams
College



Kristyn Jones
Stanford
SPARQ,
now Meta



Yael Granot
Smith College



Emily Balcetis
NYU



"Tamir Rice is in the wrong. He's menacing. He's 5-feet-7, 191 pounds. He **wasn't** that little kid you're seeing in pictures. He's a **12-year-old in an adult body**"
— Steve Loomis.

Will the '21 Foot' Defense Work for the Chicago Cop Who Shot Laquan McDonald?

Revisiting a 30-year concept that is used to justify deadly force.

Baltimore's 21-foot rule necessary to protect police

'Outdated' 21-foot rule for police shootings finally bites the dust

Commentary: Was Officer Van Dyke simply following the '21-foot rule'?

21 ft

CRITICAL ISSUES IN POLICING SERIES

Guiding Principles On Use of Force



SANCTITY OF LIFE • PROPORTIONALITY • DUTY TO INTERVENE • DE-ESCALATION
• OFFICER SAFETY • DISTANCE + COVER = TIME • CRISIS INTERVENTION •
CRITICAL DECISION-MAKING MODEL • CONTAIN AND NEGOTIATE • TIME
IS ON OUR SIDE • TACTICAL COMMUNICATIONS • CHALLENGING CON-
VENTIONAL THINKING • TACTICS • SCENARIO-BASED TRAINING • LESS-LETHAL
OPTIONS • ETHICS • AGENCY VALUES • RENDER FIRST AID • OFFICER
WELLNESS • TRAINING AS TEAMS • PERSONAL PROTECTION SHIELDS •

“...we recommend **discontinuing**
outdated concepts, such as...the so-
called “21-foot rule”..

