Title: Casting Criminals: Does Fear Generalize From the “Criminal Type Face” to All Other Faces Within a Race?

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Introduction:

Research shows that stereotypically Black facial features (e.g. broad nose, full lips) are associated with criminality and violent behavior more so than atypical Black features. These fears and stereotypical associations influence jury decisions, eyewitness identification, and voter opinions about the protection of individual rights. Research shows that fear of objects generalizes from prototypical to atypical members of a category (e.g. a fear of birds generalizes from crows to penguins). It follows that associated fear across category member would hold true for faces and criminality.

Purpose:

The study investigates whether priming individuals with “criminal type” stereotypically Black faces will heighten the association between criminality and all Black faces, leading to biased judgments for atypical Black faces.

Methods:

A 4x2 mixed factorial design study is proposed. Participants will be primed with a series of photos that reflect either a majority-stereotypical Black or White, or majority-atypical Black or White fictional prison population. Participants will be told that the experimenters are casting an educational video aimed at youth in hopes of reducing future gun crime. They will then view a series of faces representing unknown “actors,” and decide how believable the actor would be if cast in a particular role (Drug Dealer, Teacher, or Artist). After a distraction task, they will re-view the slide show of the prison population, then cast “actors” in the role of a dangerous criminal by deciding whether they consider the face to be dangerous or not. Demographic information, a social distance scale, and a fear of crime scale will be used to assess participant bias.

Discussion:

Results will have theoretical implications for whether the processes for categorization and the generalization of fear within categories operate in the same way for faces as for other stimuli. Other applications of this data may affect collection and evaluation of eyewitness testimony, police lineups, jury decisions, and criminal sentencing decisions.

Keywords: Stimulus Generalization, Face Perception, Racial and Ethnic Groups, Facial Features, Stereotyped Attitudes, Prejudice