Social Desirability and Racial Bias in Canadian Mock Jurors

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INTRODUCTION

- Canadian court data indicate higher conviction rates for Indigenous vs. White accused individuals[1].
- Historically, Canadian mock juror studies have also found a pro-White bias[2,3].
- More recent mock juror studies report no racial bias or an unexpected anti-White bias[4,5].
- It is unknown if this shift reflects a genuine reduction in racial bias, or if participants recognize the study's racial focus and adjust their responses to appear unbiased[6].

OBJECTIVE

Examine whether defendant race influences Canadian mock jurors' awareness of the study's purpose, and if this awareness influences verdicts.

- H1: Indigenous and Black (vs. White) defendant conditions will increase awareness of a racial study purpose.
- H2: Black (vs. Indigenous) defendant condition will increase awareness of a racial study purpose.
- H3: The relationship between racial awareness and verdict will vary by defendant race.

METHODS

Research Design

- 3-condition, between-subjects design
- IV: Defendant race (Indigenous, Black, White)
- DVs: Awareness of study purpose (open-ended) and verdict (guilty, not guilty)

Participants

- *N* = 494 (recruited via Prolific)
- Met Canadian jury eligibility criteria
- Age: M = 36 (range 18–75)
- Gender: Men (41%), Women (57%)

Materials

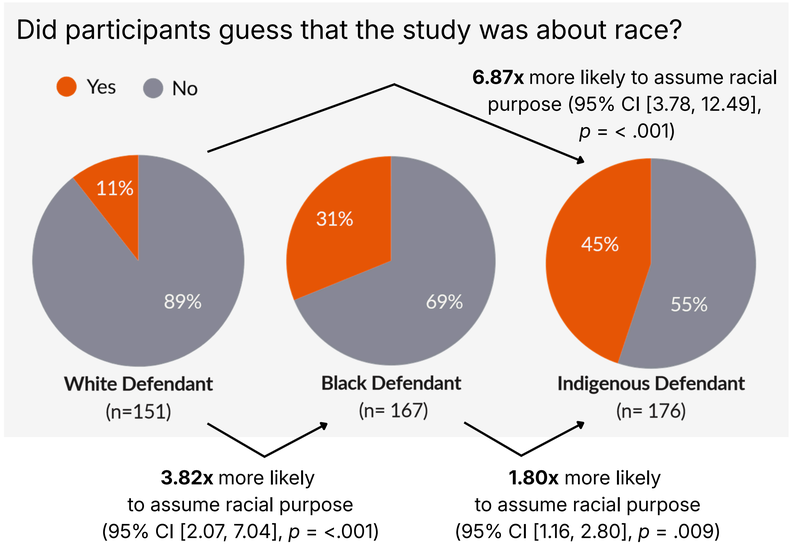
- Mock criminal record image (defendant race manipulated)
- 28-page trial transcript (assault case)
- Questionnaire (verdict, study purpose awareness)

Data Analysis

- Racial study purpose awareness coded dichotomously (IRR: 97.4% agreement; κ = .915, $p < .001$)
- Binary logistic regression used for primary analyses

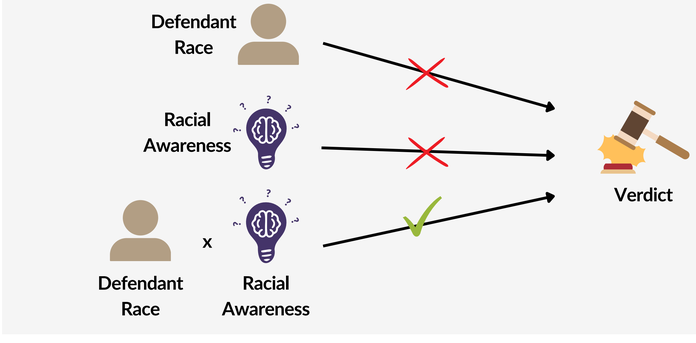
RESULTS

01 Defendant race influenced whether participants guessed that the study was about race



02 The interaction between defendant race and racial awareness signficantly impacted verdict

No significant main effects of defendant race or racial awareness on verdicts. There was a significant interaction between defendant race and racial awareness on verdicts.



The relationship between racial awareness and verdict differed significantly between participants who viewed a White defendant and those who viewed an Indigenous defendant (OR = 0.19, 95% CI [0.06, 0.65], $p = .008$).

03 Differences in the impact of racial awareness (vs. no racial awareness)

	White Defendant	Indigenous Defendant
Full participant sample	Those who guessed the study was about race were more likely to provide a guilty verdict (OR = 3.12, 95% CI [1.07, 9.12], $p = .038$)	Racial awareness was not significantly associated with verdict (OR = 0.59, 95% CI [0.32, 1.10], $p = .094$)
White-only participant subsample	Those who guessed the study was about race were more likely to provide a guilty verdict (OR = 9.17, 95% CI [1.810, 46.412], $p = .007$	Those who guessed the study was about race were less likely to provide a guilty verdict (OR = .427, 95% CI [.190, .960], $p = .039$)

Among participants who guessed the study was about race, those who viewed an Indigenous and Black defendant were less likely to provide a guilty verdict than those who viewed a White defendant (OR = 0.29, 95% CI [0.10, 0.90], $p = .032$; OR = 0.27, 95% CI [0.08, 0.86], $p = .027$, respectively). This pattern was also found among White participants only.

CONCLUSION

- The presence of a racialized defendant alone makes race salient to Canadian mock jurors, complicating efforts to measure racial bias.
- Canadian mock jurors appear particularly sensitive to racial considerations when evaluating Indigenous defendants.
- Awareness of racial study purpose is associated with harsher verdicts for White defendants (anti-White bias).
- Recent mock juror findings likely reflect socially desirable responding rather than a genuine reversal of racial bias.