

THE EFFECTS OF COLORBLIND RACIAL SOCIALIZATION ON
PERCEPTIONS OF BLACK CRIMINALITY

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A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science
in Applied Criminology

Northern Arizona University

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

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Current literature on racial socialization frequently examines its role in promoting positive intercultural relations and minimizing racial stereotypes. More recently, the effects of different forms of racial socialization, such as colorblind and color-conscious racial socialization, have also been examined. However, no existing literature on racial socialization considers how different racial socialization practices can influence the development of racial stereotypes, such as the perception of black criminality. This thesis thus explores this relationship. Using a quantitative research design, this thesis randomly selected a sample of undergraduate students at Northern Arizona University's Flagstaff Mountain Campus to complete an online survey. Questions pertained to the frequency of parental racial socialization behaviors, individual colorblind racial attitudes, and estimations of black criminality, and it was hypothesized that individuals who experienced more instances of colorblind racial socialization were more likely to have greater perceptions of black criminality. Results generally supported this hypothesis, suggesting that colorblind racial socialization operates indirectly through colorblind racial attitudes to affect perceptions of black criminality. The importance of these results are explored with regard to prior literature and theory, and policy implications, including the need for increased awareness of racial biases, are considered.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Michael Costelloe, for all of his feedback, guidance, and support. From teaching three of my graduate courses to chairing my capstone project, he has been there for me the entirety of my graduate career. His criminological knowledge, statistical understanding, and overall perspective supported me through each chapter draft and revision. This project would not be what it is if not for him. I am forever grateful for his insight, patience, and mentorship during both this project and my graduate education.

Next, I would like to thank Dr. Christine Arazan and Dr. Rebecca Maniglia. Dr. Christine Arazan put in a significant amount of work to ensure that obtaining my sample of respondents and administering my survey went smoothly. She also provided wonderful methodological insight, and I would not have been able to execute my study without her guidance and support. On the other hand, Dr. Rebecca Maniglia planned, coordinated, and taught my independent study course in the fall to ensure my theoretical foundations for this project were accurate and complete. I am forever appreciative for the knowledge she shared with me, and I am grateful to have worked with each member of my committee to produce this project.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my family, partner, friends, and cohort for their support during graduate school and beyond. It truly takes a village, and I could not have done it without any of you. Thank you for supporting me, always.

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This thesis is dedicated to the notion by Michelle Alexander that:
“Seeing race is not the problem. Refusing to care for the
people we see is the problem.”

Chapter 1: Introduction

Racism is said to decrease as awareness of racial biases and explicit conversations about racism increase (Perry, Skinner & Abaied, 2019; Hughes et al., 2006), thus providing a basis for programs and practices to challenge racial stereotypes and potentially reduce negative attitudes towards different racial and ethnic groups. Racial socialization, or transmitting the role of race and culture in society to children and young adults (Byrd & Ahn, 2010), is one such practice. Research indicates that racial socialization is often used to promote positive intercultural relations and convey the salience of racial categories (Priest et al., 2014; Ruck, Hughes, & Niwa, 2021). However, the process of racial socialization is shown to vary across racial and ethnic groups (Loyd & Gaither, 2018). Racially and ethnically minoritized groups, for instance, are exposed to more explicit conversations about race and racism, while white people tend to experience more colorblind racial socialization (Loyd & Gaither, 2018)—a socialization process whereby race is not openly discussed.

Although some studies have examined the relationship between different racial socialization practices and racial attitudes (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012; Perry et al., 2019), to my knowledge, no studies have examined how colorblind racial socialization influences perceptions of black criminality. Because a lack of effective racial socialization may result in the adoption of social stereotypes pertaining to race and ethnicity (Loyd & Gaither, 2018)—and because the social stereotype of black criminality perpetuates existing structures of inequality by maintaining a racial hierarchy (Alexander, 2012)—it is important to determine if colorblind racial socialization results in an acceptance of social stereotypes regarding black criminality. This thesis aims to investigate this relationship.

Specifically, this thesis intends to investigate how colorblind racial socialization may influence perceptions of black criminality in order to identify the potential origin of racial biases and propose solutions for the minimization of biased attitudes and behaviors. Given this aim, this study uses a quantitative survey design. Utilizing a simple random sampling technique, 4,000 students at Northern Arizona University's (NAU) Flagstaff Mountain Campus were randomly selected to take a survey during the spring semester of 2023. The survey asked questions pertaining to the frequency of parental racial socialization behaviors, individual colorblind racial attitudes, and estimations of black criminality, and it was hypothesized that individuals who reported experiencing more instances of colorblind racial socialization were more likely to have greater perceptions of black criminality.

The feasibility of this hypothesis is supported by the fact that colorblind racial socialization is shown to reduce awareness of racial biases (Perry et al., 2019), diminish the accuracy of social judgments pertaining to other racial and ethnic groups (Apfelbaum et al., 2010), and prevent individuals from detecting the continued existence of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). The feasibility of this study, however, is supported by psychological research that suggests social development during childhood and young adulthood has a lasting effect on how persons perceive and engage with the world (Quintana et al., 2006). In the context of racial socialization, this suggests that the way an individual is racially socialized can impact how persons perceive and engage with the concept of race and ethnicity in their everyday lives. Understanding individual experiences with racial socialization is thus a potential pathway to remedying racial inequalities and misconceptions about other racial and ethnic groups (Killen, Rutland, & Yip, 2016).

It is for this reason that this thesis seeks to fill the gap in existing literature on racial socialization and perceived black criminality. A significant body of research recognizes that “views about crime, including perceptions about its prevalence, who engages in it, and who is likely to be victimized, derive in no small part from views about blacks” (Mears et al., 2013, p. 279). Numerous theoretical works also examine how blackness came to be associated with criminality (Alexander, 2012; Welch, 2007). However, the lack of literature examining the persistence of social stereotypes—particularly those regarding black criminality—in relation to socialization practices and the reproduction of racially biased attitudes and behaviors establishes a need for more contemporary research. This thesis thus represents an important contribution to the literature, with the results potentially promoting awareness for the way the concepts of race and racism are, or are not, discussed with children and young adults.

Chapter 2: Racial Socialization

Prior to examining the relationship between colorblind racial socialization and perceptions of black criminality, it is important to understand racial socialization. This chapter thus provides an overview of racial socialization, paying specific attention to the goal of racial socialization, its various components, how it is transmitted, and how it is practiced. Two forms of racial socialization, colorblind and color-conscious, are also discussed, along with their associated implications.

Overview of Racial Socialization

Defined conceptually, socialization is a “social, cognitive, and developmental process through which individuals transmit, negotiate, and acquire beliefs, values, social norms, and behaviors to engage appropriately with society” (Loyd & Gaither, 2018, p 55). Racial socialization serves the same underlying purpose. However, as opposed to transmitting broad beliefs, values, social norms, and behaviors, racial socialization specifically transmits the role of race and culture in society (Byrd & Ahn, 2020). In other words, racial socialization makes children aware of the significance of race and ethnicity (Aldana & Byrd, 2015) and teaches children how to appropriately engage the topics of race and ethnicity in their relationships and experiences (Loyd & Gaither, 2018). Although race and ethnicity are separate concepts, agents of socialization, such as parental figures and peer groups, often fail to distinguish between race and ethnicity within the socialization process (Loyd & Gaither, 2018). Racial socialization is, therefore, often compounded as racial-ethnic socialization in the literature. For the purpose of this study, racial socialization is synonymous with racial-ethnic socialization.

In terms of how racial socialization is operationalized in the literature, Hughes et al. (2006) identifies and defines four themes prominent in racial socialization practices: cultural

socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and cultural pluralism. Cultural socialization involves teaching children about their racial or ethnic history. Preparation for bias promotes awareness of discrimination, while a promotion of mistrust emphasizes the need to exercise caution in interracial interactions. The last theme, egalitarianism, focuses on shared commonalities between racial and ethnic groups as opposed to highlighting differences among groups (Hughes et al., 2006).

The aforementioned themes are often used to study the racial-ethnic socialization of minoritized groups; however, it is important to acknowledge that racial socialization takes place for all youth regardless of race (Aldana & Byrd, 2015). Because race and ethnicity are salient social categories that influence access to valued resources, opportunities, money, and power (Ruck et al., 2021), racial socialization occurs for all youth as a way to promote positive intercultural relations and potentially reduce racism in diverse societies (Priest et al., 2014). Although this underlying purpose may be similar across racial groups, it is important to note that the way in which racial socialization occurs, as well as the degree to which racial socialization occurs, may vary across groups. For people of color, racial socialization tends to emphasize cultural pride (Zucker & Patterson, 2018), as well as prepare children to function safely and effectively in a predominantly white society (Loyd & Gaither, 2018; Karras et al., 2021). In other words, color-conscious racial socialization among people of color is a survival mechanism, as it teaches them to navigate life experiences in a society where racism and discrimination are prominent. Racial socialization for white people, however, is different—and undoubtedly not a survival mechanism—given that white people do not typically have to navigate racial issues from the same position as minoritized racial groups (Loyd & Gaither, 2018).

The historical status of white people as superior to minoritized racial groups (i.e. white supremacy) makes racial socialization a different experience for white youth and families (Karras et al., 2021). According to Maniglia (2018), white people are less likely to think about themselves in terms of race, as whiteness is often deemed both invisible and normative. Fostering awareness of discrimination and potential racism thus occurs more frequently among minoritized racial groups (Simon, 2021). In fact, white people receive less racial socialization messages overall than do other racial and ethnic groups (Priest et al., 2014), and white parents tend to avoid conversations about race and racism with their children altogether (Hughes et al., 2006). However, because racial socialization can occur within and outside the family, white people may still be exposed to conversations about race and ethnicity.

Agents of Racial Socialization

Similar to how racial socialization can differ across racial and ethnic groups, it can also differ depending on the context in which it occurs. Much of the literature conceptualizes racial socialization as taking place within the family, or at a micro level, as the family is the primary agent of socialization (Castelli, Zogmaister, & Tomelleri, 2009). However, as the child ages, racial socialization may also be experienced through other agents such as the school or peer groups (Aldana & Byrd, 2015).

With regard to school, Perry et al. (2019) mentions that greater school diversity may promote racial socialization outside of the family. These findings are consistent with intergroup contact theory, which suggests that intergroup contact can reduce prejudice among members of different racial and ethnic groups (Mancini et al., 2015). Because several studies have identified a relationship between positive racial attitudes and higher intergroup contact (Pahlke et al., 2012; Nelson, Adams, & Salter, 2012), it can be inferred that diverse school settings and peer groups

are important agents of racial socialization. Should children experience less racial socialization, or more negative forms, such as colorblind racial socialization, it is more likely that definitions of race will be constructed based on the broader social context, or at a macro level (Zucker & Patterson, 2018; Karras et al., 2021).

Types of Racial Socialization

Although racial socialization occurs in various settings and across all racial and ethnic groups, different groups may experience different types of racial socialization. For example, given the normativity of whiteness (Maniglia, 2018) and the fact that white people generally do not have to navigate race in the same way as minoritized racial groups (Loyd & Gaither, 2018), white people are unlikely to be racially socialized in a way that makes them conscious of race or of the social consequences associated with racial categories. This type of racial socialization, referred to as colorblind racial socialization, is based in an ideology of colorblindness and does not explicitly discuss race for fear that it will lead to future racism (Neville et al., 2000). Color-conscious racial socialization, on the other hand, explicitly discusses race and relays to children the salience of race in society (Zucker & Patterson, 2018).

Colorblind Racial Socialization

Given that colorblind racial socialization relies on an ideology of colorblindness, it is important to define colorblindness and identify its shortcomings, particularly with regard to minimizing racism. According to Pahlke et al., (2012), colorblindness is a “dominant ideological approach to issues of racial diversity” (p. 1164). Given the history of overt racism in the United States (i.e. slavery, Jim Crow), colorblindness was popularized because it intends to promote racial equality (Apfelbaum et al., 2010). Proponents of colorblindness believe that calling attention to race is a precursor for racism and that, for racial equality to exist, racial labeling and

categorization should be eliminated (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Despite this intent, research indicates that colorblindness is rooted in an “epistemology of ignorance” (Mueller, 2017, p. 220) and thus actually magnifies racial biases (Apfelbaum et al., 2010), disguises white privilege, (Mueller, 2017), and reproduces existing structures of inequality (Karras et al., 2021).

Considering the implications associated with a colorblind worldview, it can be inferred that similar consequences will arise should children experience colorblind racial socialization. Typically, studies show that white parents tend to be uncomfortable discussing race with their children and may use a colorblind approach to racial socialization to avoid talking about race (Perry et al., 2019; Williams & Banerjee, 2021). White parents are further shown to believe that not discussing race will reduce racial bias in their children (Karras et al., 2021). Despite these beliefs, research has demonstrated that colorblind racial socialization does the opposite of what is intended.

Rather than eliminate racial biases, colorblind racial socialization reduces *awareness* of racial biases (Perry et al., 2019). Racial biases thus still exist, but the social implications associated with such biases (i.e.. blaming underlying causes of criminality among minoritized groups on defective personalities, choices, and subcultural values as opposed to structural inequities) are ignored. Colorblind racial socialization also may cause children to be unaware of the existence of racism and of their own racial privilege (Pahlke et al., 2012; Strain, 2018). This is specifically the case for white children who experience colorblind racial socialization, as an ignorance of race preserves racism (Simon, 2021) and reinforces existing structures of inequality that benefit white people at the expense of minoritized racial and ethnic groups (Karras et al., 2021). Colorblindness as both an ideology and a socialization practice thus benefits white people by promoting ignorance (Mueller, 2017).

Although colorblind racial socialization is mostly studied and seen within white families, it is possible for other racial and ethnic groups to experience colorblind racial socialization. However, given the salience of race and ethnicity in obtaining access to resources, opportunities, and power (Ruck et al., 2021), it is *unlikely* for minoritized racial and ethnic groups to experience colorblind racial socialization. Instead, it is more likely that minoritized racial and ethnic groups will experience color-conscious socialization, in which children are taught about racism and the importance of race in daily life.

Color-Conscious Racial Socialization

Unlike colorblind racial socialization, color-conscious racial socialization teaches children about race and racism. Additionally, color-conscious racial socialization addresses privilege and discusses the ways in which individual, systemic, and structural racism inhibit the promotion of equality among different racial and ethnic groups (Zucker & Patterson, 2018). Such a practice, when used with minoritized racial and ethnic groups, also functions to prepare children for potential experiences with racism and biases in a predominantly white society (Karras et al., 2021). Again, it serves as a survival mechanism. When used with white children, color-conscious racial socialization is not a mechanism of survival; however, it is predictive of reduced social biases and improved attitudes towards other racial and ethnic groups (Perry et al., 2019). Discussing race is thus critically important, particularly for white families.

According to Perry et al. (2019), racial awareness and a willingness to recognize existing racial biases is one of the strongest predictors of intergroup empathy. Hughes et al. (2006) further states that knowing about race is critical in improving race relations. Without explicit instructions or socialization practices, children and young adults can construct their own explanations for the racial differences they observe, and such explanations may be biased in

favor of their own racial or ethnic group (Zucker & Patterson, 2018). For example, in the context of this study, white people may attribute the disproportionate incarceration of black persons to greater criminality, defective personalities, poor choices, and/or deviant subcultural values as opposed to structural inequities rooted in white supremacy. It is, therefore, important to consider the ways in which children and young adults are racially socialized so as to identify the potential root of racial biases, particularly with regard to perceptions of black criminality.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Foundations

In order to assess racial socialization practices in relation to perceptions of black criminality, a deeper analysis of theory is required. This chapter, therefore, seeks to establish a theoretical foundation for the hypothesized relationship between colorblind racial socialization and perceptions of black criminality. Specifically, this chapter discusses the origins of colorblindness in association with the formation of race relations in the United States, how orbit theory (Baldwin, 1992) and the concept of the New Jim Crow (Alexander, 2012) can explain the persistence of racial hierarchies, and how blackness has come to be associated with criminality. Racial threat theory (Blalock, 1967) and the sociocultural theory of cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1973) are also referenced, as such theories inform the expectation that a greater acceptance of colorblind ideologies will increase perceptions of black criminality and potentially lead to the reproduction of racially biased attitudes and behaviors.

Origin of Colorblindness

Similar to the way colorblind racial socialization reduces awareness of racial biases, scholars suggest that, as opposed to reducing racism, an ideology of colorblindness magnifies racial biases and reproduces existing structures of inequality (Apfelbaum et al., 2010; Karras et al. 2021). More specifically, Mueller (2017) and Bonilla-Silva (2017) argue that colorblindness exists to foster ignorance and maintain a structure of white supremacy, or the belief that white people are a superior race and should dominate society (Saad, 2020). With this argument in mind, the origin of colorblindness is, therefore, inseparable from the formation of race relations—specifically white supremacy and black inferiority—in the United States. With regard to race relations, some scholars argue that such relations were constructed via processes like European expansion and colonialism (Ransby, 2018; Smith, 2012), while other scholars suggest

that race was cemented due to the exploitation of slave labor required for capital accumulation (Mullings, 2015; Issar, 2021).

European Colonization

Black scholars indicate that racial categories are the product of a particular cultural moment and setting (Coates, 2015; Ignatiev, 1996). In other words, race is not a trait. It is a relation and ideology originating from the European attempts to make sense of and dominate non-white others (Morning, 2011). As European colonial expansion reached the Americas, the need to justify the treatment of persons brought to the United States from Africa, as well as Native Americans, informally created racial categories (Cox, 1948). All Europeans were homogenized as white, while all people of African descent were placed into the category of black (Ohio State University [OSU], 2021). This is the folk idea of race, as it is based on observable physical features.

Eventually, this folk idea of race evolved and became a scientific/biological idea during the Enlightenment (OSU, 2021). Europeans were believed to be biologically superior, and race science—tests and experiments purporting to show that humankind is separated into separate and unequal races (Horsman, 1981)—was used to further justify the inhumane treatment of persons of African descent. Race science also ensured that the biological superiority of white Europeans was not questioned and that the black-white racial binary, in which persons with European ancestry had full citizenship and persons with African ancestry were enslaved, remained intact (Morning, 2011). This black-white binary is still the crux of the American race concept today, indicating that the United States has been steeped in racial ideology from the beginning (Morning, 2011; Ransby, 2018).

Economic Need

The economic perspective on race also suggests that the United States has long benefited from this specific form of racial ideology. However, rather than developing as solely the result of European colonization, some scholars suggest that the concept of race was further cemented because of the development of capitalism and the need for economic labor (Goldstein, 2022; Virdee, 2018). Termed racial capitalism by Cedric Robinson (2019), this perspective suggests that race was central in the formation of labor hierarchies in capitalist economies. Race—and the creation of a class of persons that were exclusively viewed as a labor force—thus, was developed to justify the use of slavery for economic exploitation.

According to Turner (2021) and Kendi and Blain (2021), slavery is the defining experience between black and white people. Establishing race and justifying the use of slavery out of economic necessity eliminated any moral understanding of black persons as human (Turner, 2021) and established an economic interest in black lives. From that point forward, black persons were brought to the United States with a predetermined understanding of how they fit into the growing society (Kendi & Blain, 2021). Both this perspective and that of European colonization imply that race is not real and is, instead, a social construct. However, the reason this construct and the social relations that surround it persist today is due to a need for white people to keep black people in their place (Baldwin, 1992).

Concept of the Orbit

Because of the origin of black-white relations in both colonization and capitalism, there is a longstanding need for white people to keep black people in their place. Throughout history, white people were defined in direct opposition to black people (Baldwin & Peck, 2017). The white identity is thus deeply intertwined with the black identity, and black people need to remain

who white people made them to be in order for white people to understand their own identity (Baldwin & Peck, 2017). It is for this reason that the longstanding need for white people to keep black people in their place, or orbit, exists. Derived from the work of James Baldwin (1992), the concept of the orbit aligns with the perspective of other scholars (Ignatiev, 1996; Coates, 2015) and suggests that race is a social construct based in a particular moment and setting. That is, the meaning of race and race relations change overtime, but the overarching social structure that is designed to disadvantage black people and advantage white people remains intact (OSU, 2021).

In her book, *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander (2012) emphasizes this point, claiming that caste-like systems of racial discrimination never disappear but, instead, evolve with time to maintain a racial hierarchy. In line with the concept of the orbit, these caste-like systems function to keep black people in their place, even as society appears to make progress towards racial equality. Using slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration to support her claims, Alexander (2012) argues that the criminal justice system is a contemporary form of racial control, only it is more covert than the prior systems of slavery and Jim Crow laws. The reason for this covertness, Alexander (2012) argues, is due to the principle of colorblindness.

Era of Colorblindness

After the civil rights movement, systems of overt racial discrimination, like Jim Crow, were no longer deemed socially acceptable (Alexander, 2012). As *The New Jim Crow* and the concept of the orbit imply, however, this does not mean that racism or race ceased to be important. In fact, according to Bonilla-Silva (2015), “racial inequality [today] is still produced in a systemic way (i.e. there is still a racial structure in America), but the dominant practices that produce it are no longer overt, seem almost invisible, and are seemingly nonracial” (p. 1363). Specifically, racial inequality on a structural, systemic, and individual level still persists due to

mechanisms of covert discrimination, such as mass incarceration and an ideology of colorblindness. Mass incarceration, for example, utilizes the word criminal as a euphemism for race, disproportionately labeling black people as criminal and allowing society to engage in all the practices of racial discrimination that were supposedly left behind (Alexander, 2012). Similarly, colorblindness encourages practices of racial discrimination by refusing to acknowledge racial differences and, consequently, the social meaning attached to race.

By ignoring racial differences under the guise of eliminating racism and promoting racial equality, a colorblind perspective also inevitably ignores the differential opportunities afforded to white people as compared to other racial groups. Therefore, despite claiming to be progressive, colorblindness actually functions to protect whiteness while rationalizing and reproducing the deeply rooted system of white supremacy in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Karras et al., 2021). This not only makes the ideology of colorblindness another way of keeping black people in their orbit, but it also makes colorblindness a form of racism.

According to Kendi (2019) in his novel, *How to be an Antiracist*, any practice that causes discrimination, regardless of intent, is racist. Thus, because colorblindness allows white people to ignore the realities of racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Mueller, 2017), it is racist. Considering that colorblindness is a “dominant ideological approach to issues of racial diversity” (Pahlke, et al., 2012, p. 1164), the claim that it is racist raises implications regarding racial socialization practices and the persistence of racist ideologies in the twenty-first century, particularly with regard to perceptions of black criminality.

Perceptions of Criminality

Within the literature, criminality refers to any behavior that is forbidden by criminal law (Mears et al., 2013). Perceptions of criminality thus refer to how crime and forbidden behaviors

are understood and interpreted. Interpretations of criminality, however, are largely contingent on the context in which they are situated. Although crime is an inevitable part of all societies (Durkheim, 1897), the behaviors that are defined as criminal frequently change. Perceptions of criminality are thus subject to influence by a myriad of actors, but it is particularly important to recognize that definitions of criminality often reflect those behaviors that threaten or are contrary to the interests of the dominant social group (Quinney, 2001). Because this perspective suggests that crime is socially constructed to reflect and protect dominant interests, perceptions and interpretations of criminality must be analyzed in their respective social context if they are to be wholly understood.

In the modern social context where race is covertly discussed through codes words, such as welfare and crime, perceptions of criminality are largely influenced by perceptions of race. Minoritized individuals are the targets of social control mechanisms that subject them to greater scrutiny from social structures, institutions, and individual actors (Chacón, 2015). This discriminatory treatment is then justified by their purportedly disproportionate involvement in criminal or other maladaptive behaviors. The cycle of criminality, therefore, persists, and minoritized individuals experience a variety of social consequences that reinforce their inferior position within the social hierarchy (Heitzeg, 2015). The extent to which hierarchal positions of power and privilege are maintained, however, is contingent upon white hegemony, black vulnerability, and the racialization of crime.

White Hegemony

The extent to which perceptions of criminality are related to race requires consideration of how race is continuously created and destroyed based on social needs. Omi and Winant (2014) propose a theory of racial formation in which race is defined as a socially constructed identity

that varies in content and importance depending on social, economic and political forces. Omi and Winant (2014), therefore, suggest—in line with many black scholars (Ignatiev, 1996; Coates, 2015; Baldwin, 1992)—that racial identities are continuously created and destroyed. The malleability of racial identities, however, is prone to manipulation by the dominant social group whose interests permeate law and social structures (Young, 2009). White hegemony—dominance in economic, political, and social arenas—and white supremacy were prevalent in the founding of the sovereign United States (Pemberton, 2015); therefore, racial identities are often subject to manipulation by white individuals in order to maintain social and political privilege.

This idea that white power and privilege must be maintained and enforced through the continual manipulation of racial differences suggests that racial identities change depending on the social context. Given that overt racism and control of racial groups fell out of favor following the civil rights era, race was reconstructed to be associated with criminality. This process, deemed the “racialization of crime,” eliminated overt discussions about race by making crime a code word for race instead (Chiricos, Welch, & Gertz, 2004). However, even though the racialization of crime seems to be a relatively recent phenomenon, or a new form of racial caste in the context of *The New Jim Crow* (Alexander, 2012) and James Baldwin’s (1992) orbit, this phenomenon actually has its roots in slavery and the produced vulnerability of the black body.

Black Vulnerability

According to Coates (2015), the portrayal of black as criminal would not be possible without the produced vulnerability of black bodies. Considering the origins of race, particularly with regard to the development of capitalism and the rise of slavery, black people were valued only for their bodies (Turner, 2021). Black people were thus made vulnerable and viewed as

inhuman in the founding of the United States, and this vulnerability and perception of black bodies still persists in the white consciousness today (Coates, 2015; Turner, 2021).

In addition to persisting in the white consciousness, the vulnerability and inhumanity of the black body is maintained through covert mechanisms of social control (Currie, 2020; Coates, 2015). One such mechanism of control is residential segregation. With the rise of Jim Crow, fear of African Americans began to spread beyond the southern region of the United States (Rothstein, 2017). This fear was fueled by the assumption that black people were perverse and inferior, and this assumption ultimately justified the expulsion of black people from white communities across the nation (Rothstein, 2017). Black neighborhoods were degraded into slums, and zoning laws, which govern how property can and cannot be used in certain areas, provided a legal channel through which to enforce residential segregation (Rothstein, 2017). This process of residential segregation alone did not create the ghetto, but rather strengthened the boundaries that were already in place after World War I (Logan et al., 2015). However, in strengthening these racial boundaries, residential segregation ultimately helps eliminate legitimate opportunities, reinforce the violence against black bodies by black bodies, and maintain black vulnerability (Coates, 2015).

Another way that black vulnerability is maintained and reinforced is through the association of blackness with criminality. Like residential segregation, the conflation of blackness with criminality, as well as the disproportionate incarceration of black bodies, is allowed because it is not overtly racialized (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). However, these mechanisms of control are also allowed because of the loophole that exists in the Thirteenth Amendment (Alexander, 2012; Goodwin, 2019). The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution states: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime

whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction” (U.S. Const. amend. XIII). The Constitution thus legitimizes a modern form of enslavement and involuntary servitude as a form of criminal punishment (Goodwin, 2019). At first glance, this exception for criminal punishment does not appear racialized, as persons convicted of a crime can be of any race or ethnicity. However, by associating blackness with criminality, this exception becomes the tool by which black people are kept vulnerable and disposable, even as society appears to make progress towards racial equality (Alexander, 2012).

In addition to keeping black people vulnerable and disposable, associating blackness with criminality intends to show that black people *earned* their disposability by committing crimes (Alexander, 2012). This claim, much like the Thirteenth Amendment, does not appear racialized given that disposability is seemingly inherent in the concept of prison (i.e. locking people away from the rest of society). Nevertheless, it is racialized because there are undeniable parallels between what it means to be black and what it means to be criminal. In his book, *Nobody: Casualties of America’s War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond*, Marc Lamont Hill (2017) argues that to be black is to be vulnerable, disposable, and subject to state violence. To be criminal can also mean to be vulnerable, disposable, and subject to state violence. Since overt racism and control over black bodies is no longer socially acceptable, conflating blackness with criminality is a covert way to allow people in power, particularly white people, to approach black people and harm them in a way that is justified (Hill, 2017; Degruy, 2017). The concept of black criminality thus has nothing to do with black behavior and, instead, has everything to do with the production of black vulnerability.

The Racialization of Crime

Albeit a way of producing black vulnerability, it is important to recognize how the stereotype of black as criminal, or the racialization of crime, came to fruition. According to some scholars, the stereotype of black as criminal first arose to control and discipline slaves (DeLombard, 2019). Slave patrols, for instance, in which groups of people were paid to “patrol specific areas and prevent crimes and insurrection by slaves against the white community” (Turner, Giacomassi, & Vandiver, 2006, p. 186), assumed that black people posed a criminal threat. While this criminal stereotype may very well be the result of controlling and disciplining slaves, the means by which crime is racialized today is due to punitive crime policies—such as the War on Drugs—that actively target minoritized individuals and communities. As Michelle Alexander (2012) suggests, the War and Drugs and the subsequent mass incarceration of minoritized groups is the Jim Crow of the modern era, and the overrepresentation of people of color in the criminal justice system is a manifestation of white hegemony rather than a legitimate response to crime. The criminal justice system is thus a means of enforcing white power and privilege through the control of minoritized groups (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008).

Although the control of minoritized groups previously occurred through overt racism, racial discrimination has since become subtler. Rather than overtly discriminating based on racial characteristics, the law now embodies a colorblind racial ideology that maintains previously established color lines through mechanisms of control like residential segregation (Rothstein, 2017) and the disproportionate policing, surveillance, and prosecution of black persons (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008). These mechanisms of control, particularly the disproportionate contact of black persons with the criminal justice system, not only allow racial differences to persist, but also reinforce the socially constructed relationship between race and crime. Enforcing such a relationship benefits the dominant social group by diverting attention away from shared class

interests and allowing the dominant group to retain social and political power, thus suggesting that the racialization of crime is a means of maintaining white power and privilege at the expense of minoritized groups (Stewart et al., 2018).

Racial Threat Theory

Though this project is largely informed by the aforementioned literature, it is also informed by two theories that help explain why this study anticipates a relationship between colorblind racial socialization and perceptions of black criminality. Firstly, addressing racial threat theory, prior literature has used racial threat theory to explain a variety of relationships including punitive attitudes towards immigrants (Costelloe, Stenger, & Arazan, 2021), interracial and intraracial crimes (D'Alessio, Stolzenberg, & Eitle, 2002), and juvenile court decisions (Leiber, Donnelly, & Lu, 2021). This study uses racial threat theory to inform the expectation that a greater acceptance of colorblind ideologies will increase perceptions of black criminality.

Originally proposed by Blalock (1967), racial threat theory posits that an increase in the population of minoritized groups is perceived as an economic, political, and social threat to the dominant social group. As a result, the dominant group imposes more mechanisms of social control, including various forms of violence, to contain the perceived threat to their power and privilege. In many ways, racial threat theory aligns with the concept of James Baldwin's (1992) orbit, as the persistence of the orbit, in which black people are continuously pushed back into their designated place in the social hierarchy, has to do with the desire for white people to maintain economic, political, and social power. Any threat of liberation posed by minoritized populations is thus met with various forms of social control or orbits (i.e. slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration).

As indicated by Alexander (2012) and Feldmeyer and Ulmer (2011), mechanisms of social control have evolved with the social context. Given that overt racial discrimination lost favor following the civil rights era, the law now adopts a colorblind ideology intended to promote equal treatment across all racial groups. However, because white hegemony is inherent in the founding of the sovereign United States (Pemberton, 2015) and the persons making laws are still largely white individuals with wealth and power, the purportedly objective elements of law still reflect white ideologies. Minoritized racial groups, therefore, are judged according to white standards, which allows racial differences to persist (Maniglia, 2018).

Because colorblindness in the law implies all racial groups are treated equally, it is plausible to assume that the consequences associated with this perceived, yet mistaken, sense of legal objectivity—such as the over-policing of communities of color and the disproportionate incarceration of minoritized racial groups—are rational crime control policies. In other words, people who adopt colorblind ideologies may be more likely to accept that black people are criminal because they are overrepresented in the criminal justice system or that black people are disproportionately arrested and incarcerated because they are more criminal. The beliefs are mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, the fact that a social emphasis on colorblindness promotes discussions of crime as a euphemism for race (Chiricos et al., 2004) may also explain the relationship between colorblind ideologies and perceptions of criminality. With both of these perspectives, however, the extent to which this overrepresentation of minoritized individuals in the criminal justice system is the result of power dynamics and social control is ignored, thus allowing the consequences of racial differences to persist.

Although a social emphasis on colorblindness may yield greater perceptions of black criminality, it is important to also acknowledge the extent to which the elements of racial threat

theory relate to racial socialization practices. Perry et al. (2019) suggests that a lack of effective socialization in familial and social contexts (i.e. the school and peer groups) may encourage individuals to adopt oversimplified explanations of criminal behavior—such as the idea that minoritized racial groups are inherently more criminal or that minoritized racial groups are more likely to choose crime over work—for perceived racial differences. Society thus becomes the means in which individuals are racially socialized. The extent to which this relationship holds is particularly critical to evaluate with regard to NAU students, as such students are likely to enter a diverse array of career fields. Should colorblind socialization practices influence racial biases and encourage an adoption of oversimplified explanations for crime and race, it is possible that students may utilize microaggressions and reinforce existing racial differences in the workplace and beyond.

In considering the potential impact of social explanations of crime on perceptions of race and threat, it is also important to highlight how social explanations of crime are informed by colorblind ideologies. According to Bonilla-Silva (2017), colorblind ideologies permeate purportedly objective constructions of law, risk, and threat. It is, therefore, likely that socialization within the broader social context will yield similar colorblind attitudes that may increase the propensity for perceiving black as criminal. The underlying framework of racial threat theory thus provides insight as to why the racialization of crime occurred; yet, it also explains the extent to which a reliance on colorblind racial ideologies may increase perceptions of black criminality.

Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development

Although racial threat theory provides one explanation for the possible effect of colorblind ideologies on perceptions of black criminality, the potential for internalizing

colorblind racial socialization practices can be explained by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development. Originally proposed in 1973, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development posits that the process of human development, as well as the acquisition of cultural values and beliefs, occurs within a social and cultural context. The theory also suggests that human development occurs on both a social and individual level (Vygotsky, 1973; Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993).

Much like other sociocultural theories, these elements of Vygotsky's (1973) theory suggest that the environment in which children grow up will influence how they think and what they think about. Although it is proposed that learning environments are influenced by psychological, educational, political, and cultural factors, mechanisms of learning are also influenced by the communication and filtration of knowledge through more knowledgeable others (i.e. parents, teachers, and/or peers) (Vygotsky, 1973). Vygotsky refers to this acquisition of knowledge through more capable others as one side of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), or the space between what a learner can do without assistance and what a learner can do with guidance from a more knowledgeable other. Later conceptualized as scaffolding by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), the ZPD describes the process of assisted learning through more experienced adults as graduated steps ranging from mild to cognitively challenging. As learning progresses, cognitive elements—such as language, dialogue, and cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1973)—are internalized and carried out independently, thereby facilitating human development within a given social and cultural setting.

Given this emphasis on the ZPD and the gradual accumulation of knowledge from more capable others, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development is most commonly associated with academic learning (Arnold & Walker, 2008; Morcom, 2014). However, because

Vygotsky's theory is multifaceted, it can be used to explain a variety of relationships (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), including the relationship between colorblind racial socialization and an internalization of colorblindness. Utilizing Vygotsky's (1973) idea that the acquisition of cultural values and beliefs occurs through more knowledgeable others, it can be inferred that the transmission of colorblind ideologies from parental figures to children through racial socialization will influence cultural beliefs. Furthermore, given that cognitive development occurs on both a social and individual level (Vygotsky, 1973), the transmission of colorblind ideologies through socialization implies that colorblindness may be reproduced in individual behavior and language. This has implications for the perception of black criminality, as social explanations of crime may also be informed, in part, by colorblind ideologies.

Chapter 4: Literature Review

Although the way race is discussed and addressed has shifted with the rise of Black Lives Matter (BLM), particularly with people paying more attention to policy issues and antiracist terminology, such as mass incarceration and systemic racism, respectively, (Dunivin et al., 2022) the public association of blackness with criminality is referenced in a minimal amount of literature (Welch, 2007). There is thus a limited understanding of the ways in which racist ideologies and perspectives can persist amidst social change. Of the studies that have examined perceptions of black criminality, most generally focus on interracial contact and news exposure as predictors of perceived black criminality (Mancini et al., 2015; Intravia & Pickett, 2019). No studies to date have examined perceived black criminality in relation to socialization or the reproduction of racial biases and attitudes. This literature review, therefore, discusses existing studies that examine perceived black criminality and presents a methodological foundation upon which this thesis is partially built. Specifically, this chapter considers the way that perceptions of black criminality have been measured, as well as examines correlates of perceived black criminality presented in the literature.

Measuring Perceptions of Black Criminality

Perceptions of black criminality have been measured in several ways, including by assessing perceived levels of violence and aggression (Smith, 2001; Sniderman, Tetlock, & Piazza, 1991), how much of a certain crime is attributed to black people (Mancini et al., 2015; Chiricos et al., 2004) and how likely it is for a black person to commit a violent crime or sell drugs (Mears et al., 2013). Given the variation in measurement for perceptions of black criminality, it is important to identify the primary ways such perceptions are measured in the literature, as well as identify the strengths and weaknesses of each measurement.

Beginning with measures of perceived black criminality that have been used nationwide, in 2000, the General Social Survey asked respondents to determine how prone to violence they feel certain racial and ethnic groups are. The question stated, “In the next statement, a score of 1 means you think almost all people in the group are prone to violence. A score of 7 means you think that almost everyone in the group is not violence prone” (Smith, 2001, p. 31). Response categories listed white people, black people, Jewish people, Hispanic people, and Asian Americans. A similar question was asked on the 1991 National Race and Politics Survey, except respondents were asked only about the perceived violence and aggressiveness of black persons as opposed to other racial and ethnic groups (i.e. how well they feel the words aggressive and violent describe black persons on a scale from 0 to 10) (Sniderman et al., 2001). Although these measures were utilized on nationwide surveys and are likely both valid and reliable, they do not explicitly ask about black criminality. Measuring the association of blackness with violence and aggression does provide some insight as to what respondents may perceive of black criminality, but specific conclusions are unable to be drawn without an overt question on black criminality. Other, more recent studies have thus measured perceived black criminality more explicitly.

Unlike the General Social Survey and National Race and Politics Survey, one of the more contemporary measures of perceptions of black criminality asks respondents to estimate the percentage of violent crimes they believe to be committed by black persons. Mancini et al. (2015), for example, identified this measure as “Stereotypes of Blacks as Criminal” (p. 1004) and utilized a combination of three measures of racial typification to determine stereotypes pertaining to race and offending. The three measures of racial typification pertain to violent crimes, burglary, and robbery, and respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of each type of crime they feel are committed by black persons. Chiricos et al. (2004) utilized a similar

measurement in a study pertaining to the racial typification of crime and support for punitive measures. In both studies, response categories reflect a range of percentages, and the extent to which an individual overestimated percentage of black involvement in crime was determined with the use of objective measures, such as the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) and the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program.

Although the above measurement is frequently used to capture the extent to which participants endorse stereotypes of black as criminal, it presents some limitations. For instance, it is widely recognized that NCVS and UCR data do not accurately reflect crime or victimization rates. For UCR data specifically, the database only accounts for crimes that were reported to police (Gramlich, 2020). It does not account for crimes that occurred and went unreported. The NCVS attempts to fill this gap by utilizing a self-reported survey on crime victimization; however, as with all self-administered surveys, there is still a risk of sampling error and nonresponse bias (Kruttschnitt, Kalsbeek, & House, 2014). The statistics drawn from these sources may thus not be entirely objective, potentially generating errors in the response categories and analysis of perceptions of black criminality.

In lieu of using official statistics to create a measure, one study measured perceptions of black criminality by determining the extent to which respondents believe a black person is likely to engage in criminal behavior as compared to other races and ethnicities (Mears et al., 2013). In this study, respondents were asked, “On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means not at all likely and 10 means very likely, how likely is each of the following?” (p. 282). Six scenarios that included the likelihood of a white male, black male, or Latino male committing a violent crime or selling drugs before age 30 were provided. Perceived measures of criminality for each racial and ethnic group were determined by averaging the two responses (i.e. likelihood of committing a violent

crime and selling drugs before age 30) for each group. A similar measure utilized by Intravia and Pickett (2019) asked respondents, “Out of every 100 people who commit [a violent crime/a property crime/sell illegal drugs] in this country, what number do you think are white, black, Latino, or some other race/ethnicity?” (p. 623). Perceptions of black criminality were determined by subtracting the stated percentage of crime committed by whites from the stated percentage of crime committed by black persons for each type of crime, with higher scores representing a belief that black persons commit a greater proportion of crime.

The reliability and validity of both of these measures in determining perceptions of black criminality has not been measured, and the only studies to adopt such measures thus far collected data from convenience samples of non-white Hispanic persons and university students, respectively (Mears et al., 2013; Intravia & Pickett, 2019). However, given that each measure does not rely on official statistics and covertly measures perceptions of black criminality by asking about other racial and ethnic groups, such measures may yield a better understanding of perceptions of black criminality than previous measures.

Another covert measure that may yield a better understanding of perceived black criminality asks respondents about which racial and ethnic groups they feel are more likely to be involved in crime. This measure, utilized in a study by Henry, Hastings, and Freer in 1996, consists of three questions, each of which gets more specific. First, respondents are asked about the extent to which they agree or disagree that individuals from certain racial or ethnic groups are more likely, on average, to be involved in crime than people from other racial and ethnic groups. Next, respondents are asked which racial and ethnic group they feel is more likely to be involved in crime, with response categories consisting of Jamaicans/West Indians/Blacks in general,

Asians, and Vietnamese. The last question asks respondents to identify the reason for this disproportionate involvement in criminal activity.

Although this measure has also only been used in one study to date, it is important to note the limitations associated with such a measure. For instance, the response categories of Jamaicans/West Indians/Blacks in general, Asian, and Vietnamese are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive, and it is hard to draw conclusions about whether respondents attribute crime to just Jamaicans, just West Indians, or all black persons in general. Thus, in spite of the covertness of this measure as compared to previous measures, such a measure may produce an inaccurate understanding of perceived black criminality overall. With the strengths and limitations of this measure, as well as previous measures, in mind, I proceed next to a discussion of what has been uncovered about perceived black criminality in the literature.

Perceptions of Black Criminality

The literature reports varying viewpoints on perceptions of black criminality. Generally, it is known that blackness tends to be associated with criminality due to the rise of punitive crime policies and the subsequent overrepresentation of minoritized racial and ethnic groups in the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2012; Welch, 2007). However, literature on perceptions of black criminality reports that an acceptance and endorsement of the black criminal stereotype is also dependent on a number of factors, including interracial contact (Mancini et al., 2015; Mears et al., 2013) and news exposure (Dixon, 2008; Intravia & Pickett, 2019). This section, therefore, considers the results of such research and evaluates its implications for this thesis.

Interracial Contact

Across the minimal studies that examine black criminality, the variable that most impacts perceptions of black criminality is interracial contact, or direct contact with minoritized racial

and ethnic groups. A large body of literature examines the relationship between intergroup contact and racial prejudice, with most studies supporting the hypothesis that more interracial contact reduces racial prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, only two studies have examined the affect of interracial contact on perceptions of black criminality. Mancini et al. (2015), for example, surveyed a random sample of 494 undergraduate students and ultimately found general support for the idea that contact with minoritized individuals “reduces the endorsement of stereotypical beliefs about them among whites” (p. 1010). Interestingly, though, the relationship between interracial contact and reduced endorsement of black criminality was only statistically significant for four types of contact: “employment, knowing three minorities by name, close friendship, and dating” (Mancini et al., 2015, p. 1009). This implies that the nature and setting of interracial interactions is important in reducing stereotypes about black criminality.

Another study conducted by Mears et al. (2013), produced conflicting results when examining interracial contact and perceived black criminality. In this study, 520 adults of age 18 or older were surveyed via telephone, and Mears et al. (2013) sought to determine the mediating effect of perceived black criminality on the relationship between interracial contact and perceived victimization risk. In first analyzing the relationship between interracial contact and perceived black criminality, Mears et al. (2013) found that interracial contact may *reinforce* stereotypes about blacks. However, perceived criminality for other racial and ethnic groups (i.e. white and Latinos) also increased with interracial contact, thereby suggesting that “interracial contact has an educative effect that increases perceptions that people in general are more likely to offend” (Mears et al., 2013, p. 284). Mears, Mancini, and Stewart’s (2009) study on the relationship between interracial contact and concern about crime yielded similar results, with

greater interracial contact increasing concern about crime in general due to a perceived educative effect.

Despite the fact that the educative effect of interracial contact contrasts with the findings of Mancini et al. (2015), it is important to note that perceived black criminality was also a mediating variable between interracial contact and perceived victimization risk. In other words, greater interracial contact increased perceptions of black criminality, which, in turn, increased perceptions of victimization risk. Given the educative effect of interracial contact (Mears et al., 2009; Mears et al., 2013), however, interracial contact effects should hypothetically be mediated by the perceived criminality of *all* racial and ethnic groups, not just the perceived criminality of black persons. Although this thesis does not measure perceived victimization risk, the fact that interracial contact is both positively and negatively associated with perceived black criminality could be relevant in determining the strength of the relationship between colorblind racial socialization and perceptions of black criminality.

News Exposure

In addition to interracial contact, news exposure is also shown to influence perceptions of black criminality. A number of studies have concluded that, in the news, black persons are disproportionately portrayed as perpetrators of crime as compared to their white counterparts (Sonnett, Johnson, & Dolan, 2015; Dixon, Azocar, & Casas, 2003). Specifically, one study conducted by Dixon and Linz (2000) found that black persons were overrepresented as perpetrators in the news (37%) as compared to in arrest reports (21%). Along with being overrepresented as perpetrators of crime, black persons are also more likely to be portrayed as having played a violent or threatening role in reported crimes (Oliver, 2003). In fact, one study found that 84% of crime stories with black suspects concerned violent crime as opposed to

nonviolent crime (Entman, 1992). These studies, although important, pertain mostly to television news sites. Considering that the vast majority of adults in the United States use at least some online outlets to view the news (Pew Research Center, 2021), it is important to also consider how black persons are portrayed on Internet news sites.

Of the studies that have examined the portrayal of race on Internet news sites, it is generally reported that black persons are represented in Internet news stories relative to or less than their overall population in the United States (Josey et al., 2009). However, despite being represented at rates relative to or less than their overall population, black persons are two times more likely than whites to be portrayed using a negative stereotype (i.e. criminal, poor) (Josey, 2015). Given the overrepresentation of black persons as perpetrators of crime in television news, as well as their negative portrayal in Internet news stories, news exposure likely has a significant effect on perceptions of black criminality.

One study conducted by Dixon (2008) examined this relationship, hypothesizing that news exposure is positively correlated with the perception of black persons as violent. 506 residents of Los Angeles County, California, were surveyed via telephone, and results suggested that exposure to the overrepresentation of black persons as criminal on news programs was positively related to the perception of black persons as violent (Dixon, 2008). A more contemporary study conducted by Intravia and Pickett (2019) yielded similar conclusions. However, as opposed to examining television news exposure, Intravia and Pickett (2019) examined the relationship between social media news consumption and the typification of black persons as criminal. Synthesizing survey data collected from 429 university students, it was concluded that social media news consumption was positively associated with typifying black persons as criminal, whereas Internet news consumption was not (Intravia & Pickett, 2019). The

relationship between social media news consumption and the typification of black persons as criminal was also shown to be statistically significant for liberal/moderate and white respondents, but not among nonwhite or conservative respondents. This suggests that, in addition considering the amount of news exposure and type of news exposure experienced by respondents, it is also important for this thesis to consider political ideology and race/ethnicity when examining perceived black criminality.

Gap in Existing Literature

Overall, the public association of criminality with blackness has been referenced in minimal literature, with most research pertaining more towards the perceptions of crime, victimization, and black violence as opposed to black criminality. Although it is claimed that “views about crime, including perceptions about its prevalence, who engages in it, and who is likely to be victimized, derive in no small part from views about blacks” (Mears et al., 2013 p. 279), very minimal studies have used perceptions of black criminality as a standalone variable. A significant body of literature examines racial attitudes and racial biases in relation to variables such as age, education, race and ethnicity, and political ideology, but no studies explicitly measure perceptions of black criminality in relation to such variables. Furthermore, only a handful of studies have examined how colorblind racial socialization affects racial biases and racial attitudes.

Of the studies on colorblind racial socialization and racial biases that have been conducted, it is generally shown that a greater amount of colorblind racial socialization results in both a magnification of racial biases and a decreased *awareness* of racial biases (Apfelbaum et al., 2010; Perry et al., 2019). Because colorblindness as an ideology is also argued to prevent individuals from recognizing the existence of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Mueller, 2017) and

racial privilege (Pahlke et al., 2012), this thesis seeks to extrapolate these findings to a study that specifically examines the effect of colorblind racial socialization on perceived black criminality.

Chapter 5: Methods

Current Study

Although prior studies have examined the relationship between racial socialization practices and racial attitudes, the tendency for racial attitudes to evolve with the social climate justifies a need for more contemporary research. Furthermore, the extent to which colorblind racial socialization practices and racial attitudes reinforce racial differences is largely understudied. This study, therefore, intends to address this gap by examining how colorblind socialization practices influence perceptions of criminality. More specifically, this research posits the following hypothesis:

H₀: Colorblind racial socialization has no effect on perceptions of black criminality.

H₁: Individuals who experience more instances of colorblind racial socialization are more likely to have higher perceptions of black criminality.

Data and Sample

Data for this study were collected via an online survey administered to 4,000 randomly selected students from Northern Arizona University's (NAU) Flagstaff Mountain Campus in the spring of 2023. To obtain a diverse sample of students at NAU, respondents were selected via a simple random sample by the Office of Student Affairs Strategic Initiatives and Operations Analytics and Assessments at NAU. All undergraduate students at the Flagstaff Mountain Campus had an equal chance of being selected to participate in the study, and the initial sample of 4,000 was representative of the population. Obtaining a sample representative of the population is valuable in the context of this study, as it would allow the results to be generalized to the population and could provide implications for mitigating racial biases among university

students. However, as with all survey research, the potential for non-response bias among selected participants may reduce the generalizability of results.

Along with the potential for generalizability, a simple random sample can reduce sampling bias and facilitate the accumulation of a diverse sample of respondents. Although a simple random sample cannot guarantee representativeness, the demographics of the 4,000 selected students were proportional to the demographics of NAU Flagstaff Mountain Campus students. However, because simple random sampling does not guarantee an adequate response rate, the demographics of the final sample ($n = 514$) do not mirror that of NAU's Flagstaff Mountain Campus. Descriptives for the final sample are discussed in the following chapter.

In order to obtain the maximum number of respondents, the survey was accessible online through Qualtrics. A survey link from Qualtrics, along with an informed consent form, was distributed to the 4,000 randomly selected students via email, with a follow-up delivered both five and eight days after the initial distribution. Each email was distributed with an incentive stating that all people who respond to the survey will be entered in a drawing to win a \$20 Amazon gift card.

Measures

Dependent Variable

To determine if colorblind racial socialization influences perceptions of black criminality, perceptions of black criminality was measured using a multi-item variable constructed by Mancini et al. (2015). The variable contained three items intended to measure the extent to which the respondent believes black people commit violent crime, robbery, and burglary, and it was derived from similar studies (i.e. Chiricos et al., 2004) that also attempted to operationalize stereotypical images of blacks as criminal. For this measure, the survey question asked, “*What*

percentage of people who commit violent crime in this country would you say are black?” The following response categories were then provided: 1 = 0% to 20%, 2 = 21% to 40%, 3 = 41% to 60%, 4 = 61% to 80%, or 5 = 81%-100% (Mancini et al., 2015). The same question was posed regarding both burglary and robbery, and responses were recoded to reflect either an overestimation or an underestimation of crime: 0 = *less than 41%*, 1 = *more than 41%*. Percentages are derived from the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) data and represent the proportion of violent crime, burglaries, and robberies committed by individuals identifying as black. The score from each item was then combined to yield an aggregate score ranging from 0 to 3, where 0 represents less perceptions of Black criminality and 3 represents more perceptions of Black criminality.

In the original measure, an overestimation of black involvement in crime was determined by the use of objective measures including victimization survey results and arrest data. The data, however, was collected in 2008, so the objective measures were reanalyzed using victimization survey data from 2018. National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data from 2018 suggests that black people accounted for 35.9% of violent crimes and 51.1% of robbery offenses (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2018). NCVS data does not include percentages for burglary offenses; therefore, Uniform Crime Report (UCR) statistics were consulted. Reports from 2018 suggest the Black people were responsible for only 29.4% of burglaries (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2018). Because Black people accounted for 51.1% of robbery offenses in 2018, it is inappropriate to use the same coding mechanism presented by Mancini et al. (2015). The present study, therefore, used the original codes (1 to 5) for each of the three items to create a summed index (PERBLKCRIME) with scores ranging from 3 to 15, in which 3 represents low perceptions of criminality and 15 represents high perceptions of criminality.

Independent Variable(s)

Racial socialization. To measure racial socialization practices, this study used Rodil's (2020) modified version of the Parental Racial-Ethnic Socialization Behaviors Scale (Pahlke et al., 2012). Both the Pahlke et al. (2012) and Rodil (2020) scales were variations of a scale constructed by Hughes and Johnson (2001). While the original Hughes and Johnson (2001) scale contains 10 items split into three subscales—cultural socialization/pluralism, preparation for bias, and promotion of mistrust—the modified Pahlke et al. (2012) scale proposed by Rodil (2020) contains 25 items split into six subscales—egalitarianism, history of other groups, group difference, preparation for bias, general discrimination, and discrimination against other groups. These items and subscales can be found in Appendix A.

In the original study by Pahlke et al. (2012), the Parental Racial-Ethnic Socialization Behaviors Scale was used to measure the frequency with which white mothers discussed messages about race with their child. Coefficient alphas for this scale ranged from 0.74 to 0.92, indicating that all subscales were reliable. However, it should be noted that this scale did not distinguish between colorblind socialization and color-conscious socialization. In Rodil's (2020) study, the scale assessed how a person was socialized to view race by measuring the frequency with which a person experienced certain messages about race. Given that the questions in Rodil's (2020) were modified to capture young adult's reports on parental socialization practices as opposed to parent's self-reports of their own socialization practices, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on this new measure. The confirmatory factor analysis indicated an adequate fit model, with a comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.913, a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.070, and a standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR) of 0.064 (Rodil, 2020). Because the current study also measures the frequency with which a person

experienced certain messages about race, the use of Rodil's (2020) modified scale was appropriate.

In Rodil's (2020) study, participants indicated how frequently they experienced certain messages about race on a scale ranging from *1 = Never*, *2 = Rarely*, *3 = Sometimes*, *4 = Often*, and *5 = Very often*. In the current study, response categories were also *1 = Never*, *2 = Rarely*, *3 = Sometimes*, *4 = Often*, and *5 = Very often*. However, as opposed to creating a summed index for each of the six subscales as Rodil (2020) did, this study used the items to create both a colorblind socialization (COLORBLINDERS) and color-conscious socialization (COLORCONSCIOUSERS) scale.

The items included in the colorblind and color-conscious socialization scale were chosen using my knowledge of racial socialization and theoretical understanding of colorblindness. Provided that an ideology of colorblindness was popularized because it intends to promote racial equality (Apfelbaum et al., 2010), the items included in the colorblind racial socialization scale were chosen due to their emphasis on equality (i.e. *On a scale from 1 = never to 5 = often, please indicate how often your parents told you people of all races have an equal chance at life*). The items in the color-conscious racial socialization scale, on the other hand, were included because the listed behavior somehow referenced racial differences, acknowledged discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity, and/or attempted to dispel existing racial stereotypes (i.e. *On a scale from 1 = never to 5 = often, please indicate how often your parents told you American society is not always fair to all races and ethnicities*). After the items were chosen, reliability analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which the items within each scale were related.

Overall, three items were used in the colorblind racial socialization scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.580$), while 16 items were used in the color-conscious racial socialization scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.938$). Items in each index were then summed to provide an overall score that represented the frequency of colorblind and color-conscious racial socialization practices, with lower scores representing infrequent [colorblind or color-conscious] socialization practices and higher scores representing more frequent racial socialization practices. Items chosen for each of the two scales can be found in Appendix B.

Colorblind racial attitudes. Because colorblind racial attitudes may serve as a mediating variable between colorblind racial socialization and perceptions of black criminality, colorblind racial attitudes were measured using a scale constructed by Neville et al. (2000). The *Colorblind Racial Attitudes Scale* (CoBRAS) consists of 20 items, and each item depicts a social issue pertaining to race in the United States. Variable attributes range from *1 = Strongly disagree* to *6 = Strongly agree* to indicate the extent to which respondents agree with that particular social issue. The responses to each of the individual items were then summed to produce an aggregate score of colorblind attitudes (COBRAS), with higher scores suggesting more colorblindness or more racial unawareness (Neville et al., 2000). See Appendix C for a full list of the items included in the CoBRAS.

In the initial construction of the CoBRAS, Neville et al. (2000) conducted a factor analysis using a three-factor solution, in which the 20 items were split into three categories: racial privilege, institutional discrimination, and blatant racial issues. Because the scale will not be changed in the proposed study, the results of the initial factor analysis are only included to indicate that the scale has been shown to be valid. The first factor—racial privilege—consists of 7 items (eigenvalue = 6.84), and it accounted for 31% of variance. The factor of institutional

discrimination also consists of 7 items (eigenvalue = 2.46), and it accounts for 8% of variance. The last factor—blatant racial issues—consists of 6 items (eigenvalue = 1.84) and accounts for 6% of variance. The results of the three-factor solution factored to one load, demonstrated a total factor structure that accounts for 45% of variance.

Control Variables

Gender. Various studies have indicated that gender is the most important factor related to fear of crime, with women reporting higher levels of fear than men (Cops and Pleysier, 2011; Sutton, Robinson, & Farrall, 2011). Although no studies indicate that heightened fear of crime increases the likelihood of seeing black as criminal or that females are more likely to be socialized in a colorblind manner, the current study found it important to control for potential differences in perceptions of criminality across gender. Gender was, therefore, operationalized by asking, “*What is your gender identity?*” with 1 = *Male*, 2 = *Female*, 3 = *Non-binary/third gender*, 4 = *Other, please specify*, and 5 = *Prefer not to say*. Because gender is a nominal level variable, it was necessary to recode this variable so it could be included in the regression analysis, which requires interval/ratio level variables. In the final analysis, therefore, gender was transformed into three dummy variables: MALE (0 = not male, 1 = male), FEMALE (0 = not female, 1 = female), and NONBINARY (0 = not non-binary, 1 = non-binary).

Race/Ethnicity. Although racial socialization occurs across all racial and ethnic groups, much of the literature indicates that the form and purpose of racial socialization will vary depending on race and ethnicity (Loyd & Gaither, 2018; Vittrup, 2018; Caughy et al., 2006). Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that the race and ethnicity of individual respondents correlates with how one is socialized in regards to race, as well as how one perceives black criminality. For this reason, race was controlled using a coded nominal variable that states,

“Please indicate your race below.” Variable attributes consisted of 1 = *American Indian or Alaska Native*, 2 = *Asian*, 3 = *Black or African American*, 4 = *Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander*, 5 = *White*, and 6 = *Prefer not to answer*. In the final analysis, race was also recoded into a series of dummy variables. Ethnicity was also controlled for using a variation of the measure from the U.S. Census (Jensen et al., 2021). The coded nominal variable (HISPANIC/LATINX) stated, “Do you identify as Hispanic/Latina/o/e/x?” Variable attributes included 1 = *Yes* and 2 = *No*.

Intergroup contact. Because intergroup contact has been shown to increase positive forms of racial socialization and reduce racial bias, a three-item index was created to measure exposure to diverse persons. First, homogeneity of friend group was measured because racial socialization outside of the family context can occur via peer groups (Adana & Byrd, 2015). Apfelbaum et al. (2010) further posits that intergroup contact with diverse peer groups can reduce racial bias. Homogeneity of friend group was thus controlled using a Likert scale question that states, “*My immediate friend group consists mostly of people of my same race/ethnicity.*” Response categories ranged from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. In the final analysis, this measure was reverse coded (1 = *Strongly agree*; 5 = *Strongly disagree*).

The school is another means through which racial socialization can occur outside of the family context (Zucker & Patterson, 2018; Perry et al., 2019). Depending on the perceived racial and ethnic diversity of the school, it may also encourage interracial contact that, in turn, can mitigate perceptions of black people as criminal (Mears et al., 2013). Perception of school diversity was, therefore, measured with a Likert scale question that states, “*The student body at my high school was racially and ethnically diverse.*” To promote clarity for respondents, a racially and ethnically diverse school will be defined as a school where 50% or more of the

students consisted of races/ethnicities different from the race/ethnicity of the respondent.

Variable attributes ranged from *1 = Strongly disagree* to *5 = Strongly agree*.

Lastly, racial threat theory suggests that perceptions regarding the size of minoritized groups influence mechanisms of social control (Blalock, 1967). Therefore, the social context in which an individual is situated is important to consider when measuring perceptions of criminality. Increased exposure to minoritized groups in social settings may also implicate intergroup contact theory and reduce racially biased attitudes (Bigler & Liben, 2007). The perceived racial composition of the area in which an individual grew up is thus an important control that was accounted for with a Likert question stating, “*The neighborhood I grew up in was racially or ethnically diverse.*” To promote clarity for respondents, a racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood will be defined as an area where 50% or more of the population consisted of races/ethnicities different from the race/ethnicity of the respondent. Response categories ranged from *1 = Strongly disagree* to *5 = Strongly agree*. In the final analysis, this measure was summed with respondents’ homogeneity of friend group and perception of school diversity to create the intergroup contact index (INTERGROUP). This index ranged from 3 to 15, with 3 representing low intergroup contact and 15 representing high intergroup contact.

Political ideology. Because attitudes towards both race and crime, as well as the perceived relationship between them, are shown to be related to political ideology (Cooley, Brown-Iannuzzi, & Cottrell, 2019; Tonry, 2010), political ideology (CONSERVATIVE) was controlled for by asking respondents to describe themselves politically on a scale from 0–10, where *0 = Very liberal* and *10 = Very conservative*.

Exposure to News Media. Previous studies have suggested that perceptions of black criminality are influenced by exposure to news media, which often overemphasizes stereotypical

images of the black criminal (Mears et al., 2013; Chiricos et al., 2004). Although the type of media exposure is not specifically identified, it is important that the current study controls for the potential confounding effect of exposure to news media on perceptions of criminality. News media exposure (NEWS) was, therefore, measured by asking, “*How often would you say you are exposed to news media/current events?*” Response categories ranged from 1 = *Always* to 5 = *Never*.

Year in School. With regard to racialized perceptions of crime, the literature suggests that more education reduces such stereotypical images (Federico & Holmes, 2005). In the college environment, seniors may, therefore, yield different racial perceptions than do freshman. Provided that a sample composed of students from different classes (i.e. freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior) was obtained, education level was measured with a coded nominal variable stating, “*Please indicate your class below.*” Variable attributes will consist of 1 = *Freshman*, 2 = *Sophomore*, 3 = *Junior*, 4 = *Senior*, 5 = *Graduate student*, and 6 = *Other, please specify*. In the final analysis, year in school was recoded as a set of dummy variables.

Age. In the literature on implicit biases and perceptions of crime, age is shown to affect racial prejudices (Stewart, von Hippel, & Radvansky, 2009). Although no studies explicitly state that perceptions of black criminality and/or colorblind racial socialization practices are affected by age, it is reasonable to expect that those who are more mature in their thought processes are less likely to rely on stereotypes in considering racial issues. Age in years (AGE) is, thus, included as a control variable.

Chapter 6: Results

In order to examine the relationship between colorblind racial socialization and perceptions of black criminality, numerous multivariate regression models were estimated using *SPSS* (version 27). Tests for multicollinearity among key study variables were also conducted utilizing a bivariate correlations procedure. This chapter thus presents the results of these analyses. Characteristics of the final sample and descriptive statistics for the dependent, independent, and key control variables are also discussed.

Sample

Of the 4,000 respondents that were contacted, 514 individuals completed all or part of the survey, yielding a response rate of 12.85%. Because the sample was drawn from a population of NAU Flagstaff Mountain Campus students, all respondents were students at the NAU Flagstaff Mountain Campus in the spring of 2023. Both females and whites were overrepresented in the final sample. Of the 391 respondents that disclosed their gender, 270 were female (69.1%), 87 were male (22.3%), and 26 were non-binary/other (6.6%). Regarding race, 290 of the 388 (74.7%) respondents that answered the question pertaining to race were white, 5.7% were Asian, 3.6% were black or African American, and 2.8% were American Indian/Alaskan Native. Comparing the proportion of gender and race in the sample to official NAU statistics from the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (2022), females comprised approximately 63.4% of the student body, while males comprised 36.6%. Whites comprised approximately 54.6% of the student body, with black or African American, Asian, and American Indian/Alaska Native each comprising 3 percent.

In regards to political ideology, 391 individuals disclosed their level of conservativeness on a scale from 0–10, with 0 being extremely liberal and 10 being extremely conservative. The

mean was 3.45. As for year in school, the 391 respondents that disclosed this information were comprised mostly of freshmen (32.4%). Sophomores comprised 24.8%, while juniors and seniors comprised 23% and 19.4%, respectively. Lastly, 201 of the 252 students that responded to the question about ethnicity identified as non-Hispanic or Latinx (79.8%).

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for key study variables along with their bivariate correlation with the dependent variable, perceptions of black criminality. Looking first at the control variables, several are significantly correlated with perceptions of black criminality. Being female is negatively associated with perceptions of black criminality ($r = -0.130, p < 0.01$), as is being non-binary ($r = -0.113, p < 0.05$). Conservativeness, on the other hand, is positively associated with increased perceptions of black criminality ($r = 0.329, p < 0.01$).

When looking at the independent variables of interest, both colorblind racial attitudes and colorblind racial socialization practices are significantly and positively correlated with perceptions of black criminality ($r = 0.405, p < 0.01$ and $r = 0.175, p < 0.01$, respectively). Color-conscious racial socialization, on the other hand, was not significantly related to perceptions of black criminality. It should be noted, however, that we should not read too much into the results, as these bivariate correlations may be spurious.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables

VARIABLE	MEAN	SD	<i>r</i> PERBLKCRIME	DESCRIPTION
PERBLKCRIME	5.16	2.01	1.00	R's perception of black criminality score
AGE	20.12	2.92	-0.015	R's age
FEMALE	0.53	0.50	-0.130**	R is female (dummy variable; 1 = female)
NONBINARY	0.04	0.20	-0.113*	R is nonbinary (dummy variable; 1 = nonbinary)
FRESHMAN	0.25	0.43	-0.017	R is a freshman (dummy variable; 1 = freshman)
SOPHOMORE	0.19	0.39	-0.016	R is a sophomore (dummy variable; 1 = sophomore)
JUNIOR	0.18	0.38	0.026	R is a junior (dummy variable; 1 = junior)
INTERGROUP	9.01	2.84	-0.009	R's intergroup contact score
NEWS	2.03	0.86	0.012	R's news exposure
CONSERVATIVE	3.45	2.45	0.329**	R's conservativeness
NATIVE AMERICAN	0.02	0.15	-0.029	R is American Indian/Alaskan Native (dummy variable; 1 = American Indian/Alaskan Native)
BLACK	0.03	0.16	-0.036	R is black (dummy variable; 1 = black)
ASIAN	0.04	0.20	0.003	R is Asian (dummy variable; 1 = Asian)
HISPANIC/LATINX	1.80	0.40	-0.090	R's ethnicity
COBRAS	46.53	18.00	0.405**	R's colorblind racial attitudes
COLORBLINDERS	9.64	2.77	0.175**	R's colorblind racial socialization score
COLORCONSCIOUSERS	47.35	14.06	0.014	R's color-conscious racial socialization score

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Multivariate Regressions

Perceptions of Black Criminality

Several multivariate regression analyses were undertaken for the purpose of this thesis. Table 2 displays the estimates for five separate regression models for the full sample. The first model includes only the control variables, models 2–4 include the effects of the three independent variables of interest, each estimated separately, and the final model includes all variables. Unstandardized and standardized coefficients are presented in the tables.¹ It should also be noted that, although bivariate correlations among key study variables are not displayed, an analysis of such correlations revealed that no coefficients were greater than 0.70. More specifically, and perhaps most importantly, none of the correlations between the independent variables of interests had coefficients exceeding 0.70. Colorblind and color-conscious racial socialization had a coefficient of $r = 0.381$, while colorblind and color-conscious racial socialization and colorblind racial attitudes had coefficients of $r = 0.274$ and $r = 0.00$, respectively. Multicollinearity was, therefore, deemed a non-issue in all models.

Model 1 of Table 2 is the baseline model that includes only demographics and other control variables. The results illustrate that females are significantly less likely to perceive black as criminal than their male counterparts ($b = -1.07, p < 0.001$). On the other hand, people who are conservative are significantly more likely to perceive black as criminal ($b = 0.269, p < 0.001$). As previously mentioned, Models 2–4 of Table 2, show the estimated effects when the independent variables (colorblind racial socialization, color-conscious racial socialization, and colorblind racial attitudes) are introduced individually.

¹ Standard errors can be provided upon request.

Table 2: *Effects of Racial Attitudes, Racial Socialization, and Controls on Perceptions of Black Criminality (Full Sample)*

VARIABLES	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>
	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)
AGE	-0.081 (-0.118)	-0.077 (-0.113)	-0.073 (-0.108)	-0.081 (-0.107)	-0.072 (-0.096)
FEMALE	-1.07*** (-0.26)	-1.05*** (-0.256)	-0.996*** (-0.247)	-0.817 (-0.198)	-0.742 (-0.182)
NONBINARY	-1.02 (-0.139)	-0.964 (-0.129)	-1.09 (-0.151)	-0.776 (-0.107)	-0.787 (-0.108)
FRESHMAN	-0.434 (-0.104)	-0.405 (-0.097)	-0.284 (-0.068)	-0.531 (-0.126)	-0.368 (-0.088)
SOPHOMORE	-0.317 (-0.068)	-0.271 (-0.058)	-0.187 (-0.041)	-0.460 (-0.098)	-0.324 (-0.070)
JUNIOR	-0.327 (-0.071)	-0.364 (-0.079)	-0.279 (-0.061)	-0.400 (-0.086)	-0.326 (-0.072)
INTERGROUP	0.050 (0.069)	0.050 (0.069)	0.043 (0.060)	0.068 (0.092)	0.065 (0.088)
NEWS	-0.065 (-0.028)	-0.070 (-0.030)	-0.058 (-0.025)	-0.065 (-0.028)	-0.036 (-0.016)
CONSERVATIVE	0.269*** (0.323)	0.252*** (0.301)	0.248*** (0.298)	0.088 (0.105)	0.085 (0.102)
NATIVE AMERICAN	0.055 (0.004)	0.067 (0.005)	-0.653 (-0.047)	0.022 (0.002)	-0.619 (-0.045)
BLACK	-0.654 (-0.061)	-0.537 (-0.050)	-0.605 (-0.058)	-0.454 (-0.043)	-0.411 (-0.040)
ASIAN	-0.061 (-0.008)	0.025 (0.003)	-0.063 (-0.008)	-0.027 (-0.004)	-0.005 (-0.001)
HISPANIC/LATINX	-0.410 (-0.083)	-0.433 (-0.088)	-0.399 (-0.082)	-0.341 (-0.067)	-0.338 (-0.068)
COLORBLINDERS		0.051 (0.071)			0.024 (0.034)
COLORCONSCIOUSERS			-0.005 (-0.33)		-0.003 (-0.023)
COBRAS				0.032*** (0.295)	0.030* (0.272)
Constant	7.371	6.879	7.405	6.075	5.769
Adjusted R ²	0.158	0.154	0.138	0.184	0.159
<i>n</i>	250	247	244	237	231

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Model 2 of Table 2 shows the estimated effects when the colorblind racial socialization (COLORBLINDERS) scale is introduced into the regression model. Among the control variables, FEMALE and CONSERVATIVE are again significant, with females being less likely to perceive black as criminal as compared to their male counterparts ($b = -1.05, p < 0.001$) and conservatives being more likely to perceive black as criminal ($b = 0.252, p < 0.001$). This relationship between females and perceptions of black criminality, as well as the relationship between conservativeness and perceptions of black criminality also holds in the third model ($b = -0.996, p < 0.001$ and $b = 0.248, p < 0.001$, respectively) when color-conscious racial socialization is introduced into the model. However, as can be seen in both Model 2 and Model 3, neither colorblind racial socialization nor color-conscious racial socialization are statistically significant and appear to have no effect on perceptions of black criminality.

As neither of the two racial socialization measures proved significantly related to increased perceptions of black criminality, it was decided to examine independently the effect of colorblind racial attitudes (COBRAS). It is possible that individuals come to develop colorblind attitudes through a variety of mechanisms (i.e. peer groups, media, etc.) and not simply from parental socialization. This may be particularly true for college students, some of who may have been living away from their parents for some time. Model 4 presents the results for this analysis.

It should be noted that once racial attitudes are controlled for, gender and conservativeness are no longer significant. This suggests these effects are spurious. That is, females are less likely to express colorblind attitudes and less likely to have increased perceptions of black criminality, while conservatives are the opposite. Unlike these relationships, the scale for colorblind racial attitudes is significantly and positively associated with perceptions of black criminality ($b = 0.032, p < 0.001$). In short, those who scored higher on the colorblind

racial attitudes scale were more likely to perceive higher levels of black criminality than those who report having more racially color-conscious attitudes.

Finally, Model 5 presents the estimates when all independent variables (colorblind racial socialization, color-conscious racial socialization, and colorblind racial attitudes) are included. Here, it can be noted that no control or demographic variables are significant. In fact, the only variable that shows as significantly predictive of increased perceptions of black criminality is the colorblind racial attitudes scale. Individuals who express more colorblind racial attitudes are statistically more likely to perceive black as criminal ($b = 0.030, p < 0.05$).

As previous literature has indicated that the content and process of racial socialization is likely to vary across racial and ethnic groups (Lloyd & Gaither, 2018), it is possible, then, that some of the effects between racial socialization and perceptions of black criminality in Table 2 may be impacted by the presence of individuals of various races. Table 3, therefore, shows the same model estimates for a whites-only sample. Again, Model 1 is the baseline model that contains all demographic and control variables. In this model, conservativeness is once again significant, meaning that whites who are conservative are more likely to perceive black as criminal ($b = 0.311, p < 0.001$).

Table 3: *Effects of Racial Attitudes, Racial Socialization, and Controls on Perceptions of Black Criminality (Whites Only)*

VARIABLES	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>
	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)
AGE	-0.085 (-1.09)	-0.084 (-0.108)	-0.087 (-0.112)	-0.141 (-0.146)	-0.140 (-0.146)
FEMALE	-0.984 (-0.238)	-0.947 (-0.228)	-0.934 (-0.227)	-0.699 (-0.167)	-0.656 (-0.157)
NONBINARY	-0.871 (-0.120)	-0.777 (-0.104)	-0.935 (-0.130)	-0.613 (-0.086)	-0.623 (-0.086)
FRESHMAN	-0.286 (-0.068)	-0.292 (-0.069)	-0.237 (-0.056)	-0.680 (-0.160)	-0.617 (-0.144)
SOPHOMORE	0.160 (0.034)	0.171 (0.036)	0.189 (0.040)	0.191 (-0.040)	-0.159 (-0.033)
JUNIOR	-0.067 (-0.014)	-0.107 (-0.023)	-0.069 (-0.015)	-0.240 (-0.052)	-0.243 (-0.053)
INTERGROUP	0.076 (0.101)	0.074 (0.099)	0.061 (0.082)	0.094 (0.123)	0.080 (0.105)
NEWS	0.020 (0.009)	0.020 (0.009)	0.010 (0.004)	0.055 (0.023)	0.068 (0.028)
CONSERVATIVE	0.311*** (0.361)	0.304*** (0.352)	0.311*** (0.361)	0.118 (0.135)	0.126 (0.146)
HISPANIC/LATINX	-0.701 (-0.132)	-0.678 (-0.128)	-0.672 (-0.127)	-0.625 (-0.112)	-0.586 (-0.105)
COLORBLINDERS		0.036 (0.047)			0.014 (0.019)
COLORCONSCIOUS ERS			-0.008 (-0.057)		-0.004 (-0.032)
COBRAS				0.036** (0.320)	0.034** (0.301)
Constant	7.158	6.773	7.647	6.94	7.073
Adjusted R ²	0.168	0.162	0.156	0.200	0.178
<i>n</i>	189	187	185	177	172

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Upon introducing racial socialization practices in the second and third models, white people who are conservative are again statistically more likely to perceive black as criminal ($b = 0.304, p < 0.001$; $b = 0.311, p < 0.001$). Colorblind racial socialization and color-conscious racial socialization are not significant and do not appear to be related to perceptions of black criminality. Next, the fourth model shows the results of including colorblind racial attitudes as a predictor variable. While none of the control variables were statistically significant, we do find that, among white people, those who scored higher on the colorblind racial attitudes scale are significantly more likely to perceive black as criminal ($b = 0.036, p < 0.01$).

Lastly, Model 5 contains all independent, control, and demographic variables and also suggests that white people who are conservative are significantly more likely to perceive black as criminal ($b = 0.034, p < 0.01$). No control or demographic variables were significant in this model, nor were racial socialization practices.

Colorblind Racial Attitudes

Given that these results indicate that racial socialization practices are not predictive of perceptions of black criminality, it was decided to examine if racial socialization practices operate indirectly through racial attitudes to affect perceptions of black criminality. To test this relationship, the effects of the same demographic and control variables, as well as colorblind racial socialization and color-conscious socialization, were again estimated, though this time colorblind attitudes (COBRAS) replaced perceptions of black criminality as the dependent variable. The logic behind this is as follows: if it is found that racial socialization is predictive of colorblind attitudes—which has already been shown to significantly predict perceptions of black criminality, it can be concluded that racial socialization affects perceptions of black criminality

indirectly through its affect on the formation of racial attitudes. Table 4 shows the results of this analysis.

As can be seen in Table 4, four separate regression models were estimated for the full sample. Again, the first model includes only the control variables, Models 2–3 include the effects for each independent variable of interest (colorblind racial socialization and color-conscious socialization) estimated separately, and the final model includes all variables.

As before, in Model 1, females are statistically less likely to have colorblind racial attitudes than are their male counterparts ($b = -9.21, p < 0.001$), while conservatives are statistically more likely to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = 5.44, p < 0.001$). After introducing colorblind racial socialization in the second model, females are once again statistically less likely to have colorblind racial attitudes than their male counterparts, and conservatives are statistically more likely to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = -8.79, p < 0.001$ and $b = 5.33, p < 0.001$, respectively). However, as Model 2 illustrates, colorblind racial socialization is also significantly correlated with colorblind racial attitudes in that individuals who experience a greater frequency of colorblind racial socialization practices are statistically more likely to hold colorblind racial attitudes ($b = 0.666, p < 0.01$). The opposite relationship is also true, as evidenced in Model 3.

Model 3 introduces color-conscious racial socialization into the regression model. While females remain statistically less likely and conservatives remain statistically more likely to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = -9.03, p < 0.001$ and $b = 5.45, p < 0.001$, respectively), the results also illustrate that individuals who experience a greater frequency of color-conscious socialization are statistically less likely to hold colorblind racial attitudes ($b = -0.091, p < 0.05$).

Table 4: *Effects of Racial Socialization on Racial Attitudes (Full Sample)*

VARIABLES	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)
AGE	-0.450 (-0.065)	-0.403 (-0.058)	-0.515 (-0.074)	-0.516 (-0.075)
FEMALE	-9.21*** (-0.244)	-8.79*** (-0.233)	-9.03*** (-0.241)	-8.55*** (-0.228)
NONBINARY	-8.47 (-0.127)	-7.23 (-0.107)	-9.08 (-0.139)	-8.15 (-0.122)
FRESHMAN	0.975 (0.025)	1.19 (0.031)	0.950 (0.025)	0.808 (0.021)
SOPHOMORE	0.941 (0.022)	1.19 (0.027)	1.04 (0.024)	0.914 (0.021)
JUNIOR	0.423 (0.010)	0.220 (0.005)	0.259 (0.006)	-0.390 (-0.009)
INTERGROUP	-0.731 (-0.109)	-0.688 (-0.103)	-0.831 (-0.124)	-0.842 (-0.125)
NEWS	0.068 (0.003)	0.171 (0.008)	-0.287 (-0.013)	-0.324 (-0.015)
CONSERVATIVE	5.44*** (0.706)	5.33*** (0.693)	5.45*** (0.709)	5.31*** (0.690)
NATIVE AMERICAN	4.08 (0.035)	4.20 (0.036)	3.56 (0.028)	4.97 (0.039)
BLACK	-6.35 (-0.066)	-5.15 (-0.054)	-5.58 (-0.059)	-3.12 (-0.033)
ASIAN	-0.498 (-0.007)	0.534 (0.008)	-0.357 (-0.005)	1.38 (0.020)
HISPANIC/LATINX	-0.759 (-0.016)	-1.11 (-0.024)	-0.609 (-0.013)	-1.14 (-0.025)
COLORBLINDERS		0.666** (0.101)		0.972*** (0.148)
COLORCONSCIOUSERS			-0.091* (-0.073)	-0.165** (-0.132)
Constant	51.19	43.83	58.04	53.58
Adjusted R ²	0.629	0.638	0.621	0.641
<i>n</i>	214	235	232	231

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Finally, Model 4 presents the estimates when all control, demographic, and independent variables (colorblind and color-conscious racial socialization) are included in the regression model. Like the second and third models, this model suggests that people who experience more colorblind racial socialization are statistically more likely to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = 0.972, p < 0.001$), while people who experience more color-conscious racial socialization are statistically less likely to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = -0.165, p < 0.01$). This model also shows that females remain significantly less likely ($b = -8.55, p < 0.001$) and conservatives remain significantly more likely ($b = 5.31, p < 0.001$) to have colorblind racial attitudes.

As with the previous regression models displayed in Tables 2 and 3, it is possible that the effects between racial socialization practices and colorblind racial attitudes may be impacted by the presence of individuals of various races. Because prior literature indicates that white people are less likely to think of themselves in terms of race (Maniglia, 2018) and less likely to receive racial socialization messages as compared to other racial groups (Simon, 2021), the same multivariate regression models were again estimated for a whites-only subsample. Table 5 shows the results for these analyses.

As before, Model 1 is the baseline model that contains all demographic and control variables. In this model, being female and conservative are once again significant, meaning that white females are less likely than their white male counterparts to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = -9.14, p < 0.001$) and whites who are conservative are more likely to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = 5.65, p < 0.001$).

Table 5: *Effects of Racial Socialization on Racial Attitudes (Whites Only)*

VARIABLES	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)	<i>b</i> (beta)
AGE	0.431 (0.050)	0.478 (0.055)	0.331 (0.038)	0.353 (0.041)
FEMALE	-9.14*** (-0.244)	-8.48*** (-0.226)	-9.00*** (-0.240)	-8.18*** (-0.218)
NONBINARY	-7.69 (-0.120)	-5.93 (-0.091)	-8.29 (-0.131)	-6.54 (-0.100)
FRESHMAN	5.85 (0.154)	5.54 (0.145)	5.91 (0.154)	5.40 (0.140)
SOPHOMORE	4.50 (0.105)	4.20 (0.098)	4.73 (0.110)	4.13 (0.096)
JUNIOR	2.30 (0.055)	1.36 (0.033)	2.16 (0.052)	0.783 (0.019)
INTERGROUP	0.624 (-0.091)	-0.652 (-0.096)	-0.710 (-0.104)	-0.771 (-0.113)
NEWS	-0.183 (-0.009)	-0.004 (0.000)	-0.701 (-0.033)	-0.580 (-0.027)
CONSERVATIVE	5.65*** (0.725)	5.53*** (0.711)	5.74*** (0.736)	5.61*** (0.719)
HISPANIC/LATINX	-0.755 (-0.015)	-0.540 (-0.011)	-0.911 (-0.018)	-0.875 (-0.018)
COLORBLINDERS		0.753** (0.108)		1.05** (0.149)
COLORCONSCIOUSERS			-0.118* (-0.093)	-0.183** (-0.144)
Constant	29.01	20.60	38.27	31.42
Adjusted R ²	0.632	0.643	0.634	0.657
<i>n</i>	177	175	173	172

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Upon introducing colorblind and color-conscious racial socialization in Models 2 and 3, respectively, white females are again statistically less likely than their white male counterparts to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = -8.48, p < 0.001$; $b = -9.00, p < 0.001$), while white people who are conservative are again statistically more likely to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = 5.53, p < 0.001$; $b = 5.74, p < 0.001$). In Model 2, colorblind racial socialization is also significant, suggesting that white people who experience more colorblind racial socialization are more likely to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = 0.753, p < 0.01$). The reverse is once again true in Model 3, as white people who experience more color-conscious racial socialization are statistically less likely to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = -0.118, p < 0.05$).

Lastly, Model 4 contains all independent, control, and demographic variables. This model also implies that white females are significantly less likely than their white male counterparts to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = -8.18, p < 0.001$) and that whites who are conservative are statistically more likely to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = 5.61, p < 0.001$). Colorblind racial socialization and color-conscious racial socialization remain significant, with white people who experience more colorblind racial socialization being more likely to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = 1.05, p < 0.01$) and white people who experience more color-conscious racial socialization being less likely to have colorblind racial attitudes ($b = -0.183, p < 0.01$).

In summary, these results suggest that racial socialization practices operate indirectly through racial attitudes to affect perceptions of black criminality. In other words, more frequent colorblind racial socialization is predictive of increased colorblind racial attitudes, which are then predictive of increased perceptions of black criminality, and more frequent color-conscious racial socialization is predictive of decreased colorblind racial attitudes, which are then

predictive of decreased perceptions of criminality. These findings are displayed in Figure 1 and, in the next chapter, are discussed in relation to theory and prior research.

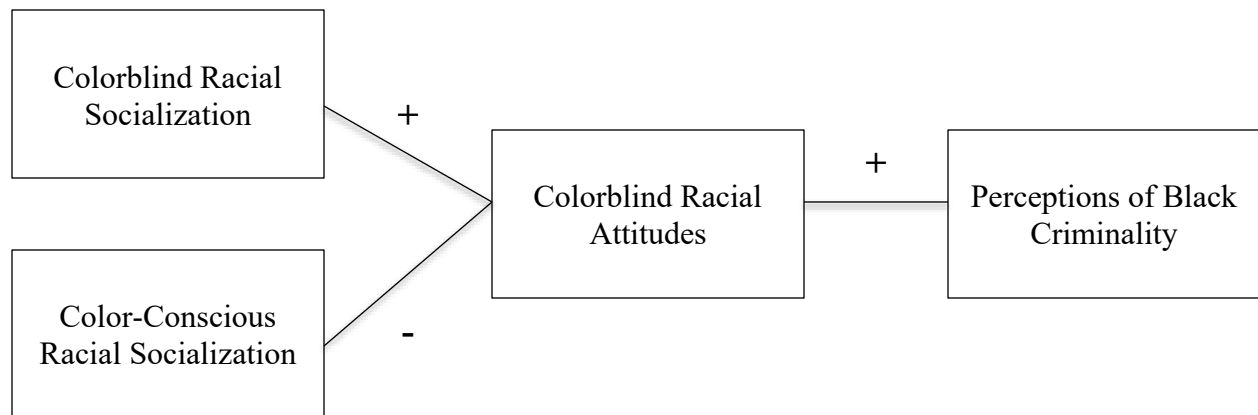


Figure 1. A finalized model with relationship directions.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

Several scholars have examined the role of racial socialization in promoting positive intercultural relations (Priest et al., 2014) and minimizing racial stereotypes (Loyd & Gaither, 2018). Other scholars, however, have examined how racial socialization can vary, with certain forms, such as colorblind racial socialization, generating negative (e.g. reduced awareness of racial biases and diminished accuracy of social judgments) as opposed to positive outcomes (Perry et al., 2019; Apfelbaum, 2010). In spite of these findings, existing literature has yet to consider the relationship between racial socialization and perceptions of crime. More specifically, no studies have examined how colorblind racial socialization influences perceptions of black criminality. To fill this gap in the existing literature, this thesis used a simple random sample of undergraduate university students to test the hypothesized relationship that individuals who experience more instances of colorblind racial socialization are more likely to have higher perceptions of black criminality. This chapter presents the subsequent findings and associated implications of this thesis.

First, the results of these data analyses show that colorblind and color-conscious racial socialization are not directly correlated with perceptions of black criminality when controlling for a number of demographic variables. At first glance, this might seem to be inconsistent with what was initially hypothesized, which is a partially valid conclusion. What was discovered, instead, is that the effect of racial socialization is a bit more complicated. That is, the results of this study demonstrate that racial socialization does matter in the formation of perceptions of black criminality. However, it does so indirectly. In other words, racial socialization was found to be significantly predictive of colorblind attitudes, which, in turn, affects the perceptions of black criminality. Those who are socialized in a colorblind manner are thus more likely to form

colorblind attitudes, which subsequently increases the probability of perceiving black criminality.

That colorblind racial attitudes are positively associated with perceptions of black criminality is consistent with existing social-psychological research that suggests there is a significant and positive correlation among attitudes, behavior, and cognition (Glasman & Albarracín, 2006; Fazio, 1986; Fazio & Zanna, 1981). Such a result also aligns with the principle of attitude consistency, which implies that “for any given attitude object, affect, cognition, and behavior are usually in line with one another” (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2022, p. 212). That is, attitudes are generally shown to be predictive of cognitive processes (i.e. perceptions and sensations) and behavior.

Additional psychological research further supports this finding, indicating that while attitudes direct an individual to act or react in a particular way when faced with a situation, person, or thing (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2022), attitudes also direct a person to interpret stimuli in a way that helps them organize and make sense of their observations (Pickens, 2005). Interpretations will vary among individuals; however, it is important to note that what a person perceives and how such a perception is justified may not accurately reflect reality (Pickens, 2005). This appears to be the case given the results of this thesis. Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and NCVS data indicate that black persons account for 35.9% of violent crimes, 51.1% of robbery offenses, and 29.4% of burglaries (BJS, 2018; FBI, 2018). However, individuals with more colorblind racial attitudes were shown to overestimate the amount of crimes that black persons actually commit. Though it is unknown in this study how respondents’ interpretations of black criminality are justified, psychological research suggests that attitudes do, in fact, affect perceptions.

In addition to social-psychological research, literature on colorblindness also helps explain the positive relationship between colorblind racial attitudes and perceptions of black criminality. As indicated by Alexander (2012) and Kemple, Lee, and Harris (2015), colorblindness contributes to the continuation of racism in the United States, such that, when race does matter, people cannot see it. In the context of this thesis this implies that, when confronted with the reality that black persons are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, a person with colorblind racial attitudes will not attribute this overrepresentation to racism. Instead, the ability to maintain colorblind racial attitudes may yield oversimplified explanations for disproportionate incarceration rates, such as the idea that minoritized racial groups are inherently more criminal and thus commit more crimes than other racial and ethnic groups. Some existing research does support this idea, suggesting that people who rely on colorblind frames of thinking minimize the existence and consequences of racism (Dunbar & Holbrook, 2022; Okah et al., 2021). Colorblind attitudes may, therefore, affect perceptions of black criminality by encouraging an ignorance of the historical and contemporary impact of race.

The second finding of this thesis shows that racial socialization, though not significantly correlated with perceptions of black criminality, operates indirectly through attitudes to affect perceptions of black criminality. That is, racial socialization affects the development of colorblind attitudes, which are then predictive of perceptions of black criminality. There are two potential explanations for the existence of this relationship. First, because colorblindness is learned, not taught, socialization may be an important component in the development of colorblind attitudes. Second, psychological literature suggests that the link between attitudes, cognition, and behavior is stronger when attitudes are stable and easy to recall. Therefore,

socialization, among the family and other institutions (i.e. the education system and the media), may function to both introduce and maintain colorblind racial attitudes.

Considering that colorblindness is not explicitly taught, it is believed that colorblind ideologies and attitudes are the product of subtle messages received from the media, the family, and other institutions (Kemple et al., 2015). Regarding the family specifically, Vygotsky's (1973) sociocultural theory of cognitive development presents two important considerations: 1) that learning occurs most through more knowledgeable others, and 2) that a child's environment growing up affects how they think and what they think about. The family may, therefore, be one of the more important transmitters of colorblind attitudes. Though one study supports this claim, stating the single most important force shaping the attitudes of college students towards blacks was the method and content of socialization employed by parents (Schaffer & Schaffer, 1966), other studies imply that it is difficult to draw any causal relationships between colorblind socialization and attitudes (Vittrup, 2018; Skinner & Meltzoff, 2019). I, therefore, acknowledge that, while significantly correlated, familial racial socialization practices are not the only predictor of colorblind attitudes. Generally speaking, however, existing literature on the transmission of colorblind attitudes implies that favoring colorblind attitudes in any setting minimizes opportunities for education and racial understanding (Pahlke et al., 2012).

Prior to discussing the policy implications associated with these findings, it is important to note that the relationship between colorblind racial socialization, colorblind racial attitudes, and perceptions of black criminality is particularly strong for white people. Such a result is unsurprising given that colorblindness is argued to protect whiteness and maintain a structure of white supremacy (Mueller, 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2017). In fact, it is almost expected for whites to

express more colorblind attitudes and have greater perceptions of black criminality given the way colorblindness currently functions to keep black people in their place or orbit.

As Michelle Alexander (2012) argues, black people are disproportionately labeled as criminal so as to allow society to engage in practices of racial discrimination. A colorblind perspective does not acknowledge this as racial discrimination and, as stated before, may produce oversimplified explanations that justify this treatment. This view thus does not function to reduce racism. Instead, this view functions to protect the white identity and reproduce the deeply rooted system of white supremacy that exists in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). This is not to say that other racial and ethnic groups cannot experience colorblind racial socialization or have colorblind racial attitudes. It is still possible, though unlikely, for other racial and ethnic groups to have such experiences and attitudes. However, the reasoning or motive for these experiences and attitudes may be different than they are for white people. Generally speaking, though, the results of this thesis appear to reinforce existing theoretical perspectives that argue colorblindness exists to the benefit of white people (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Alexander, 2012; Mueller, 2017).

Policy Implications

Provided both that white people are more likely than other racial and ethnic groups to have colorblind attitudes and that parental racial socialization is unlikely to be the only source of colorblind attitudes, it is important to consider why the results of this thesis are important. Psychological literature indicates that, regardless of the origin of or the reason for attitudes, the repeated expression and stability of attitudes overtime strengthens the link between attitude and behavior (Downing, Judd, & Brauer, 1992; Glasman & Albarracín, 2006). That is, attitudes correlate more strongly with behavior when they are readily accessible, frequently expressed,

and constant. In the case of colorblind racial socialization, parents or guardians frequently expressing colorblind racial attitudes can provide children and young adults with greater access to colorblind perspectives. The same is true of other institutions, such as the media or the education system. If people are continuously exposed to colorblind perspectives and attitudes across multiple domains, it is likely that such attitudes are more accessible and more frequently employed. The practical implications of this are harmful, particularly for the development of race relations in the United States.

As Baldwin's (1992) concept of the orbit suggests, there is a longstanding need for white people to keep black people in their place or orbit. This perspective implies that race is a social construct with malleable definitions and that the overarching social structure designed to disadvantage black people is rigid (Baldwin, 1992). Therefore, regardless of how the meaning of race changes, it will always be defined in a way that reinforces black inferiority. Today, as evidenced in Michelle Alexander's (2012), *The New Jim Crow*, race is defined through a lens of colorblindness and often referred to indirectly by conflating the term with crime (Chiricos et al., 2004). Not only does this minimize the existence of race, but this definition of race also minimizes the existence of racism and its visible consequences, including the disproportionate incarceration of black bodies and the use of the criminal justice system to maintain the inferior social position of black people. There can, therefore, be little progress toward advancing race relations in the United States when some people do not realize or refuse to acknowledge that a problem exists.

Assuming that colorblind perspectives and attitudes are derived from socialization practices, among other institutions, it is important that the transmission of such attitudes is minimized to increase awareness of racism and racial injustices. As psychological research

implies, the link between attitudes and perceptions, as well as behaviors, grows stronger when attitudes are frequently expressed and more readily accessible (Fazio, 1986; Glasma & Albarracín, 2006). Given that this thesis found the relationship between parental racial socialization and colorblind racial attitudes to be significant, minimizing the transmission of colorblind attitudes via the process of socialization is an important first step.

In order to minimize the transmission of colorblind attitudes and colorblind perspectives to children, it is important that parents are made aware of their own racial biases. Though some studies imply that it is difficult to draw any causal relationships between colorblind socialization and attitudes, it is speculated that a lack of explicit conversations about race and/or colorblind conversations about race can transmit colorblind attitudes (Vittrup, 2018; Skinner & Meltzoff, 2019). It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that color-conscious conversations about race would minimize the transmission of colorblind attitudes (as was found in the analysis of the data for this study). However, in order to have color-conscious conversations about race, Perry et al. (2019) recommends increasing parents' awareness of their own racial biases via an intervention that targets judgment and decision-making. Given the results of this thesis, this may be a meaningful solution. While more research would be needed to determine how effective such an intervention would be, it yields promise for encouraging more explicit conversations about race.

Evidently, increasing awareness of racial biases and reducing the transmission of colorblind attitudes via parental socialization will not eliminate colorblind attitudes entirely. Colorblind perspectives and attitudes can still be transmitted via other social institutions, and eliminating the existence of colorblindness altogether is both unrealistic and beyond the scope of these solutions. This, however, does not minimize the importance of explicitly discussing race. Thus, in addition to recommending parents undergo an intervention (Perry et al., 2019), it is

recommended that all individuals undergo an intervention. Such an intervention does not need to be formal. In fact, a number of handbooks, such as *Me and White Supremacy* (Saad, 2020) and *The Racial Healing Handbook* (Singh, 2019), exist to help navigate racial experiences and identify racist frames of thinking. What matters most is that people become aware of their racial biases, consciously challenge said racial biases, and understand how certain attitudes and ways of thinking are harmful to minoritized communities. Engaging in this type of resistance at the individual level by transmitting color-conscious attitudes and educating children, young adults, and ourselves about racism is a potential start and, over time, may help chip away at the rigidity of race relations in the United States.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As with all studies, this thesis is not without limitations. One shortcoming of this study is the scale utilized to measure racial socialization. Although this study intended to measure colorblind racial socialization, the scale utilized measured the frequency of socialization practices and did not distinguish between colorblind and color-conscious socialization. Since the scale did not explicitly identify any items that were colorblind or color-conscious, this thesis did. The items included in the colorblind and color-conscious socialization indices were thus chosen relatively subjectively, and care should be taken in the future to identify or to create a survey tool that explicitly identifies colorblind and color-conscious socialization behaviors.

A second limitation of this study is the response rate. Though the sample of 4,000 students that were randomly selected to participate in the survey was representative of the population demographics at NAU, the resulting sample of 514 individuals that completed all or parts of the survey was not. As mentioned in the results chapter, whites and females were overrepresented in the sample of undergraduate students that completed the survey. Considering

this, it is possible that a more representative sample would have yielded different results. Moreover, the fact that whites constituted almost 75% of the sample means no conclusions can be drawn about the impact of various forms of racial socialization on perceptions of criminality across different racial and/or ethnic groups. It is, therefore, cautioned against generalizing the results of this study to all NAU students, as well as to anyone outside of this population. To draw meaningful conclusions about the relationship between racial socialization, racial attitudes, and perceptions of black criminality, future studies must survey different populations and gather a sample that is representative of said population.

Lastly, as indicated above, this study is limited in its generalizability given the population that was surveyed. Racial socialization, as with other socialization practices, is shown to occur at a younger age, typically when children are still living in the home (Hughes et al., 2006). College students have often been removed from their childhood home for several months or years, insinuating that perhaps the relationship between racial socialization and racial attitudes is secondary to influence from peer groups, the media, or other institutions. Though we can speculate that the relationship between colorblind racial socialization and colorblind attitudes might be stronger among a younger population, it will prove difficult to draw any sound conclusions. Additionally, younger children may not be equipped to answer questions pertaining to their perception of black criminality, making it difficult to test this exact relationship across different age groups. Future research, however, should survey different populations in regards to age and race and incorporate more control variables that account for socialization, such as peer groups, media, and education, to determine if the relationship between racial socialization, racial attitudes, and perceptions of black criminality holds.

Conclusion

Because racism is said to decrease as awareness of racial biases and explicit conversations about race increase (Perry et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2006), racial socialization, or transmitting the role of race and culture in society to children and young adults (Byrd & Ahn, 2010), is a practice that may challenge racial stereotypes and reduce negative attitudes towards different racial and ethnic groups. Though some literature has examined the benefits and consequences of racial socialization (Priest et al., 2014; Ruck et al., 2021), as well as the relationship between racial socialization and racial attitudes (Pahlke et al., 2012; Perry et al., 2019), no studies have examined the relationship between racial socialization and perceptions of black criminality.

Considering that a lack of effective racial socialization can result in the adoption of social stereotypes pertaining to race and ethnicity (Loyd & Gaither, 2018)—and that the stereotype of black criminality perpetuates existing structures of inequality that keep black people in an inferior social location (Alexander, 2012)—this thesis attempts to fill the gap in existing racial socialization literature. To test the relationship between colorblind racial socialization and perceptions of black criminality, this project used a quantitative survey design and randomly selected 4,000 students at Northern Arizona University’s Flagstaff Mountain Campus in the spring semester of 2023 to participate. Respondents were asked to answer questions pertaining to the frequency of parental racial socialization behaviors, individual colorblind racial attitudes, and estimations of black criminality, and it was hypothesized that individuals who reported experiencing more instances of colorblind racial socialization were more likely to have greater perceptions of black criminality.

Results indicated that, though not significantly correlated with perceptions of black criminality directly, colorblind racial socialization operates indirectly through colorblind racial attitudes to affect perceptions of black criminality. That is, racial socialization affects racial attitudes, which then affect perceptions of black criminality. In addition to supporting existing psychological research on the link between attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Fazio, 1986; Glasma & Albarracín, 2006), this finding also supports the idea that colorblindness minimizes awareness of racism and racial injustices (Alexander, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2017). In the context of this thesis, this implies that people with greater colorblind attitudes may not recognize the racial disparities in the criminal justice system and, instead, may produce oversimplified explanations for the reality that black persons are disproportionately incarcerated.

Given also the positive association between racial socialization and racial attitudes, it is possible that color-conscious racial socialization can minimize colorblind racial attitudes and increase awareness of racism. To promote color-conscious racial socialization, however, would require parents to be aware of their own racial biases. In line with Perry et al. (2019), it is, therefore, recommended that parents undergo an intervention that targets judgment and decision-making. Should parents be more intentional in the race-related messages they send to their children, it is possible that colorblind racial attitudes and an acceptance of race-related stereotypes, such as the perception that black people are more criminal, may decrease. Though this solution may not reduce all colorblind attitudes nor significantly change race relations in the United States, it is a meaningful way to encourage more explicit conversations about race and, perhaps, mitigate racial biases and racial attitudes from manifesting into stereotypical perceptions and discriminatory behaviors.

Overall, this thesis is a meaningful step towards understanding the formation of colorblind attitudes and the influence of colorblind attitudes on perceptions of black criminality. Future research should address the limitations of this study (i.e. using standardized measures and sampling different populations) in order to draw any significant conclusions regarding the relationship between racial socialization, racial attitudes, and perceptions of black criminality, and the acceptance of other racial stereotypes, not just perceptions of black criminality, should also be tested in this particular model. Should these changes be adopted and this relationship be examined further, it is possible that the colorblind approach to race and race relations can be challenged, one individual and one family at a time.

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Appendix A: Parental Racial-Ethnic Socialization Behaviors Scale (Modified)

On a scale from 1 = *never* to 5 = *often*, please indicate how often your parents _____.

1. Egalitarianism (5)

- A. told you that you should try to make friends with people of all races and ethnic backgrounds.
- B. told you about the importance of getting along with people of all races and ethnicities.
- C. told you people of all races have an equal chance in life.
- D. told you it is important to appreciate people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- E. told you people are equal, regardless of their racial or ethnic background.

2. History of Other Groups (4)

- A. told you about important people in the history of other racial or ethnic groups.
- B. told you about the history of other racial or ethnic groups in our country.
- C. taught you about the history or traditions of other racial or ethnic groups.
- D. read books about the history or traditions of different ethnic and racial groups, other than your own.

3. Group Difference (3)

- A. told you it is best to have friends who are the same race or ethnic group as you are.
- B. told you people of different races and ethnicities have different values and beliefs.
- C. told you it is a bad idea to marry someone who is of a different ethnic background or race than yours.

4. Preparation for Bias (2)

- A. told you about the possibility that some people might treat you badly or unfairly because of your race or ethnicity.
- B. told you about discrimination or prejudice against your ethnic or racial group.

5. General Discrimination (4)

- A. told you American society is fair to all races and ethnicities.
- B. told you sometimes people are treated badly just because of their race or ethnicity.
- C. told you American society is not always fair to all races and ethnicities.
- D. told you other racial or ethnic groups are just as trustworthy as people of your own ethnic or racial group.

6. Discrimination Against Other Groups (7)

- A. told you about the discrimination people from other racial or ethnic groups have experienced in the past.
- B. told you about discrimination or prejudice against other ethnic or racial groups.
- C. told you that people from other racial or ethnic groups are sometimes still discriminated against because of their race or ethnicity.
- D. told you that in the past, people from other racial or ethnic groups were discriminated against because of their race or ethnicity.

- E. told you that people of your race or ethnic group have better opportunities than people of other racial or ethnic groups.
- F. told you about something unfair that he/she witnessed that was due to racial or ethnic discrimination against another ethnic or racial group.
- G. told you about something he/she saw that showed poor treatment of different ethnic or racial groups, other than your own.

Appendix B: List of Items Used in Colorblind and Color-Conscious Racial Socialization Indices

On a scale from 1 = *never* to 5 = *often*, please indicate how often your parents _____.

1. Colorblind Racial Socialization (3)

- A. told you people of all races have an equal chance in life.
- B. told you people are equal, regardless of their racial or ethnic background.
- C. told you American society is fair to all races and ethnicities.

2. Color-Conscious Racial Socialization (16)

- A. told you that you should try to make friends with people of all races and ethnic backgrounds.
- B. told you about the importance of getting along with people of all races and ethnicities.
- C. told you it is important to appreciate people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- D. told you about important people in the history of other racial or ethnic groups.
- E. told you about the history of other racial or ethnic groups in our country.
- F. taught you about the history or traditions of other racial or ethnic groups.
- G. read books about the history or traditions of different ethnic and racial groups, other than your own.
- H. told you sometimes people are treated badly just because of their race or ethnicity.
- I. told you American society is not always fair to all races and ethnicities.
- J. told you other racial or ethnic groups are just as trustworthy as people of your own ethnic or racial group.
- K. told you about the discrimination people from other racial or ethnic groups have experienced in the past.
- L. told you about discrimination or prejudice against other ethnic or racial groups.
- M. told you that people from other racial or ethnic groups are sometimes still discriminated against because of their race or ethnicity.
- N. told you that people of your race or ethnic group have better opportunities than people of other racial or ethnic groups.
- O. told you about something unfair that he/she witnessed that was due to racial or ethnic discrimination against another ethnic or racial group.
- P. told you about something he/she saw that showed poor treatment of different ethnic or racial groups, other than your own.

Appendix C: Colorblind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS)

Directions. Below is a set of questions that deal with social issues in the United States (U.S.). Using the 6-point scale, please give your honest rating about the degree to which you personally agree or disagree with each statement. Please be as open and honest as you can; there are no right or wrong answers. Record your response to the left of each item.

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------|
| | Strongly
Disagree | | | | | Strongly
Agree |
| 1. | _____ Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich. | | | 10. _____ Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension. | | |
| 2. | _____ Race plays a major role in the type of social services (such as the type of health care or day care) that people receive in the United States. | | | 11. _____ It is important for political leaders to talk about racism to help work through or solve society's problems. | | |
| 3. | _____ It is important that people begin to think of themselves as American and not African American, Mexican American, or Italian American. | | | 12. _____ White people in the United States have certain advantages because of the color of their skin. | | |
| 4. | _____ Due to racial discrimination, programs such as affirmative action are necessary to help create equality. | | | 13. _____ Immigrants should try and fit into the culture and adopt the values of the United States. | | |
| 5. | _____ Racism is a major problem in the United States. | | | 14. _____ English should be the only official language in the United States. | | |
| 6. | _____ Race is very important in determining who is successful and who is not. | | | 15. _____ White people are more to blame for racial discrimination in the United States than racial or ethnic minorities. | | |
| 7. | _____ Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today. | | | 16. _____ Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against White people. | | |
| 8. | _____ Racial and ethnic minorities do not have the same opportunities as White people in the United States | | | 17. _____ It is important for public schools to teach about the history and contributions of racial and ethnic minorities. | | |
| 9. | _____ White people in the United States are discriminated against because of the color of their skin. | | | 18. _____ Racial and ethnic minorities in the United States have certain advantages because of the color of their skin. | | |
| | | | | 19. _____ Racial problems in the United States are rare, isolated solutions. | | |
| | | | | 20. _____ Race plays an important role in who gets sent to prison | | |

The following items (which are bolded above) are reverse scored (such that 6 = 1, 5 = 2, 4 = 3, 3 = 4, 2 = 5, 1 = 6): item #2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 15, 17, 20. Higher scores should show greater levels of “blindness,” denial, or unawareness.

Appendix D: Survey Consent and Initial Contact Email

Hello!

You are invited to participate in a research study about student attitudes towards crime in America. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey/questionnaire.

You may access the survey here: [\\${1://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

This survey/questionnaire will ask about familial experiences and personal attitudes towards race and justice-related issues. It will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete. Upon completing the survey, your name will be entered into a drawing for a chance to win one of five \$20 gift cards. Odds of winning are approximately 1 in 100, but these odds will vary depending on the number of respondents. Winners will be contacted after the survey closes.

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may provide insight as to how students perceive certain topics and contribute to the growing body of literature assessing perceptions of societal and criminological issues. We believe the only risk associated with this research study is answering questions related to criminal justice policies, race, and ethnicity. There are no other known risks; however, as with any online related activity, the risk of a breach of confidentiality is always possible. To the best of our ability your answers in this study will remain confidential.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are free to skip any question that you choose. If you choose not to participate it will not affect your relationship with Northern Arizona University or result in any other penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher, Quincy Pfeffer, at gmp4@nau.edu or the faculty advisor, Dr. Michael Costelloe, at Michael.Costelloe@nau.edu or (928)-523-7261. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact Northern Arizona University IRB Office at irb@nau.edu or (928) 523-9551.

You may access the survey here: [\\${1://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

The deadline for participation is February 6, 2023. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey!

Best regards,
Quincy