How Black Are You?: The Influence of Racial Centrality on Stereotype Threat in the Courtroom

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HOW BLACK ARE YOU?: THE INFLUENCE OF RACIAL CENTRALITY ON STEREOTYPE THREAT IN THE COURTROOM

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ABSTRACT

The current study explores whether stereotype threat, or fear of confirming negative stereotypes about one’s in-group, might manifest in the criminal justice system. This study specifically asks whether the threat of confirming stereotypes connecting race and crime manifest, among Black defendants, in nonverbal behaviors that might be perceived by observers as guilt. This research further explores whether racial centrality, the degree to which one identifies with one’s race, moderates effects of stereotype threat. Black female-identifying college students, who rated their degree of racial centrality, were randomly assigned to experience the activation of the race-crime stereotype or to a control condition. They filmed a legal statement of defense for a purported trial based on a crime for which they were being falsely accused and rated their perceptions of that experience and how they believed they appeared to others. Trained coders were shown these videos and rated nonverbal behaviors representing anxiety, as well as broader perceptions of guilt. No significant main effect of stereotype threat was found alone. However, Black participants higher in racial centrality were rated by objective coders as displaying more anxious behaviors on average than Black participants with lower racial centrality. Further, Black participants high in racial centrality that were in the stereotype threat condition were perceived by coders as displaying more anxious behaviors. Racial centrality also significantly interacts with stereotype threat activation conditions for self-report ratings of perceived guilt and coder ratings of guilt and apprehensiveness.
INTRODUCTION

Racial group membership underlies some of the deepest disparities in the criminal justice system. Today, approximately 2.3 million Americans are incarcerated in federal, state, or local prisons and jails, and approximately 40% of those individuals are Black despite Black Americans representing only 13% of the national population (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). This is emblematic of structural racism within the U.S. as applied to its criminal justice system: discretion built into the system allows for discrimination to emerge at almost every stage of the criminal justice process (Petersilia, 1983). Discrimination stems from the cognitive biases, or stereotypes, that individuals hold against other groups, especially minority groups. Research has specifically demonstrated extant negative stereotypes connecting Black individuals and criminality (Devine, 1989). Such a stereotypic association has been linked to discrimination on the basis of race and may underlie racial disparities in the courtroom (Haw, Pﬁefer, & Meissner, 2005).

Further, the degree to which a defendant resembles their racial group may compound this bias. Eberhardt et al. (2006) examined whether the likelihood of being sentenced to death was influenced by the degree to which a Black defendant was perceived to look more stereotypically Black. They found, particularly when the victim was White, the more stereotypically Black a defendant was perceived to appear predicted a greater likelihood that that he had been sentenced to death rather than a more lenient sentence. Further, when defendants have committed crimes that are more strongly and stereotypically associated with their racial group membership, they often face harsher punishment. For example, mock jurors that read about a Black defendant who
committed a crime that was said to be more stereotypical (i.e. auto theft) as compared to a less stereotypical crime (i.e. embezzlement) were more likely to perceive the defendant negatively and search for evidence confirming guilt (Jones & Kaplan, 2003).

Typically, the research connecting racial group membership and stereotyping to punishment decisions has had a narrow directional focus: what has predominantly been studied is how the jury perceives a defendant based on that defendant’s racial identity, through the lens of their own identities. Little research has considered the reverse -- how the defendant’s perception of the jury -- or meta-perception of how the jury perceives them -- may affect trial outcomes.

**Stereotype Threat**

Meta-perception is at the heart of stereotype threat, which is when an individual belonging to a stereotyped group feels they are at risk of confirming stereotypes about their social group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat occurs when an individual wants to avoid the negative consequences that are associated with in-group stereotypes regarding a specific domain or situation (Shapiro & Neurber, 2007). Steele & Aronson (1995) coined the term stereotype threat in the context of an experiment that tested whether Black college students performed worse on standardized tests than their White counterparts after being primed to think about their racial group. They found that when Black college students were asked to indicate their race on a demographic survey before taking an exam testing their “intellectual ability”-- an act and statement that activated their group membership and stereotypes about poorer academic performance tied to that identity -- they performed significantly worse on the exam than their White peers.

There are various models of stereotype threat that attempt to define the causes, moderators, and mediators that are required for threat to occur. Shapiro and Neurber’s (2007)
Multi-Threat Framework outlines interpersonal aspects of stereotype threat, highlights several situations for stereotype threat to occur, and describes different forms of stereotype threats. Of particular relevance, the model highlights Own-Reputation Threat, which is the fear that one’s behavior will confirm in the eyes of outgroup members that a negative stereotype about one’s group is true of them, and they will therefore be judged or treated badly by the outgroup as a consequence (Shapiro & Neurber, 2007). Schmader, Johns, & Forbes (2008)’s integrated process model further elaborates on what causes stereotype threat to alter cognitive and social performance. This model highlights the nuanced and central role of physiological arousal. The anxiety of being confronted with a negative in-group stereotype and fear of confirming it activate physiological responses that impair executive function. Further, the individual attempts to monitor their behavior and the situation more vigilantly, resulting in increased cognitive load. Finally, the stereotyped individual will use self-regulatory efforts – alter their behavior-- in an attempt to disconfirm the stereotype -- which, counterproductively, may further sap cognitive resources. These models have also empirically various potential moderators that might mitigate or exaggerate the experience of stereotype threat including whether the individual identifies with the domain relevant to the stereotype and the degree to which the individual identifies with the group in question (Schamder, Johns, & Forbes, 2008; Shapiro & Neurber, 2007).

**Racial Centrality as a Moderator of Stereotype Threat**

Racial centrality is the degree to which one identifies with their racial group. How much an individual identifies with their racial group can affect how they appraise stereotypes and perceive discrimination. According to Sellers & Shelton (2003), individuals who regard their stigmatized group membership as a central part of their identity are more likely to see the potential for others to make stereotypic associations in relevant situations and therefore more
likely to see themselves as targets of personal and group discrimination. Yip (2016) also investigated how everyday encounters with stereotypes affect individuals with varying racial centrality. One hundred and twenty-nine minority college students complete a 21-day daily diary to keep track of any instances when they felt stereotyped and levels of disidentification - psychological distancing from a threatened social identity to preserve a positive sense of self. At the end of the study students completed a modified version of The Multidimensional Model of Black Identity (MMBI) (Sellers et al. 1997) to measure racial centrality. Yip (2016) found that individuals with higher levels of racial centrality were particularly likely to disidentify with their group the more that they encountered stereotypes. This could reflect an attempt to regulate emotional distress (Shapiro & Neurber, 2007), or could be driven by the heightened sensitivity that those high in racial centrality have in perceiving discrimination targeting their group (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Stereotype appraisal is necessary for stereotype threat to occur, and Yip’s (2016) research suggests those high in racial centrality might be especially aware of, and therefore vulnerable to, stereotypes directed at their group. This has important implications for the current research which posits racial centrality as a moderator of stereotype threat in the courtroom.

**Stereotype Threat and Nonverbal Behavior**

Few studies in the past decades have attempted to evaluate how stereotype threat may manifest through nonverbal behaviors. Bosson et al. (2004) – some of the only researchers to investigate nonverbal expressions of stereotype threat – tested manifestations of physiological anxiety as a function of gay men’s experience of stereotype threat. The study videorecorded gay male participants interacting with young children and activated sexual identity – and presumably the stereotype that “gay men are dangerous to young children” – via a demographic checkbox.
prior to the task. Stereotype threat was then measured by having independent coders evaluate participant’s non-verbal anxiety. Coders made note of any signs of “uncomfortability” and “anxiety” in participants’ behavior while interacting with the children. Bosson et al. (2004) found that gay male participants for whom stereotype threat was activated where significantly more likely than those in the control condition to evince cues of non-verbal anxiety. Their results suggested stereotype threat can be observed non-verbally.

This non-verbal expression of stereotype threat has also been demonstrated in inter-racial interactions. When people were primed to think about their identities before having a racially relevant conversation it affected how they interacted with others (Gaither, Sommers, & Ambady, 2013). When biracial participants were primed with their Black identity, as compared to their White identity, they conversed less comfortably with a White research confederate; they demonstrated less engagement and enthusiasm, less eye contact, body movement, and smiling. This research suggests that simply being reminded about one’s racial identity, and the subsequent activation of stereotypes associated with that identity, impacts how one perceives and navigates interpersonal contact among ingroup and outgroup members, in subtle but perceptible ways.

**Stereotype Threat in the Legal Context**

Past research on stereotype threat has mainly pertained to race and gender in educational settings, and recent research is only beginning to suggest its relevance in legal contexts. Najdowski (2011) conducted a meta-analysis that demonstrated that Black people are overrepresented in samples of false confessors compared to White people; in explaining her results, she posited that Black suspects may experience greater stereotype threat in interrogations compared to White suspects, which may manifest in more arousal, self-regulatory efforts, and cognitive load. Najdowski (2011) suggested that excessive monitoring of one’s behavior in the
face of stereotype threat, may lead to enacting more nonverbal behaviors that are associated with nervousness; these behaviors may, to observers, be perceived as deception, suspiciousness, and guilt. Indeed, the very act of trying to appear truthful may lead to behaviors that are associated with the techniques liars utilize (Vrij, 2008). Najdowski, Bottoms, & Goff (2015) attempted to empirically test whether stereotype threat affected hypothetical behavior for individuals in a police interaction. The researchers first established, via survey, that Black men were significantly more likely than White men to anticipate that they would feel anxious, monitor the situation and their behavior for risk of being stereotyped, and behave in ways that the police would perceive as suspicious. When participants then read a vignette vividly placing themselves in a police interaction, no racial differences emerged in anticipated nonverbal behaviors. Najdowski, Bottoms & Goff (2015) attributed this lack of effect to low power to inadequate sample size. Additionally, the hypothetical nature of the scenario may not have adequately captured the threat of an altercation with law enforcement, highlighting the need for rigorous, experimental work that captures how the legal system may perpetuate stereotype threat.

**The Current Research**

This research is meant to expand past research on stereotype threat, racial bias in the courtroom, and racial identity. This research has two aims. First, I will examine whether and how stereotype threat manifests itself in the courtroom. More specifically, I ask whether the anxiety Black defendants experience on trial in the courtroom might make them appear more culpable and guilty of the crime, regardless of actual culpability, as a result of stereotype threat. The second purpose of the current study is to examine whether the effects of stereotype threat are moderated by the racial centrality of the Black defendants. More specifically, I ask whether the
degree to which Black defendants identify with their racial group affects the degree to which they respond to the activation of stereotype threat.

**Hypotheses**

The present research manipulated stereotype threat activation for Black participants, exposing some participants to race-crime stereotypic information and others not. Participants also completed a measure of their individual differences in racial identity centrality and were asked to film themselves offering a defense of a crime they were falsely accused of committing. Based on past research and theory, I hypothesized the following:

*Hypothesis 1:* Participants for whom stereotype threat is activated, as compared to those in a control condition, will experience more stereotype threat -- as indicated by higher coder ratings of guilt, nonverbal behaviors demonstrating anxiety, and global impressions associated with guilt, and potentially by their own conscious ratings of how they feel and believe they appear to others.

*Hypothesis 2:* Participants with higher levels of racial centrality will experience more stereotype threat -- as indicated by higher coder ratings of guilt, nonverbal behaviors perceived as anxiety, and global impressions associated with guilt -- than those that rate lower on the racial centrality scale, regardless of whether they were in the stereotype threat or control condition.

*Hypothesis 3:* Stereotype threat activation and racial centrality will interact such that, primarily for participants in the stereotype threat condition, higher in racial centrality will be associated with more stereotype threat than other participants, as indicated by higher coder ratings of guilt, nonverbal behaviors perceived as anxiety, and global impressions associated with guilt. This pattern will be muted for participants in the control condition.
METHODS

Study Design

Participation and Procedure. I recruited Black women-identifying participants at a metropolitan Midwestern college campus, via online advertisements sent to various Black student organizations. Participants were compensated $30 dollars in exchange for full completion of the study. There were 39 respondents to the initial participant recruitment survey, however only 29 participants were able to complete both parts of the study. Due to technological errors during the main experimental Zoom session, one participant was removed from the experiment. Therefore, the final analyses below reflect 29 participants were utilized in this study. An a priori power analysis using the effect size garnered from Bosson et al. (2004) indicated that for significant effects of coder-rated non-verbal manifestations of stereotype threat, I would need approximately 84 participants. However, due to the limited number of Black women-identifying students at this college campus, as well as time constraints, we were unable to obtain the desired number of participants. Future research with a larger sample is intended.

Racial Centrality Measure. Individuals that expressed interest in participating completed a measure of racial centrality embedded within a “preliminary scheduling and eligibility” survey. Black participant’s racial centrality was measured by abridging the Multidimensional Model of Black Identity (MMBI) (Sellers et al., 1997). The original MMBI is a scale with several categories for centrality, private regard, public regard, assimilation items,
humanist items, minority items, and nationalist items. There are 56 items total, and each item can be scored on a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). In this study, as in Yip (2016), participants just completed the 8 racial centrality items, α = .56. The racial centrality subscale of the MMBI consists of items such as, “I have a strong sense of belonging to Black people” and “Being Black is an important reflection of who I am.” Three items were reverse coded (e.g., “Being Black is not a major factor in my social relationships.”) (See Appendix C).

Participants that met recruitment criteria (identify as Black/African American -- regardless of additional racial group identities, identify as female) were invited to participate in the broader study, which they were told was intended to investigate legal perceptions of intersectional identities. This study was advertised as an investigation of legal perceptions from an intersectional lens, and = participants were informed that the Zoom session for the main part of the study would take approximately 30 minutes. In the advertisement, participants were also informed that they would be videotaped, and that videotape would be shown to future participants. This primary part of the study was conducted via Zoom session hosted by the researcher. To disguise the race of the experimenter, the experimenter’s camera was turned off during the entirety of the Zoom call, and the experimenter’s name was displayed as “Researcher”. The entirety of the Zoom session adhered to a set script to maintain consistency across participants. In the beginning of the Zoom session, the researcher reiterated once more that this study would require participants to be recorded during a statement of defense and that mock-jurors would watch the video and determine culpability from the videos.

*Stereotype Threat Activation.* Participants were then provided an online survey link, which randomly assigned them to either a stereotype threat activation condition or a control condition; the experimenter was blind to participants’ condition assignment. Those in the
societal threat activation \((n = 14)\) condition began by completing a demographic survey that primed them to think of their racial identity by asking which racial group they identify with (these demographic items appeared at the end of the survey for participants in the control condition). Then, they read a newspaper article describing a drug crime where the perpetrator, named Kevin Johnson, a Black man, was visible in a featured picture. Participants in the control condition \((n = 14)\) read the same article in which Kevin Johnson was depicted as White (see Appendix B). The newspaper article, particularly for those in the stereotype threat activation condition, was expected to further encourage participants to consider the race-crime stereotype as well as their racial identity. After reading the newspaper article, participants answered questions regarding whether they believed Kevin Johnson was guilty (Likert scale 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), the years Kevin Johnson might serve in prison (0 to 25 years utilizing a sliding scale displaying increments of 5), and the amount of money Kevin Johnson would be fined ($0 USD to $1,500 USD on a slider scale). These questions were intended as a subtle manipulation check to see whether race or the concept of racial bias was activated in participants’ minds, by shifting perceptions of the degree to which the defendant would be punished, reflecting activation of awareness of bias within the legal system.

*Defense Videos.* Next, the researcher, in conjunction with the online survey, guided participants to imagine themselves in a hypothetical scenario. Participants read a vignette adapted from a study conducted by Struckman-Johnson et al. (2008) (see Appendix C), which described to participants a scenario in which they are on trial, falsely, for shoplifting/theft and facing a penalty of 2-5 years in prison. Participants were given the strengths of the case against them, for example that they had been implicated as a suspect by an eyewitness. Participants were also given details that questioned their own culpability, and which they could use in their own
defense (e.g., no footage identified them clearly as the culprit). All participants were then told they would make a videotaped statement of defense and given several minutes to draft a summary or notes of what they planned to say in their video, assisted by a restatement of some factors they could use to distance themselves from the crime. Participants were informed that the statement of defense must be approximately 2-3 minutes in duration and were asked not to directly read from their notes but to use them for reference ($M = 108, SD = 49$). The participants were then told that they must turn on their Zoom cameras and video-record a statement of defense that they could use to plead “not guilty.” After the recording was completed, participants responded to an item about their perceived experiences of stereotype threat (e.g., “to what extent do you agree that potential jury members would find you guilty”, $1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The experimenter then debriefed the participants, explicitly explaining that other people would watch the videos and rate the perceived culpability of the individual (and ensured participants were still comfortable with their materials being used as future stimuli).

**Behavioral Coding**

_Coders._ Objective coders were recruited from psychology classes, with the opportunity to gain experience doing research coding. Four coders were selected, all of whom identified as women (2 identified as White, 2 identified as Asian, and 1 identified as multiracial: Asian and Hispanic).

The coders were told that the purpose of the research was to investigate guilt expressed through nonverbal behaviors, and that they would be watching videos of individuals who may or may not have committed a crime. Following Bosson et al. (2004), these coders watched the videos and were instructed to “consider any behaviors that communicate discomfort or anxiety.” More specifically, the coders were instructed to pay attention to certain nonverbal behaviors
associated with stereotype threat that have been correlated with anxiety, nervousness, and deception from previous studies and meta-analyses, such as increased rigidity, reduction of body and facial movements, and averting eye-contact, among other behaviors.

The coders were trained together by watching a real-life statement of defense retrieved from the internet and by watching a sample participant video, that was not utilized in the data analysis. Coders conferred after rating each video by discussing why they coded each behavior and global impression a certain way. This was done to clarify any discrepancies.

**Coding for Nonverbal Behavior.** The coders were given access to all 28 for the participant videos and given instructions on how to code. The coders were instructed to only watch each video a maximum of 3 times. The first viewing of the video was to gain a general impression. The second viewing’s objective was to code for the frequency of 15 specific nonverbal behaviors associated with anxiety and guilt (e.g., excessive blinking, averting gaze, shrugging shoulders; full list appears in Appendix F). They coded for these specific behaviors on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *none*, 2 = *occasionally*, 3 = *often*, 4 = *most of the time*). On the third viewing, coders rated global impressions of the individual in each video across 6 dimensions (e.g., guilt, confidence, indifference, apprehensiveness, emotional expressions, and defensiveness.). They coded for global impressions, on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *a little*, 3 = *moderately*, 4 = *very*, 5 = *extremely*). To minimize the likelihood that ratings of each video might influence the subsequent video watched, as well as to reduce the likelihood of overtiring, coders were instructed to not watch each video within 5 minutes of each other and to not watch more than 7 videos per day.

**Intraclass Correlation Coefficients.** Interrater reliability was assessed by calculating several two-way mixed, consistency, average measures intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC)
to assess the degree to which the coders were consistent in their ratings of specific nonverbal behaviors associated with anxiety and guilt, ratings of overall guilt, as well as other global impression ratings. According to Cicchetti (1994), the appropriate interpretations of interrater reliability based on ICC values is as follows: less than .40 is poor, values between .4 and .59 are fair, values between .60 and .74 are good, and values between .75 and 1.0 are excellent. ICC values were computed for each the 15 non-verbal behaviors associated with guilt and anxiety (see Appendix F). The specific behaviors of hand movements, self-touch, eyebrow movements, use of fillers (e.g., “um”, “uh”, etc.) pauses in speech, averting gaze, and talk speed were in the ICC = .77 to .95 range, indicating that the behavioral coders had an excellent degree of agreement. The behaviors of blinking, shoulder movements, head movements (e.g., shaking head, forward, backward, etc.), repositioning oneself, and stuttering were in the ICC = .67 to .72 range, indicating that the coders had a good degree of agreement amongst these behaviors. Finally, the behaviors of inappropriate smiling, lip movements, and posture were in the ICC = .4 to .53 range, indicating a poor to fair degree of agreement amongst these variables. The majority of the behaviors that were coded were in the good to excellent range. This suggests that the majority of the specific anxiety and guilt-related behaviors that were coded were rated similarly across the 4 coders. Taken together, these ICC values suggest that the nonverbal behavior ratings were validly measured to test the hypothesis of the current research study.

The ICC values for global impressions were also calculated while utilizing the same two-way mixed, consistency, average measures ICC method to compute the degree of interrater reliability amongst the 4 coders (see Appendix F). Interrater reliability amongst the coders was relatively fair. Only apprehensiveness was calculated to be in the excellent range and only confidence was calculated to be in the good range. Indifference, defensiveness, and guilt had
ICC values in the .52 to .67 range, indicating that interrater reliability for global impressions amongst the coders was relatively fair.
RESULTS

Manipulation Check. Participants were asked to assign punishment to Kevin Johnson, who appeared to be a Black man in the stereotype activation condition and a White man in the control condition. Participants in the stereotype activation condition were not more likely to find Johnson guilty ($M = 4.93, SD = .83$) than those in the control condition ($M = 5.57, SD = 1.742$), $t(26) = 1.25, p = .22$. Similarly, participants in the stereotype activation condition were also not more likely to fine the defendant more money ($M = 887.64, SD = 422.47$) than those in the control condition ($M = 820.07, SD = 497.63$), $t(26) = -.39, p = .70$. Finally, Kevin Johnson’s assigned prison time did not significantly differ between participants in the stereotype activation condition ($M = 9.50, SD = 8.11$) and those in the control condition ($M = 5.14, SD = 5.78$), $t(23.49) = -1.64, p = .12$. This manipulation check was not as direct as potentially asking if participants were aware of the race of the target or the implications of race in the legal system—however, a more direct manipulation check could have possibly alerted participants to the true purpose and hypotheses of the study. Therefore, this check was only able to capture any unconscious racial biases the participants held against Black defendants in the legal system. However, this bias may not be as strong among Black Americans due to their awareness of discrimination towards Black people within the legal system (Hurwitz, Peffley, & Mondak, 2015). For these reasons, this measure may not have effectively captured the efficacy of the manipulation.
Self-Report Ratings. Independent samples \(t\)-tests were conducted to compare between the control and stereotype threat activation conditions, predicting participants’ self-ratings of nervousness, a hypothetical jury’s perception of their guilt, their likelihood of being in a similar situation, and bodily confidence. None of these differences were significant, \(p’s > .227\), suggesting no overall effect of stereotype threat activation on these self-report measures.

I next tested whether racial centrality might moderate the influence of stereotype threat condition on these measures. Linear regression analyses were conducted predicting participants’ self-ratings of guilt and anxiety from effects-coded stereotype threat condition (-1 = control, 1 = stereotype threat activation), mean-centered racial centrality, and their interaction. Results indicated no significant interactions except when predicting participants’ sense that juries would find them guilty. Predicting that dependent measure, no main effect of stereotype threat condition emerged, \(B=.29, t (24) = 1.64, p = .11\), nor was there a main effect of racial centrality, \(B=-.24, t (24) = -1.34, p = .20\). However, a significant interaction emerged predicting the degree to which participants thought jurors would find them guilty, \(B=.40, t (24) = 2.27, p = .03\) (See Figure 1). Among participants in the stereotype threat activation condition, racial centrality did not significantly impact perceptions that one appeared guilty to the jury, \(B=.17, t (24) = .60, p = .55\). Conversely, among participants in the control condition, greater racial identity centrality was negatively associated with perceptions of appearing guilty, \(B=-.64, t (24) = -2.86, p = .01\).

The similar self-ratings across condition and racial centrality, except for the interaction observed in predicting the likelihood a jury would perceive the participant as guilty, may reflect the concept that stereotype threat is a largely unconscious process and other research has demonstrated that participants that experienced stereotype threat did not report experiencing any
more anxiety compared to control groups (Bosson et al., 2004). Further explanation for this occurrence is given in the discussion section.

Figure 1. Self-Report: Jury Perceived Guilt

![Figure 1](image)

*Note.* Participants’ perceptions of whether a jury would find them guilty, as a function of stereotype threat condition and mean-centered racial centrality.

**Coder Ratings of Specific Behaviors.** Further independent sample *t*-tests were run to explore the effect of stereotype threat condition on coder ratings of specific behaviors associated with guilt and anxiety. Of these behaviors and evaluations, only perceptions of blinking behavior were significantly different between groups, such that the coders evaluating participants in the control condition perceived them to blink more often (M = 2.02, SD = .59) than participants in the stereotype threat activation condition (M = 1.55, SD = .33) t (20.29) = 2.57, *p* = .02. However, the coder ratings displayed a similar lack of significant stereotype threat condition effects as participants’ self-reports.

Again, I tested whether racial identity centrality might moderate stereotype threat activation effects on observer ratings. I ran a linear regression analysis predicting coder-rated perceived apprehension and lack of confidence from effects-coded stereotype threat condition (-1 = control, 1 = stereotype threat activation), mean-centered racial centrality, and their interaction.
Results indicated no main effect of stereotype threat condition, $B = -.12, t(24) = -.63, p = .54$, nor a main effect of racial centrality, $B = .26, t(24) = 1.33, p = .20$. However, a significant interaction emerged predicting coder-perceived apprehension and lack of confidence, $B = .42, t(24) = 2.26, p = .03$ (See Figure 2). Among participants in the stereotype threat activation condition, racial identity centrality predicted coder-rated apprehension, $B = .69, t(24) = 2.31, p = .03$, such that the more that participants themselves identified with their racial group, the more they were perceived by outside coders to appear apprehensive and unconfident. Conversely, among participants in the control condition, where stereotype threat was not activated, racial centrality did not predict coder-rated apprehension, $B = -.18, t(24) = -.73, p = .47$.

Figure 2. Coder Perception of Participant Apprehensiveness and Lack of Confidence

Note. Coders’ perceptions of participants apprehensiveness and lack of confidence, as a function of stereotype threat and mean-centered racial centrality

**Coder-ratings of Anxious Behaviors.** An additional regression analysis was conducted predicting coder-rated anxious behaviors, all averaged together, from effects-coded stereotype threat condition ($-1 = $ control, $1 = $ stereotype threat activation), mean-centered racial centrality, and their interaction. Results indicated no main effect of stereotype threat condition, $B = -.18, t(24) = -1.06, p = .30$. There was a main effect of racial centrality, $B = .51, t(24) = 2.92, p = .01$,
such that the more that participants identified with their racial group the more that coders perceived them to enact anxious behaviors. Further, a significant interaction emerged predicting coder-rated behaviors, $B=.42, t(24) = 2.47, p = .02$ (See Figure 3). Among participants in the stereotype threat activation condition, there was a significant positive effect of racial centrality, $B=.93, t(24) = 3.47, p = .002$, such that the more that participants themselves strongly identified with their racial group, the more they were perceived by outside coders to enact anxious behaviors. Conversely, among participants in the control condition, where stereotype threat was not activated, racial centrality had no effect on coder-rated behaviors, $B=.08, t(24) = .36, p = .72$.

Figure 3. Coder Perception of Anxious Behaviors

Note. Coders’ perceptions of participant’s displaying anxious behaviors, as a function of stereotype threat and mean-centered racial centrality

**Coder Ratings of Guilt.** A final linear regression analysis predicting coder-rated perceived guilt from effects-coded stereotype threat condition (-1 = control, 1 = stereotype threat activation), mean-centered racial centrality, and their interaction was conducted. Results indicated no main effect of stereotype threat condition, $B=-.07, t(24) = -.41, p = .69$, nor a main
effect of racial identity centrality, $B = -.03, t(24) = -.15, p = .88$. Again, a significant interaction emerged predicting perceived guilt, $B = .48, t(24) = 2.67, p = .01$ (See Figure 4). Among participant in the stereotype threat activation condition, there was a trending effect, $B = .47, t(24) = 1.63, p = .11$, such that the more that participants strongly identified with their racial group, the more they were perceived by outside coders to appear guilty. Conversely, among participants in the control condition, where stereotype threat was not activated, greater racial identity centrality was negatively associated with perceived guilt, $B = -.52, t(24) = -2.23, p = .04$.

Figure 4. Coder-rated Perceptions of Guilt

Note. Coders’ perceptions of participant guilt, as a function of stereotype threat and mean-centered racial centrality.
DISCUSSION

By bridging the literatures on racial identity, stereotype threat, nonverbal behaviors, and legal perceptions, this present study is the first, to my knowledge, to empirically test the way that racial centrality can moderate stereotype threat effect, and one of the first to directly investigate the relationship between racial centrality and stereotype threat in a simulated legal setting. Further, this is one of only a couple studies to investigate how stereotype threat can be observed through nonverbal behaviors.

The results revealed that Hypothesis 1 was not supported in that stereotype threat condition alone did not predict either self-reported or observer coded nonverbal manifestations of stereotype threat. Indeed, there was no significant main effect of stereotype threat activation condition across any of the dependent measures of perceived anxious behaviors, guilt, or any other supplemental coder-rated global impressions or participant’s self-report. Hypothesis 2 was partially supported in the data analyses. Only one significant main effect of racial centrality emerged across analyses. The data suggested a significant main effect of racial centrality on coder-rated behaviors associated with guilt and anxiety; the more that an individual identified with their racial group the more that objective coders perceived them to engage in behaviors that were associated with guilt and anxiety. Finally, Hypothesis 3 was fairly strongly supported, in the emergence of multiple significant interactions between stereotype threat condition and racial centrality predicting coder ratings of anxious behaviors, apprehensiveness, and guilt.
It is important to view these data alongside the ICC values for each variable to appropriately interpret the data. As stated previously, the ICC value for guilt was in the fair range, while the ICC value for apprehensiveness was in the excellent range. Thus, slight differences in patterns of interaction across these measures may reflect variations in the consistency with which these outcome measures were coded. The data also suggest that individuals that identified more with their racial group were more likely to be perceived by objective coders as engaging in behaviors associated with anxiety. More specifically, the interaction with stereotype threat suggests that those with higher racial centrality in the stereotype threat activation condition were more likely than those in the control condition to be perceived as engaging in anxiety associated behaviors, as predicted in Hypothesis 3. Most of the ICC values for each of the specific nonverbal behaviors were in the good to excellent range, therefore we can interpret the combined overall perception of anxious behaviors has having good to excellent interrater reliability.

The data suggested that no significant main effect of stereotype threat influenced nonverbal behaviors or apparent guilt perceptions alone, unless stereotype threat activation interacted with the participant’s racial centrality. This finding, and its discrepancy from the other obtained interactions, could be attributed to the experimental design of both the control and stereotype threat activation groups. This research study was advertised as investigating Black women’s legal perception, and during the study the participants were all shown a description of a drug crime. Past research has demonstrated that Black people are aware that drug crimes are often associated with their racial group (Sigelman & Tuch, 1997). Therefore, the stereotype of
Black criminality may have been subtly activated for the control group as well as the stereotype activation group, just by mentioning the drug crime.

Stereotype threat activation and racial centrality interacted to predict participant’s self-reports of the likelihood a jury would perceive them as guilty. More specifically, the data suggested that the more an individual identified with their racial group in the control condition, the more likely they were to perceive that a future jury would find them guilty. This might be best explained by the fact stereotype threat is often not a consciously experienced process. Therefore, asking people to consciously reflect on it, may lead to surprising patterns of results. For example, Bosson (2004) found that despite being rated by outside coders as displaying high frequencies of nonverbal, anxious behaviors, individuals in the stereotype threat condition did not self-report experiencing anxiety or apprehension.

According to Yip’s (2016) research on stereotype threat appraisal, racial centrality, and disidentification, when individuals are high in racial centrality, they are more aware of stereotypes and more likely to disidentify from their stereotyped identity group the more they encounter stereotypes about that group. Since there is the possibility that the stereotype of Black criminality was subtly activated in the control condition as well, we can assume that those individual’s high in racial centrality in the control condition were somewhat cognizant of the stereotype during the self-report, while still disidentifying with their racial group during the statement of defense to cope. This may be why the pattern of effects predicting self-report ratings of apparent guilt is different than the pattern predicting coder-rated behaviors and evaluations of guilt in the control condition.
The data displays a trending effect in higher racial centrality leading to higher coder ratings of perceived guilt for participants in the stereotype threat condition, however the main effect was not significant. This trending effect contextualized the key implications this study was designed around – individuals that are higher in racial centrality that experience stereotype threat may be more likely to be perceived as guilty. Even though the effect was not significant, this could be due to the fair, rather than excellent, interrater reliability for coder-rated guilt. The present study suggests that future research with more coders and participants could obtain a significant effect.

Overall, the data suggest that racial centrality significantly interacts with stereotype threat activation conditions to predict self-report ratings of perceived likelihood of a jury perceiving one as guilty, coder ratings of guilt and apprehensiveness, and coder ratings of overall anxious behaviors. These significant interactions displayed in the data suggest that racial centrality influences how Black individuals present themselves in a legal scenario. The present study furthers stereotype threat research as it relates to nonverbal behavior by demonstrating that stereotype threat and racial centrality interact in such a way that higher racial centrality in combination with stereotype threat activation leads to higher coder ratings of behaviors associated with anxiety. More specifically, this study suggests that those who identify more with their racial group are more likely to be perceived as engaging in anxious behavior in a legal scenario when the stereotype of Black criminality is activated. Considering this is one of the first studies to empirically demonstrate that the degree to which one identifies with their racial group can be shown to amplify the experience of stereotype threat, this data should encourage future scholars to investigate this relationship.
Limitations

Power. As previously stated, coder ratings and self-report ratings’ lack of significance for certain behaviors may be explained by the lack of statistical power due to the small sample size utilized in this study. According to a power analysis, to predict a small to medium interaction effect ($f^2 = .04$), within a multiple regression analysis containing 3 predictors (stereotype threat condition, racial centrality, and their interaction), alpha of .05, power of .80, the present study would need a sample of approximately 199 people. Thus, this study’s design does not have the adequate amount of power to detect a small-to-medium interaction effect. However, the consistency of the findings across our interactions hints at a potentially much larger and more reliable underlying population effect.

Domain Relevance. This research study may have been unable to obtain a main effect of stereotype threat due to the domain relevance to the participants. Past research on stereotype threat demonstrates that stereotype threat can only be captured when the domain that is linked to the stereotype associated with that minority group is important to the individual (Steele, Spencer, Aronson, 2002). The experimental design involves Black women interacting with the legal system through a hypothetical scenario. This current study assumed that proving innocence in a legal setting would already be an important domain to all the participants. However, it is possible that the need to prove innocence in a hypothetical scenario was not equally important to everyone. Therefore, domain relevance potentially contributed to the variability in our results. Nonetheless, the analysis was able to capture interactions between racial centrality and stereotype threat activation condition despite the variance in personal importance of proving
one’s innocence. Further research should ensure that participants included in the sample would consider proving their innocence to be of great personal importance.
IMPLICATIONS

The present study adds to the limited body of research regarding stereotype threat in the legal context, and it is also one of the few studies to investigate the relationship between stereotype threat and nonverbal behaviors. This is also the first to explore empirically the potential for racial centrality to serve as a moderator of stereotype threat. Even though the statistical power for this study was low and domain relevance may be low for some participants, the significant and trending effects from this study emphasize the need for further research. This study has further outlined how bias against Black people emerges in the criminal justice system by demonstrating that the Black women (more research would need to test these effects among Black men) that interact with the legal system are susceptible to being perceived as displaying behaviors associated with anxiety and subsequently guilt due to variables such as differing racial identification. Yet, individuals for whom racial identity is high may find themselves particularly vulnerable to engaging in behaviors that legal decision-makers might interpret in biased ways. This is important because racial identification is not related to culpability of any crime, and therefore completely unrelated to legal judgments. Future research with adequate sample size and power is needed in order to observe the disparities implied by this current research study. These results for this study and future research propositions have important implications for changes that need to be made in the current criminal justice system. In connecting perceptions of
guilt to nonverbal anxiety expressed by Black defendants, this work in no way intends to blame Black victims for the overly harsh sentences they receive or suggest that the systemic biases in punishment result from Black defendant’s own behavior. Instead, this work addressed how Black individuals, who exist in a legal system that is biased against them, may expect the worst outcome whenever they interact with the legal system, and further unjustly act in a manner that helps fulfill that outcome.
APPENDIX A

MMBI RACIAL CENTRALITY SUBSCALE
Centrality Scale

(1 - 7 Likert Scale; 1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree; R = Reverse Coded)

1. Overall, being Black has very little to do with how I feel about myself. (R)

2. In general, being Black is an important part of my self-image.

3. My destiny is tied to the destiny of other Black people.

4. Being Black is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am. (R)

5. I have a strong sense of belonging to Black people.

6. I have a strong attachment to other Black people. 7. Being Black is an important reflection of who I am. 8. Being Black is not a major factor in my social relationships. (R)
APPENDIX B

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE
STEREOTYPE THREAT ACTIVATION CONDITION
Illinois man arrested for drug possession

By Eddie Adams, USA Today
CHICAGO (USA) -- A 22-year old man has been arrested on drug possession and trafficking charges, after he was pulled over in the city of Rockford, IL.

Around 12:30 p.m. Wednesday, the police observed a “suspicious vehicle,” and pulled over the driver. Police identified the driver as Kevin Johnson from his driver’s licence.

A search of the vehicle revealed a backpack full of a controlled substance. The quantity of drugs and drug paraphernalia indicated that Johnson was attempting to traffic the controlled substance. Johnson was apprehended, placed into restraints, and informed of his rights before being transported to the county jail.

Johnson has been charged with one felony count for possession of controlled substance as well as an additional felony count for trafficking. He is due to appear in bond court next week.

CONTROL CONDITION
Illinois man arrested for drug possession

By Eddie Adams, USA Today
CHICAGO (USA) -- A 22-year old man has been arrested on drug possession and trafficking charges, after he was pulled over in the city of Rockford, IL.

Around 12:30 p.m. Wednesday, the police observed a “suspicious vehicle,” and pulled over the driver. Police identified the driver as Kevin Johnson from his driver’s licence.

A search of the vehicle revealed a backpack full of a controlled substance. The quantity of drugs and drug paraphernalia indicated that Johnson was attempting to traffic the controlled substance. Johnson was apprehended, placed into restraints, and informed of his rights before being transported to the county jail.

Johnson has been charged with one felony count for possession of controlled substance as well as an additional felony count for trafficking. He is due to appear in bond court next week.
APPENDIX C

SCENARIO VIGNETTE
Scenario Vignette

You have been FALSELY charged with theft at a Target near campus in Rogers Park.
Here are the details of the event:

A trainee employee at the local Target on Sheridan recalls seeing someone suspiciously wandering throughout the electronics aisle around 7:30PM on a Thursday night. That evening the Target employees completed an inventory check and noticed a Bose speaker and Apple Airpods missing. The store has surveillance cameras near the store entrance. The manager combed through the unclear CCTV footage from that day and the employee pointed out the individual they saw in the electronics aisle. The employee gave a description of the individual to the manager and the description they gave matched your description. Store security and other employees had been notified to call the police the next time you arrived in the store. A week later you entered the Target and were apprehended by the store security team. The police were called and you were arrested. Your credit card statement places you at the Target the day of the crime, and no one can account for where you were during the time of the crime. The items stolen amount up to $350, which classifies this theft as a felony. Felonies like this could be punishable by up to 2-5 years in prison.

Despite your denial of involvement, your case goes to trial and you are required to make a statement in your defense before you appear on trial.

Provided below is a list of details that you can use to defend yourself:

- Unclear CCTV footage of the entrance of the store
- You regularly shop at this Target
- What you bought at Target the day of the crime (ex: snacks, groceries, or school supplies)
- What you intended on purchasing the day you were arrested (ex: snacks, groceries, or school supplies)
- Unreliable eyewitness (trainee employee); the employee has not seen you shop there before
- Your roommate saw you come home after the crime and has not noticed any new electronics in the apartment

Using the information provided above, please write briefly in words a short statement of what you might say to defend yourself. We will then ask you to refer to these notes in making a videotaped statement to the jury. Mock-jurors will review your statement to evaluate your guilt.
APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Introduction: You are invited to take part in an online study that will be conducted using Zoom. The study is designed to learn more about perceptions about legal cases. It is being conducted by Kendall Redwood, for their master’s thesis and Provost Fellowship under the supervision of Yael Granot, PH.D., in the Loyola University Chicago Psychology department. You must be 18 years or older, Black, and woman-identifying to participate in this study. Please read this page carefully before deciding to proceed with the study. After you complete the study, a thorough written explanation of it will be provided.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to learn more about people’s perceptions of legal proceedings.

Procedures: If you agree to be in the study, you will be first be asked to complete a 5-minute recruitment survey with basic demographics and survey items, and information on how to schedule your main study session. In the main study, you will be asked to read some legal materials, as well as envision yourself in a hypothetical legal scenario where you are on trial for a crime you did not commit.

In this study, you will:
- Complete basic demographic questions.
- Read a news article and imagine hypothetical legal scenario.
- Record yourself filming a statement of defense with a researcher present.

Participation should take between 20-30 minutes.

Risks/Benefits: Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. For a portion of the study, you will be video-recorded for approximately 3-5 minutes, and this video will be shown to future participants, also Loyola students, as part of a follow-up study. If you permit, this recording may also be shown as part of research presentations, but your name and information will never be linked with the video. Your participation in this study involves risks similar to a person’s everyday use of the Internet. By participating you will help researchers to understand how defendants respond to and perceive legal proceedings.

Compensation: Upon completion of both parts of the study, you will then receive either a $30.00 mobile payment or an Amazon gift card worth $30 to compensate you for your participation. At the end of the video portion of the study, you will be asked to provide the researcher with either your Venmo or Cash App username and the last 4 digits of your phone number in order to receive compensation. If you chose to end participation before completing the study, you will not be compensated.

Confidentiality: A video recording of yourself will be collected for this study and shown
to future participants who are also Loyola students. Video recordings will not be associated with your name. All videos will be associated with a unique identification number (e.g. 101, 102, 103…). The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications. At the end of the study, the researchers will ask if you additionally permit your video to be potentially used in future research presentations. If you do not give your consent, your video will only be shown to other participants.

Study data will be stored only on secured, private computers belonging to the researchers, as well as on Qualtrics’ secure servers – see Qualtrics’ privacy policy. For purposes of open science, we may post aggregate anonymized raw data (not videos) to the open science framework (OSF) or similar portals.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. If you wish to exit the study, you may do so by closing the browser window. If you complete the survey and the video portion and then choose to withdraw from the study, you must tell the experimenter, in order for them to be able to erase your data. Your decision to participate or not will have no effect on your relationship with Loyola University Chicago.

**Contacts and Questions:** If there is anything about the study or taking part in it that is unclear or that you do not understand, and if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact the faculty sponsor, Dr. Yael Granot, by email at ygranot@luc.edu. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

**Statement of Consent:**

By clicking “I consent”, I affirm that I am at least 18 years of age, which is the minimum age to participate in this study. I also affirm that the purpose and nature of this research have been sufficiently explained that I have read this consent form, and I agree to participate in this research study.
APPENDIX E

DEBRIEFING
Debriefing Form

Thank you for participating in our study!

The purpose of this study was to determine if stereotype threat – in particular the fear of confirming a race-crime stereotype - can affect how culpable a criminal defendant appears. We wanted to test whether being exposed to information linking race and crime (via newspaper article), would activate “stereotype threat” and lead mock-defendants to engage in behaviors (e.g. fidgeting, averting eyes, shaking voice) that evince nervousness, and therefore lead defendants to look more guilty. We also wanted to find out if the degree to which one identifies with their racial group would make people more or less susceptible to effects of stereotype threat on non-verbal behavior. The news article and the legal scenario you read were not real and were created for the purpose of this research.

Because this study involved video-recording, we want to re-affirm your consent to use your video materials to show to future participants (“mock-jurors”) and potentially in research presentations. Your name will never be tied to your video. Please CHECK ONE:

_____ I GIVE my consent for you to use my video.
_____ I DO NOT give my consent for you to use my video in future research/presentations.

Lastly, we ask that you not discuss this experiment with other people that may also participate in this study, as that may bias individuals who may become participants in this study at a later time. If you have any questions regarding this particular research project or psychological research in general, please feel free to contact the people below.

Kendall Redwood  
kredwood@luc.edu

Yael Granot, Ph.D.  
ygranot@luc.edu

For information or questions regarding research ethics and guidelines, please contact:

Office of Research Services  
6525 N. Sheridan Road  
Granada Center, Suite 400  
(773) 508-2689  
ORS@luc.edu
APPENDIX F

INTRACLASS CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS
# Intraclass Correlation Coefficient Tables

## ICC Table for Specific Behaviors Associated with Guilt Across 4 Coders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>ICC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blinking</td>
<td>.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shoulder Movements</td>
<td>.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head Movements</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand Movements</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Averting Gaze</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauses in Speech</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuttering</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Fillers (e.g. “um”, “uh”, etc.)</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smiling</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lip Movements</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyebrow Movements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Touch</td>
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<td>Repositioning</td>
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<td>Talk Speed</td>
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<td>Posture</td>
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## ICC Table for Global Impressions Across 4 Coders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global Impressions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
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<td>Defensive</td>
<td>.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guilty</td>
<td>.52</td>
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REFERENCES


VITA

Kendall Redwood was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Throughout their life, due to their father’s occupation as a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Air Force, they have moved to several states and countries. Redwood attended Loyola University Chicago for their BS/MA 5-Year Applied Social Psychology Program that allowed them to obtain their Bachelor of Science in Psychology with a Minor of Psychology of Crime & Justice in 2021, while working towards their Masters of Applied Social Psychology.

While at Loyola, Redwood was a member of Loyola’s Black Cultural Center and worked as a Peer Advisor in Loyola’s First-and-Second Year Advising Program throughout their undergraduate experience. Currently, Redwood lives in Chicago, Illinois.