

# INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES RELATE TO JUVENILE OFFENDER STEREOTYPES

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Juvenile offenders convicted in adult criminal court receive harsher judgments than juveniles in juvenile court and young adults. This disparity could reflect preexisting stereotypes, such that criminal court actors could consider juvenile offenders waived to criminal court to be superpredators rather than wayward youth. This study assessed the relationship between individual differences and superpredator and wayward youth stereotype endorsement. In a sample of 252 MTurk workers, legal authoritarianism and a tendency to attribute crime to internal factors were positively associated with superpredator stereotype endorsement. Moreover, a tendency to attribute the causes of crime to internal factors mediated the relationships between social dominance orientation (SDO), social conservatism, and superpredator stereotype endorsement. Higher scores on SDO and legal authoritarianism were associated with decreased endorsement of the wayward youth stereotype, while a

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tendency to attribute the causes of crime to external factors was associated with a greater likelihood of wayward youth stereotype endorsement.

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The rise in juvenile offending in the 1980s led to the expansion of transfer policies nationwide, as the adult criminal justice system was viewed as a more appropriate court for serious, violent, or repeat juvenile offenders (Griffin, Addie, Adams, & Firestone, 2011). In contrast to the juvenile justice system where juveniles served relatively short sentences and were treated from a rehabilitative perspective, transfer into criminal courts allowed for longer sentences and less individualized justice (Feld, 1999). Nearly 4,000 juveniles were waived to criminal court by a judicial waiver in 2013, but the frequency of statutory and prosecutorial transfers is unclear (Sickmund, Sladky, & Kang, 2015). Of the few states that report detailed transfer statistics, the proportion of juveniles transferred judicially compared to other methods (e.g., prosecutor, statutory exclusion) varies greatly (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2016). For example, only 5.8% of transferred juveniles in Arizona were waived by a judge, while 71.4% of transferred juveniles in Michigan were waived by a judge. Additionally, approximately 137,000 juveniles who have aged out of juvenile court jurisdiction (e.g., the age of jurisdiction in New York is 15 years old) are processed annually in criminal courts (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). Juveniles in adult criminal courts frequently face harsher punishments than other defendants. For instance, juveniles convicted in criminal court receive longer sentences than youths retained in juvenile courts (Myers, 2003) and young adults prosecuted in criminal courts (Kurlychek & Johnson, 2004).

The discrepancy in criminal court outcomes could be a reflection of preexisting stereotypes associated with waived juveniles. For example, jurors might consider juvenile offenders waived to criminal court to be dangerous superpredators deserving of harsh punishments rather than wayward youth in need of treatment. Indeed, activation of a superpredator stereotype leads to greater likelihood of finding a juvenile offender guilty of a felony (Haegerich, Salerno, & Bottoms, 2013). Jurors' individual differences might also be related to a greater tendency to endorse stereotypes associated with juvenile offenders (Tang, Nunez, & Bourgeois, 2009). The punitive orientation of the criminal justice system, coupled with sentencing disparities for transferred juveniles, highlight the importance of understanding factors that might bias perceptions of juveniles in criminal court. The current study seeks to further our understanding of perceptions of juvenile offenders by examining which individual differences are associated with superpredator and wayward youth stereotype endorsements for juveniles transferred to criminal court.

### OUTCOMES OF WAIVED JUVENILES

Juvenile defendants waived to criminal court could be judged more harshly than juveniles adjudicated in juvenile court and their young adult counterparts. Tang and colleagues (2009) examined the impact of trial venue on mock juror decision making in cases involving a juvenile defendant tried in adult court, a juvenile adjudicated in juvenile court,

and an adult tried in criminal court. Participants who read about the juvenile defendant in criminal court rated the defendant's crime as most serious, were more likely to assume the defendant was a chronic offender, and were more likely to perceive the juvenile defendant was a danger to society. Additionally, mock jurors found transferred juvenile defendants guilty based upon lower standards of evidence than needed for adult defendants (Tang & Nunez, 2003).

There is some evidence that juveniles waived to criminal court receive harsher punishments than young adults or juveniles retained in juvenile court. Myers (2003) examined the outcomes of a cohort of male juvenile offenders arrested for a violent offense involving the use of a deadly weapon. Juveniles who were waived to criminal court were more likely to be convicted. When convicted, they were also more likely to be incarcerated and received longer sentences than juveniles retained in juvenile court. Examining Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing data from 1997 to 1999, Kurlychek and Johnson (2004) compared sentencing outcomes between waived juveniles and young adults in criminal court (i.e., 18 to 24 years old). They found that juvenile offenders received longer sentences, even after controlling for offense gravity, prior criminal history, and mandatory sentencing—the three greatest predictors of sentence severity overall. Specifically, juvenile offenders in criminal court were 10% more likely to be incarcerated and received a 29% increase in sentence length. These results have been supported by subsequent research (e.g., Steiner, 2009). Collectively, this research suggests that juveniles waived to criminal court are often perceived as more dangerous, blameworthy, and deserving of harsh sentences than young adults or juveniles in juvenile court.

## STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes of juvenile delinquents have shaped their treatment at several stages of juvenile system processing, including intake (Leiber & Johnson, 2008), sentencing (MacDonald & Chesney-Lind, 2001), and placement decisions (Miller, 1996). Most notably, Bridges and Steen's (1998) study of presentence reports of juvenile delinquents found that probation officers attributed African American delinquents' behaviors to internal attributions (e.g., a defiant personality), while Caucasian delinquents' behaviors were attributed to external attributions (e.g., the juvenile came from a broken home). These stereotypes then led to differential sentencing, as juveniles perceived as offending due to internal attributions were seen as more dangerous and deserving of harsh punishments. Thus, probation officers' perceptions of criminality influence judges' perceptions of delinquents, in turn shaping sentencing outcomes (see also Gaarder, Rodriguez, & Zatz, 2004).

Over the past twenty years, responses to delinquents have also been shaped by stereotypes of juveniles as superpredators and wayward youth, two stereotypes that closely mirror prior attribution research. Superpredators are juveniles who lack morals and are "ruthless and unconcerned about the consequences of their actions" (Haegerich, 2002, p. 14). Parallels can be made between superpredators and adult offenders, as superpredators are perceived as rational decision-makers and non-rehabilitative (Haegerich et al., 2013). In contrast, wayward youths are perceived as juveniles who are misguided, lack parental role

models, are failed by society, commit non-violent offenses, and are immature (Haegerich, 2002). Haegerich suggests that wayward youths are “inherently good, but strayed from the right path” (p. 14).

Public fears of violent delinquents rose following John DiIulio’s (1995) claim that “juvenile super-predators...are perfectly capable of committing the most heinous acts of violence for the most trivial reasons..., they fear neither the stigma of arrest nor the pain of imprisonment..., [and] they live by the meanest code of the meanest streets” (para. 29). In response, states increasingly eased transfer restrictions, resulting in a greater number of offenses (e.g., drug, property, public disorder) that qualified for transfer and reduced the transfer eligibility age (Griffin et al., 2011). Although the rate of juvenile arrests has decreased over the past 30 years (Sickmund & Puzanchera, 2014), juvenile waiver laws remain relatively unchanged (Linde, 2011). Thus, the system grew progressively punitive toward delinquents when delinquency rates were increasing, but remained punitive despite dramatic declines in offending.

Perceptions of juveniles as superpredators or wayward youth may also shape their sentencing outcomes in criminal courts. For example, Haegerich (2002) found that mock jurors were more likely to perceive juveniles who committed violent crimes as wayward youths than as superpredators. However, when mock jurors did endorse a superpredator stereotype, they were more likely to find juveniles guilty and recommend longer sentences. A subsequent trial experiment similarly suggested that endorsement of the superpredator stereotype led jurors to find the juvenile guilty (Haegerich et al., 2013).

One explanation as to why transferred juveniles could be perceived as either wayward youths or superpredators is jurors’ individual differences that shape their verdicts and perceptions. Devine and Caughlin (2014) proposed that jurors are not necessarily rational decision makers but rather that they develop and adopt narratives to explain the events leading up to the crime. Individual differences might shape the story development and “criminal” stereotype endorsement. Jurors also “learn” about crime and criminal behavior through the media, which commonly depicts criminals as young, poor, and violent males whose internal dispositions led them to engage in criminal behavior.

### INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Although jurors are advised by judges to consider only legal case factors in the decision making process, extra-legal factors, such as individual differences, can shape verdict and sentencing decisions. For example, in a meta-analysis including individual differences, Devine and Caughlin (2014) found that, among six juror characteristics (i.e., educational level, prior experience, gender, need for cognition, trust in the legal system, and legal authoritarianism), individual differences (i.e., trust in the legal system and legal authoritarianism) showed the greatest associations with conviction.

Much of the psycholegal individual differences research has focused more on verdict and sentencing outcomes and less on the relationship between individual differences

and criminal stereotypes. However, one study examined relationships between individual differences and endorsement of criminal stereotypes for juvenile offenders (i.e., superpredator or wayward youth) (Tang et al., 2009). Specifically, defense-biased participants were more likely to endorse a wayward youth stereotype than prosecution-biased participants. It could be that other individual differences might also be associated with superpredator and wayward youth stereotype endorsement for juveniles transferred to criminal court, including social dominance orientation, authoritarianism, social conservatism, and criminal attribution styles (i.e., external and internal).

Social dominance orientation (SDO) is a measure of an individual's preference for intergroup social hierarchy and inequality (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Individuals high in SDO are more likely to support ingroup dominance and outgroup oppression and support ideologies and policies that promote ingroup power and superiority. SDO has been linked with stereotyping and prejudice toward African Americans and individuals who are gay or lesbian (Whitley, 1999), as well as a punitive and prejudicial approach to criminal justice processing (Sidanius, Mitchell, Haley, & Navarrete, 2006). Considering SDO's relationship with punitiveness and stereotyping, social dominance orientation should be associated with a greater likelihood of superpredator stereotype endorsement.

Authoritarianism is a disposition characterized by submission to authority figures; an inclination to stereotype others; adherence to societal norms and values; and punitivity toward those who violate those norms (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Rattazzi, Bobbio, & Canova, 2007). Legal authoritarianism (LA) is an authoritarian predisposition in legal contexts. Individuals higher in LA are more likely to endorse the crime control model than the due process model (Skeem & Golding, 2001). Mock jurors higher in LA are more conviction prone than individuals lower in LA (Devine & Caughlin, 2014; Narby, Cutler, & Moran, 1993). As authoritarianism is associated with stereotyping (Adorno et al., 1950; Byrne & Kelley, 1981), outgroup hostility towards "easily identified groups" (Byrne & Kelley, 1981, p. 160 as cited in Narby et al., 1993), and a punitive approach towards crime, legal authoritarianism should be positively associated with superpredator stereotype endorsement for juveniles waived to criminal court. It should be noted that authoritarianism has been associated with, but differs from political conservatism (Stenner, 2009), which was also considered in this study.

As a political ideology, conservatism is characterized by ambiguity intolerance, risk-aversion, dogmatism, and a lack of resistance to social change (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Although social psychological research often measures political ideology with a single item, recent research has suggested that political ideology could be more appropriately assessed by distinguishing between social and economic conservatism, as individuals might be socially liberal but economically conservative or vice versa (Everett, 2013). Conservatism has been associated with a greater tendency to support punitive criminal sanctions, including life in prison and the death penalty for adults (Baumer, Messner, & Rosenfeld, 2003; Moon, Wright, Cullen, & Pealer, 2000) and juveniles (Moon et al., 2000). Thus, individuals higher in conservatism should be more likely to endorse the superpreda-

tor stereotype and individuals lower in conservatism should be more likely to endorse the wayward youth stereotype for juveniles waived to criminal court.

As mentioned previously, the superpredator and wayward youth stereotypes echo early attribution research (Haegerich, 2002). Attribution theory asserts that individuals' conceptualizations of the causes of crime could influence their attitudes toward criminal sanctioning (Hawkins, 1981). Generally speaking, individuals who believe that crime is caused by internal or dispositional attributes (e.g., personal choice) are more likely to endorse a punitive approach to crime than individuals who believe that crime is caused by external or situational factors (Carroll, Perkowitz, Lurigio, & Weaver, 1987). For example, individuals who attribute crime to internal causes are more likely to find deterrence as an important sentencing goal and less likely to endorse rehabilitation than individuals who attribute the causes of crime to situational factors (Templeton & Hartnagel, 2012). Additionally, individuals with an internal criminal attribution style are more likely to support capital punishment for juvenile offenders than individuals with an external attribution style (Cochran, Boots, & Heide, 2003). Thus, a tendency to attribute the causes of crime to internal factors should be positively associated with superpredator stereotype endorsement for juveniles waived to criminal court, while a tendency to attribute the causes of crime to external factors should be positively associated with wayward youth stereotype endorsement.

## OVERVIEW OF STUDY AND HYPOTHESES

Jury decision-making should be based upon factual case characteristics, but the reality is that a variety of factors shape decision-making practices, including jurors' own individual differences and stereotypes of defendants. Previous research has found that defense-biased individuals are more likely to endorse a wayward youth stereotype for juvenile offenders than prosecution-biased individuals (Tang et al., 2009). Prior research also suggests that jurors with preexisting stereotypes of juveniles as superpredators are more likely to find transferred juveniles guilty (Haegerich, 2002). However, it remains unclear how other juror individual differences shape perceptions of juveniles as superpredators and wayward youth. To further explore individual differences, the current study employed a convenience sample of participants who were surveyed about perceptions of transferred juveniles. We hypothesized that several scales of individual differences (i.e., social dominance orientation, legal authoritarianism, social conservatism, and internal criminal attribution style) would be positively associated with endorsement of the superpredator stereotype and negatively associated with endorsement of the wayward youth stereotype.

## METHOD

### *Participants and Procedure*

Participants were compensated \$3 to complete an online study through Amazon's MTurk website. This study was part of a larger online cross-sectional study that examined perceptions of juvenile defendants waived to criminal court. The questionnaire included

individual difference measures and three items assessing belief in the superpredator stereotype and three items assessing belief in the wayward youth stereotype.

Just over half of the 252 participants were male, with an average age of 37.5. Fifty-three percent of participants had never been married, 36% were married, and 10% were divorced. Participants were 75% White or European American; 7% Black or African American; and 7% Asian or Asian American. Thirty-two percent of participants reported having some college experience and 35% indicated that they had obtained a four-year degree.

### **Variables**

**Dependent variables.** Endorsement of the superpredator stereotype was measured by three items developed by the authors: “Generally speaking, how likely is it that juvenile offenders who have been transferred to criminal court are cold and calculating criminals,” “Generally speaking, how likely is it that juvenile offenders who have been transferred to criminal court are likely to become life-long criminals,” and “Generally speaking, how likely is it that juvenile offenders who have been transferred to criminal court deserve harsh punishment?” Endorsement of the wayward youth stereotype was assessed with three items: “Generally speaking, how likely is it that juvenile offenders who have been transferred to criminal court have been failed by their parents,” “Generally speaking, how likely is it that juvenile offenders who have been transferred to criminal court have been failed by their community,” and “Generally speaking, how likely is it that juvenile offenders who have been transferred to criminal court come from disadvantaged backgrounds?” Participants rated each item from 1 (*extremely unlikely*) to 6 (*extremely likely*). All six items were randomly ordered.

Prior to performing preliminary analyses, a factor analysis (principal axis factoring) using all six items and promax rotation was conducted, which resulted in a two-factor solution. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .70 and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant [ $\chi^2(15) = 551.83, p < .001$ ], which indicated that the sample was adequate for factor analysis. Two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted. The first factor (*eigenvalue* = 2.42) explained 40% of the variance and the second factor (*eigenvalue* = 2.02) explained 34% of the variance. As the determinant of the correlation matrix (.104) was greater than .00001, multicollinearity did not appear to be an issue. Factor loadings indicated that all three superpredator items loaded on one factor and all three wayward youth items loaded on a second factor. Participants’ scores for the three superpredator items were combined and averaged, as were the three items pertaining to the wayward youth stereotype. The merged superpredator stereotype scale had good reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .82$ ), as did the wayward youth stereotype scale (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .80$ ).

**Independent variables.** The independent variables of social dominance orientation, legal authoritarianism, social conservatism, and criminal attributions (i.e., internal and situational) measured individual differences. For each scale, participants’ scores were computed by averaging their responses.

**Social dominance orientation.** The social dominance orientation scale (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001) is a 16-item Likert-type scale with response categories ranging from 1

(*very negative*) to 7 (*very positive*). Sample items from this scale included, “Some people are just inferior to others” and “All groups should be given an equal chance in life” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .96$ ).

**Legal authoritarianism.** The revised legal attitudes questionnaire (RLAQ) (Kravitz, Cutler, & Brock, 1993) includes 23 Likert-type items with response categories ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Items included, “There is just about no such thing as an honest cop” and “Accused persons should be required to take lie-detector tests” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .85$ ).

**Social conservatism.** A 7-item Likert-type social conservatism subscale (Everett, 2013)[1] measured the extent to which participants felt positive or negative towards social issues, such as military and national security and traditional marriage, by sliding a scale from 0 (*extremely negative*) to 100 (*extremely positive*) with 50 as the midpoint (*neither positive nor negative*). In accordance with prior research (i.e., Everett, 2013), participants’ mean scores were divided by ten. Initially, the inter-item reliability was slightly below acceptable (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .67$ ). As a result, one item referencing abortion was removed. The revised inter-item reliability for the remaining 6 items was high (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Internal criminal attribution style.** A 4-item Likert-type “individual causation” subscale, (Carroll et al., 1987) with response categories ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), measured the extent to which individuals believe that crime results from internal factors. Internal attributions included, “Criminals are people who don’t care about rights of others or their responsibility to society” and “Most criminals deliberately choose to prey on society” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .82$ ).

**External criminal attribution style.** A 4-item Likert-type “economic causation” subscale (Carroll et al., 1987) with response categories ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) assessed the extent to which individuals believe that crime is caused by external factors. External attributions included, “People who commit crimes are usually forced to by the situations they find themselves in” and “Many crimes are more the result of flaws in society than any basic criminality in the offender” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .84$ ).

## RESULTS

Two multiple hierarchical linear regressions were conducted to determine whether LA, SDO, social conservatism, and criminal attribution style (IVs) were associated with endorsement of the superpredator and the wayward youth stereotypes (DVs)[2]. Independent variables were each entered in a separate block to determine their unique contribution to each model. A preliminary visual inspection of the data indicated that no cases were missing data for the variables of interest. The SDO variable was substantially positively skewed, whereby the skewness  $z$  score ( $z = 10.12, p < .05$ ) exceeded a cut off value of 1.96. Log and inverse transformations were attempted. The inverse transformation significantly improved the distribution (skewness:  $z = 1.49, p < .05$ , kurtosis:  $z = 0.08, p < .05$ ). The



data were also examined for univariate outliers by computing and assessing standardized scores for values exceeding +/- 3 standard deviations. No univariate outliers were detected. Although primary analyses were conducted with the transformed data, untransformed means are reported (Table 1).

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Independent and Dependent Variables

|                               | M     | SD     | Range  |
|-------------------------------|-------|--------|--------|
| Legal Authoritarianism (RLAQ) | 2.723 | .592   | 1 - 7  |
| SDO                           | 2.091 | .1.229 | 1 - 5  |
| Social Conservatism           | 5.723 | 1.722  | 1 - 10 |
| Attribute Crime-Social        | 5.102 | .929   | 1 - 7  |
| Attribute Crime-Individual    | 4.003 | 1.329  | 1 - 7  |
| Superpredator                 | 3.881 | 1.128  | 1 - 6  |
| Wayward Youth                 | 4.542 | .995   | 1 - 6  |

Note: n = 252

### ***Superpredator Stereotype Endorsement***

There were two sweeps of multivariate outliers conducted (no outliers detected after the second sweep) and three cases were removed from subsequent analyses. An examination of the standardized residual histogram and normality plots indicated that residuals were approximately normally distributed. A review of the correlation matrix (Table 2), VIF values (all above 0.01), and Tolerance values (all below 5) indicated that multicollinearity was not an issue. Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson test indicated no issues with auto correlation.

Overall the final model was significant,  $F(5, 243) = 24.48, p < .001, R^2 = .335$ . Scores on SDO, social conservatism, and a tendency to attribute crime to external factors were not significantly associated with endorsement of the superpredator stereotype for juveniles transferred to criminal court (Table 3). However, scores on RLAQ (assessing legal authoritarianism) were significantly associated with endorsement of the superpredator stereotype. For every one unit increase on RLAQ, superpredator stereotype endorsement increased .179,  $p = .006$ . Additionally, scores on the tendency to attribute crime to individual factors were also significantly associated with superpredator stereotype endorsement. For every 1 unit increase in a tendency to attribute crime to the individual, superpredator stereotype endorsement increased .421,  $p < .001$ .

Table 2: Zero Order Correlations between Independent and Dependent Variables

|                            | Legal<br>Authoritarianism | SDO    | Social<br>Conservatism | Attribute<br>Crime-<br>Social | Attribute<br>Crime-<br>Individual |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|--------|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Legal Authoritarianism     |                           |        |                        |                               |                                   |
| SDO                        | .274*                     |        |                        |                               |                                   |
| Social Conservatism        | .458*                     | .231*  |                        |                               |                                   |
| Attribute Crime-Social     | .068                      | -.124  | .244*                  |                               |                                   |
| Attribute Crime-Individual | .503*                     | .419*  | .402*                  | .264*                         |                                   |
| Superpredator              | .378*                     | .255   | .278*                  | .149*                         | .526*                             |
| Wayward Youth              | -.246*                    | -.287* | -.114                  | .438*                         | -.031                             |

Note: \*  $p < .001$

Table 3: Individual Differences Associated with Superpredator and Wayward Youth Stereotypes

|                            | Superpredator |             |         | Wayward Youth |             |         |
|----------------------------|---------------|-------------|---------|---------------|-------------|---------|
|                            | <i>B</i>      | <i>SE B</i> | $\beta$ | <i>B</i>      | <i>SE B</i> | $\beta$ |
| Legal Authoritarianism     | .332*         | .120        | .179*   | -.452**       | .105        | -.281** |
| SDO                        | .024          | .053        | .027    | -.115         | .047        | -.148*  |
| Social Conservatism        | .023          | .039        | .036    | -.026         | .035        | -.046   |
| Attribute Crime-Social     | .065          | .069        | .055    | .466**        | .060        | .451**  |
| Attribute Crime-Individual | .349**        | .057        | .421**  | .037          | .050        | .052    |
| R <sup>2</sup>             |               | .335**      |         |               | .284**      |         |
| F                          |               | 23.27       |         |               | 24.48       |         |

Note: Superpredator  $n = 249$ ; Wayward Youth  $n = 247$ . \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$

We noticed that the relationships between social conservatism and superpredator stereotype endorsement and social dominance orientation and superpredator stereotype endorsement became non-significant once internal criminal attribution was added to the

model. This led us to consider a tendency to attribute crime to internal factors as a possible mediator between these independent variables and superpredator stereotype endorsement.

Linear regression analysis results indicated that social conservatism was significantly associated with a tendency to attribute the causes of crime to individual factors,  $b = .296$ ,  $SE = .045$ ,  $p < .001$ , and that a tendency to attribute the causes of crime to individual factors was significantly associated with superpredator stereotype endorsement,  $b = .410$ ,  $SE = .050$ ,  $p < .001$ . Social conservatism was no longer significantly associated with superpredator stereotype endorsement after controlling for a tendency to attribute the causes of crime to internal factors,  $b = .060$ ,  $SE = .038$ ,  $p = .118$ . The indirect effect was tested using a bootstrap estimation with 5,000 samples. The results indicated that the indirect coefficient was significant,  $b = .121$ ,  $SE = .026$ , [95 CI = .0769, .1776].

Next, we examined whether the relationship between SDO and superpredator stereotype endorsement might also be mediated by a tendency to attribute the causes of crime to internal factors. The results indicated that SDO was significantly associated with a tendency to attribute the causes of crime to individual factors,  $b = .423$ ,  $SE = .063$ ,  $p < .001$ , and that a tendency to attribute the causes of crime to individual factors was significantly associated with superpredator stereotype endorsement,  $b = .427$ ,  $SE = .050$ ,  $p < .001$ . SDO was no longer significantly associated with superpredator stereotype endorsement after controlling for a tendency to attribute the causes of crime to internal factors,  $b = .053$ ,  $SE = .0536$ ,  $p = .326$ . The indirect effect was tested using a bootstrap estimation with 5,000 samples and results indicated that the indirect coefficient was significant,  $b = .181$ ,  $SE = .033$ , [95 CI = .1246, .2541].

### **Wayward Youth**

Prior to conducting our second hierarchical multiple linear regression, we conducted two additional sweeps of outliers and no outliers were detected after the second sweep. Five cases were removed from further analyses. Examination of standardized residual histograms and normality plots indicated that residuals were approximately normally distributed. Once again, multicollinearity and auto correlation were not issues.

Overall, the final model was significant,  $F(5, 241) = 23.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .326$ . Scores on social conservatism and a tendency to attribute crime to individual factors were not significantly associated with endorsement of the wayward youth stereotype for juveniles transferred to criminal court [3] (Table 3). However, scores on RLAQ were significantly associated with the wayward youth stereotype. That is, for every 1 unit increase in legal authoritarianism (RLAQ), wayward youth stereotype endorsement decreased .281,  $p < .001$ . Additionally, scores on the tendency to attribute crime to external factors were also significantly associated with wayward youth endorsement. More specifically, for every one-unit increase in a tendency to attribute crime to external factors, wayward youth stereotype endorsement increased .451,  $p < .001$ . Finally, scores on SDO were significantly associated with endorsement of the wayward youth stereotype for waived juveniles such that for every 1 unit increase in SDO, wayward youth stereotype endorsement decreased .148,  $p = .015$ .

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results partially supported our hypotheses that there are individual differences associated with superpredator and wayward youth stereotype endorsement for juvenile defendants in criminal court. More specifically, legal authoritarianism was positively and significantly associated with superpredator stereotype endorsement. It is conceivable that this preexisting stereotype negatively biases some jurors in criminal trials with waived juvenile defendants because individuals who endorse a superpredator stereotype are more likely to find a defendant guilty and more likely to support harsher punishment (Haegerich et al., 2013). Legal authoritarianism was also significantly and inversely associated with wayward youth stereotype endorsement for juveniles transferred to criminal court.

A tendency to attribute the causes of crime to internal factors was also positively associated with superpredator stereotype endorsement but not associated with wayward youth stereotype endorsement. Instead, a tendency to attribute the causes of crime to external factors was positively and significantly associated with wayward youth stereotype endorsement. It is reasonable to assume that individuals who have a tendency to attribute the causes of crime to external factors would be more likely to endorse a wayward youth stereotype. This comports with previous research which found that perceptions of criminality are associated with perceptions of juvenile offenders (Bridges & Steen, 1998).

SDO was negatively associated with endorsement of the wayward youth stereotype but not associated with support for the superpredator stereotype. Further probing revealed that SDO had an indirect relationship with superpredator stereotype endorsement through a tendency to attribute the causes of crime to internal factors. That is, individuals who support social hierarchy appear to endorse the superpredator stereotype by attributing the causes of crime to individual factors.

Similarly, the results did not support our hypothesis that social conservatism would be directly associated with support for either the superpredator stereotype or the wayward youth stereotype. We expected that social conservatism would be positively associated with the superpredator stereotype and negatively associated with the wayward youth stereotype because prior research suggested that political conservatism is associated with a more punitive approach to juvenile crime (Moon et al., 2000). However, it appears that socially conservative individuals also endorse the superpredator stereotype through a tendency to attribute crime to internal factors. Collectively, our findings suggest that individual differences beyond prosecution- or defense-bias (Tang et al., 2009) relate to preexisting beliefs about juveniles transferred to adult court.

### *Implications*

The first implication from our findings is that participants scoring higher on legal authoritarianism or internal criminal attributions are significantly more likely to perceive a waived juvenile as a superpredator. Considering these findings, defense attorneys could be better able to prepare for a trial involving a juvenile transferred to criminal court by developing a defense strategy that attenuates the superpredator stereotype. For example, defense

attorneys can thematically paint a picture that highlights situational factors that could have played a role in the defendant's appearance in court and/or take special care to refute any evidence that could suggest that the alleged crime was committed due to personal choices. McErlean, Stolle, and Smith (2010) found that jurors would be more likely to support whichever side of a case that had a better theme, and this strategy fits with the conceptualization of the story model (Devine & Caughlin, 2014). Furthermore, if the defense attorney is successful, jurors might then be more likely to consider a waived juvenile defendant as a wayward youth rather than a superpredator.

The second implication is that individuals might have preexisting biases about juveniles who are transferred to criminal court. As a consequence, this could harm a juvenile defendant's chances at receiving a fair and impartial jury and verdict. It might be that stereotypes about juveniles waived to criminal court explain why these juveniles are perceived as more dangerous (e.g., Tang et al., 2009) and receive harsher punishments than juveniles retained in juvenile court or young adults in criminal court (Kurlychek & Johnson, 2004; Myers, 2003).

These findings are concerning when considering the types of juveniles who are actually transferred to criminal courts each year. In 2013, half of the juveniles waived to criminal court through a judicial waiver were charged with a non-violent property, public order, or drug offense (Sickmund et al., 2015). This statistic does not include the vast number of juveniles transferred through statutory exclusions. Ten states allow for statutory exclusions for certain drug and property offenses, in some cases for juveniles as young as 14 years old (Griffin et al., 2011). Furthermore, several states set the age of juvenile court jurisdiction under the age of 18, resulting in thousands of 16 and 17 year olds being processed annually in criminal courts (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). Finally, transferred juveniles are oftentimes first-time offenders (Wolfson, 2005) who are similar to delinquents processed in juvenile courts in a variety of domains (e.g., victimization, maturity level) (Beyer, 2006). Thus, jurors could mentally assign a "transfer penalty" to juveniles in criminal court based upon the belief that they are violent, repeat, and dangerous offenders. In reality, a high percentage of juveniles in criminal courts are non-violent, first-time offenders who are eligible for punitive sentencing.

Additionally, our findings reveal important considerations for social psychological research. Specifically, our results suggest that individual differences, such as SDO and social conservatism, are mediated by internal criminal attributions in relation to preexisting ideas about juvenile offenders. Future research should consider attribution styles or other potential mediators when considering individual difference research, especially in legal contexts.

### ***Limitations of study***

There are several noteworthy limitations to the current study. As mentioned previously, this study was part of a larger study that examined perceptions of juvenile defendants waived to criminal court. In consideration of participant fatigue, our study used three items to assess the superpredator stereotype and three items to assess the wayward youth

stereotype. These items were designed by researchers to capture the root causes of crime (i.e., nature versus nurture) and beliefs about criminal punishment, which are associated with superpredator and wayward youth stereotypes. However, prior research examining these stereotypes has utilized more extensive measures (e.g., Haegerich et al., 2013). As such, although our dependent variables showed high internal consistency, our measures might not wholly encapsulate each construct. Equally noteworthy, our study asked participants about juveniles waived to adult court in general. That is, no case-specific facts were provided. The extent to which individual differences relate to stereotypes about waived juveniles might be moderated by factors specific to each case.

Furthermore, because this is a sample of mock jurors and not an actual trial, we cannot be certain that participants would respond similarly in a real trial. As a result, verisimilitude (Bornstein, 1999) cannot be guaranteed. This is a common limitation within mock jury research. Ultimately it is possible that jurors in a real-life courtroom, with consequences for real courtroom cases, might come to different conclusions when provided more time and under more formidable circumstances. Related to this limitation, it should be acknowledged that preexisting biases might be attenuated or amplified during jury deliberation. For example, Haegerich et al. (2013) found that individuals who endorsed a superpredator stereotype were even more likely to find a defendant accused of robbery guilty post-deliberation than pre-deliberation but less likely to find a defendant accused of murder guilty post-deliberation. More specifically, the significant relationship between superpredator stereotype endorsement and perception of guilt disappeared after deliberation.

A final limitation associated with the current study revolves around concern over generalizability. The respondents in this study were a non-probability convenience sample of participants who each completed an MTurk survey online. It is possible that a probability sample of respondents or a different survey format might have yielded different results. While we were unable to ensure the representativeness of our sample to the general population, prior research indicates that MTurk samples are suitable for social psychological research. For example, MTurk samples are representative of the general population in several psychological domains (e.g., depression and anxiety) (Shapiro, Chandler, & Mueller, 2013) and MTurk participants more accurately answer attention check questions than student samples (Hauser & Schwarz, 2016).

### ***Conclusion***

Findings from this study indicate that there are individual differences that might increase the likelihood that juveniles transferred to criminal court are perceived as either cold and calculating, life-long criminals who deserve harsh punishments or as disadvantaged youths who have been failed by parents and communities. These stereotypical beliefs could influence jurors' verdicts and juvenile defendants' sentencing outcomes. As such, it is important that our criminal justice system take necessary steps to ensure a fair and impartial jury for all defendants, especially juveniles who are waived from a system that focuses on rehabilitation and into one that is focused on punishment.

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### ENDNOTES

1. We initially ran our analyses with the economic conservatism subscale (fiscal responsibility) in addition to the social conservatism subscale; however, this variable did not contribute to the model and was not discussed or analyzed further.
2. We initially ran our preliminary analyses with respondent age, sex, and race-ethnicity as control variables but only age appeared to be significantly associated with either dependent variable so sex and race-ethnicity were removed from analyses. Age was significantly associated with the superpredator dependent variable but this relationship became non-significant when social conservatism was introduced into the model. Hence, no control variables are discussed or analyzed.
3. Regression analysis did not indicate that social conservatism had an indirect effect on wayward youth stereotype endorsement through a tendency to attribute crime to situational factors. Therefore, this analysis is not discussed.