

## ABSTRACT

**THESIS:** Antisocial Behavior: The Role of Gender and Racial Stereotypes in Sentencing

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Despite the enactment of sentencing guidelines to ensure equity in sentencing, racial and gender disparities persist in the criminal justice system. In general, racial/ethnic minorities are sentenced more harshly than Whites, and men are treated more harshly than women (Spohn, 1985, 2000, 2002; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2000, 2001, 2006), suggesting that confirming stereotypes predicts harsher punishments (cognitive consistency theory). However, women who commit crimes outside of traditional gender norms may be treated more harshly than men (Bishop & Frazier, 1992; Gamble et al., 2002; Johnson & Scheuble, 1991; Nagel & Johnson, 1994), suggesting that women face harsher punishments for violating gender stereotypes (backlash effect). Three-hundred and twenty-five adults (88.6% White, 72.0% female,  $M_{\text{age}} = 23.11$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 7.6$ ) completed an online survey indicating their perceptions of a hypothetical defendant on trial for an aggressive antisocial crime, their perceptions of the defendant's social groups, and their recommended likelihood and duration of incarceration. Results revealed greater support for the backlash effect than cognitive consistency theories for both race and gender; defendants who were perceived to deviate more negatively from their racial or gender stereotypes were more likely to receive harsher punishments. Defendant race also affected sentencing. Participants were more likely to recommend incarceration and longer

sentences for White than Black defendants. Defendant gender and the interaction between defendant race and gender were not related to the likelihood or duration of incarceration. These findings contribute to the stereotype content model literature regarding criminal defendants and suggest that these stereotypes may be affected by societal context. Theoretical implications and future research were discussed.