

ABSTRACT

Stereotype Threat and Racial Disparities at the Front End of the Criminal Justice System

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To avoid initial contact with a racially disparate criminal justice system, Black men in the US must be hyperaware of how others perceive them in public. These efforts may be futile, though, as decades of stereotype threat research suggests that the targets of well-known stereotypes often become so overwhelmed with trying to deflect them that they underperform in relevant situations. Through a series of three online experiments, this research examines whether stereotype threat applies to Black men's experiences at the front end of the criminal justice system. Results reveal that references to the criminal justice system lead Blacks but not Whites to anticipate being stereotyped as criminal, which then increases the rate at which they engage in criminal/rule-breaking behaviors, and decreases the rate at which they collaborate with the police. Furthermore, implementing procedurally just policing policies can partially reduce these detrimental effects by outlining the steps being taken to ensure fairness within the criminal justice system. Collectively, this research further extends stereotype threat theory into criminal justice system contexts and offers a viable, front-end intervention to lessen some of the related systemic racial disparities.