

Official Title: Study of Life Challenges, Personality, and Emotional Experiences

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PRS Study Protocol

1. Study Overview

Paranoia is a dimensional construct characterized by beliefs of being threatened, persecuted, or targeted. Prior research indicates that Black Americans report higher levels of paranoia than White Americans, and that adverse experiences related to race are associated with higher paranoia endorsements. However, existing evidence is largely correlational. This study uses an experimental paradigm to test whether priming of adverse experiences related to race can increase paranoia among Black American adults in a controlled, randomized design.

2. Objectives and Hypotheses

Primary Objective (Experimental Effect):

To test whether experimentally priming blatant and subtle adverse experiences related to race via an audio-guided visual imagery task increases paranoia among Black American adults.

Primary Hypothesis:

Participants randomized to race-related adverse experience conditions will report higher post-task paranoia than participants in control conditions.

Secondary Objective (Affective Response):

To characterize changes in affect (valence and arousal) from pre- to post-task across conditions.

Follow-up Objective (Pre-specified Moderation Analyses):

To test whether individual differences—particularly self-reported past adverse experiences related to race, in addition to race and ethnicity—moderate the effect of experimental condition on post-task paranoia.

3. Study Design

This is a randomized online experiment conducted in a single session.

Arms/Conditions (4 total):

1. **Blatant adverse experience imagery**
2. **Subtle adverse experience imagery**
3. **Social exclusion imagery**
4. **Neutral imagery**

Participants are randomized to one condition only.

4. Study Population and Recruitment

Population: Black American adults recruited using online data collection.

Target Sample Size: 480

Inclusion Criteria:

- Adult (≥ 18)
- Self-identifies as Black/African American
- Resides in the United States
- Able to complete an online study in English
- Access to a device capable of audio playback

Exclusion Criteria (high-level):

- Failure of attention checks or data quality screens
- Inability to complete the audio task due to technical issues

5. Procedures

All procedures occur online within a single session administered via a survey platform. Participants are randomly assigned in equal proportions to one of the four conditions within the survey platform (Qualtrics).

5.1 Consent

Participants review an online consent form and provide electronic consent prior to initiating any study activities.

5.2 Baseline Measures

Participants complete baseline questionnaires assessing:

- Demographics
- Self-reported past adverse experiences related to race
- Racial/ethnic identity
- Additional psychosocial measures may be included to characterize the sample and support future analyses; these are not primary outcomes of the intervention.

5.3 Pre-task Affect

Participants complete a brief pre-task affect rating (valence and arousal).

5.4 Audio-Guided Visual Imagery Task (Intervention)

Participants complete an audio-guided visual imagery task designed to prime standardized social experiences. They are instructed to imagine themselves actively participating in the scene. The task includes:

1. **Pre-stimulus relaxation period**
2. **Instruction period**
3. **Imagery period** (audio-delivered scenario; ~30 seconds)
4. **Recovery period**

Participants complete brief practice trials using neutrally valenced scenes to familiarize them with the task format. Participants then complete the assigned condition scenario.

5.5 Post-task Measures (Primary, secondary, pre-specified outcome measures)

Immediately following the imagery task, participants complete:

- Post-task affect (valence and arousal)
- Primary outcome: paranoia (assessed immediately post-task)
- Manipulation checks / task engagement items (e.g., imagery vividness, attention to the scenario)
- Brief items assessing discomfort and technical issues

Participants then receive debriefing.

6. Data Quality and Exclusions

Pre-specified data quality procedures include:

- Attention checks and infrequency items
- Removal of participants with incomplete data for the primary endpoint
- Identification of technical failures (e.g., inability to play audio)

All exclusions will be documented and applied consistently prior to primary analyses.

7. Statistical Analysis Plan

Primary Analysis:

A one-way fixed-effects ANOVA will test condition differences in post-task paranoia.

Planned Contrasts (Pre-specified):

- (Blatant + Subtle) vs Neutral
- (Blatant + Subtle) vs Social Exclusion
- Social Exclusion vs Neutral
- Exploratory (as power allows): Blatant vs Subtle

Secondary Analysis:

Condition effects on affect change scores (pre- to post-task).

Follow-up (Moderation) Analyses:

Multiple linear regression models will test interactions between condition (contrast-coded) and:

- Self-reported past exposure to adverse experiences related to race
- Racial and ethnicity

Primary moderation tests will prioritize contrasts that show significant main effects; additional tests will be labeled exploratory.

8. Data Handling and Confidentiality

Data are collected via secure online survey tools and stored in de-identified form to the extent feasible. Prolific identifiers are separated from response data where possible. Access is restricted to authorized study personnel. Data retention and sharing will follow institutional and sponsor requirements.