# **“They don’t identify with us”: Perceptions of Police by Australian Transgender People**

### Abstract

### Previous research indicates that transgender people are one of the most victimised groups in Western society and are more likely than other people to be ill-treated by police. However Australian research examining transgender people’s perceptions of the police and policing is lacking. It is also an area of research needing systematic enquiry. Using in-depth interviews conducted with members of the transgender community (N = 21) in one Australian state, the current research builds upon previous work examining how transgender people view police. Overall, the research determines that transgender people’s perceptions of police form around negative perceptions of intergroup difference. They also form around an expectation that police will treat transgender people badly because of their gender expression and police perceptions of normative gender identity.

### Introduction

There has been much literature written about minority groups and their perceptions of the police. The main body of literature in this field has largely been drawn from studies examining the perceptions of racial and ethnic minority groups. Little is known about how other diverse minority groups perceive the police. This is especially true in relation to transgender people whose attitudes and opinions regarding police and policing practice have largely been ignored (see Rosenbaum, Schuck, Costello, Hawkins & Ring, 2005). Research suggests that transgender people are one of the most victimised groups in society and are more likely to be abused by police than other members of the public (See Alliance for a Safe & Diverse DC, 2008; Berman & Robinson, 2010; Edelman, 2014; Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Harrison, Herman and Keisling, 2011; Heidenreich, 2011; Levin & McDevitt, 1993; Miles-Johnson, 2013a; Miles-Johnson, 2013b; Redfern, 2014; Wolff & Cokely, 2007, Woods, Galvan, Bazargan, Herman & Chen, 2013). According to the Stonewalled Report (Amnesty International, 2005) police abuse of transgender people typically includes racial, homophobic and transphobic slurs (which often intersect in terms of policing) and in some instances the verbal abuse escalates to physical or sexual abuse and sometimes death, such as the beating of trans woman Duanna Johnson in the United States in 2008, and the death in custody of Australian sister-girl Veronica Baxter, in 2009. The purpose of this article therefore is to analyse the key findings from a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with members of the transgender community in Australia to answer the following research question: *How does contact/experiences with the police influence transgender people’s perceptions of the police?*

***Police and Transgender People***

Research shows that the police have been consistently criticised for targeting transgender gender expression and that this type of negative police judgement typically results in police treatment towards transgender people that is not procedurally fair (See Dane, Masser, MacDonald, and Duck, 2010; Injustice at Every Turn, 2011; The Stonewalled Report, 2005; The Tranznation Report, 2007). In Australia, transgender people avoid police contact and are cautious of police interaction and similar to other minority groups (based on racial or ethnic identifiers) do not trust the police or consider the police to be a legitimate organisation (Anderson, McNair & Mitchell, 2001; Dennehy, 2012; Dwyer, 2011; Hooley, 2006; Mason & Tomsen, 1997; Miles-Johnson, 2013a; Miles-Johnson, 2013b; Ohle, 2004). Mistrust in the police poses an ongoing problem for police organisations expected to engage with minority groups. Nemoto, Bodeker and Iwamoto (2011) state that transgender people generally lack trust in authoritarian groups due to social and institutional discrimination. Social discrimination occurs frequently in the lives of transgender individuals around the world (Amnesty International, 2005). The stigma of being recognised as a transgender individual (as a person who is perceived to be different to the social, cultural and legal expectations of their birth sex) can have negative consequences. Vilification of people who are perceived to be different often leads to harassment, bullying and discrimination by those who do not understand (Miles-Johnson, 2013).

In Australia, violence perpetrated against transgender people is a phenomenon that is reportedly increasing (Anderson et al., 2001; Dennehy, 2012; Dwyer, 2011; Hooley, 2006; Mason & Tomsen, 1997; Ohle, 2004) and yet is largely unnoticed in police official reports or police documentation concerning violence displayed towards other minority groups such as the gay and lesbian communities (Blight, 2000; The Tranznation Report, 2007). This is problematic and critics argue that police discrimination towards minority groups such as the transgender community is historical, extensive, and reflective of wider social discrimination that is displayed towards transgender people (Nemoto et al., 2011). The history of transgender people in Australia is a past that has been influenced by British law which linked transgenderism with homosexual behaviour. In 1885 the Criminal Law Act was passed in the United Kingdom which made all homosexual behaviour illegal. Consequently people who cross-dressed became easy targets of the law because they were associated with homosexual subcultures (Whittle, 2010). In Australia during the British-colonial era, similar laws were enacted regarding homosexual behaviour and any conduct associated with homosexual behaviour (such as cross-dressing or changing gender identity) was considered a capital crime (Carbery, 2010). This often resulted in harsh treatment from the authorities.

As such, the relationship between transgender people and the police in Australia is an anticipated association based on mistrust, stigma and expectation of abuse (Cummings, 2007). For example, the Tranznation Report (2007) indicated that many transgender people experience at least one social form of stigma or discrimination on the basis of their gender identity and that this lesser treatment occurs when interacting with police. The Stonewalled Report (2005) and Injustice at Every Turn (2011) also indicate that this type of treatment is not exclusive to Australian transgender people but is a shared and negative ‘lived-experience’[[1]](#footnote-1) that many transgender people report around the world. This is problematic, especially since Australian police organisations have moved away from policing techniques previously considered discriminatory towards more community oriented strategies (Miles-Johnson, 2013). Yet few Australian minority groups defined by external behaviours or other features that distinguish them from the general population (such as transgender people) have voluntary contact or are involved in community partnership programs with the police (Cunneen, 2001).

The difficulties raised by transgender people regarding their experiences of policing seem to stem from a lack of police understanding regarding the visibility of difference and ‘what should be visible and what should not, who should occupy space and who should not’ (Moran and Skeggs, 2004, p.7 cited in Dwyer, 2012). Dwyer (2012, p.23) argues that police and security practices in Australia constrain and govern individuals who are perceived as different, particularly individuals whose identities fail to align with cisgendered notions of gender and sexuality, and who recognise that their gender does not normatively align with the sex they were assigned at birth. Yet many police organisations have embraced the idea of diversity and equality strategies. For example, in 2009, the London Metropolitan Police addressed the critical issues of diversity and equality setting out aims for tackling discrimination and inequality of transgender people (Metropolitan Police, 2009).

Despite the fact that the police have attempted to make significant changes in policy and practice implemented toward transgender people (for example lesbian and gay community police-liaison officers, policing of hate crime, and in one Australian state good practice guidelines for policing of transgender people), members of diverse minority groups such as the transgender community still purposefully avoid contact and interaction with police officers (Berman & Robinson, 2010; Miles-Johnson, 2013). What is more, regardless of changes in the social, political, and legal history of the relationship between police and transgender people (extensive analyses of which are beyond the scope of this article), the nature of the relationship between the police and transgender people in Australia remains problematic (Crime and Misconduct Commission, 2009).

This raises questions regarding how discrimination of transgender people can be reduced, particularly in relation to policing of transgender people and the attitudes of police officers towards people who do not conform to the normative expectations between assigned sex at birth and gender identity. In 2009, under its ‘professional model of policing’ an Australian police organisation (de-identified for ethical reasons) created a procedural manualfor its members which provided professional-practice guidelines for police officers “*Who may come into contact with members of the transgender community in their official capacity*.” While the existence of the document has the potential to improve relations between transgender people and the police, the relationship between transgender people and the police within this particular Australian state continues to be difficult (Anderson et al.,2001; Dennehy, 2012; Dwyer, 2011; Hooley, 2006; Mason & Tomsen, 1997; Miles-Johnson, 2013; Ohle, 2004).

An analysis of previous literature detailing the experiences of transgender people (See Anderson et al.,2001; Berman & Robinson, 2010; Dennehy, 2012; Dwyer, 2011; Hooley, 2006; Mason & Tomsen, 1997; Miles-Johnson, 2013; Moran & Sharpe, 2004; Ohle, 2004), also indicates that the damaging effects of transgender experiences and perceptions of police hostility and discrimination have actually stemmed from a lack of support and aggression directed towards this community from police officers themselves. As a consequence, police hostility has contributed to the lack of trust and confidence that transgender people have in policing (Moran & Sharpe, 2004). It is also a reason why many minority groups feel disconnected from the police (Mason & Tomsen, 1997).

One Australian police organisation’s police code of conduct states that police officers are “*expected to perform their duties in such a manner that the public have confidence and trust in the integrity, objectivity and impartiality of the Police*”. However, research suggests that transgender people are prone to further ridicule, violence and harassment within the context of the criminal justice system which is often initiated by the police (GenderPAC, 1997). King (1993, p. 16) discusses that it is actually the gender transition for a transgender person (either male to female or female to male), which involves an encounter with a *different* social and cultural experience of gender which moves the transgender individual into a position in which they are *more* exposed to the “*direct and brutalising effects of everyday violence whilst interacting within the criminal justice system*”. As such, they are *more* exposed to abuse from the gatekeepers of the criminal justice system, i.e. the police.

One Australian state specifies within its ‘Police Powers and Responsibilities Act’ that the police are responsible for aiding and protecting all members of the community including members of the transgender community. Although Tomsen and Mason (2001) argue that numerous cases of police *phobia* directed towards transgender people (particularly verbal and physical harassment) have been documented within Australia and these include unequal enforcement of the law. It also includes deliberate mishandling of anti-transgender violence cases. Finn and McNeil (1987) argued that many police officers viewed anti-transgender crimes as harmless pranks and judge such behaviour as acceptable. Yet Reisig and Parks (2004) argue that police behaviour is actually a reflection of broader prevailing community’s expectations and attitudes and represents how such expectations constrain and regulate social behaviour and not just police attitudes (Galliher, 1971).

Previous research by Alpert, Dunham, and Piquero, (1998), Cordner, (1997), Eck and Rosenbaum, (1994), Greene and Pelfrey, (1997), and Skogan, (1998) all posit that effective policing requires citizen cooperation, and to encourage such cooperation, many policing initiatives have attempted to make policing part of the community. Integrating police into the community can be difficult with minority groups like the transgender community who have a history of poor police relations (Grinc, 1994; Parker, Onyekwuluje, & Murty, 1995; Sadd & Grinc, 1994). One method of improving minority group cooperation with police is to increase perceptions of police *legitimacy* and trustworthiness (Hawdon, Ryan, & Griffin, 2003; Stoutland, 2001; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1990; Tyler & Huo, 2002) but if many minority groups still feel disconnected to the police this raises questions regarding how the police can *effectively* construct meaningful and trustworthy partnerships. Levin and McDevitt (1993), argued that this is further complicated because the police often regard members of minority groups (such as members of the transgender community) to have negative social identities, based on their perceived group membership. They also state that police rejection of minority groups (such as the transgender community) further emphasises group differences between diverse factions of society and encourages social discrimination between groups of people based on intergroup difference.

In Australia, the extent of the problem regarding negative policing practices implemented toward transgender people and the resultant transgender community’s perceptions of the police as a non-procedurally fair and non-legitimate organisation is evident (Berman & Robinson, 2010). Many Australian police organisations are becoming increasingly aware that transgender perceptions of the police are based on the remnants of a less than satisfactory history of policing (Berman & Robinson, 2010. As a result, many Australian police organisations have implemented outreach programs such as engaging community liaison officers to interact within specific communities. Yet many of these programs do not last (Tomsen, 2009) or in the case of police liaison officers often end up becoming distanced from the community that they were designed to help (Cherney & Chui 2010; NSW Attorney General’s Department, 2003).

Previous research shows that many minority groups[[2]](#footnote-2) do not consider the police to be a legitimate organisation and such perceptions are based on ‘reflective attitudes’ of police perceptions of the illegitimacy of minority group identities (See Berman & Robinson, 2010). Murphy and Cherney (2012, p. 182) state that legitimacy is a judgment people make about the status of an organisation as a legitimate authority, and is therefore “*an internalised belief that an authority does their job well and is therefore entitled to be obeyed*.” Murphy and Cherney (2012) also state that legitimacy reflects the level of confidence and trust people have in those authorities. For example, where authorities are judged to be legitimate, people feel that they ought to defer to their decisions and rules, cooperate with them and follow them voluntarily out of obligation rather than out of fear of punishment or anticipation of reward (Murphy & Cherney, 2012). Yet Dwyer (2011) argues that throughout Australia policing of gender norms by police organisations have taken the form of police refusals to recognise the transgender community’s diverse gender identities. Such refusals have led to the harassment and profiling of transgender people based on police perceptions of their gender non-conformance, thereby resulting in both reflective police and transgender perceptions of each other as non-legitimate groups.

Identification with one group as opposed to another group is therefore, an adequate reason (under certain conditions) to trigger processes of intergroup discrimination and competition between groups and group members. Consequently, individuals accept their assigned social category (and group membership) as a relevant self-definition upon identifying with a group. Social comparisons between groups (which are relevant to an evaluation of a person’s social identity) then produce pressures for intergroup differentiation (Turner, 1999). In this instance, individuals in certain groups may not be subject to the same positive treatment that other groups display toward their own group members or groups of people that they favour. For example, Lumb and Breazeale (2002) found that over time, police officers were more inclined to treat other police officers more positively than members of the public, and more positively than members of minority groups.

A number of previous scholars (Gardner, Paulsen, Gallois, Callan, & Monaghan, 2001; Abrams, O’Connor & Giles, 2002) point out that perceptions of group membership and perceptions of intergroup difference are established and negotiated through communicative practices. Past research shows that language is an important indicator of group membership and a fundamental measurement tool for intergroup comparison, discrimination and competition (See Christian, Gadfield, Giles &Taylor, 1976; Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977; Giles, Taylor, Lambert & Albert, 1976; Leclezio, Louw-Potgieter & Souchon, 1986). Language (particularly language which upholds intergroup bias) can also be a protective motive that helps maintain a positive group image and therefore a positive self-image of members within a group (Maas, 1999). Individuals may explicitly or implicitly want to portray their group as favourably as possible and may (either strategically or unconsciously) pick their words in a biased way (Fiedler, 2007). Therefore, it was determined that using in-depth interviews to measure group identification would be appropriate since it was anticipated that interviews could help understand transgender peoples’ perceptions of the police in relation to their awareness of their group identity within the transgender community. Interviews could also establish what this means for transgender people in terms of their relations with the police, and their perceptions of policing. As such, an in-depth analysis of transgender people’s perceptions of police and policing and perceptions of intergroup difference can provide a useful framework for how members of this minority group perceive police officers (Myers, Forest & Miller, 2004).

***Methodological Process for Semi-structured In-depth Interviews***

***Procedure***

According to TransgenderExplored.com (2011), transgender people like to actively network online, and as such, foster strong levels of self-identity and a sense of their own community. TransgenderExplored.com (2011) also states that there is a high level of participation and interaction between transgender people online, and consequently, this type of high level interaction helps to create a sense of safety (and inclusion) for transgender people. Accordingly, transgender participants were recruited via an online survey *Policing Gender Diversity* posted in various internet community forums hosted by *Facebook*. The online survey asked participants to volunteer in an in-depth anonymous semi-structured interview exploring perceptions of police and policing.

Participants were given the opportunity to voluntarily offer contact information (such as mobile telephone numbers and/or email addresses) to participate[[3]](#footnote-3). Each of the participants gave informed consent to participate in the research; this was done either by giving written consent (a signed consent form) or by giving verbal consent (recorded by the interviewer). Each of the interviewees was informed that their responses would be de-identified. Interviews were conducted inside a safe and secure room at one campus within a large university situated within the state or at a location chosen by the participant deemed to be safe. A convenient time for the interview was chosen by the participants and although the majority of interviews were conducted in person, five interviews were conducted over the telephone. Interviews continued until all the data collected revealed adequate descriptions, and all of the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim for analysis. To ensure the safety and protection of participants, guidelines for the ethical and safe conduct of research were stringently followed.

***Analysis of the interview data and emerging themes***

Following the transcription of the semi-structured in-depth interviews, the principles of the 'framework' method of qualitative data analysis (devised by Ritchie and Spencer, 1994) were applied to the transcripts. This allowed the application of an analysis technique that would be better adapted to this type of research because Ritchie and Spencer (1994) state that framework analysis was initially devised to be applied to examine research that asks specific questions within a limited time frame, and with research that has a pre-designed sample (such as the sample of transgender participants used in the current research).

To safeguard precision in the analysis, I also used Leximancer, a specialist analytic tool for unstructured, qualitative, textual data analysis. It was understood that analysis of the in-depth interview data would also need to include identification of themes that would enable the presence of group identity and group membership of transgender people to be recognised (and therefore intergroup identity differences between transgender people and police) to be discovered. To identify words, language or expressions that would enable group membership and notions of identity to emerge, inclusive and exclusive words had to be identified within the in-depth interview transcripts. Past research shows that inclusive words and language (for example ‘we’ ‘us’ ‘our’ etc.) and exclusive language (such as ‘they’ ‘them’ those’ etc.) can be an indicator of group membership and a particularly important dimension of identity (See Christian et al.,1976; Giles et al.,1977; Giles et al.,1976; Leclezio et al.,1986). Inclusive language (particularly language which upholds intergroup bias) can also be a protective motive that helps maintain a positive group image and therefore a positive self-image of members within a particular group (Maas, 1999). For example, individuals may explicitly or implicitly want to portray their group as favourably as possible and may (either strategically or unconsciously) pick their words in a biased way (Fiedler, 2007). Leximancer therefore, helped enable the identification of these types of inclusive and exclusive words, language and expression within the in-depth interview transcripts. This allowed the researcher to identify the main themes that emerged from the text. During the in-depth interviews all of the transgender participants emphasised different types of inclusive and exclusive words, and this emphasis is illustrated in the direct quotes with the use of inverted commas.

***Sample***

In the Australian state where this research was conducted[[4]](#footnote-4) the term transgender has traditionally referred to and included transsexual men and women, transvestite males and females, drag queens (gay men who impersonate women, often for entertainment purposes), drag kings (lesbians who impersonate men, often for entertainment purposes), and any individual who deviates from expected gender norms such as androgynies (people with ambiguous gender characteristics), gender-benders (individuals who merge characteristics of all genders in subtle or flaunted ways) and intersexed individuals (or people with congenital differences which causes atypical development of their chromosomal, gonadal, or anatomic sex) (Cummings, 2007)[[5]](#footnote-5).

The in-depth interview sample comprised 21 members (*N* = 21) of the transgender community residing in various locations across one state in Australia. The ages of the participants ranged from 19 to 69 years, and the majority of the transgender participants identified under the umbrella term transgender (*n* = 11; 52.4 %) with two participants identifying as trans man (*n* = 2; 9.5%); Two participants identifying as trans boy (*n* = 2; 9.5%); One participant identifying as transgender male (*n* = 1; 4.8%); Two participants identifying as transgender woman (*n* = 2; 9.5%); Three participants identifying as trans woman (*n* = 3; 14.3%); One participant identified as transgender female (*n* = 1; 4.8%); and one participant who identified as a ‘Pre-Op’[[6]](#footnote-6) transgender woman (*n* = 1; 4.8%). Only one of the participants identified as a transvestite (*n* = 1; 4.8 %); and only one of the participants identified as FTM or female to male transsexual (*n* = 1; 4.8 %). Three participants identified as gender queer (*n* = 3; 14.3%) and three participants identified as drag queens (*n* = 3; 14.3%)[[7]](#footnote-7). Most of the participants identified as Caucasian (*n* = 20; 95.2%) although one of the participants identified as Black/African descent (*n* = 1; 4.8%). The majority of the participants were in a committed relationship at the time of the in-depth interview (*n* = 14; 66.7%)[[8]](#footnote-8); and over three-quarters of the participants were working full -time (*n* = 18; 85.7%); and only three of the participants were unemployed (*n* = 3; 14.3 %)[[9]](#footnote-9).

***Interview questions***

Questions included in the in-depth interviews covered identity; perceptions of police (to understand levels of police engagement and perceptions of police legitimacy); and specific and hypothetical police contact (to understand actual and perceived interactional experiences involving transgender people and the police)[[10]](#footnote-10). The individual interviews incorporated brief life histories and focused interviewing techniques[[11]](#footnote-11). Participants were asked to talk about their perceptions of police, and to describe their lived experiences of interactions with police officers. For participants who had not had direct contact with the police each participant was asked to provide feedback related to hypothetical questions regarding perceived police interaction. The interview questions asked the transgender participants about their perceptions regarding compliance with police *‘Did you comply with any of the decisions that the police made?’*, trust in police *‘Did you trust the police when you interacted with them?’*, communication with police (ability to speak freely with police) *‘Did you speak freely with the police and get involved in the decision processes?’,* quality of treatment from police *‘How do you think the police treated you?’*, and interaction with police and cooperation with police *‘How would you describe the interaction and cooperation that took place between you and the police?’*?’

### Findings

All of the transgender participants established their sense of identity through the use of language. During the interviews it was frequently observed that the transgender participants reinforced their membership to the group (and group cohesiveness). They did this by self-categorising themselves in ways which favoured transgender people as a group at the expense of others that they considered to be outside of the group (in this instance the police). This sense of group identity was repeatedly expressed by the transgender participants through their use of positive language and expression.

The transgender participants’ sense of group identity and group membership indicates that they already have a strong sense of intergroup identity difference in relation to other members of society. This needs to be considered when analysing perceptions of the police since perceptions of intergroup difference with other members of society could shape identity differences between the transgender participants and the police. This also raises questions regarding the importance that transgender people place on their inclusion in and membership within their-group (the transgender community), and how this level of importance also shapes or influences their perceptions of the contact and/or experiences of the police. It also affects how such perceptions influence their opinions regarding the police.

**Transgender Identity**

All of the transgender participants’ self-identities (and sense of group identity) were noticeably defined by their use of inclusive language such as ‘we’ or ‘us’ and in the *emphasis* that they placed on inclusive words such as ‘we’ or ‘us’- shown in italics within the text. For example, Participant B said:

… *We* just all hang out together…it is because of who *we* are… it’s what *we* do… we all just hang out and become mates…it’s like a brotherly thing although it’s a lot closer than brothers because *we* have all been through the same experience… so *we* are the trans boys…

The use of inclusive language was expressed by the transgender participants more frequently than the use of singular language to refer to themselves as singular identities, such as the use of the individual language word ‘I’. For example, when responding to one question about group identity many of the transgender participants placed vocal emphasis on the way they spoke about the inclusivity of the group. This was particularly expressed by Participant N, who stated:

...There is a lot to be said for shared experiences and developing an understanding with other trans women... that is probably the way that I connect with other transgender women... my very best friend is a transgender woman... who I speak to a lot and *we* have become very close friends in a very short period of time... um, probably because *we’ve* got a lot in common and because we have so many shared experiences that *we* love to talk about... and it’s not necessarily about trans related stuff but it just seems that we are very similar people... but I think that both of *us* being transgender is probably what set off our friendship... and *our* sense of shared identity...

All the transgender participants had a strong sense of connection to the wider transgender community in terms of their sense of emotional and mental support. The transgender participants identified a connection between ‘community’ and their inclusion within the transgender community, and their identity as individuals. As a group this was also expressed in terms of ‘we’ and ‘us’. This is similar to findings by Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell (1987) and Turner, Oakes, Haslam and McGarty (1994) who found that people self-categorise (as cognitive groupings of the self) in terms of shared similarities with members of certain social categories, in contrast to other social groups or groupings of categories. According to Turner et al., (1994, p.454) when an individual thinks or perceives of themselves as ‘we’ or ‘us’ (social identity) as opposed to ‘I’ and ‘me’ (personal identity) the self is defined in terms of *others who exist outside the individual person or persons doing the experiencing* and therefore contributes to group identification. This type of group identification was expressed by Participant D, Participant H and Participant J, who stated that they felt that it was important for them and other transgender people to belong to the wider transgender community, particularly in terms of their own identity as a transgender person. For example, Participant D said:

...I think it’s important for all trans, especially trans-woman to belong to the trans community even though they can go off and live in the suburbs and have the white picket fence and everything, years later they’ll pick up the phone and ring us and just say “Remember me from six years ago” and I’ll say “Yes love, what can we do for you?” and they’ll say “I just need to speak to somebody of my own kind” ...and that’s how it is...

Many of the transgender participants also expressed that their sense of group identity was upheld by socialisation within the different factions of the wider transgender community such as social groups for transgender women, transgender men or Gender-Queer people. However, socialisation or inclusion within the smaller individual groups within the wider transgender community did not impact on many of the transgender participants’ own sense of identity (or core identity) or alter their sense of self identity within their perception of membership within the group. By establishing that the transgender participants have a strong sense of identity the results indicated that there are distinct perceptions of difference that the transgender participants have regarding themselves and other people. It was reasonable to determine therefore, that the social relationship which many of the transgender participants have with others in society is based on either their perceptions of inclusion or exclusion within a group. By establishing that the participants are linked within a group identity and within the framework of group membership, the results provide the contextual background regarding group identity and group membership. For example, Participant C said:

...It is not important to my identity to belong to the wider transgender community but it is important to be part of the transgender community... it is *our* community. It is important for me to raise the value of *our* community within mainstream society… like, in the empowering of transgender people… that is something that I see as um… something that I may be able to do something about or… help towards…

**Perceptions of Police**

All of the transgender participants expressed their perceptions of the police as a distinctly different group through their use of language. During the interviews it was frequently observed that the transgender participants reinforced intergroup differences between themselves and the police. They did this by categorising the police in ways which favoured transgender people as a group at the expense of the police. It was observed that the sense of group identity given to the police was repeatedly expressed by the transgender participants through negative language and expression to signify that the police have their own group status. In this way, all of the transgender participants referred to the police as a distinct group separate to their own.

This was noticeably defined by their use of exclusive language such as ‘they’ or ‘them’ when referring to the police, and the emphasis they placed on these types of words (shown in italics in the quotes). This is also similar to findings by Turner et al., (1987) and Turner et al., (1994) who found that people categorise others as cognitive groupings in terms of dissimilarities in contrast to them and others with whom they share similar identifying characteristics. For example, this was expressed by the transgender participants in their emphasis and use of the formal title ‘the Police’ and their use of informal titles such as ‘the Cops’, or ‘Coppers’ to grant them a negative group status. For example, Participant O said:

...Most drag queens would agree with me that *they* would have nothing in common with *us*… I mean some of them…they might like to watch us perform … but not in an admiring way… *they* see *us* as freaks… Coppers aren’t going to take *us* seriously… *they* see *us* as a freak show… they think that *they* are the normal people…*we* are just weird to *them…*

The transgender participants’ sense of police identity and their own group identity and group membership (with other people in the wider transgender community) showed that the participants already had a strong sense of *intergroup* identity difference. Such perceptions of identity difference could predetermine the transgender participants’ perceptions of the police since contemporary research on intergroup relations, prejudice and discrimination appears to accept the idea that group favouritism and negativity is reciprocally related (Brewer, 1999).

In addition, previous research (See Islam & Hewstone, 1993) showed that to be successful in changing a negative evaluation of a particular group, contact with a member of the group in question (in this instance the police) must be considered as an intergroup-encounter. This means that the transgender participants as members of their own group must continue to be aware of the police as members of another group if intergroup perceptions are to change. Awareness of intergroup encounters is a conscious idea that members of minority groups (such as the transgender community) have regarding interaction with authority figures such as the police (Miles-Johnson, 2013). The transgender participants’ recognition of the police as a distinct group based on intergroup difference is consistent with previous literature examining other minority perceptions of the police, especially given that transgender people have a less than satisfactory history of policing (see Berman & Robinson, 2010).

This result raises questions regarding the importance that transgender people place on their inclusion and membership within their own group (the transgender community) and conversely, their exclusion from the police. It also raises questions regarding how this level of importance shapes or influences the transgender participants’ perceptions of the contact and/or experiences with police, and in turn how such perceptions influence their opinions of the police. This type of recognition of intergroup difference can lead to fear and distrust, creating hostility and conflict between groups even without the presence of actual and/or negative interaction (Brewer, 1999).

The transgender participants may also have either strategically or unconsciously used such words to describe the police as a distinct group. Such use of words may add support to the intergroup bias between transgender people and the police (Fiedler, 2007) because this particular use of words maintained a positive group image for transgender people and a negative group image of the police. For example, when responding to a question about the police, and whether or not the police and the participants shared any values (including beliefs or attitudes) in common, all of the transgender participants expressed a strong sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ regarding inter-group differences between the police and transgender people. They also stated that both groups would not have any values in common. For instance, Participant D stated:

... I think that the only belief the police and I share, is the belief in the ‘Aussie barbeque’ not truth or justice, again, I think that most transgender people would agree with me, they probably would not have any shared beliefs with the police, although I do think that the police and *us*...the transgender community... are slowly getting in to line with one another, although it is still *them and us* although *they* are supposed to be out there to help *us*... I mean, it’s better than it was fifteen or twenty years ago because *we* at the time had no rights, until recently, before that there was nothing... most trans-girls would hide because the police would belt them up...that’s one good thing that has happened... there is some change *...*

Engendered stereotypes can manifest into four different types of threats that have been examined by social psychologists to be the causes of prejudice. One of these types of threats is symbolic threats which include threats to the group’s value system or belief system (Stephen & Renfro, 2002). By distinctly separating any values or beliefs that the transgender participants have in common with the police, the transgender participants show that the value systems and ideologies of the dominant group (the police) did not reflect upon the value systems of the transgender participants. In recognising that there are no values or beliefs that the police have in common with transgender people (due to identity difference) the perception of intergroup difference regarding police values and beliefs certainly poses a symbolic threat to the beliefs and values that transgender people have. This may potentially influence any levels of prejudice that the transgender participants may feel towards the police.

In addition to the separation of values and beliefs between transgender people and the police, all of the transgender participants expressed the opinion that they believed that the police would ‘abuse power’. The majority of transgender participants also perceived through the transmission and maintenance of collective cultural stereotypes that the majority of police officers engage in undesirable and unprofessional behaviour. This perception was expressed by Participant F, Participant H, Participant K, Participant L, Participant P, and Participant Q. For example, Participant L said:

…I mean...*they* are in a position of absolute power, and *they* know all the rules and laws, and I don’t... so yeah, I think I would be pretty wary of a situation where *they* were asking me lots of questions about my identity... and I would be wary of the officers…they can and do abuse their positions of power…it’s what happens…

Assumptions about one group’s behavior to another are reflective of ‘intergroup anxiety’, one of four different types of threats that have been examined by social psychologists to be a cause of prejudice (SeeStephen & Renfro, 2002). Intergroup anxiety includes expressions of anxiety due to the anticipation of negative outcomes occurring during intergroup interactions such as embarrassment, harm, and negative evaluations.

The majority of the transgender participants reported that they had experienced *negative* interactions with police. When asked in detail about previous contact with the police the majority of the transgender participants indicated that they had experienced negative incidents with the police and also indicated that during interaction with the police the police officers in question did not accept the gender identity that each of the transgender participants presented. The answers given by the transgender participants actually helped to reinforce their perceptions of group membership of the police and group cohesiveness of transgender people. By establishing that the majority of transgender participants have had negative interaction with the police it enables conclusions to be drawn regarding how this may shape their perception of intergroup identity difference. The transgender participants’ responses regarding negative interaction with the police included responses from Participant B, Participant F, Participant H, Participant I, Participant M, Participant O, Participant Q, Participant R, and Participant T. For example, Participant O said:

...There were these two police officers, who were slowly walking past andtheysaw me, and started making really derogatory comments um, about me ,and at first theycommented on my height because in heels I am very tall… and then *they* started saying things like “That’s no girl, that’s a poof… that’s a fucking poof” andthey started laughing and making comments to me saying things like “Did I want to take it up the arse?” and one of *them* called me a ‘Queer’and it made me really nervous… I was really scared actually because it was about two or three o’clock in the morning and I wasn’t well, all I wanted to do was get a cab and go home, and these officers *they* were standing by the side of the road ridiculing me*…*

Interactions between the police and the public (at the individual level) play an important part in the perceptions of (and ideas regarding) police legitimacy (Miles-Johnson, 2013a). Since the majority of the transgender participants expressed that they have had negative experiences regarding interaction with the police this can impact on their perceptions of the police. Especially since their perceptions are based on personal experiences of procedural fairness and if people have an experience that is not characterised by fair procedures then their perception of police legitimacy will be based around their negative experience.

It was also understood that the results would impact on howformal and informal policing of transgender people shapes intergroup identity differences between transgender people and the police. This is because the responses that each of the transgender participants’ gave regarding their perception of intergroup identity difference were distinct enough to formulate clear boundaries between the police as one group and the transgender participants as another group. The majority of the transgender participants reported that they have had negative police interactions and accordingly intergroup differentiation between the police and the transgender participants has been achieved through negative evaluations of one group over another. Intergroup differentiation was not achieved through positive means. It was also acknowledged that the results used to answer the research question would be drawn predominantly from negative perceptions of intergroup identity difference which would be influential on the transgender participants’ perceptions of police. Yet this was not the case for the minority of transgender participants who reported that they had experienced positive interaction with the police. For example, Participant A said:

...Over the years I have had contact with many different police officers… and specifically one police officer…which was a really positive experience for me. This officer… to me he was just another guy… like me… and I felt that he treated me really well and that I could comply with him and his requests… I did think that I could trust him because I trusted that he was trying to help me… I could speak freely… I can’t remember specifically how I did but I remember being happy that I had said all that I wanted too… but I didn’t get involved too much in the decision processes that were being made anyway… I just left it up to *them*… I mean… I didn’t think that *they* would let me that involved anyway...

Perceptions of police are based on personal experiences of procedural fairness (Tyler, 2005) and if people have an experience that is characterised by fair procedures then their perception of police legitimacy will be based around this positive experience. Experiencing fair procedures supports notions of legitimacy (Tyler, 2005). It was decided that this factor needed careful reflection particularly in terms of linking the positive findings (regarding police interaction) reported by the minority of the transgender participants to the negative findings (regarding police interaction) reported by the majority of the transgender participants.

Only a very small number of transgender participants reported that they had not previously interacted with police. All of these participants show that any potential police interaction would result in negative outcomes for themselves or another transgender person. The transgender participants’ responses regarding no previous interaction with the police included responses from Participant D, Participant J, Participant L, Participant S, and Participant U. For example, Participant J said:

...As a transgender woman I haven’t had any specific contact with any one police officer, or with any groups of police officers but I think if I did I would probably be nervous because of how I look, and that I don’t really look exactly like other women... and I don’t think that *they* would accept me, and I think that this would generally be the way that most of *them* would be with me...

Although it was only a small amount of transgender participants who reported that they have had not had previous interaction with the police the results are critical since each of these participants was asked about hypothetical interaction with the police. Each of the participants shows in their responses that they would expect any interaction with the police to have a negative outcome for themselves and others within the transgender community. Since a small number of the transgender participants expressed that they have not had any previous contact with the police but expressed that they felt that any interaction with the police would result in negative outcomes the findings have implications because perceptions of police are based on personal experiences of procedural justice (Tyler, 2005). When people have not interacted with the police but expect interaction to be negative it raises questions regarding how their perceptions of police interaction are formed.

A transgender person’s positive or negative *vicarious* belief about the police may actually pre-determine or bias how they will view intergroup identity differences between themselves and the police regardless of actual interaction. It can be surmised that the perceptions of the transgender participants who indicated that they have not had previous interaction with the police but expect police interaction to have negative outcomes are based on vicarious beliefs. Perceptions of positive or negative police legitimacy are also formulated around experiences that are characterised by fair or unfair perceptions of treatment (Tyler, 2005). It was determined therefore, that this finding would be important to consider since the responses from this small group of transgender participants revealed that they expected to be treated unfairly by police officers.

All of the transgender participants (regardless of having had previous contact with the police or not having had previous contact with the police) felt that compliance with police, trust in police and communication with police, would be difficult or a negative experience. For example, when each of the transgender participants was asked about their perceptions regarding compliance with police the majority of the transgender participants either responded negatively to the question or responded that compliance with the police was something that was compulsory and not a choice. Many of the transgender participants indicated that compliance with police was an expected outcome of interaction with the police that would more likely be a negative experience for them as a transgender person. For example, Participant A said:

…I would comply with them, I would have to… and I would speak freely to them if I could… but you never know do you… I mean, I haven’t had a reason not to trust *them…* although I think I would be more comfortable around female police officers, I think that I would trust them more than the males… I don’t know why… but I think that I would just trust them more*…*

A large part of the notion of police legitimacy is public cooperation with the police (to obey the law and comply with the police) (Tyler, 2005). It is also the perception that to be considered as a legitimate organisation, the police (once complied with) must be perceived to have the capacity to reduce crime towards all members of society and to be able to offer police protection towards all members of society regardless of their social status (Tyler, 2005). Yet the majority of the transgender participants indicated that they perceived that compliance with the police would either be a negative experience for them as a transgender person and/or result in a negative outcome for them due to their transgender identity. When each of the transgender participants was asked about their perceptions of trust in the police the majority of the transgender participants either responded negatively to the question or responded that trust in the police was something that was not easily given to the police as an organisation or to police officers. Many of the transgender participants indicated that trust in the police was an expected outcome of interaction with the police that would more likely be a negative experience for them as a transgender person. For example, Participant H said:

….You know… if I had to trust any of *them* I would trust the female officers… because you can trust them…more than the average male police officers… but if I came across most police officers I would be very wary of how I trusted them…

Another large part of the notion of police legitimacy is the public’s ability to trust the police (Tyler, 2005). For example, when the police are viewed as trustworthy the public is more likely to hold positive attitudes toward them, resulting in increased perceptions of police legitimacy (Weitzer, 2000). Yet, the results of the in-depth interviews indicate that the majority of the transgender participants do not trust the police and that the majority of the transgender participants reported that they perceived that the police are unlikely to perform their duties towards transgender people in a way that will inspire trust. When each of the transgender participants was asked about their perceptions of communication with the police (particularly their perceptions regarding being able to speak freely with the police) the majority of the transgender participants either responded negatively to the question or responded that communication with the police would result in a negative outcome for themselves and other transgender people. Many of the transgender participants indicated that communication with the police would more than likely result in being verbally used by police officers due to negative police perceptions of the transgender person’s gender identity difference. For example, Participant T said:

…Speaking freely with the police... I think that I could speak freely with them depending on what it was that *they* were asking of me… um, I think that a lot of transgender people respond to *them* in a guarded way… drag queens would anyway…*we* would be very guarded of what we said to *them*… I mean… if they ask a question *we* would answer the question but speak freely… I don’t think any of *us* would offer much more than we had to...

Govier (1998) states that trust is a presumption of meaningful communication and that meaningful communication helps form initial perceptions regarding whether or not an organisation can be considered legitimate. Positive and meaningful communication between the police and members of the public plays an important part in public perceptions of police legitimacy. Fiedler (2007) states that the police often overlook meaningful communication in their interaction with the public particularly in their need to establish legitimate authority through social distance by being non-accommodative regarding some levels of communication. The majority of the transgender participants reported that communications with the police were based on previous negative interaction where the police were not simply communicating professionally as part of the requirements of their roles. The results also show that the majority of the transgender participants felt that the negative communication that they had with the police was based around negative police perceptions of the transgender person’s gender identity difference. Since communication (above all the ability of a person to speak freely to the police) plays a large part in public cooperation with the police and perceptions of the police it was determined that this finding was meaningful. In addition, all of the transgender participants (regardless of having had previous contact with the police or not having had previous contact with the police) felt that quality of treatment from police, interaction with police and cooperation with police would also be difficult or a negative experience. For example, when each of the transgender participants was asked about their perceptions of police treatment, interaction, and cooperation with the police many of the replies were negative regarding police treatment, interaction and cooperation. For example, Participant F said:

… I think interaction with the police would be negative… you always know when someone is uncomfortable around you… and I don’twant *them* to feel that way because it makes me feel that way…and then I don’t think I would be treated well… and that’s the bottom line… cooperation?...well I would *have to* wouldn’t I… I wouldn’t have a choice…

This type of finding is problematic given that a large part of the construction of perceived police legitimacy is the public’s perception of how they are treated by the police, how they perceive potential interaction with the police and whether or not cooperation with the police will have a positive (or meaningful) outcome (Tyler, 2005). Bettencourt and Bartholow (1998) found that when one group (such as the transgender community) does not accept the treatment that is given to them by another group (such as the police) they are more prone to negativity and bias towards that group. The findings indicate that the majority of the transgender participants reported that they have had previous negative interaction with the police that resulted in negative outcomes for them due to police perceptions of the transgender person’s gender identity difference.

All of the transgender participants (regardless of having had previous contact with the police or not having had previous contact with the police) reported that they wanted the police to recognise and understand their gender identity difference so that they would feel protected by the police if a vulnerable situation arose. All of the transgender participants indicated that if they perceived that the police were providing protection for the transgender community then it would strengthen their own and other transgender people’s sense of self-worth. Many of the transgender participants indicated that positive awareness of perceived police protection would also ease future interaction between transgender people and the police and would help to legitimise the police as a trustworthy organisation. The transgender participants’ responses regarding police recognition and understanding of their gender identity difference included responses from Participant B, Participant C, Participant E, Participant F, Participant J, Participant O, Participant Q, and Participant U. For example, when asked about police recognition and understanding of gender identity difference, Participant F said:

…It is very important to my identity as a transgender person to identify with the police because I would want to know that if I was going to a performance or coming from a performance and something happens to me… either I was attacked by someone or get into a car accident the cops are not going to say ‘Oh well it’s just a man in a dress’ and treat me badly… I want to be taken seriously by *them* as say ‘This is a person who needs our help’… you know? Regardless of what I look like or what I’m wearing*…*

However, when asked about police recognition and understanding of gender identity difference, Participant O said:

…It’s more important that *they* identify with *us…* I think that this is the important part… it’s the fact that *they don’t identify with* *us... we* know what *they* are supposed to do… their job… *but do they* know what it is that *we* are really doing*…* no, it’s just what *their* prejudices think that we are doing…it wouldn’t make any difference to me whatsoever to identify with them, but god*,* it would make a difference the other way around… although I think there will always be this element from *them* thatthey willalways see *us* as freaks, as deviants, as something that needs to be… um, treated differently…I don’t think that *they* see beyond the expression of gender difference...

Each of the transgender participants indicated that they perceived that the police do not accept or recognise their gender identity. The transgender participants alluded to the fact that they perceive that the police consider transgender people to be members of a separate group to police and to others in society. This finding is in accordance with research by Stephan and Renfro (2002) which shows that members of a dominant group and members of a subordinate group usually live in distinct worlds and generally have little or no contact other than through engendered negative stereotypes. This idea was expressed by the majority of the transgender participants who indicated that the justification of the superiority of the police was based on the lack of police acceptance and understanding of the transgender participants’ gender identity difference. This finding also has implications for notions of procedural fairness given that issues of procedural fairness have frequently arisen between transgender people and the police (Miles-Johnson, 2013b). Particularly since many police officers refuse to take a complaint from a transgender person (and/or take the complaint seriously) because the transgender person may not fit within the confines of what a police officer considers a normative gender appearance (See Alliance for a Safe & Diverse DC, 2008; Berman & Robinson, 2010; Edelman, 2014; Grant et al., 2011; Heidenreich, 2011; Levin & McDevitt, 1993; Miles-Johnson, 2013a; Miles-Johnson, 2013b; Redfern, 2014; Wolff & Cokely, 2007, Woods et al., 2013).

Furthermore, notions of justice in the Australian state where this research was conducted are based around an individual’s perceived fairness of the procedures involved in the decision-making of the police and the perceived interpersonal treatment an individual receives from a police officer. Since the majority of the transgender participants reported that they perceived that the interpersonal treatment they received from police officers resulted in a negative experience or negative outcomes the findings must be considered. This is because perceptions of formal and informal policing are based upon positive and/or negative notions of procedural justice that are (according to the results in this study) influential on perceptions of intergroup identity difference from a transgender person’s point of view.

### Discussion

The results of this research show that the transgender participants’ have negative perceptions of the police. This finding is consistent with conclusions drawn by Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing and Malouf (2002) who found that most of the transgender respondents in their study expected negative treatment from police. It is also consistent with Moran and Sharpe (2004) who argue that a negative experience with an authoritarian group such as the police will reflect on transgender people’s perceptions of legal authorities. Previous research posits that policing has always been implicated in processes of social inclusion and exclusion (Bradford, 2012). In this instance, the transgender participants’ negative perceptions of the police as a non-legitimate organisation highlighted a pre-existing or emerging sense of difference and alienation from the police and policing practice. However, it is acknowledged that the small sample size in the present study is appropriate for qualitative research but means that broad generalisations about the wider transgender community cannot be made and the findings may only apply to transgender people who participate in online community forums. This is because the sample is very different from other samples included in previous studies that have discussed the relationship between the police and transgender people in contexts fraught with tensions around gender, race and poverty (See Amnesty International, 2005; Grant et al., 2011). It is also acknowledged that although the sample comprises a small group of diverse people who do not conform to the normative expectations of their assigned sex at birth and gender identity, the participants are linked under the umbrella term ‘transgender’ that is used by both The Gender Centre (NSW/QLD) and by members of the transgender community in this particular Australian stateto identify different transgender identities both within and outside the transgender community. In addition, since the transgender participants were recruited via an online survey posted in various internet community forums hosted by Facebook, the sample may not be representative of the wider transgender community, particularly members of the transgender community who do not participate in online forums or whose relative privilege does not enable them access to the internet (Grant et al, 2011). Therefore, a more inclusive sample of transgender people across Australia would certainly be more generalisable. For example, although the Australian state where the research was conducted is considered to be multi-cultural, the lack of inclusion of transgender people from the Indigenous Aboriginal Australian community and the Torres Strait Islander community may alter the overall findings about perceptions of police, since both these communities have had unique experiences (and typically negative histories) with police organisations across Australia (Weatherburn, 2014).

However, the research was able to understand the ensuing anxiety that many transgender participants expressed regarding interaction with the police (in relation to their perceptions of the police as a non-legitimate organisation) and the ensuing fears that they all expressed regarding not being treated in a fair manner. For example, the majority of the participants indicated that the police officers were disrespectful and displayed unprofessional and harassing behaviours towards transgender people, particularly in regards to communication about police treatment. In addition they felt that negative treatment was to be expected from a group of individuals (the police) to which they (as a transgender person) could not belong. This is important to consider given negative perceptions of fair treatment will determine how one group interacts with the other in the future (Tajfel, 2010).

This belief also helped to determine and uphold the transgender participants’ perceptions of intergroup difference between themselves and the police and at the same time reinforced their perceptions of similarity with other transgender people. It also shows the value that each of the transgender participants placed on their perceived inclusion within the group (the transgender community). The evaluation that the majority of transgender participants gave to the police (as non-legitimate actors) was collectively expressed by most of the participants regardless of whether or not they had in fact had previous interaction (or engagement) with the police in a professional manner. This finding is consistent with previous work by Skogan (1994) who also found that there was a lack of symmetry between a person’s opinion of the police and their actual experience or contact with the police. Skogan (1994) found that many minority groups such as the transgender community base their knowledge of policing on other people’s positive or negative experiences with the police.

This sense of shared negative evaluation of the police regardless of previous contact or interaction is not uncommon in previous studies that have examined minority group perceptions of the police (See Bradford, 2012; Murphy & Cherney, 2011). Many studies have found that minority group members often have the expectation that they will automatically receive abuse from the police and other law enforcement agencies simply because of their minority group status (See Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Previous studies also show that the expectation of poor treatment from authority figures to minority groups is based on an assumption held by members of minority groups that the expected ill treatment that they will receive is based on or reflective of the relevant society’s social rejection of minority groups. This is due to negative stereotypes that are linked to the minorities under their minority group status (See Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994; Leyens, Yzerbyt & Schadron, 1994).

Identifying and recognising that the transgender participants’ negative perceptions of police legitimacy (and their lack of fairness when interacting with the police) are based on negative contact or experiences that have actually (or hypothetically) occurred between the two groups is vital when considering the contextual factors that may influence transgender participants responses. According to Rosenbaum et al., (2005) the prejudice hypothesis suggests that knowledge of a prior experience with the police and a person’s group (such as a community) may create a predisposition for an individual who identifies with the group to interpret police contacts within a negative or positive framework. Yet none of the transgender participants who participated in the in-depth interviews referred to historical recollections of either positive or negative police treatment. All of the transgender participants that participated in the in-depth interviews spoke about their perceptions of contact and experiences with the police in terms of their own life history, casting their responses to the questions within the context of their daily lives.

Examination of the results of this research support the idea that transgender people perceive that the quality of treatment they will receive from the police (as well as their past contact and experiences with the police) are equally important in determining their overall satisfaction with the police and their evaluation of the police as a legitimate agency. Such perceptions of the quality and type of treatment that the transgender participants will receive from the police is formed around their own awareness of the expected rejection and prejudice that will be directed towards them from the police due to their differences in gender identity. Therefore the findings from this research demonstrate the importance of contact and experience (both direct and indirect) in predicting transgender people’s perceptions of the police.

***Conclusion***

Policing transgender people poses an on-going problem for police organisations. Previous research examining transgender people suggests that transgender people in Australia have historically had difficult experiences when interacting with the police (Miles-Johnson, 2013a; Miles-Johnson, 2013b). Despite the extensive body of research examining policing of ethnic minority groups the empirical field of policing and the transgender community is in its infancy. Initial examination of the transgender literature shows that it was unclear how transgender people perceive the police. It was also unclear how transgender people define understand or experience intergroup relationships with the police and whether or not such experiences impact on their opinions or perceptions of the police and police practices.

Primarily this research shows that transgender people perceive that the contact and experiences that they have with the police (either actual or hypothetical) will influence their perceptions and attitudes towards the police, with negative outcomes regarding police interaction reinforcing their perceptions. Such perceptions are based on transgender people’s perceptions that the police will not treat them professionally due to the lack of awareness that police officers have regarding the transgender community. The police need to be more aware of the individual needs of transgender people and policy responses that distinguish policing practices of transgender people from those created for the policing of other minority groups.

The findings from this research also indicate that specific attention needs to focus on creating micro level strategies that shape police practice in ways that generate positive perceptions of the police among transgender people. This will increase the likelihood that transgender people will engage with the police and as such increase positive perceptions of the police. Particularly since the findings indicate that transgender people perceive that interaction with police and subsequent treatment stems from negative police perceptions of their difference in gender identity. This is the key factor which determines the outcome of police interaction with transgender people. The findings also illustrate that police policy needs to create policing strategies on a macro level which will help change transgender people’s negative perceptions of police treatment and their overall negative perceptions of the police. Transgender people do not expect treatment in a procedurally fair manner by police officers and it is this negative perception of ill-treatment (based on actual and hypothetical situations in this research) which determines why transgender people do not perceive the police as legitimate.

The results of this research offer insight into perceptions of intergroup difference between police and transgender people and the police practices implemented towards transgender people and the subsequent intergroup identity differences such procedures generate. The results indicate that transgender people do not consider the police to be a legitimate organisation due to negative perceptions of formal and informal police practices. The results provide evidence for the idea that as well as enhancing legitimacy experiencing policing practices considered fair will strengthen a transgender person’s relationship to the police. It may also diminish perceptions of negative intergroup difference. Thus by changing the way that transgender people perceive engagement with the police it may dispel negative perceptions of police engagement and improve future interactions.

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1. Harper and Schneider (2003) state that a ‘lived experience’ refers to first-hand accounts and impressions of living as a member of a minority group. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For the purpose of this article, minority groups are defined as groups having external behaviours or other features that distinguish them from the general population, thereby affording them a subordinate identity group status which results in significantly less control or power over their lives than other members of dominant or majority groups (United Nations Human Rights, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. No Internet Protocol (IP) addresses were collected as part of this research. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The particular Australian state where the research took place has been de-identified as part of the ethics agreement since members of two online transgender forums situated in this particular area requested anonymity of the geographical location. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Although other Australian studies use different terminologies to identify the diversity of the transgender community (see Dane et al., 2010), the terminologies used in this research are similar to those used by Cummings (2007) and The Gender Centre (NSW/QLD) and other members of the transgender community in this particular geographical area to identify different transgender identities. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Although it is acknowledged that the term ‘Pre-Op’ is often problematic since it categorises individuals by surgical status and places emphasis on a procedure that can be difficult to obtain for some transgender people, this terminology was used by the individual to self-identify in this research. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In the Australian state where this research took place these identifiers are commonly used by members of the transgender community to categorise themselves and others within their community. As such, it was determined that for the purposes of this research the sample would not be subject to data reduction techniques to reduce these categories to a discrete set of only transgender male and transgender female participants. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Seven participants stated that they were not in a committed relationship. However, none of these participants disclosed any other additional information regarding their relationship history. Therefore it could not be determined if any of the seven had been previously married, divorced or in any other types of relationships. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. At the time of the interviews, each of the unemployed participants admitted that they were actively seeking employment and none of them were students or homemakers or retired. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The questions included in the interviews were devised by the researcher and based on questions used in previous studies measuring group identification and as such, each of the questions was deemed to be reliable in their ability to measure the nature of perceived group difference (Smith, Tyler, Huo, Ortiz & Lind, 1998; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Wakslak, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. During the construction and adaptation of the in-depth interview questions, two transgender community members were consulted so that appropriate questions regarding ‘life histories’ could be included. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)