

# Do police officers perceive themselves, and the incidents they attend, differently depending on the type of uniform they are wearing?

Research considering how officers perceive themselves when wearing response or public order uniform.

## Key details

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Police region	London
Collaboration and partnership	This research is being conducted as part of a professional doctorate through the University of West London with support from Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies.
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	October 2020
Date due for completion	September 2024

## Research context

This study will seek to understand the relationship between the uniform worn by officers and their perception of themselves in terms of their ability, and their perceived exposure to risk.

Specifically considering the wearing of public order kit, this study will build upon an initial pilot study and literature review which explored the relationship between uniform and the perception of individual ability, and incident-based risk.

Proposed hypotheses at this stage are:

Hypothesis one – novice police support unit (PSU) officers who have not deployed will self-describe when wearing PSU uniform with more ‘aggressive’ words than experienced officers.

Hypothesis two – all PSU officers will self-describe with more ‘aggressive’ words when in PSU uniform than when in ‘normal’ uniform.

There is an existing body of research considering how police uniform may impact the perception of the person viewing them, however, there is limited research to date exploring how this uniform impacts upon the wearer.

This study is based upon some key research themes, particularly Dress, Body, Self – Johnson, Lennon & Rudd (2014) who posit that the person is influenced by three factors linked to appearance and being. The first is Dress. Dress simply relates to the clothing worn, this would also include the wearing of a uniform. The second is Body. Body refers to the physical person, and would include characteristics such as physical stature, gender, ability and disability. Finally, Self is the term used to illustrate thoughts, feelings, mindset and emotion.

Key research pieces in this field include:

- DRESS – Enclothed Cognition – Adam & Galinsky (2012),
- BODY – Self Objectification – Fredrickson and others (1998)
- SELF – Symbolic Interactionism – Blumer (1969)

## Research methodology

An initial pilot study will comprise of an online questionnaire distributed to a sample group. Following this, the research will be expanded to comprise of interviews with officers in three categories:

- Non-PSU officers

- PSU officers on their initial course with no deployment experience
- Experienced PSU officers

Both samples of PSU officers will be interviewed twice, once wearing their PSU uniform, and once wearing their standard working uniform (or detective equivalent).

It is anticipated that the sample size will be approximately eight officers per category.

Using thematic analysis, the results of the interviews will be analysed to consider both anecdotal and linguistic themes, and identify any trends in the responses.

## References

Adam, H. & Galinsky, A.D (2012) 'Enclothed cognition' Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Volume 48, Issue 4, Pages 918-925

Blumer, H. (1969) Symbolic Interactionism Perspective and Method Los Angeles: University of California Press

Fredrickson BL, Roberts TA, Noll SM, Quinn DM, Twenge JM. (1998) That swimsuit becomes you: sex differences in self-objectification, restrained eating, and math performance. J Pers Soc Psychol. 1998 Jul;75(1):269-84. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.75.1.269. PMID: 9686464.

Johnson, K., Lennon, S.J. & Rudd, N. (2014) 'Dress, body and self: research in the social psychology of dress.' Fashion and Textiles 1, 20 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40691-014-0020-7>

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## Research participation

The researcher anticipates recruiting participants within Norfolk and Suffolk constabularies where the research is being supported at NPCC level. If a wider sample is required, the researcher will seek to recruit from other forces.