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How the "Black Criminal" Stereotype Shapes Black People's Psychological Experience of Policing:

Evidence of Stereotype Threat and Remaining Questions

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Abstract

Cultural stereotypes that link Black race to crime in the U.S. originated in and are perpetuated by policies that result in the disproportionate criminalization and punishment of Black people. The scientific record is replete with evidence that these stereotypes impact perceivers' perceptions, information processing, and decision-making in ways that produce more negative criminal legal outcomes for Black people than White people. However, relatively scant attention has been paid to understanding how situations that present a risk of being evaluated through the lens of crime-related stereotypes also directly affect Black people. In this article, I consider one situation in particular: encounters with police. I draw on social psychological research on stereotype threat generally as well as the few existing studies of crime-related stereotype threat specifically to illuminate how the cultural context creates psychologically distinct experiences of police encounters for Black people as compared to White people. I further consider the potential ramifications of stereotype threat effects on police officers' judgments and treatment of Black people as well as for Black people's safety and wellbeing in other criminal legal contexts and throughout their lives. Finally, I conclude with a call for increased scholarly attention to crime-related stereotype threat and the role it plays in contributing to racial disparities in policing outcomes, particularly with regard to diverse racial, ethnic, and intersectional identities and personal vulnerability factors and the systemic changes that might mitigate its deleterious effects.

Public Significance Statement

Cultural stereotypes that portray Black people as criminal cause Black people to expect unfair judgment and treatment when they encounter police officers. This culturally, contextually, stereotype-driven psychological experience is stressful and burdensome. It also may increase Black people's vulnerability to disproportionately negative policing and criminal legal outcomes compared to White people, and otherwise compromise their safety and wellbeing. Psychologists have an important role to play in illuminating the unacceptable costs imposed by this continuing legacy of slavery, and developing interventions to change the contexts that generate them.

How the "Black Criminal" Stereotype Shapes Black People's Psychological Experience of Policing:

Evidence of Stereotype Threat and Remaining Questions

In our image of the Negro breathes the past we deny, not dead but living yet and powerful, the beast in our jungle of statistics.

—James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*

Stereotypes are the ideas that people have about what members of a social group are like, how they behave, and why these patterns of characteristics and behaviors exist (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). A plethora of social psychological science has evidenced the pervasiveness of a stereotype that associates Black race with violence and crime (Devine, 1989; Devine & Elliot, 1995; Madon et al., 2001). For instance, using data from more than 85,000 people around the world, Nosek et al. (2007) demonstrated that people more strongly associated Black (versus White) people with weapons and White (versus Black) people with harmless objects. This pattern emerged using both self-report measures of explicit bias and tests designed to assess automatic implicit associations, although the latter was stronger and only modestly correlated with the former. These results highlight a crucial point: The stereotype linking Black race to crime is not merely an individual belief; it also represents a set of cognitive associations that develops through the interactions people have in interconnected proximal environments and distal contexts, including the social, political, and historical particularities of the time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Payne & Hannay, 2021).

The cultural stereotype that portrays Black people as criminal is an enduring social psychological legacy of slavery. In the early years of colonial U.S. history, Slave Codes were enacted to uphold the economic, political, and social order (Du Bois, 1935). Enslaved Black people who sought freedom from the brutal institution of chattel slavery were portrayed as violent rebels (Kendi, 2016), and free Black people were cast as having a corrupting influence and suspected as potential traitors to the cause (Hadden, 2003). After the Thirteenth Amendment abolished chattel slavery, the Slave Codes evolved into Black Codes that established an elaborate system of de facto slavery through convict leasing. These laws criminalized, among other things, a variety of social conditions that afflicted formerly enslaved Black youth and adults—such as being orphaned, unhoused, or unemployed—and then forced "offenders" to labor for the state or private parties (Du Bois, 1935). Later Jim Crow laws enforced caste hierarchy by separating racial groups, for instance, by outlawing interracial marriage and systematically segregating public settings, violations of which were punished through formal legal

mechanisms as well as extrajudicial lynching. Even as significant civil rights victories were won in the 1950s and 1960s, the government's War on Crime worked to quell protests and maintain control over Black people by increasing the number of police in urban communities where they lived, as well as the scope of police work. Police and policing powers, including the militarization of the police, continued to expand through later "tough-on-crime" laws, the War on Drugs, and ongoing proactive policing practices (Hinton & Cook, 2021). Thus, for centuries, U.S. laws, policies, and policing tactics have subjected Black people to mass and disproportionate surveillance, aggressive and violent policing, and criminalization. The past and present overrepresentation of Black people in statistics on police contacts, arrests, convictions, and incarceration is largely a reflection of differential policing and access to resources and opportunities produced by systemic racism, not actual disproportionate propensity toward crime (Braga et al., 2019; Sampson et al., 2018). Nonetheless those statistics have been used to pathologize Black race, perpetuating the stereotype that Black people are inherently predisposed to criminality (Hinton & Cook, 2021; Jones-Brown, 2007; Muhammad, 2019). As Michelle Alexander described in her 2010 book *The New Jim Crow*, "Today mass incarceration defines the meaning of blackness in America: black people, especially black men, are criminals. That is what it means to be black" (p. 244).

A great deal of research has revealed that the automatic activation of this sociopolitical and cultural meaning among non-Black people—including police officers—results in cognitive bias and negative evaluations and treatment of Black people (Eberhardt et al., 2004; Goff et al., 2014; Hehman et al., 2018; Hester & Gray, 2018), but very little attention has focused on its impact on Black people's psychology. Nosek et al.'s (2007) results demonstrated that although the cognitive link between Black race and weapons was stronger in non-Black people than Black people, the association manifested among Black people as well. The purpose of this article is to describe and consider the implications of recent research revealing that activation of the Black criminal stereotype triggers a form of psychological threat with which Black people must contend, one that is especially relevant in the context of encounters with police officers. First I describe how stereotype threat generates fundamentally different psychological experiences of police encounters for Black people as compared to White people. I then suggest that stereotype threat makes police encounters more stressful, effortful, and mentally taxing for Black people than White people. Also, I consider the understudied possibility that the threat of being stereotyped might increase Black people's vulnerability to burdensome and aggressive policing and

criminalization. Finally, I highlight gaps in our knowledge so that psychologists might generate a more complete understanding about how the societally prevalent and persistent stereotype that associates Black race with crime harms Black people, so they may reveal paths forward to prevent that harm.

Stereotype Threat and the Psychological Experience of Police Encounters

In general, people who are culturally stigmatized are aware of how they may be viewed and devalued collectively by other people in society (Crocker et al., 1998). When people experience social situations in which they may be evaluated by others through the lens of stigmatizing stereotypes, those stereotypes are easily brought to mind (Vorauer et al., 2000). Moreover, people who are culturally stigmatized understand that negative stereotypes put them at risk of being discriminated against (Crocker et al., 1998). All of this has the potential to influence how people who belong to stigmatized groups perceive, interpret, and respond to situations in which a negative stereotype might be applied to them. In other words, even when situations are "essentially the same" (Steele, 1997, p. 613), they can be psychologically experienced in very different ways by people who are at risk of being stereotyped, judged, and treated negatively as compared to other people not at such risk. Steele and Aronson (1995) identified this phenomenon as stereotype threat. As Steele et al. (2002, p. 390) explained, "All people have some group or social identity for which negative stereotypes exist . . . when they are doing things in situations where those stereotypes might apply, they can experience this threat."

This effect is important to understand because Black people become conscious of negative racial stereotypes early in their lives, when they are at least as young as three years old. In 1947, Kenneth Clark and Mamie Clark published their groundbreaking study showing that more Black children selected a White rather than Black doll when asked to select a nice doll, a doll that was a nice color, or a doll with which they would like to play. In contrast, more Black children selected the Black (versus White) doll when asked to select a doll that looked bad. Over half a century later, McKown and Weinstein (2003) found that 80% of 10-year-old children who identified as Black, Latinx, or Native American were aware of broadly held stereotypes about people from racial and ethnic minority groups. Reporting on themes that emerged from semi-structured interviews, Quam et al. (2020) noted that Black teen-aged boys "were acutely aware of structural factors and racial injustice" (p. 642). This consciousness persists into adulthood, as Black adults report believing that White people perceive them as inferior and pathological (Sigelman & Tuch, 1997).

Of particular relevance to the current topic is research showing high rates of awareness that Black

people are stereotyped specifically as criminal among Black children and adults. For instance, when asked to list stereotypes they have heard about Black people, 27% of 10-year-old Black children spontaneously generated stereotypes about criminality (e.g., "Black people are always going to jail"), and 43% reported stereotypes about violence (e.g., "They shoot and kill and fight and steal"; Hines Shelvin et al., 2014, p. 204). Black adults also think they are misperceived as criminal (Cheryan & Monin, 2005) and judged to be more likely than others to commit violent crimes (Sigelman & Tuch, 1997). Brooms and Perry (2016) interviewed Black men about their personal experiences of racism and stereotyping and found that the men perceived they were continuously policed and surveilled by White people because of their racial and gender identities. Black youth in Quam et al.'s (2020) qualitative study reported being stereotypically portrayed as criminals and moral failures, identified these stereotypes as a source of stress and despair in their lives, and viewed police encounters as settings in which they were at especial risk of unfair judgment and, as a result, danger. Indeed, stereotype threat is predicated not only in a person's judgment that it is possible they will be negatively stereotyped but also that stereotyping is probable in a particular situation (Wout et al., 2009). The risk that Black people will experience threat in interactions with police officers is underscored by evidence that Black people are more likely than White people to believe that (a) racial prejudice is prevalent among police officers, (b) police racially profile Black people, and (c) police treat Black people worse than they treat White people (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).

In light of all of this, one might logically expect Black people to be concerned that the cultural crime-related stereotype about their racial identity will unfairly motivate police officers to suspect, stop, or otherwise discriminate against them. I and my colleagues were the first to directly test the possibility that Black people experience stereotype threat in police encounters (Najdowski et al., 2015). In our first study, we administered a survey to assess how much Black and White undergraduate students worry in the abstract that police officers might stereotype them as criminal because of their race. On average, Black students agreed this was a source of worry for them, whereas White students disagreed. As expected, Black students were more likely than their White counterparts to agree they experience stereotype threat in their encounters with police. Although those results suggested that Black and White people have psychologically distinct experiences of police encounters, considering they are in reality policed in qualitatively different ways (Hinton & Cook, 2021; Najdowski & Stevenson, 2022), an alternative explanation is that the Black and White students in our first study imagined different kinds of encounters that posed different levels of risk for being perceived or treated as a criminal. We

accounted for this possibility in a second study by asking Black and White men to imagine how they would feel

in the same hypothetical police encounter (Najdowski et al., 2015). Specifically, participants envisioned walking

down the street at night while a police officer exited a store, noticed them, stopped, and then watched them.

Participants next responded to an open-ended question about how they would feel, what they would think,

and how they would react. Coding and analysis revealed that Black participants were more likely than White

participants to spontaneously reference the stereotype linking Black race to crime in their responses. For

instance, one Black participant reported, "I would feel like he suspects me of doing something because I'm

Black" (Najdowski et al., 2015, p. 469). This finding is consistent with earlier work showing increased stereotype

activation among stigmatized people in situations in which they may be stereotyped (Vorauer et al., 2000). In

addition, participants completed the same measure of stereotype threat as in our prior study, and analyses

yielded the same pattern of results: On average, Black participants agreed they would be concerned that the

police officer might stereotype them as a criminal because of their race, White participants disagreed, and the

race-based difference in stereotype threat levels was statistically reliable. Participants also reported how

worried they would be that the hypothetical officer would accuse them of doing something wrong, and Black

participants also reported more concern about being accused by the officer than White participants did.

I extended from this line of work by testing for racially distinct psychological experiences of a simulated

police encounter (Najdowski, 2012). Black and White men from the community participated individually in a

study that ostensibly assessed relations between attitudes and anxiety. As part of the elaborate study

procedure, a White woman experimenter made an excuse to leave each participant alone in the room where

the study took place. Then, a White man confederate who was posing as a security officer approached the

room and initiated a scripted interaction with the participant. Neither activation of the Black criminal stereotype

nor concern about being accused of wrongdoing differed as a function of participant race, but, in line with the

earlier findings (Najdowski et al., 2015), Black men were more likely than White men to agree they were

worried the security officer's perceptions would be affected by their race. Compared to White men, Black men

also thought it was more likely that the security officer stereotyped them as a criminal. Thus, Black people

appear to think it is both possible and probable that law enforcement officers will negatively stereotype them.

I also experimentally manipulated the security officer's script to vary the relevance of crime-related

stereotypes in the interaction (Najdowski, 2012). In a high stereotype-relevance condition, the officer stated a

theft had been reported and asked investigatory questions. In a low stereotype-relevance condition, the officer

stated he was looking for a diversity training meeting and asked for directions. Activation of the race-crime

stereotype did not differ across conditions, but when the stereotype was of high rather than low relevance to

the situation, participants were more likely to agree they experienced threat and thought it was more likely that

the officer stereotyped them as a criminal. Participants also were more concerned about being accused of

doing something wrong in the high versus low stereotype-relevance condition. Contrary to expectations,

however, participant race did not interact with stereotype relevance to affect stereotype threat. This pattern of

findings indicates that, in general, the perceived risk of being stereotyped unfairly as a criminal was heightened

when the officer was acting in an investigatory capacity, but stereotype threat was not neutralized even when

the officer was portrayed in a non-investigatory role and as potentially egalitarian-minded—Black men still

experienced more stereotype threat than White men did in the context of such an encounter.

Thus, across three studies involving different sample types and different methods, Black and White

participants reported divergent phenomenological experiences of interactions with police and security officers.

The race-based differences in stereotype threat that were documented in relation to abstract and hypothetical

encounters with police officers of unspecified race (Najdowski et al., 2015) generalized to a realistic encounter

with a White security officer (Najdowski, 2012). Together, the results confirm that the risk of being evaluated

and discriminated against posed by the cultural backdrop of the Black criminal stereotype creates

psychologically different police encounters for Black people as compared to White people. What are the

consequences of these differences?

Why It Matters that Black People Experience Stereotype Threat in Police Encounters

Apprehension about the risk of being stigmatized or stereotyped due to one's social identity induces a

number of physiological, emotional, and cognitive reactions that occur automatically, without alleviating or

changing the stress-inducing situation. In addition to these uncontrolled stress responses, people may

consciously and effortfully attempt to monitor and cope with the situation, including by managing their

responses (Brownlow, 2022; Major & O'Brien, 2005). As a result of these processes, stereotype threat may

manifest in affect, cognition, and behavior. Some of these impacts are experienced intrapersonally but others

may have adverse consequences for interpersonal perception (Apfelbaum et al., 2008; Goff et al., 2008). Thus,

stereotype threat, by rendering police encounters more psychologically challenging for Black people than White

people, could increase Black people's vulnerability to negative responses from police officers. Beyond affecting immediate experiences, stereotype threat also may have negative repercussions for Black people's long-term safety and wellbeing. Next, I review a selection of these stereotype threat effects and the detrimental consequences they may lead to in police encounters and throughout Black people's lives.

Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Consequences of Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat is a stressful, anxiety-provoking experience. For instance, experimental manipulations designed to generate high levels of stereotype threat in women students in the domains of math, science, and engineering have been found to correspond with increased physiological arousal, including higher skin conductance, lower skin temperature, higher diastolic blood pressure, and increased sympathetic cardiovascular activation (Murphy et al., 2007; Osborne, 2006, 2007). Similarly, Black students who were induced to feel high stereotype threat in a testing situation had higher arterial blood pressure than other Black students or White students, a difference that persisted for at least 15 minutes (Blascovich et al., 2001). I observed links between crime-related stereotype threat and physiological arousal in my simulated police encounter study too (Najdowski, 2012). Even after controlling for baseline heart rate, Black and White men's heart rate did not reliably differ while they interacted with the White security officer. However, participants' heart rate was higher when the Black criminal stereotype was of high versus low relevance in the situation. Overall, stereotype threat and heart rate were positively correlated: The more concerned men were about being stereotyped as a criminal, the more physiologically aroused they were.

In addition to eliciting objectively observable arousal, stereotype threat is subjectively experienced as stressful. Shelton (2003) found that White participants who were told that White people often make stereotypical and biased judgments about Black people reported feeling more anxiety in a subsequent interracial interaction as compared to White people who were not concerned about prejudice. Likewise, in Study 2 of Najdowski et al. (2015), participants indicated how likely it would be for them to feel anxiety in a hypothetical police encounter. Compared to White men, Black men rated themselves as more likely to feel anxious in that context. Moreover, the more stereotype threat men exhibited, the more likely they were to anticipate feeling anxious. My simulated police encounter study also revealed positive correlations between stereotype threat and self-reported anxiety, both during the encounter and afterwards (Najdowski, 2012).

People also respond to stereotype threat with a variety of negative emotions (e.g., dejection, Keller &

Dauenheimer, 2003). Black men in Brooms and Perry's (2016) interview study described feeling dehumanized and powerless as well as vulnerable, disappointed, embarrassed, annoyed, and infuriated. Stereotype threat also negatively impacted men's emotional states in my simulated police encounter study (Najdowski, 2012). As the perceived likelihood of being stereotyped as a criminal and accused of wrongdoing increased, men reported feeling less happy and pleasant while simultaneously more defensive, angry, and hostile.

The stress, anxiety, and negative emotions attendant to feelings of stereotype threat prompt people to engage in both automatic and deliberate cognition as they attempt to cope with the demands of the situation. Humans are neurobiologically wired to reflexively orient their attention to stimuli that signal risks to safety and wellbeing (Davis & Whalen, 2001), and there is evidence that this cognitive vigilance occurs both automatically and consciously in response to potential threats that are tied to social identities (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Kaiser et al., 2006; Murphy et al., 2007; see Brownlow, 2022). People under threat search for interpersonal and contextual cues that either prove or disprove that they are being stereotyped. At the same time, they also direct attention to their own cognitions, affect, and behavior (Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Schmader et al., 2008). This can involve monitoring and managing one's reactions to counter the stigma or negative stereotype. In support, Shelton's (2003) study of dyadic interracial interactions showed that, regardless of whether prejudice concerns were made overtly salient, Black people reported being more attentive to their thoughts, feelings, and actions than White people did. This self-monitoring can cause behaviors that might otherwise have occurred automatically to be displaced by consciously controlled presentations (Beilock et al., 2006).

This line of thinking about threat effects corresponds with findings from qualitative research on Black men's experiences of coping with the Black criminal stereotype. Based on his ethnographic study of interracial interactions in Philadelphia, Anderson (2011, p. 99) observed that stereotypes associating Black skin with danger create a deficit model for any young Black man, such that he "must prove himself to be law-abiding and trustworthy." In response to the perpetual risk of being stereotyped in cross-racial interactions, Brooms and Perry's (2016) Black interviewees described being on constant guard for negative latent meanings underlying others' words and deeds. They also described being mindful of how others perceive them, especially that their physical size or tone of voice might be judged as threatening or aggressive. In reaction, they purposefully worked to mitigate stereotyping by dressing conservatively, limiting where they go, avoiding confrontration, and modeling respectability. In this way, Black men take on responsibility for countering negative racial

stereotypes not only for themselves but also for Black people as a collective (see also Brownlow, 2022).

My research indicates that Black men also work to cope with stereotype threat in police encounters. When imagining a hypothetical encounter (Najdowski et al., 2015, Study 2), Black men were more likely than White men to report they would be cognitively vigilant to threat-related cues and monitor their own behavior. Further, the more threatened men felt over the risk of being stereotyped and treated like a criminal, the more they expected to self-regulate their thoughts and behaviors. The effect of race on self-regulatory efforts did not generalize to my simulated police encounter study (Najdowski, 2012). However, when the race-crime stereotype was of high rather than low relevance, men regulated their thoughts and behaviors more often. Also, as feelings of threat and concern about being accused of wrongdoing increased, so did men's likelihood of being cognitively vigilant and monitoring their behavior while interacting with the officer. This is in line with other evidence that Black men engage in "self-policing" (Brooms & Perry, 2016, p. 175) to avoid actual policing.

In general, efforts to monitor a situation for evidence of threat and to control one's behavior to offset it are cognitively costly (e.g., Baumeister, 1998), and stereotype threat increases cognitive load, thereby limiting working memory capacity (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; see Spencer et al., 2016). Beilock et al. (2007) found that women who were induced to experience math-related threat were more concerned about and monitored their performance more than other women did; they also were less accurate on more versus less cognitively demanding math problems. Richeson and Shelton (2003) also showed that the amount of control White participants exerted over their behavior in an interaction with a Black experimenter correlated with worse performance on a later cognitive task. Many Black men in Brooms and Perry's (2016) study of profiling experienced their constant efforts to decipher others' intent as cognitively taxing. As one participant explained,

> You don't know what's in their heart, so you're constantly in this state of paranoia. Did that person not
>
> hold that door because they're not nice or because I'm a Black man?" You know? So you can turn that
>
> over in your head a thousand times and still not know. (p. 174)

Anxiety, vigilance, and self-regulation are likely to constrain working memory similarly in police encounters (see Feagin, 1991), especially considering the high stakes of those encounters. However, to my knowledge, my simulated police encounter study has been the only study to date to directly measure the effects of crime-related threat on cognitive load, and no relations were observed (Najdowski, 2012).

Research also has examined whether concerns about being stereotyped and treated unfairly might be

expressed in behavior. Shelton (2003) demonstrated such behavioral responses in her study of interracial interactions. On the one hand, White participants fidgeted less when concerned about appearing prejudiced to their Black interaction partners relative to when not focused on this risk. On the other hand, Black participants fidgeted more when they expected their White interaction partners to be prejudiced than when this concern was not highlighted. Other studies of prejudice concerns have shown that threatened individuals also engage in less eye contact (Vorauer & Turpie, 2004) and appear more anxious (Bosson et al., 2004) than others.

Whereas stereotype threat may automatically manifest in behavior, it is well-established that people also deliberately try to confute negative beliefs that they think others have about them by modulating their behavior (Hilton & Darley, 1985; Smith et al., 1997; for reviews, see Brownlow, 2022; Miller & Meyer, 1998). As one example, Shelton et al. (2005) showed that Black participants who thought their White interaction partners were prejudiced reported more negative affect, felt less authentic, and liked their partners less than did non-threatened Black participants. Even so, threatened Black participants appeared to be more engaged during the interaction: They exhibited more efforts to be social in conversation, leaned toward their partners more, and smiled more. Shelton et al. concluded that Black people may try to mitigate the risk of experiencing racial bias by controlling verbal and nonverbal behaviors that could reveal their true attitudes and feelings while also affecting other behaviors to facilitate a smooth interaction.

My research suggests these sorts of behavioral effects occur when Black people experience stereotype threat in encounters with police officers, too. When I and my colleagues asked participants to imagine how they thought they would act in a hypothetical encounter (Najdowski et al., 2015, Study 2), Black men were more likely than White men to anticipate that they would "try to avoid looking nervous," "avoid making eye contact," "freeze up," and "look nervous" (p. 468). Path analyses showed that the more concerned Black men were that the officer would stereotype them as a criminal, the more they anticipated they would monitor the situation and their behavior for risk, and, in turn, the more they expected they would engage in the aforementioned behaviors. To the contrary, White men's scores on the stereotype threat scale were unrelated to anticipated self-regulatory efforts or behavior in the hypothetical police encounter.

Additional evidence that the internal psychological state of stereotype threat manifests in observable behavior comes from my simulated police encounter study (Najdowski, 2012), in which a concealed videocamera recorded participants while they were interacting with the White security officer. Overall,

participants were rated as appearing more nervous when crime-related stereotypes were more (versus less)

relevant to the situation (i.e., when the officer was acting in an investigatory versus non-investigatory capacity).

However, across both stereotype-relevance conditions, Black men appeared more nervous than White men.

These effects were explained in part by feelings of stereotype threat during the encounter. In other words,

expecting to be judged and treated unfairly due to racial stereotypes about criminality caused Black men to

behave differently—more nervously—than White men in a realistic encounter with a police-type figure.

Together, the results from this program of research suggest that Black men may deliberately attempt to

counter the stereotype of Black criminality by appearing calm and nonconfrontational in police encounters

(Najdowski et al., 2015, Study 2), but their actual threat-provoked behavior could have the unintended

consequence of making them appear anxious to officers (Najdowski, 2012).

How Stereotype Threat Could Indirectly Affect Police Decision-Making

Although cultural stereotypes linking race and crime might directly influence police officers'

perceptions, judgments, and behaviors in ways that generate racially disparate criminal legal outcomes (e.g.,

Eberhardt et al., 2004; Hester & Gray, 2018)*,* ironically, the threat Black people experience over whether

stereotypes will affect police officers' decision-making also may indirectly contribute to disparities. That is, to

the extent that stereotype threat affects arousal, anxiety, vigilance, self-monitoring, cognitive load, and,

ultimately, behavior, police officers may respond differently to Black people who are under crime-related

stereotype threat than to non-threatened White people. Of especial concern is that police officers may

misconstrue certain responses that are symptomatic of stereotype threat as evidence of guilt, deception,

noncompliance, or danger, further increasing risk that Black people will be overpoliced and harmed.

First of all, police officers may be more likely to initiate investigatory stops when threat influences Black

people's behavior. As I and my colleagues showed (Najdowski et al., 2015, Study 2), merely thinking about being

observed by a police officer is sufficient to cause Black men to anticipate feeling stereotype threat. Moreover,

the more threat Black men expect to experience in this context, the more likely they are to become vigilant to

the risk posed by the situation and monitor their behavior, and, in turn, to respond behaviorally, for example, by

trying to avoid looking nervous and avoiding eye contact with the officer. At issue is that courts have

determined that officers may legally form reasonable suspicion of civilians on the basis of many kinds of "furtive

movements" (e.g., avoiding eye contact with officers, *Hoover v. Walsh*, 2012), and police often rely on such

behavior when deciding whether to initiate a stop (Stroshine et al., 2008). In a civil rights case brought by thousands of Black and Latinx civilians who were stopped, questioned, or frisked on the basis of the New York City Police Department's (NYPD) unconstitutionally discriminatory practices, one NYPD officer testified that "furtive movement is a very broad concept" that can include "getting a little nervous" and looking "a little suspicious" (*Floyd v. City of New York*, 2013, p. 561). My analysis of NYPD data indicated that officers cited civilians' "furtive movements" as the rationale underlying over half of investigatory street stops made in 2012, and more often when stops involved Black rather than White civilians (Najdowski, 2014). Morrow and Shjarback (2019) further found that Black civilians' odds of being stopped for furtive movements in 2011 and 2013 were higher than White civilians' odds even after controlling for a host of individual, situational, and neighborhood characteristics. These disparities may be due in part to the race-crime stereotype lowering officers' threshold for developing suspicion of Black civilians (Goel et al., 2016), but it is also possible that the threat of being stereotyped as a criminal stimulates Black people to engage in behaviors that police misinterpret as suspicious.

After being stopped by police, the same psychological effects may make Black people more likely than White people to engage in behaviors that police commonly perceive as indicative of deception or noncompliance. Recall that I found that the more concerned men were about being racially stereotyped as a criminal during a simulated interaction with a security officer, the more defensive, angry, and hostile they felt and the more nervous they appeared to be (Najdowski, 2012). If police officers misinterpret affective or behavioral symptoms of threat as a signal that the person they are interacting with is guilty, lying, or uncooperative, those symptoms may lead to more aggressive policing in the form of more coercive questioning, detainment, searches, use of force, or arrest. Concern about this potential dynamic is underscored by evidence that a large majority of police believe lying is revealed by a person's decreased eye contact or tense posture (Colwell et al., 2006b; for review, see Najdowski, 2011). Although some nonverbal behaviors are reliably associated with lying (e.g., nervous appearance), some are not (e.g., avoiding eye contact), and when the behaviors are a product of stereotype threat, they are never diagnostic of deception. Several studies suggest that, compared to White people, Black people engage in more deceptive-looking behaviors in police encounters, even when innocent and telling the truth, and especially when interacting with a White police officer (Johnson, 2006, 2007; Vrij et al., 1992; for review, see Najdowski, 2011). In addition, when civilians either have a "bad attitude" or are noncompliant (as opposed to being compliant) during stops, law enforcement

officers are likely to be more suspicious and feel more antagonistic toward them (Nix et al., 2019). Evidence also suggests that Black people are more likely than White people to have a negative demeanor when interacting with police (Reisig et al., 2004), and negative demeanor may contribute to racial differences in arrest rates (Smith & Visher, 1981). Even if cultural differences may partially explain racial differences in communication styles and behaviors (LaFrance & Mayo, 1976; see Halberstadt, 1985), my research suggests that crime-related stereotype threat also may lead to divergences that affect police officers' judgments on credibility and demeanor as well as the outcomes of their interactions with civilians.

Perhaps most concerning is the risk that crime-related stereotype threat may cause police officers to misperceive Black people as dangerous because threat-induced affect and behavior may appear similar to fight-or-flight responses that officers believe precede interpersonal violence. Law enforcement officers have been shown to believe that certain gross body movements, tension, and sociophysiological behaviors (e.g., rigidity, rapid breathing) are concerning indicators of an imminent attack (Sweet & Burzette, 2018). This is unsurprising considering that 100% of the police training and informational materials on pre-attack indicators analyzed by Kahn et al. (2018) claimed that arousal, anxiety, and/or reduced cognitive capacity should be interpreted as a signal that a civilian poses a physical danger. Yet none of the materials acknowledged that Black people may exhibit those same physiological or behavioral characteristics as a result of stereotype threat. This creates a situation in which police officers are likely to interpret Black people's behavior through the lens of their training and beliefs related to danger—which is probably particularly easy to do in the context of the cultural stereotype depicting Black people as violent criminals—without considering the alternate possibility that the behavior is driven by fear of being stereotyped, judged, and treated unfairly.

Broader Impacts of Crime-Related Stereotype Threat

The potential for crime-related stereotype threat to contribute to racial disparities in surveillance and criminalization is sufficiently alarming to deserve attention (for a review of consequences, see Burke et al., in press), but it also likely disadvantages Black people in other criminal legal contexts and may also negatively impact Black people's safety and general wellbeing. For example, crime-related threat could create risk of false confessions among innocent Black suspects while also having implications related to the voluntariness of confessions involving guilty Black suspects. Specifically, in interrogations, stereotype threat-induced affect and cognition could manifest in behaviors that detectives perceive as deceptive, leading them to become

increasingly coercive (Najdowski, 2011), or deplete the self-regulatory resources that are necessary for suspects to resist the situational pressure to incriminate themselves (Davis & Leo, 2012). Threat and its affective, cognitive, and behavioral correlates also have been hypothesized to disadvantage Black people in eyewitness identification procedures including showups or live lineups (Kovera & Evelo, 2021), forensic mental health evaluations (Romaine & Kavanaugh, 2019), violence risk assessments (Andretta et al., 2019), and in court proceedings (Mentovich et al., 2020; Rand, 2000). Indeed, it is quite likely that stereotype threat effects accumulate against Black people as they move through the criminal legal system.

Although the discussion so far has focused on the ways that stereotype threat may render Black people vulnerable to excessive policing and criminal legal intervention, it may simultaneously shape Black people's perceptions of whether the police can or will protect them when they are in danger, or whether the criminal legal system operates to serve them as well as White people. Research has shown that Black people believe police do not take their personal or community experiences of crime victimization seriously and feel less safe and more fearful than White people do in the presence of officers (Boehme et al., 2020; Brunson & Wade, 2019; Clevinger et al., 2018; Duhaney, 2021; Pickett et al., 2022). This is directly relevant to understanding why Black people might resist calling police when in need of support (Desmond et al., 2016; Pickett et al., 2022), and stereotype threat is implicated in this dynamic as well. For example, Black women have described staying in abusive relationships because they were afraid that calling the police would be perceived as confirming—and thus perpetuate—the stereotype of Black criminality (Duhaney, 2021; Nash, 2005). In essence, threat creates risk that Black people may avoid police intervention when help is needed. In other criminal legal settings, contextual cues may intimidate Black defendants, victims, attorneys, jurors, and judges alike, undermining their feelings of belonging and reducing their motivation to participate in proceedings (Murphy et al., 2007; Walton & Cohen, 2007), a point that judges are increasingly recognizing (Anderson & Najdowski, 2022).

Coping with stereotype threat as a chronic condition creates other dangers to Black people's safety and wellbeing over the lifespan. When threat is experienced on a repeated basis, the immediate impacts on people's bodily functioning, emotion, cognition, and behavior may cumulate over time and translate into poorer quality of life. In general, compared to White people, Black people report less satisfaction with the quality of their lives in multiple domains including overall happiness and health (Coverdill et al., 2011). The more racism and discrimination Black people perceive that they have experienced, the higher they score in

psychological distress (Pieterse et al., 2012). Also, at the U.S. state level, more stressors related to "living while Black," including the number of Black prisoners, is related to higher incidence of mental health problems, chronic drinking, suicide, and shorter than average life span among Black people (Gabbidon & Peterson, 2006). More specifically, negative stereotypes about Black men are reportedly experienced as a form of "terrorism" that constrains not only how people perceive Black men but also how Black men imagine themselves (Brooms & Perry, 2016, p. 172). In line with this, using household probability data, Whaley (2020) determined that Black people who exhibited trait-like stereotype threat activation perceived a lower sense of mastery over their lives, scored lower in cognitive functioning, and attained less education as compared to Black people who did not exhibit threat, even after controlling for age, income, and sex. Prior legal involvement exacerbates Black men's expectations of being stereotyped negatively as a criminal or unintelligent, and these expectations translate into decreased beliefs about the usefulness of education, diminished motivation to pursue it, and feelings of unbelonging in college settings (Murphy et al., 2020; Strayhorn, 2021).

Stereotype threat also increases physical health risks as well. For instance, research indicates a connection between threat and unhealthy eating patterns, which may be a by-product of having depleted self-regulatory resources from coping (Guendelman et al., 2011; Inzlicht & Kang, 2010). Also, stereotype threat triggers the immune system to release inflammatory cytokines, so continually experiencing it throughout the life course may be linked to the development of chronic health problems and diseases that are more prevalent among Black people than White people, including hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease (Blascovich et al., 2001; John-Henderson et al., 2014, 2015). At least one recent study also pointed to negative health effects that carry over from Black young adults to their mothers as a result of "stress contagion" (Barr et al., 2018). Research on long-term effects of stereotype threat is limited but the research reviewed here provides preliminary reason to believe it diminishes Black people's wellbeing over the lifespan.

Remaining Questions and Future Directions for the Field

In 2011, Claude Steele noted the "emerging generality of stereotype threat effects" (p. 97), and the recognition that Black people may experience crime-related threat in encounters with the police—with potentially life-changing and even life-threatening effects—is an important advance in the movement toward racial justice in criminal legal systems. Still, a great deal remains unknown about who is more or less likely to be impacted by crime-related threat in criminal legal contexts, or how situational circumstances and the broader

cultural context might be changed so they no longer cause threat to occur. Future research addressing the first

gap in knowledge will be important for determining individuals' risk of experiencing threat as a psychological

phenomenon, as well as its downstream consequences that increase vulnerability to negative policing

outcomes and negatively impact long-term wellbeing. Work aimed at the second set of concerns will be useful

for enhancing understanding of crime-related stereotype threat as a symptom of racism embedded in contexts,

an analytical approach that is likely to yield insights for how policy and practice may be used to address the

problem at its roots. I provide future directions for addressing each of these types of questions next.

Person-Level Vulnerability to Crime-Related Stereotype Threat

While other forms of stereotype threat generalize broadly across different groups of people (Walton &

Spencer, 2009), research on crime-related stereotypes to date has focused predominantly on Black people's

experiences in police encounters (Najdowski, 2012; Najdowski et al., 2015). However, U.S. legal policies and

practices also have systemically discriminated against other racially and ethnically minoritized people (Cunneen

& Tauri, 2019; Esqueda, 2020; Hagan & Palloni, 1999; Selod, 2018), and stereotypes about dysfunction and

criminality similarly affect Native, Latinx, Arab, and Middle Eastern Americans as well as non-White immigrant

people (Avery et al., 2022; Esqueda, 1997; Martinez & Lee, 2000; Niemann et al., 1994). To what degree is

crime-related stereotype threat experienced in police encounters by people who belong to these racial and

ethnic groups? Threat also may impact people who have other stigmatized social identities for which crime-

related stereotypes exist—such as associations between gay sexual orientation and child sexual abuse, or

assumptions that people who committed crime in the past will do so again in the future (e.g., Bosson et al.,

2004; Davis & Leo, 2016). Testing whether the experiences and outcomes outlined herein generalize to other

racial, ethnic, and otherwise criminally stereotyped identities should be an important priority for future study.

Within-group variability and intersecting identities also must be appreciated to understand who is

vulnerable to crime-related stereotype threat in police encounters. Trait-based factors that merit attention

include sensitivity to being stereotyped based on one's identity (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002), the centrality of

the stereotyped identity to individuals' self-concept (Sellers & Shelton, 2003), and fear of negative evaluation in

general (Clevinger et al., 2018). Other characteristics that also could condition susceptibility to crime-related

threat include age (McKown & Weinstein 2003), phenotypic racial stereotypicality (Kahn et al., 2017), being a

nonnative English speaker (Kim et al., 2022), and immigration status (Goff et al., 2013).

Gender in particular is a construct that requires further study in this space. In our first study examining race and stereotype threat in police encounters (Najdowski et al., 2015, Study 1), I and my colleagues found that both White men and White women disagreed that they experience crime-related stereotype threat in police encounters. In contrast, Black men agreed they have this concern. Black women, however, neither agreed nor disagreed that they worry police officers will stereotype them as criminal because of their race. To explain this apparent gender difference in threat, we suggested that the negative stereotype of Black criminality may extend to Black men but not Black women, due to Black women's relative social invisibility (Thomas et al., 2014). That explanation is consistent with evidence that people spontaneously generate stereotypes relating to criminal activities when they are asked to freely describe Black, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern men but not women (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Niemann et al. 1994). Also, people are more likely to implicitly think of danger when viewing Black targets who are males rather than females (Thiem et al., 2019). Even Black mothers report being more concerned over and impacted by their sons' vulnerability to criminality and criminalization than their daughters' (Barr et al., 2018), and racism and discrimination have more negative mental and physical health impacts on men than women of color (Assari & Lankarani, 2017). However, my colleagues and I also may have failed to detect crime-related threat in Black women due to imprecise measurement, as we asked about concerns related to being stereotyped as a criminal without specifying what type of offense the individual might be suspected of having committed. People's prototypes of crime tend to skew toward extraordinary and violent circumstances (Finkel & Groscup, 1997), whereas the areas of life in which control over Black women was a primary concern during the era of slavery and the types of activities for which Black women have since been disproportionately scrutinized and criminalized are less sensational and more likely to constitute crimes against property or society—for example, theft, drugs, prostitution, or bad parenting (Najdowski et al., 2020; see McMurtry-Chubb, 2016). When we asked about criminality in the abstract, Black women may have reported on concerns related to prototypical crimes without considering the distinct contexts in which they are vulnerable to stereotyping. Indeed, qualitative interviews of Black women who had been charged with offenses related to intimate male partner abuse revealed that many of the women had been defending themselves against their partners' abuse, but police officers dismissed their experiences and masculinized their acts of aggression. Many of these Black women also believed officers are racist and stereotype Black people in general and Black women in particular as "inferior, more aggressive, violent, and prone to crime than their white counterparts" (Duhaney,

2021, p. NP21202). These findings are consistent with Coles and Pasek's (2020) analysis linking Black women's

masculinization to their victimization by criminal legal systems. More work is clearly needed to understand the

content of racialized and gendered crime-related stereotypes and how they may shape expectations and

experiences of police encounters among men and women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Another important question is how stereotype threat interacts with actual innocence or guilt to affect

Black people's risk of being subjected to police scrutiny and intervention. Black men in my simulated police

encounter study had not committed the theft of which they were accused, yet were concerned the security

officer would racially stereotype them and assume they were guilty, suggesting innocence facilitates threat

(Najdowski, 2012). To the extent that stereotype threat causes innocent Black people to be subjected to

unwarranted police attention, coercion, or aggression, the psychological phenomenon is undeniably

detrimental. Do Black people who have committed crime also experience stereotype threat when interacting

with police officers? One could claim that any phenomenon that increases officers' ability to detect actual

crimes is beneficial. This argument fails to consider that threat could contribute to racial differences in feelings

of agency, control, or freedom in police encounters, which could lead Black people to be more likely to yield

their constitutionally guaranteed rights (e.g., Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable searches or

seizures, Burke et al., in press; Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination, Najdowski, 2011). More

importantly, however, because stereotype threat is derived from negative cultural beliefs about Black race,

claiming that Black people's experiences of stereotype threat is useful from a law enforcement perspective is

tantamount to proposing that some racism is reasonable and even desirable (see Jones-Brown, 2007). Any

potential crime control benefit must be balanced against the possible infringement of Black people's civil

liberties and the ethical implications and cultural consequences of capitalizing on racism.

Situation-Level Vulnerability to Crime-Related Stereotype Threat

To quote Claude Steele again, stereotype threat "is a predicament—something in the interaction

between a group's social identity and its social psychological context" (1997, p. 627). Therefore, it is important

to keep in mind that every interpersonal interaction between a Black person and police officer in the U.S. plays

out against the macro-level backdrop of the cultural stereotype associating Black race with violence and crime.

In this cultural context, interventions aimed at modifying the attitudes or beliefs of individual officers or

individual Black people have limited potential for mitigating stereotype threat.

Yet one of the most common recommendations for reducing racially disparate policing focuses on training officers on issues related to cultural diversity and bias. Police academies and departments have been receptive to this guidance (CBS News, 2019; Reaves, 2016; Sloan & Paoline, 2021), but evidence that such training can effectively address the various ways that cultural stereotypes contribute to racially disparate policing is lacking. For example, Worden and colleagues' (2020) randomized controlled experiment revealed that the majority of officers responded favorably to implicit bias training, learned about implicit bias, and reported trying to manage bias. Despite these positive effects on officers' knowledge and efforts, the training had no measurable impact on rates of racial disparities in stops, frisks, searches, physical force incidents, summonses, arrests, or citizen complaints over a one-month observation period (see also O'Guinn, 2022). Training focused on improving social interactions could counter stereotype threat to the extent that it helps officers communicate respect, positive regard, and support to civilians (McLean et al., 2020; Rosenbaum & Lawrence, 2017; Skogan et al., 2015), but work is still needed to determine whether such training actually levels out differences in treatment that have been observed across racial groups (Camp et al., 2021). To date, there is no evidence that training prevents the stereotype about Black race and crime from influencing police officers' perceptions, judgments, or decision-making in real interactions with Black civilians, nor that it reduces Black people's concern about these effects.

Moreover, stereotype threat instigates a process of interpretation and inference among people who belong to stereotyped groups regardless of whether other people in social interactions are actually engaging in stereotyping or not. As noted by Major and O'Brien (2005, p. 400), "perceptions of situations do not always correspond to objective events." Thus, even if officers initiate interactions for valid reasons uncontaminated by racial or ethnic bias, crime-related stereotype threat may cause people of color to assume that their interactions with police are driven by stereotype-based profiling and constitute harassment (e,g., Brooms & Perry, 2016; Feagin, 1991). A recent series of studies by Lloyd et al. (2020) is illustrative. First, Black and White participants created visual images by selecting from 400 pairs of faces which looked "more like a police officer" (p. 1207). Composite images that were generated from participants' selections were subsequently judged by separate samples of mostly White raters. Results showed that the images created by Black participants were judged to be less Afrocentric, more Eurocentric, less feminine, more masculine, less good, more bad, and more dominant. Further, when yet another predominantly White sample of perceivers imagined interacting with a

police officer whose image had been generated by Black rather than White people, the naïve perceivers expected to experience more anxiety and anticipated they would be more prepared to engage in fight-or-flight behaviors by physically defending themselves or running away. Evidence that stereotype threat may play a role in generating these kinds of racial differences in expectations and psychological reactions comes from Kahn et al.'s (2017) research. Specifically, they showed that the more racial and ethnic minority participants reported appearing physically typical for their racial or ethnic group (i.e., phenotypically stereotypic), the more threat they reported experiencing in police encounters. Stereotype threat translated into less trust in police, and, in turn, less expected cooperation with police. These findings support the idea that when people of color expect police officers to stereotype them as criminals—whether that threat is based on past experience, actual stereotyping, or even imagined treatment in the context of a real cultural stereotype—the expectation is likely to shape their interpretations of police officers' intentions and behavior and negatively impact their lives.

The futility of focusing only on individual police officers' or individual civilians' psychology is further highlighted by evidence that stereotype threat is transmitted across communities and generations. People of color come to associate the police with bias and discrimination based on not only their own personal experiences but also the experiences of their family members, peers, classmates, and neighbors, which they may either learn about or witness. For example, at least in part because of their own past experiences and fear of police mistreatment (Pickett et al., 2022), Black families engage in "The Talk," teaching their children about racist policing and providing guidance on how to interact with police to stay safe (Whitaker & Snell, 2016). This socializes Black youth to be hypervigilant to threat and to modulate their behavior to offset it—by being respectful and compliant, never resisting or making sudden movements, and keeping their hands in clear sight (Brunson & Weitzer, 2011; Woolard & Henning, 2020). As long as police encounters endanger Black people, Black families will try to prepare their children to navigate them, and stereotype threat will be the norm.

Progress addressing stereotype threat requires acknowledging that, even though police officers may be well-informed and well-intended (Worden et al., 2020), Black people's risk of being stereotyped as criminal by police is real (e.g., 96% of James et al.'s, 2016, mostly White police officer sample demonstrated anti-Black bias on an implicit race-weapon categorization task like the one used by Nosek et al., 2007), and it is entirely rational that Black people experience stereotype threat as a psychological reaction. Further, as Brownlow (2022, p. 15) noted, "the onus is not on Black Americans to change how they are coping... Given that Black individuals'

experience of racial stress is a systemic problem, it will require systemic solutions." In this case, it requires

recognizing that the cultural stereotype of Black criminality and Black people's consequent experiences of

stereotype threat are symptoms of having an adversarial criminal legal system that was designed to support

and sustain racism (Bell, 2017; Bowleg et al., 2022; McLeod, 2019). How then might policing be changed to

ensure racially equitable treatment and justice for all? Although a full response to this question is beyond the

scope of this article (but see, e.g., Akbar, 2020; McLeod, 2019; Najdowski & Goff, 2022), here I offer several

recommendations particular to stereotype threat.

Micro-Level Recommendations

One suggestion is for psychologists to design and test interventions that target the ways in which the

immediate situation creates risk for stereotype threat to negatively impact officers' treatment of people of

color. As an example, research could investigate whether diversifying police forces and increasing the likelihood

of racial congruence in police officer-civilian interactions mitigates risk. Recent data indicate that local police

officers are disproportionately likely to be White (Goodison, 2022; Jones et al., 2021), but Black people may be

less likely to experience stereotype threat when policed by Black officers than White officers. Rather, Black

civilians paired with Black officers might feel "identity safety," or the sense that they will not be perceived in

light of the criminal stereotype (Steele et al., 2002). This would be consistent with Marx and Goff's (2005)

research showing that Black people scored lower on intellectual tests than White people when the

experimenter was White, but Black people performed just as well as White people when the experimenter was

Black. Even so, people can be concerned that their ingroup members might stereotype them and judge and

treat them unfairly (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007), and Black people might still experience threat in encounters

with Black officers if the social categorization of Black as the ingroup is less salient than that of police as an

outgroup representing the White establishment (see Carbado & Richardson, 2021). However, another reason to

strive for racially congruent interactions stems from research showing a general propensity for people to more

accurately recognize the emotions of ingroup versus outgroup members (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002) as well as

a distinct disadvantage for White people in misperceiving Black people's emotions (for review, see Brownlow,

2022). This raises the possibility that Black officers may be better than White officers at distinguishing whether

Black people's emotional displays are caused by stereotype threat as opposed to guilt, noncompliance,

deception, or aggression. However, even if diversifying police forces might reduce risk of stereotype threat and

its effects, evidence is mixed as to whether racial and ethnic minority officers engage in less racially disparate policing than White officers do (Ba et al., 2021; Gaston et al., 2021; Goncalves & Mello, 2021; Skogan & Frydl, 2004), and diversification is not sufficient defense against the larger system that generates racial bias and discrimination. This point was made all too clear when five Black Memphis Police Department officers brutally attacked and killed Tyre Nichols following a traffic stop in early 2023 (Alfonseca et al., 2023). Nichols was unarmed but he was also Black, and the Black race of the officers who stopped and chased Nichols did nothing to protect him from the same violence so many other unarmed Black men and women have experienced in the U.S. Therefore diversification must be considered in tandem with other more solutions.

One promising way to restructure police officer-civilian interactions is to change the "rules of engagement." Recall that my simulated police encounter study (Najdowski, 2012) revealed that crime-related stereotype threat can manifest in physiological responses and behaviors that police officers are taught to believe reliably signal forthcoming attack (Kahn et al., 2018) or deception (Colwell et al., 2006a). Although training materials and programs should certainly be modified to culturally contextualize the potential meanings of civilian behavior, considering the limited utility of training to reduce racially disparate policing (O'Guinn, 2022; Worden et al., 2020), it would likely be more fruitful to develop policies that explicitly outline behavioral cues that do and do not warrant certain police responses (e.g., investigation, use of force, interrogation). Such an effort was part of a series of court-ordered reforms following the *Floyd v. City of New York* (2013) litigation mentioned earlier. Specifically, the NYPD determined that stops or frisks could no longer be made on the basis of civilians' furtive movements (NYPD, 2015, p. 2). It is impossible to isolate the effects of this particular change in practice from others that occurred simultaneously, but as a whole the NYPD reforms have been linked to an observed decline in racial and ethnic disparities in stops and frisks from 2011 to 2016 (Morrow & Shjarback, 2019; see also MacDonald & Braga, 2019). Researchers could design rigorous studies to assess whether policy changes along these lines effectively prevent stereotype threat from translating into unwarranted police intervention without compromising officers' safety or ability to do their work.

Meso-Level Recommendations

Psychologists also must define policing situations more broadly by recognizing that relations between police and families, peer groups, schools, and communities influence individuals' experiences of immediate officer-civilian interactions. Therefore, to alleviate Black people of the burden of experiencing stereotype threat,

interventions also must transform policing in these meso-level contexts. Schools with more Black students

enrolled are more likely to have police officers present, and schools with police present see Black students

arrested at a rate two and a half times higher than that of White students—even after accounting for the

proportion of Black students, community type, school-level poverty, and other relevant variables (Homer &

Fisher, 2020). Neighborhoods with larger proportions of Black residents also experience more surveillance-

oriented and aggressive policing than other neighborhoods (Gaston & Brunson, 2020; Klinger et al., 2016). The

increased risk of being harassed by police in the places where they learn, work, and live is concerning and

distressing to people of color (Balto, 2019; Rios, 2011; Wallace, 2018), and suggests a need to evaluate and

change policies related to police deployment and tactics. Although police officers ought to focus on crime,

majority-Black neighborhoods are themselves stereotyped as crime-ridden and dangerous (Bonam et al., 2016)

and past policing strategies that focused attention on particular locations can inflate arrest rates (e.g., Homer &

Fisher, 2020). This likely explains why officers' judgments of whether neighborhoods experience high crime are

driven more by the racial identities of the people who live there than by actual crime prevalence (Grunwald &

Fagan, 2019), and probably factors into a lower standard for reasonable suspicion being applied to Black people

in "high crime areas" than other people in similar areas (Gaston et al., 2022). Black people thus bear the brunt

of stereotypes that associate crime with their racial identity as well as the physical spaces they occupy, but

decreasing burdensome and aggressive policing of predominantly Black schools and neighborhoods could

reduce the concern Black people have about being unfairly stereotyped as criminal.

Macro-Level Recommendations

It is also important to note that the areas with disproportionately large Black populations where crime

rates are highest and where policing is most concentrated and problematic are also those that are most

negatively affected by poverty and disadvantage (Fagan & Davies, 2000; Klinger et al., 2016; Sampson et al.,

2018). This brings to the forefront questions about the mission of policing, which for centuries in the U.S. has

been used to control Black people and other socially marginalized groups in service of existing power structures

(Hinton & Cook, 2021). As I and my colleague Phillip Atiba Goff discussed in a 2022 article, psychologists can

contribute to transforming this mission so that the government's interest shifts from crime control and order

maintenance to administering public safety in ways that treat all people and communities with dignity. For

instance, psychologists and lawmakers have partnered to advocate for programs that allow trained mental

health professionals to respond to nonviolent crises stemming from mental health, homelessness, substance

use, and poverty (Goff & Porter, 2021). In cities that have implemented them, law enforcement support is

called for in less than 2% of cases, which means that thousands of people have been saved from experiencing

encounters with armed officers and being criminalized or worse (Dholakia & Gilbert, 2021). Data are not yet

available to know whether these programs also reduce racial disparities in policing outcomes, but they likely do.

Their existence is remarkable because it signals that governments are recognizing they can reduce the harms

that lead to calls for police service as well as the harms done by police service by instead providing responses

that match people's needs, and they are reimagining public safety through this lens. Balancing the scales to

eliminate racial disparities in access to living wages and quality housing, environments, healthcare, food, and

education also should help to eliminate the conditions that contribute to racially disparate policing (Akbar,

2020; McLeod, 2019). Psychologists have much to offer to the development of theories, predictions, and

investigations to determine how government agencies might work toward these changes, and whether valuing

Black people's rights and dignity helps to eliminate stereotype threat and improve their wellbeing.

      The cultural stereotype of Black criminality evolved over hundreds of years of sociopolitical history in

the U.S., and it will take many years to erode it. Researchers can investigate how to speed this process by

modifying the information people rely on when developing their beliefs about the world. For example, it could

help to publish crime statistics without mention of offenders' racial or ethnic background or proxy variables

(e.g., community type; Jones-Brown, 2007). If those details are provided, they should be framed appropriately.

In fact, although people of color are overrepresented in crime statistics relative to their representation in the

general population, overall more crimes are committed by non-Hispanic White people than people of color

(Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2020). How might this fact be used to counter stereotypes that associate race

and ethnicity with crime? Media also communicates and perpetuates stereotypes that depict people of color as

criminal, deviant, aggressive, and thug-like (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Tyree, 2011). Policies might be

implemented to obligate those who produce and disseminate media content to understand how it contributes

to the marginalization and othering of people of color. Communication platforms also could develop guidelines

that ensure they represent diverse racial and ethnic groups more fairly and accurately (Zayani, 2011).

      As work is done across all systems in our culture to eradicate the stereotype of Black criminality and the

threat it poses to Black people in police encounters, it will be important to monitor how societal events and

trends affect progress. Kahn and Money (2021) insightfully recognized this with their study of racial and ethnic differences in the effects of wearing face masks during the COVID-19 pandemic. They considered how cognitive associations that link masks with identity concealment during crime commission and stereotypes of Asian people as foreign and diseased might exacerbate Black and Asian people's concerns about being stereotyped. Both Black and Asian people were more likely than White people to report that masks increased the threat that other people in the general population would stereotype them based on their race or ethnicity. However, Black people were more likely than either Asian or White people to say that masks increased their concern that police would racially stereotype them. Moreover, this heightened sense of threat among Black people translated into greater feelings of being surveilled by police and lower likelihood of seeking help from the police when needed. Those findings held from May 2020 to August 2020, but it remains unclear how evolving perspectives on mask-wearing affected Black people's feelings about the police as the pandemic persisted over the course of multiple years. This study highlights both the importance of recognizing how broader events may shape police-civilian interactions as well as the need to remain sensitive to and monitor continually changing conditions.

Conclusion

Despite the powerful role it plays in shaping human behavior, most psychologists have neglected to incorporate culture into their theorizing and research on police officer-civilian dynamics (for exceptions, see Najdowski & Goff, 2022; Payne & Hannay, 2021; Rucker & Richeson, 2021). The derogatory cultural stereotype that associates Black people with crime was developed as part of a movement to establish the social order along racial lines, and it persists over time because of its usefulness in maintaining the caste hierarchy (Wilkerson, 2020). There is growing evidence that this stereotype causes Black people to experience encounters with police in fundamentally different ways from the experiences of White people. Before police encounters even begin, stereotypes associating Black race and crime cause Black people to worry officers will judge and treat them unfairly (Najdowski et al., 2015). This threat persists and generates observable racial differences in emotional and behavioral reactions in simulated encounters (Najdowski, 2012). To the extent that these reactions are misperceived by police as suspiciousness, noncompliance, deception, or aggression, stereotype threat is likely to contribute to racial disparities in negative policing outcomes such as force use and arrests. By rendering Black people more emotionally and cognitively burdened by policing as well as potentially more vulnerable to more aggressive and oppressive policing than their White counterparts, crime-related stereotype

threat reinforces relative societal disadvantages and advantages. In this way, the Black criminal stereotype

represents a form of noncontingent violence against Black people as Wilderson (2010) conceptualized, whereby

even in the absence of any actual transgression, Black people are presumed to be guilty of crime, a

phenomenon that both derives from and sustains the racialized structure of power in society. Psychologists

have an important role to play in illuminating the unacceptable costs imposed by this continuing legacy of

slavery, and developing interventions to change the contexts that generate them.

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