Abstract

GUILTY STEREOTYPES: THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF RACE AND SUSPICION IN POLICE INTERVIEWS AND INTERROGATIONS

by

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Over 300 people have been exonerated by post conviction DNA testing, unequivocally proving their innocence. Nearly 70% of these post conviction DNA exonerees are members of minority groups, and approximately 69% of those convicted as a result of false confessions are racial/ethnic minorities (www.innocence project.org). To date, there is little research on the role of race in police interviews and interrogations. The present research had two goals. First, we examined Black and White participants’ experiences during a mock crime interview. Second, using the interviews from Study 1, we evaluated the role suspect race plays in police officers’ veracity judgments. Using a sample of community members, Black and White suspects in Study 1 reported similar levels of anxiety and exhibited similar rates of nonverbal behaviors commonly believed to be cues to deception. Similarly, Black and White suspects cooperated with the investigation at similar rates. Police officers in Study 2 exhibited chance levels of accuracy in their culpability decisions. However, police officers were significantly more likely to misjudge innocent Black suspects as guilty than innocent White suspects, while showing no difference in their accuracy rates for guilty suspects. Additionally, police officers judged Black suspects to be less cooperative and less forthcoming than White suspects. These results suggest that being questioned about a crime is stressful regardless of a suspect’s race or ethnicity. They also suggest that innocent Black suspects are at a greater risk of being erroneously judged as guilty
during police interviews and interrogations. Implications and directions for future research are discussed.