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University of Northern Colorado
Greeley, Colorado

Perceptions of Police Self- Legitimacy in the
Rocky Mountain Region of the
United States

A Thesis/Capstone Proposal
Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment for Graduation with Honors Distinction and
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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May 2020

PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE SELF- LEGITIMACY IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN
REGION OF THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract

Recently, United States law enforcement officers have faced heavy criticism from both the public and media. Such criticism includes, but is not limited to, questions of police legitimacy, efficacy and law enforcements overall effectiveness in fighting crime. Public and media criticism stems, in part from stigmatizing incidents occurring in Baltimore, Maryland and Ferguson, Missouri. Unfortunately, this has led to ambushes of police officers and a disregard for the welfare of officers serving their communities. However, until recently research has focused upon citizen perceptions of police legitimacy which has left police perceptions of their own legitimacy unexplored. Therefore, the current study will add to current literature regarding police self-legitimacy by using survey data collected from nine police agencies, and a total of ninety-eight police officers in the Rocky Mountain Region of the United States. The current study sought to determine how law enforcement officers perceived their self-legitimacy within their departments by examining potential institutional factors which may influence an officer's perceptions. Factors examined included public, peer and supervisor recognition, external procedural justice, and perceived department effectiveness. Overall, the current study found supervisor recognition as being statistically significant to perceived self-legitimacy. Therefore, the current study has implications for further research regarding police self-legitimacy.

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Semper Fidelis

Introduction

Police legitimacy within communities is a necessity for the overall safety of the public and the safety of law enforcement officers. Today, police are facing a massive amount of criticism and backlash from the public. This is due in part to recent events that have occurred in the United States such as in Baltimore, Maryland and Ferguson, Missouri, where the police killed African American men during routine police calls (Nix, 2017a). These events, along with historical issues facing certain communities, come together to hinder the legitimacy of police in the eyes of the public. When police legitimacy becomes hindered, routine police calls may turn an already volatile situation into a deadly one. Thus, it is important to define the working definition of legitimacy that this research study will utilize. “Legitimacy is a psychological property of an authority, institution, or social arrangement that leads those connected to it to believe that it is appropriate, proper, and just” (Tyler, 2006, p. 376). Given this definition, the legitimacy of the police is of the utmost concern, as it directly relates to officer safety while on calls, where disregard of authority can exacerbate an already potentially volatile situation.

There have been multiple studies pertaining to police relations and legitimacy within all communities (Antrobus, Bradford, Murphy, & Sargeant, 2015; Jason Sunshine & Tom R. Tyler, 2003; Nadal, Davidoff, Allicock, Serpe, & Erazo, 2017; Nix, 2017; Reynolds, Estrada-Reynolds, & Nunez, 2018). Researchers performing these studies sought to determine what causal factors led people within these communities to have either a positive or a negative perception of the police, which in turn, showed the level of police legitimacy. This research study will focus on the ways that police officers view their self-legitimacy. The research question for this study is; 1) How do law enforcement

officials perceive their self-legitimacy within the Rocky Mountain Region of the United States? A complete understanding of police self-legitimacy requires the perspectives of both power holders (police) and audiences (public) (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012).

Therefore, since prior research has primarily focused on audience legitimacy, this study will focus on the power holders and how they perceive themselves as being legitimate.

Literature Review

Defining Legitimacy

Modern approaches to the study of legitimacy owe much to the work of Weber (1919) who introduced the concept of having three grounds for legitimate rule or domination. Weber (1919) argues if a state is to exist, the dominated [people] must obey the powers that be, which extends to three justifications, or legitimations of authority. Traditional domination is the recognition of ancient habits and traditions to conformity. Charismatic domination refers to the legitimization of authority who displays devotion, personal confidence, and extraordinary gift of grace, which extends to leadership. Domination by virtue of legality requires the belief in the competency of rationally based rules and obedience when discharging statutory obligations. This form of domination, as argued by Weber (1919), is exercised by the modern servant of the state. All law enforcement officers are servants of the state who bear the power of legal authority. Thus, for police to be able to effectively manage crime within their jurisdictions trust, cooperation, and the obligation to obey the law are critical within their jurisdictions. Police officers, along with all other public authorities derive their legitimacy from the support of those whom they serve. Tyler (1990, 2006) has also explored the topic of legitimacy extensively from both a normative perspective and psychological perspective

on legitimacy. According to Tyler (1990), people may legitimize institutions, such as police departments, in terms of long-term self-interest rather than short term interests, meaning an institution will remain legitimate so long as it provides for the needs and interests of the society it serves. When institutions are perceived as being legitimate, they are “better able to use collective resources to benefit the long-term interests of the group because the resources are not required for the immediate need to ensure public order. (Tyler, 2006 p. 378). Therefore, the following study will utilize the following definition of legitimacy; “Legitimacy is a psychological property of an authority, institution, or social arrangement that leads those connected to it to believe that it is appropriate, proper, and just” (Tyler, 2006, p. 376). Police self-legitimacy will be defined as; a police officers’ acceptance of the powers given to them as an authority figure to be acceptable and just.

Citizen Perceptions of Legitimacy

Numerous factors can lead to positive or negative perceptions of police legitimacy from the public’s perspective. Sunshine and Tyler (2003) explored two issues pertaining to police legitimacy within white and minority communities. The first issue examined was the importance of legitimacy relating to public support, risk of committing crime, performance of the police, and distributed services. The second issue questioned what judgments about police activity determine people's views about the legitimacy of the police. This study had a very interesting sample style as it used respondents within New York City prior to and directly following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The first sample was collected in the summer preceding 9/11, which was a time of poor police relationships within the community. This survey had a total of 586 respondents. The

second set of data collected for this study was in the summer following 9/11, with a total of 1653 respondents. This research study is unique in the fact that a terrorist attack occurred while the study was being conducted. Ultimately, the study showed the terrorist attacks had little correlation with police legitimacy because this studies emphasis was on policing activities within neighborhoods rather than national security (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). This study concluded that procedural fairness is one of the biggest factors in police legitimacy. All citizens should receive the same standard of service across the legal system, regardless of their demographics. Consistently, every community surveyed by Sunshine and Tyler (2003) found that procedural fairness was the most critical factor in sentiments of legitimacy from the public. Sunshine and Tyler (2003) also noted that regardless of the ethnicity of people, they will tend to cooperate with the police if they view them as legitimate.

Racial profiling and the psychological impacts that those interactions have within communities can have a devastating effect on police legitimacy. As racial profiling at its core is an example of procedural unfairness, it has direct effects upon police legitimacy. Nadal, Davidoff, Allicock, Serpe, and Erazo, (2017) researched the perceptions of police among specific communities of color, to find if any differences of perceptions of legitimacy within those communities existed. This was a critical aspect within Nadal's et al. (2017) study because it allowed the researchers to compare their data to show how people of different ethnic backgrounds perceive the police and why. This study was broken into two parts; the first data collection utilized a Perceptions of Police Scale (POPS) with 543 respondents to the questionnaire. The POPS is a twelve-item attitudes towards law enforcement scale, with two subscales consisting of general attitudes

towards police, consisting of nine items and perceptions of bias, consisting of three items. The researchers found that African Americans had a more negative perception of police than people of any other ethnic background. They found that often time African Americans felt singled out for simply being black, which leads to discontent with law enforcement interaction. The second part of this study took 222 respondents from the first sample and asked them how many times they were unlawfully stopped by the police. The researchers found an association between the amount of times people were stopped by law enforcement, and perceptions of police legitimacy. In their conclusion, the researchers determined that there is a massive difference in how people of varying ethnic backgrounds perceive the police throughout the United States. The researchers also recommend a more proactive approach from the police in identifying issues within minority communities that can lead to issues of police perceptions and in turn police legitimacy. Once these issues are identified, the perceptions of the police will rise within those communities. Because there will then be an understanding of what is hindering the perception of police. Police departments can then initiate programs to meet those failings.

Utilizing procedurally just methods during traffic stops and daily encounters can increase officer's legitimacy within the eyes of the public. A study, conducted by Antrobus, Bradford, Murphy, & Sargeant, (2015) in Queensland, Australia sought to answer how community norms involving police interaction can affect the individuals own perceptions on the police. The researchers within this study coordinated with the Queensland police to distribute surveys to citizens that they stopped while conducting roadside breath tests [RBTs]. The researchers used 60 pre-planned RBT operations to have the officers distribute the surveys, with 30 operations used as the control group, and

30 used as the experimental condition. The control group conducted “business as usual” at their stops with no change in procedures. The experimental group incorporated scripts designed to include key elements of procedural justice in addition to their standard procedures. The researchers concluded that trust in the police to use procedural justice directly correlates to the individuals desire to obey the law. Antrobus, Bradford, Murphy, & Sargeant, (2015) also concluded that individuals with strong community ties and other ties to social organizations tended to have stronger feelings of police legitimacy. This makes sense, given the fact that people who participate in their communities tend to build stronger relationships with officers and other community members. The researchers also note links to community organizations can affect the individual’s perceptions over time depending upon what type of organization they are involved in. If an individual identifies with a positive social group, such as clubs, research indicates the person will perceive police as more friendly. The inverse effect is seen when associations to negative influencing groups are present.

Capturing citizens’ perceptions of the police in communities across the United States is crucial in understanding how the public perceives police officer legitimacy. Reynolds, Estrada-Reynolds, & Nunez (2018) sought to develop a standardized scale to measure perceptions of police legitimacy. The measuring system that the researchers developed is called Attitudes Towards Police Legitimacy Scale (APLS). This scale originally had 73 itemized questions to capture the beliefs, attitudes, and emotions towards law enforcement from citizens. The APLS scale was reduced to 34 itemized questions in the second study, to better focus on the public’s general feelings towards police attitudes. Reynolds, Estrada-Reynolds, & Nunez (2018) also conducted multiple

follow on studies of police interactions with the public to test the validity of the APLS scale and in all their studies, the predictive validity of the APLS was sufficient. The biggest breakthrough that was made with this research is that it sets a true scale for measuring the legitimacy and perceptions of the police in a standardized way. The APLS scale can be utilized as a great tool for gauging the public perceptions of police and it can assist in future policy implications.

There are many factors that can lead to public perceptions of either legitimacy or illegitimacy of the police especially within minority communities. A recent study examined data from a stratified sample of police executives throughout the United States, to determine what their views are on what makes the police legitimate in the eyes of the public (Nix, 2017b). Nix's research is a groundbreaking development in the understanding of police legitimacy in the United States. Prior to this study, no other research had been from the perspectives of police and their views of what makes policing legitimate. The research sought to determine the most prevalent views police executives held as to what makes policing legitimate. Nix found that the most common perception executives had on legitimacy was that performance was the key for cooperation from the public in police operations, with performance being the effective actions taken in communities to prevent and deter crime within communities. Although this study is groundbreaking, as it is from the law enforcement perspective, Nix does recognize the fact that the sample used within the study was only that of police executives. This was justified throughout the study because executives enforce police department's policies and procedures, so having the opinions of executives is a strong representation of the opinions of the overall department. The study concludes that that research should

continue to explore police officers' understanding of their legitimacy in the eyes of the public (Nix, 2017b).

Police Perceptions of Their Own Legitimacy

Researchers have only just begun to explore the perceptions of legitimacy from the power holders (police) perspectives. There are many factors that influence how police officers perceive their legitimacy.

One study which focused upon law enforcement specifically, found negative publicity from the media can have a direct effect upon officer's perceptions of their own legitimacy. Such effects can have major ramifications within the jurisdictions the officers serve in. Nix and Wolfe (2017) found how negative publicity from the media regarding police officers (even from events well outside their jurisdictions) deteriorates officers' self-legitimacy. For this study, officers from a large southeastern U.S. city completed an online survey. Nix and Wolfe (2017) found negative publicity from the media strongly affected officers' motivation to perform their duties. Such a demoralizing effect can lead directly to issues arising while on duty. If officers are less motivated to do their jobs, then procedurally just practices along with proactive policing in major crime areas will decline. In turn, this leads to lower perceptions of legitimacy from the public, because as prior research has indicated, procedurally just policing methods do in fact increase police legitimacy. In a sense, this would create a vicious cycle of violence between police and the public, with no real end in sight. Nix and Wolfe (2017) also questioned whether officers who become less motivated by negative media would be more motivated without negative media coverage, or if they would already have been pre-disposed to a lack of

motivation from other sources. These other sources could include institutional factors from command staff, peers, policies, or numerous other factors. Lastly, Nix and Wolfe (2017) determined that organizational justice is the best method for achieving officer self-legitimacy. With distrust creating an *us vs them* mentality between officers and citizens it is crucial to understand the perspectives that police officers hold of their self-legitimacy. This is where Nix and Wolfe (2017) direct future research, to continue examining the many facets of officer self-legitimacy.

Cooperation is one of many essential factors police rely upon from the public when conducting operations. Nix (2017a) sought to answer what police officers felt was the best way to gain cooperation from the public. In this study Nix (2017a) utilized the 2014 National Directory of Law enforcement Administrators (NDLeA) database, to ensure a nationally representative sample of police officers was achieved. This study found police officers have differing perceptions on how best to gain trust within certain communities. In high crime areas, Nix (2017a) found that police believe performance is the most important factor to generating trust among the public. In contrast to this, Nix (2017a) found that in low crime areas, police believe that trust is gained from both performance and trust. These differences in perceptions show just how complicated it may be for officers to generate trust and cooperation from differing communities. Nix (2017a, pg.969) reiterates this fact by stating; “Police could presumably restore confidence in their authority among these citizens [high crime areas] by being procedurally fair while interacting with them.” This solution does seem easy enough, provide more procedurally just practices to all citizens, but this is very difficult solution that will require change from both the public and law enforcement officers. Nix (2017a)

understood this fact, in turn directing future research to continue exploring the complex nature of how police officers perceive their legitimacy. This fact underscores the need for future researchers to keep in mind demographic and social differences that all police departments must deal with, meaning that each department has unique issues that other departments may never have to deal with. Policing in the United States is a complex job that requires diligence and constant community support to effectively combat crime. So, in understanding how differing demographic regions respond to police is crucial in implementing better policing practices to suit each community.

Keeping in mind, each community requires different approaches to policing. It is important to discuss how police perceive their legitimacy within high or low crime neighborhoods. Most police departments must deal with issues which are unique to their area. Geography, demographics, socioeconomics, and a plethora of other factors may contribute to departments having to deal with unique issues. Due to this fact, Nix (2017b) sought to identify the potential factors police believe gain the most legitimacy from the public. Nix (2017b) surveyed police departments across the United States to ensure a truly representative sample was shown. According to Nix (2017b), this is the first study being conducted in the United States, to gauge how officers perceive their authority in differing neighborhoods. Among the many key findings (Nix, 2017b) had, the police believe that procedural justice and distributive fairness correlate to trust and acceptance among populations from both high and low crime areas. In low crime areas, Nix (2017b) found that officers believed performance was a key factor in generating trust. While in high crime areas, officers believe that procedural justice plays a more critical role in legitimacy. These differing perceptions on what each community requires to perceive

officers as legitimate has direct consequences on the safety, effectiveness and relationships officers need to complete their jobs effectively. In turn, this study, being the first in the United States, offers a critical initial insight into how best to gauge officers' perceptions of their legitimacy.

Tankebe (2018) conducted a unique study, in which the internal factors of police self-legitimacy were identified and shown to have direct influence on officers' interactions with the public. Understanding the ways in which officers perceive their self-legitimacy is critical to understand. It is critical to understand this concept because when measuring how police officers perceive their legitimacy to the public, you must also know how they legitimize themselves. Tankebe (2018) studied the concept of how police perceive their self-legitimacy and found recognition by peers and superiors is critical to officers' self-legitimacy. This is an easy enough concept to understand, because in general if people enjoy their jobs and the culture of the workplace, they will inadvertently see the institution as being legitimate and fulfilling. On that note, Tankebe (2018) also found self-legitimacy is directly related to officers' outward use of procedural justice with the population (either positively or negatively). This finding has direct implications on self-legitimacy and its effects upon policing. This finding implies when officers experience fair treatment by superiors they tend to project more procedurally just methods to the public. So, correcting issues with internal procedural justice and organizational issues in departments should increase outward procedural justice techniques drastically. This goes directly with prior research, which indicates that procedurally just methods do in fact increase public perceptions of police legitimacy. Lastly, Tankebe (2018) found, perceived police effectiveness is a key predictor of both

external and normative orientations towards crime victims. This finding suggests that police officers who view their department as being effective in fighting crime, tend to implement procedural just methods more while on patrol. Essentially, this study highlights the importance of a conducive work environment for officers to feel satisfied in their jobs, and the effects upon policing practices.

Current Study

Until recently, there has been little research devoted to the perspectives that police officers have about their self-legitimacy in the United States. “Research has primarily focused on audience legitimacy” (Nix 2017a pg. 952). Nix then raises the question on “what are the practical implications of this body of research if the police themselves do not understand how citizens perceive and respond to police legitimacy” (Nix, 2017). Another important issue raised by Nix (2017) is no studies to date have questioned whether police know of the beneficial outcomes of higher legitimacy. These are important questions since research regarding police self-legitimacy (how they view their own authority and efficiency as officers), requires the perspectives of both power holders (police) and audiences (public) for a complete understanding of the present issue (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012). Despite the lack of research in police self-legitimacy, current research has found many interesting aspects regarding the ways in which police view themselves and their job efficacy.

Police legitimacy in the eyes of the public is an issue that must be thought of because it directly correlates to the safety of all citizens and police. Recent studies have all shown similar findings in their conclusions that proper procedural justice methods and

trust in the police have positive impacts for all. More research is necessary regarding law enforcement officers' perceptions of their own legitimacy as there has not been research into this field. This notion is supported by Nix and Wolfe (2017), who also indicate self-legitimacy studies are an emerging concept, which emphasize officer organizational behaviors. Understanding the feelings and opinions of legitimacy from both sides of the law is critical in setting a tone of transparency and developing a much more community “friendly” police force in the United States through new policies and procedures.

Conducting future research regarding the self- legitimacy of the police will be beneficial for citizens, police, policy makers, and all others as it will highlight the importance of this issue and lead to much better community relations with police. Thus, the current study seeks to answer how police officer within the Rocky Mountain Region of the United States perceive their legitimacy. Answering such a question is crucial because of the current gap in literature regarding police self-legitimacy.

Methodology

The current study utilized 2019 National Directory of Law enforcement Administrators (NDLeA) information to create a contact list of potential police departments for survey distribution. Twenty-nine police departments were selected for participation in the study, all located in Northern Colorado. The departments selected for the study were chosen because of their location (Colorado) and diversity in department size. Department sizes ranged from those departments with only a couple officers to departments with hundreds of officers. In May 2019, an email was sent to the chief/sheriff of each department informing them of the nature of the study and asked for

their department's participation in the study. Chiefs/Sheriffs who responded to the initial email received a confirmation email with an embedded link for the survey.

Chiefs/Sheriffs were also asked to distribute the survey to all sworn officers within their department to complete the survey. Confidentiality was a constant concern. Therefore, no personally identifiable information was asked of the survey participants. Out of the twenty-nine departments contacted, nine participated in the study. No sheriff departments responded to this study. Overall, a 31.03% department response rate was achieved. The nine police departments who participated in the study had a total of 474 sworn police officers who had the opportunity to complete the survey. Out of the 474 officers, a total of 118 surveys were received. After data cleaning 99 completed surveys remained, which left a 20.9% response rate from officers. Data cleaning consisted of removing partially completed surveys which would not have provided viable data for analysis.

Survey

The 35-item survey sought to establish officer perceptions of self-legitimacy. The dependent variables used were; public recognition, external procedural justice, peer recognition, supervisor recognition and perceived department effectiveness.

Demographic information was also asked of officers at the conclusion of the survey. As mentioned, survey distribution took place via email. Officers were required to read a disclaimer which outlined the intent of the study and required consent to continue. The software utilized for analysis was IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). To determine the extent of which factors influence police officers perceived self-

legitimacy, an Ordinary Least Squares regression (OLS) regression was run. Table 1 shows the overall internal consistency.

Demographics

The current study had a total of ($n = 99$) completed surveys from police officers located in Northern Colorado. Out of the 99 surveys, 86 (86.9%) were completed by male officers and 13 (13.1%) were completed by female officers. The national average for gender differences for police departments in the United States is 87.4% male and 12.6% female (FBI, 2018). Therefore, the current studies sample is nationally representative in terms of gender differences between officers. Rank distribution of officers was also representative with 13 (13.1%) indicating they were command staff/supervisors and 83 (86.9%) indicating they were patrol officer. Regarding the race/ethnicity of the officers who participated in the survey, 80 (81.6%) were white, 3 (3.1%) were African American, 11 (11.2%) were Hispanic or Latino, one (1%) was of Pacific Islander descent and 3 (3.1%) claimed other as their race/ethnicity. The sample of officers was also a highly educated group of officers, 13 (13.1%) possess a Masters Degree or higher, 45 (45.5%) are college graduates, 4 (4%) completed an Associates/Technical Degree, 29 (29.3%) have completed 1-3 years of college and 4 (4%) possess a High Diploma/GED. See Table 3 for reference to demographics.

Dependent Variable

Police Self-Legitimacy was measured by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) with six

statements: “I find it difficult to convince myself that my role as a police officer is necessary” (Recoded), “My role is necessary in preventing crime”, “At times, I have thought my community would be better without police” (Recoded), “It is morally right for police to have special powers over other citizens”, “My powers as an officer are morally just”, and “Acting according to the law is what makes my role morally just”. Cronbach’s Alpha revealed moderate internal consistency ($\alpha=.715$).

Independent Variables

Public Recognition was measured by asking respondents to indicate the extent which they agreed or disagreed (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) with seven statements: Members of the public believe... “Law Enforcement officers treats them fairly”, “Law Enforcement officers are biased against the community” (Recoded), “Law Enforcement officer's powers are morally just”, “Law Enforcement officers effectively explain decisions”, “Law Enforcement officers obey the law”, “It is in their interest to cooperate with officers during investigations”, and “The laws officers enforce are in line with their beliefs”. Cronbach’s Alpha revealed moderate internal consistency ($\alpha = .832$).

External Procedural Justice was measured by asking respondents to indicate the extent which they agreed or disagreed (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) with six statements: During my duties I... “ Treat people suspected of committing a crime fairly”, “Explain my decisions to citizens”, “Allow citizens to voice their opinion when I make decisions which affect them”, “Believe it is my duty to treat all citizens with dignity and respect”, “Take time to talk with members of the public”, and “Remain

unbiased when interacting with citizens whom I know privately”. Cronbach’s Alpha revealed moderate internal consistency ($\alpha = .802$).

Peer Recognition was measured by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) with six statements; “I feel my peers support my decisions”, “I trust my peers”, “My peers trust me”, “I treat my peers with respect”, “My peers treat me with respect”, and “I have a good working relationship with my peers within my police department”. Cronbach’s Alpha revealed moderate internal consistency ($\alpha = .877$).

Supervisor Recognition was measured by asking officers to indicate the extent which they agreed or disagreed (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) with five statements: “My supervisor considers my needs when making decisions that affect me”, “My supervisor treats everyone fairly when making decisions.”, “Decisions of my supervisor are based upon facts, not personal opinions”, “My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect”, and “My supervisor promotes officers based off of merit”. Cronbach’s Alpha revealed moderate internal consistency ($\alpha = .882$).

Department Effectiveness was measured by asking respondents to indicate the extent which they agreed or disagreed (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) with five statements: My department is... “Is effective in reducing crime”, “Utilizes proactive policing”, “Actively participates in community policing efforts”, “Shares the same morals/values as the community it serves”, and “Controls violent crimes effectively”. Cronbach’s Alpha revealed moderate internal consistency ($\alpha = .889$).

Table 1
Reliability Analysis

Scale	Items	M (SD)	Chronbach's Alpha
Peer Recognition	6	4.37 (.45)	.877
Department Effectiveness	5	3.77 (.91)	.889
External Procedural Justice	6	4.41 (.43)	.802
Public Recognition	7	3.48 (.72)	.832
Supervisor Recognition	5	3.90 (.82)	.882
Self-Legitimacy	6	4.32 (.56)	.715

Results

The overall model (see Table 2) was statistically significant with an r^2 value of .254, explaining 25.4% of the variance in perceived self-legitimacy. $F(8,81) = 3.45, p = .002$. Of the eight variables included in the model, one was statistically significant; supervisor recognition. Based on this model, for every one-point increase in the supervisor recognition scale, officer's perceived self-legitimacy increases by .20 (Beta = .277, $p = .014$).

Table 2
Ordinary Least Squares Regression

Scale	Unstandardized B	SE	Beta
Supervisor Recognition	.200	.080	.277
Peer Recognition	-.018	.152	NS
Department Effectiveness	.062	.082	NS
External Procedural Justice	.194	.147	NS
Public Recognition	.085	.088	NS
Ethnicity	.036	.147	NS
Sex	.150	.167	NS
Rank	-.181	.184	NS

Table 3
Demographics

	%
Gender	
<i>Male</i>	86.9
<i>Female</i>	13.1
Race/Ethnicity	
<i>Black</i>	3.1
<i>White</i>	81.6
<i>Hispanic</i>	11.2
<i>Asian/Pacific Islander</i>	1.0
<i>Other</i>	3.1
Rank	
<i>Command Staff</i>	13.5
<i>Patrol Officer</i>	86.5
Education Level	
<i>High School/GED</i>	4
<i>College (1-3yrs, some college)</i>	29.3
<i>Associates or Technical Degree</i>	4.0
<i>College Graduate</i>	45.5
<i>Master's Degree</i>	13.1
<i>Other</i>	4.0

Discussion

Police self-legitimacy, like other sociological constructs is complex and has many factors influencing perceived self-legitimacy. Prior research (Nix and Wolfe 2017, Wolfe and Nix 2017, Tankebe 2018 and Nix 2017) also indicates the complexity of police self-legitimacy. Factors such as supervisor recognition, organizational justice, peer recognition, public support and police personality have all been discussed as having an influence upon police self-legitimacy. The primary purpose of the current study was to determine how power holders (police officers) perceive their self-legitimacy. The study sought to further current literature regarding police officer self-legitimacy, and the study achieved this goal. Self-Legitimacy's definition regarding the current study is; a police officers' acceptance of the powers given to them as an authority figure to be acceptable and just. This was achieved by conceptualizing, operationalizing and analyzing police officer's own perceptions of their self-legitimacy. A better understanding of perceptions of legitimacy from both sides of the law will help foster and develop a more community-oriented police force as well as increase officer safety. Although the current study only found supervisor recognition as being statistically significant ($\beta = .277$), to perceptions of self-legitimacy. The r^2 value for the current studies model is .254, meaning the model explains 25.4% of the variability of police officers perceived self-legitimacy who participated in the study.

Both findings are important for helping to further understand self-legitimacy. Gau and Paoline (2019) found top management as being statistically significant to measures of legitimacy; "This type of organizational justice could enhance officers' self-confidence

by assuring them that the command staff is behind them and will support them, which in turn reduces their felt need to justify their authority by laying claim to an a typically high personal status” (p.16) . When asked “decisions of my supervisor are based upon facts, not personal opinions” almost one-third (n = 30) disagreed with this statement. Also, when asked “my supervisor promotes officers based off of merit” even more officers responded negatively (n = 36). If officers believe supervisors do not make factual decisions, nor promote based on merit, such beliefs may have a detrimental impact upon perceptions of self-legitimacy and over time increase cynicism. Nix and Wolfe (2017) further underscores the importance of organizational justice has upon self-legitimacy “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”(p.103). Therefore, if officers believe supervisors are acting based upon facts and merit, then police officers may experience enhance self-confidence through better organizational justice. The public may also benefit greatly from better organizational justice because if officer cynicism decreases officers may become less aggressive and institute more procedurally just methods.

As noted, the model’s r^2 value, .254, accounts for 25.4% of the variability in police officer self-legitimacy, and supervisor recognition was the only statistically significant variable. The model supports Wolfe & Nix (2017), and Nix and Wolfe (2017) who established a correlation between organizational justice and supervisor recognition with perceived self-legitimacy. Nix and Wolfe (2017) also concluded that their “findings underscore that organizational justice is key to officers’ sense of self-legitimacy” (p. 103). Thus, the current model furthers the understanding of which factors may influence

an officer's self-legitimacy by establishing a relationship between supervisor recognition and self-legitimacy and furthering academic research of self-legitimacy.

Limitations and Future Research


Even though the current study found supervisor recognition is correlated to perceived self-legitimacy, the study is not without its limitations. First, the current study was an exploratory study in nature, due to the relatively recent rise in research surrounding police self-legitimacy (Nix, 2017a). The study was also localized in nature and focused upon police departments in Northern Colorado. Survey distribution may have also impacted response rates of officers and departments overall. Since only police executives were contacted, it is highly likely the precursor email and survey link email got lost in the inboxes of executives and/or department executives simply did not want to participate in the study. The private nature of police departments may have also impacted the response rate for the survey.

The data collected for the study is also cross-sectional data, meaning the perceptions of officers was captured when they completed the survey. Therefore, future research should continue to explore factors related to police self-legitimacy, for the safety of police officers and the public. Future research should begin to focus on nationally representative samples of police officers, to better understand the underlying factors of self-legitimacy. Future research would also benefit from researching differing perspectives rural and urban police departments hold, as well as begin conducting longitudinal studies. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into the development and maintenance of an officer's self-legitimacy over their career. If

researchers could study a cohort of police cadets throughout police academy and their careers, the understanding of what factors influence self-legitimacy could become more apparent. Self-legitimacy of officers is important as “it speaks directly to the public’s well-being” (Nix and Wolfe 2017, p. 104), in many ways such as public safety, procedural justice and having a more transparent/friendly police force. It is the hope that the current study has indeed furthered the academic research surrounding police self-legitimacy and future research will continue.

Appendices

Figure 1: IRB Acceptance Letter



UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

DATE: April 19, 2019

TO: Nathan Olin, Criminology and Criminal Justice and Political Science
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1426665-1] Perceptions of Police Self- Legitimacy in the Rocky Mountain
Region of the United States

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: April 19, 2019

EXPIRATION DATE: April 19, 2023

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

Nathan -

Thank you for a clear and thorough IRB application for this interesting and relevant study. Your protocols and materials are verified/approved exempt and you may proceed with participant recruitment and data collection.

As a minor aside, on the consent form the location of data storage should reference where the data collected will be stored once it is collected - you addressed this in your narrative within the application so just a note.

Best wishes with your research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Morse at 970-351-1910 or nicole.morse@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

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