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Abstract

Recently, scholars have documented how media accounts and policy discourse have presented Blacks and criminality as all but synonymous, a phenomenon racial threat scholarship has termed the racialization of crime. However, despite decades of research on the contact hypothesis—which holds that relationships with members of other groups should reduce stereotypes—no studies have examined whether different types of interracial contact (IC) affect Whites’ perceptions of Black criminality; by extension, virtually no research speaks to whether IC effects are contingent on specific types of racialized views (i.e., crime-related versus non-crime stereotypes); relatedly, little is known about whether the amount of IC impacts crime-related and general stereotypical views of Blacks. To address these gaps, this study first draws on data created to tap into diverse types of contact and analyzes the extent to which each is associated with Whites’ views of Black criminality. It then examines whether contact differentially predicts beliefs in crime versus non-crime-related stereotypes. Finally, it assesses whether the amount of IC influences stereotype endorsement. Consistent with the contact hypothesis, results indicate a generalized stereotype-reducing impact of IC; however, differences emerged between the models predicting crime-related views versus non-crime stereotypes of Blacks. Implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords

interracial contact, Black criminality, stereotypes
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Introduction

In recent decades, considerable scholarship has investigated the “racialization of crime”—that is, the idea, highlighted by racial threat scholarship, that race and crime have become conflated with one another in television shows (Dixon & Linz, 2000), news accounts (Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Oliver, Jackson, Moses, & Dangerfield, 2004), and political messages (Mendelberg, 1997). The result has been “the image of [B]lacks as a violent underclass” (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997, p. 380). The image is, as Quillian and Pager (2001) have emphasized, “one of the most readily invoked contemporary stereotypes about [B]lacks” (p. 721).

One strand of this body of research focuses on racialized images of violence and their impact on perceptions about crime and offending. For example, scholars have investigated the extent to which the media features news stories linking race to crime (Entman, 1992), the influence of media consumption on Americans’ views about minority offending (Gilliam, Valentino, & Beckmann, 2002), and the degree to which the public racially “typifies” crime (Chiricos, Welch, & Gertz, 2004; Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman, 1997). Racial threat theory has been used to describe and understand this phenomenon. It has, for example, been used to argue that Whites are more supportive of punitive sanctions because they perceive an increasing threat to their economic, political, and social hegemony in the presence (or assumed presence) of large numbers of minorities (Blalock, 1967) and the concomitant belief that Blacks are a violent and threatening population (King & Wheelock, 2007; Liska, Chamlin, & Reed, 1985).

These studies have not, however, examined the extent to which actual contact—such as work, neighborhood, school, and interpersonal relationships—that Whites have with Blacks which may affect their views about Blacks, and, in particular, their views of Black criminality. The omission is notable for two reasons. First, recent research has shown that racial attitudes generally, and
racialized views of crime specifically, are among the most consistent and strongest predictors of Whites’ attitudes toward crime policies (Barkan & Cohn, 2005; Chiricos et al., 2004; King & Wheelock, 2007; Unnever & Cullen, 2010). Second, and juxtaposed against these studies assessing the racial dimensions of Whites’ support for punitive policies, a large literature spanning over six decades has demonstrated, with few exceptions, that interracial contact (hereafter, IC) tempers stereotypical views about minorities (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). This work has shown that IC is associated with more positive beliefs about minority work ethic, intelligence, and parenting ability (Dixon & Rosenbaum, 2004; Wilson, 1996). In this context, then, it is somewhat surprising that studies to date have not explored whether having contact, and perhaps more precisely, whether certain types of contact, affect Whites’ beliefs about the degree to which Blacks are prone to violence and criminality. By extension, little is known about whether IC effects are contingent on specific types of racialized views (i.e., the endorsement of crime-related versus non-crime stereotypes), and concomitantly, whether the amount of IC shapes crime-related and general stereotypical views of Blacks.

In this study, we seek to extend public opinion research about race and crime by testing the effects of several types of IC on Whites’ perceptions about the extent to which Blacks commit crime. Study findings reveal support for the contact hypothesis, but with an important caveat—differences emerged between analyses predicting crime-related views versus non-crime stereotypes of Blacks. That is, only certain types of contact—employment, knowing three minorities by name, close friendship, and dating contact affected Whites’ perceptions about Blacks and their propensity to offend. In contrast, all nine types of contact measures significantly reduced general stereotype endorsement. Not least, results indicate that total amount of contact experiences significantly predicts both crime-related and general stereotype beliefs. The study concludes with a discussion of implications for theory and research.
The Racialization of Crime

The “Prototypical” and Violent Offender

Over the last two decades, perceptions about crime and offending have been studied under the context of what scholars have designated as the “racialization of crime”—that is, the increasingly prominent emphasis of race in discussions about offending. Much of this work has centered on examining the extent to which minorities are linked with accounts of crime. Findings from several studies indicate that the news media disproportionately report on crimes that involve African American offenders (Entman, 1992; Romer, Jamieson, & de Coteau, 1998). For example, one study of local news media crime reporting found that African Americans were twice as likely as Whites to be depicted as perpetrators, six times more likely to be portrayed as perpetrators than as law enforcement officers, and overrepresented as criminals, representing close to 37 percent of the perpetrators depicted whereas comprising only one-fifth of those arrested according to official crime reports (Dixon & Linz, 2000).

A similar line of research has found that in addition to this “prototypical” offender depiction (see also Oliver et al., 2004, p. 88), African Americans, as compared to other races, are also more likely to be portrayed as violent and threatening criminals in the news media. To illustrate, Entman (1992) found that among the crime stories featured during a six-month sample period in Chicago, 84 percent of news reports about African American perpetrators involved violent offenses (e.g., homicide) rather than non-violent crimes; in comparison, only 71 percent of crime stories about White perpetrators involved violent crimes. In this same study, visual analysis of individual media stories indicates that Black suspects were significantly more likely to be featured being physically held or restrained by officers (38 percent) compared to White offenders (18 percent).
The Impact of Racialized Images of Crime

As emphasized by Gilliam and Iyengar (2000, p. 571), “what appears in the news on a regular basis, the association of violent crime and racial imagery, does not go unnoticed.” Indeed, Quillian and Pager’s (2001, p. 722) observation—“the stereotype of Blacks as criminals is widely known and is deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of Americans”—indicates that the public is sensitive to reports about crime and race. Empirical evidence has supported this perception by showing that Whites typically stereotype Blacks as aggressive, hostile, violent, and criminal (Devine & Elliot, 1995; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993).

Moreover, findings from the General Social Survey (GSS) have revealed that Americans believe Blacks are the racial group that is most prone to violence (Smith, 1991, 2001). Studies assessing individuals’ assessments of the aggregate-level decomposition of crime by racial group have also found that members of the public most commonly perceive that Blacks account for a disproportionate amount of criminal offenders (Chiricos et al., 2004). For example, an analysis of national survey data has shown that a significant percentage (34 percent) of respondents believed that Black juveniles are more likely to commit crime than White juveniles (Soler, 2001).

Research suggests that the consequences of the conflation of race and crime are numerous. For instance, Quillian and Pager (2001, 2010) have shown that racial composition of place is positively related to residents’ assessments of crime risk, controlling for the objective risk of crime and local economic conditions. Other studies examining fear of crime in hypothetical social situations have found that Americans are more fearful of being victimized by Black strangers than by White strangers (St. John & Heald-Moore, 1995). Quillian and Pager (2001, p. 749) have argued that such relationships reflect the effects of the stereotype of Blacks as criminals and thus that stereotype is likely “an important factor that contributes to racial segregation in the United States.”

Studies have also shown that the racialization of crime affects Whites’ attitudes toward criminal offenders and crime policy. Hurwitz and Peffley (1997), for example, asked White
respondents to provide a determination of guilt and recommendations of punishment based on crime scenarios featuring both an African American and White suspect. Their findings revealed that Whites who embraced stereotypical views about Blacks attributed more perceived guilt and offered less lenient recommendations for the Black suspect. In a more recent experiment, Peffley and Hurwitz (2007) demonstrated that Whites were more supportive of the death penalty when informed that most of the people who are executed are Black. Other investigations have shown that Whites who perceive that Blacks commit a larger proportion of crime or are more criminally threatening than other groups are more likely to support a range of other punitive criminal justice policies (Chiricos et al., 2004; King & Wheelock, 2007).

Racial attitudes toward crime have also been shown to impact spending preferences for crime control. For example, Barkan and Cohn (2005) have determined that Whites who consider Blacks to be prone to violence, but not those who think that Whites are prone to violence, are more likely to believe that the government is spending too little to fight crime. In sum, the evidence to date has indicated that among Whites, the mental association of race and crime increases both perceived risk of victimization in the presence of Blacks and support for efforts to “get tough” with criminal offenders.

**Contact Effects**

As extant work indicates, racialized images of crime and violence are pervasive in American society and appear to exert a powerful influence on public views about offending. A related but unaddressed question about these images exists, however. How does IC influence Whites’ views about the criminality of Blacks? Although depictions linking race to crime are “likely to result in public misperceptions that reinforce existing biases and stereotypes” (Gilens, 1996, p. 516), it is believed that having actual contact with minorities, per Dixon and Rosenbaum (2004) may mitigate negative stereotypes of minority groups. Central to the contact hypothesis is the belief that social interaction with diverse individuals exposes Whites to information—specifically the
“values, lifestyles, and experiences of other groups” (Powers & Ellison, 1995, p. 205)—that leads them to have a positive perception of other groups. By extension, proponents of the theory claim the process ultimately reduces belief in racial and ethnic stereotypes about different groups.

A large body of research has tested the effects of intergroup contact and its ability to reduce racial prejudice. Most of these studies have lent considerable support to this hypothesized effect of contact. For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Pettigrew and Tropp in 2006 provides particularly strong support for the theory. Synthesizing findings from 696 samples, the researchers concluded that “meta-analytic results clearly indicate that intergroup contact typically reduces intergroup prejudice . . . greater intergroup contact is generally associated with lower levels of prejudice” (p. 766). More specifically, contact has been observed to reduce stereotypical views typically associated with minorities, such as poor work ethic (e.g., “most Blacks are on welfare”), low intelligence (e.g., “Blacks are unintelligent”), and inadequate parenting skills (e.g., “Blacks are bad parents”). To illustrate, Kinder and Mendelberg (1995) examined GSS data and found that contact with Blacks diminished the impact of prejudice (e.g., endorsing the belief that Blacks are lazy) on support for “racially tinged” policies such as welfare. Similar findings have emerged in studies of Whites’ views of Blacks’ level of intelligence and parenting skills. Dixon and Rosenbaum (2004) reported that Whites who had contact with Blacks were significantly less likely to express support for “anti-Black” stereotypes, such as the belief that Blacks are “unintelligent” or “lack a commitment to family.”

Collectively, findings from this body of work indicate that Whites who have contact with Blacks should be less likely to believe in another prominent racial stereotype—that Blacks are more criminal and violent than individuals of other races. However, there remains no direct test of this idea or the counter-argument that IC may do little to affect Whites’ views towards Black criminality. It may be, for example, that such contact is insufficient to affect a belief described as “deeply embedded” in the minds of White Americans (see e.g., Quillian & Pager, 2001, p. 722). At the same time, and as suggested by the contact literature, certain types of contact—especially contact that is of a more intimate or close nature—may have more pronounced effects on views
about Black criminality. For example, scholars have outlined the “optimal conditions” (e.g., contact should occur in a non-competitive setting, foster cooperation toward a common goal—Pettigrew, 1998) under which contact is thought to have its most beneficial effect. Per this logic, more intimate or close types of contact that occur in equal status contexts (say, friendships) should produce greater stereotype-reducing effects than other types of contact that occur in highly competitive and less intimate settings (e.g., in school or work environments). Not least, scholars have underscored the importance of voluntary and “pleasant” encounters in reducing stereototypical views about certain groups (Amir, 1969; Islam & Hewstone, 1993). More precisely, these findings indicate that the effects of intergroup contact depend on their type (e.g., competitive versus non-competitive), their nature (e.g. casual versus intimate), and the setting (e.g., work versus recreation) in which the contact occurs. At the same time, other scholars have emphasized that the total amount of IC, captured by developing multi-dimensional indices of contact, may be particularly influential in shaping stereotypical views about Blacks (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux).

What is needed, then, are studies that employ measures of a wide range of interpersonal relationships and that, in turn, can link these to stereotypical perceptions about Black criminality and other racialized views. In the next section, we describe the current study and present several hypotheses about the effects of IC on Whites’ views of Black criminality and other stereotypical perceptions.

The Current Study

As noted above, a substantial amount of empirical attention has been directed toward testing the central assumption of the contact hypothesis—that interaction with “out-group members” results in reduced stereotypical views about and prejudice expressed toward them by “in-group members” (Pettigrew, 1998). Positive effects of IC, such as prejudice reduction among Whites, have been observed when contact “facilitates knowledge of minority groups, helps dominant
group members reassess their own group, forms affective ties, and changes behavior” (J. C. Dixon, 2006, p. 2183).

Using these findings as a foundation, we first hypothesize that contact that occurs in settings that transmit information (in particular, “values, lifestyles, and experiences”; see Powers & Ellison, 1995, p. 205) about out-group members (i.e., Blacks) in non-competitive environments will have the greatest prejudice reducing effect on Whites’ views about Black offending and the endorsement of non-crime stereotypes. These interactions include intimate types of contact, such as close friendship or dating relationships.

Although prior work has not clearly established the impact of less intimate types of IC on stereotypes (see, e.g., J. C. Dixon, 2006), we theorize that casual types of contact, such as simply knowing or talking to someone of a different race, should also temper stereotypical views about Blacks. However, we anticipate that the effect will be less pronounced given that these are types of contact typically experienced in settings that are unlikely to foster a significant exchange of information (e.g., making small talk in a store).

Finally, we anticipate that certain types of interactions—primarily those types that occur in settings believed to foster competition among individuals (see e.g., Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; King & Wheelock, 2007)—may adversely affect Whites’ opinions about Blacks. For example, contact with minorities in school or in places of employment may encourage racist attitudes toward Blacks. Indeed, Blalock (1967, pp. 166-167) suggests that IC, to the extent that it increases perceptions of threat, may intensify stereotypical beliefs about minorities such as that of Blacks-as-criminals. In his view, such beliefs serve a functional purpose; they make “[W]hite mobilization more effective and immediate” (p. 167). Stated differently, Whites may respond to situations they perceive to be threatening with defensive reactions in the form of racial stereotyping and prejudice (Blumer, 1958). For this reason, the effects of contact on Whites views’ about Black criminality and other stereotypical perceptions are likely to vary based on the type and nature of the interaction, as well as the setting in which it occurs. At the same time, the total amount of contact experiences might amplify the generally positive effects of IC.
Information about the data, the specific measures of contact, and our analytic plan is presented in the next section.

**Data and Methods**

**Data**

We rely on responses from a survey about views of crime and offending that was distributed to undergraduate college students enrolled in criminology and criminal justice courses at a large university in the Southeast to test the study’s main hypothesis—that IC impacts Whites’ views about Black criminality. For this study, the use of a college sample is strategic. In particular, there has been an emphasis on studying the effects of a broad range of contact on different populations (see generally, Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). College students represent a unique segment of the public in that during the course of a typical day, they may experience several opportunities to interact with diverse individuals (e.g., on campus, during recreational activities—see Rankin & Reason, 2005); this possibility in turn substantially reduces the “self-selecting out” process identified by researchers—that is, certain people may purposely avoid situations that expose them to contact with minorities (see generally, Shelton & Richeson, 2005). There is the concern that students’ views may not represent those of society in general. However, the opinions of the general population and college students are, according to scholars, “remarkably similar” (Wiecko, 2010, p. 1189; see also Piquero & Bouffard, 2007). In short, this approach allows us to examine the effects of a wide range of types of contact (e.g., campus versus recreation contact) on a relatively diverse population.

Data collection began in 2007. Students were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that their responses, should they choose to participate in the study, were anonymous. The social and demographic characteristics of the sample mostly mirror those of the larger student body. For example, White students accounted for 71.7 percent of the larger
University community versus 72 percent of the sample; and the average age of undergraduates in the University equaled 21.1 years, in our sample, the average age ranged from 20-23 years. The final sample for this study consisted of 494 White students.

**Sample**

The focus on Whites is pertinent for two reasons. First, Whites tend to experience highly homophilous social networks—that is, compared to other racial and ethnic groups they have the least amount of contact with outside group members (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2000), and so may be expected to hold unfavorable views about minorities. Another reason involves the prominent influence that White Americans (as documented by scholars) have had historically on the development of punitive criminal justice policy. For example, Barkan and Cohn (2005, p. 311) have explained that since “African Americans are so often perceived as violent, the conflict tradition would predict that Whites, as the dominant racial group in the United States, would want the criminal justice system to do its best to fight crime . . . [Whites] would be expected, under the conflict tradition, to be especially interested in enhancing the criminal justice system’s ability to achieve this goal.” Thus, per these observations, the effects of IC on Whites are likely more pronounced than for other racial groups, and so we focus on this sub-sample of individuals.

**Measures**

To examine whether IC reduces the perception that Blacks are criminal, we relied on a multi-item variable (Cronbach’s alpha=0.78), “Stereotype of Blacks as Criminals,” which combined three measures of racial typification—the extent to which Blacks commit violent crime, robbery, and burglary (similar measures have been used in other studies examining stereotypical views about race and offending, see e.g., Chiricos et al., 2004). Specifically, the survey question asked, “What percent of people who commit violent crimes in this country would you say are Black?”
Response choices were: “1=0-20 percent,” “2=21-40 percent,” “3=41-60 percent,” “4=61-80 percent,” or “5=81-100 percent.” The question was repeated for the other two crime types (robbery and burglary). Each response was then recoded to reflect an overestimation of Black involvement of crime (“0=less than 41 percent,” “1=over 41 percent”). In determining overestimation, we consulted objective measures—victimization survey and arrest data—of Black involvement in crime. To illustrate, results from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) indicate that Blacks accounted for substantially less than 41 percent of offenders—that is, they accounted for roughly 22 percent of violent offenders and 37 percent of robbery offenders in 2006—the year before our data were collected (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008, Table 40). Because the NCVS does not provide disaggregated data about offender race and burglary offenses, we reviewed Uniform Crime Report (UCR) estimates for 2006. Here again, the same pattern emerged—less than 30 percent of offenders arrested for burglary were Black (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2007, Table 43). Thus, the belief that Blacks account for 41 percent or more of criminal offenders represents a distorted overgeneralization. Responses to these measures were then summed. The final composite variable ranges from 0 to 3 (the number of items where respondents overestimated Black involvement in crime).

We also examined the extent to which minority interaction affects other, non-criminal stereotypes about Blacks. Here, we created another complex measure—“General Racial Stereotypes” (Cronbach’s alpha=0.75). In developing this measure, we drew on prior research focused on stereotype endorsement (see e.g., T. L. Dixon, 2006; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). Respondents were first asked, “Some people believe that Blacks and other minority groups are lazy, compared to Whites. Do you agree with this statement?” Using similar language, respondents were also asked whether they agreed with three other stereotypes: “Blacks and other minority groups have trouble staying employed?” “Blacks and other minority groups are less likely to tell the truth, compared to Whites?” “Blacks and other minority groups are more reckless, compared to Whites?” (In each instance, responses were dichotomous, “1=yes,” “0=no.”). These four variables were then combined to form one multi-dimensional stereotype
measure ranging from 0 to 3 (where “0=does not endorse any stereotype,” “1=endorses one,” “2=endorses two,” and “3=endorses three or more”). Since the impact of contact is thought to depend on its type, nature, and the setting in which it is experienced, we examined various types of contact that involve different contexts or settings. First, we measured relatively casual types of contact—school, recreational, employment, store, and neighborhood—by asking, “In the past month, have you engaged in conversations with more than two people of a racial/ethnic background other than yours on campus?” “In recreational activities?” “At your job or place of employment?” “In stores?” “In dorms, apartment complex, or place of residence?” In each case, respondents could report either “0=no” or “1=yes.” We also inquired about whether respondents knew any minority individuals by name. They were asked, “Do you know more than three people of a racial/ethnic background other than yours on a mutual first-name basis?” Again, option categories were “0=no” or “1=yes.”

Next, we queried about more intimate types of relationships. To determine close friendship we asked, “Are any of your six (6) closest friends of a racial/ethnic background different from your own?” Dating history was assessed based on answers to the following: “Have you ever dated someone of a racial/ethnic background different from your own?” For each category, students could report either “0=no” or “1=yes.” Finally, drawing on the idea that the amount of contact with minorities might significantly alter views about them, we asked, “Comparing yourself to the average student of your racial/ethnic background, have you had more contact with persons of a racial/ethnic background different from your own?” Categories for this measure were “0=no” and “1=yes.”

To further unpack these effects, we also created a multi-item index of contact, “Total Amount of Contact” (Cronbach’s alpha=0.59). It is equal to the sum of eight IC measures: campus, stores, recreation, employment, residence, being familiar with three minorities, close friendship, and dated. The index ranges from 1 to 8 (where “1=one type of contact or less,” and “8=eight types of contact”). In line with other studies of intergroup contact, we controlled for a number of social and demographic factors. Age was coded as “1=18-19,” “2=20-21,” “3=22-23,” and
“4=24 or older.” Students also recorded their sex (“0=female” and “1=male”). Because income is thought to affect perceptions about crime and justice (Nagin, Piquero, Scott, & Steinberg, 2006), we included a measure of parental income as a control. In the survey, students were asked, “Which of the following categories likely includes the total annual household income of your immediate family (for example, your parents)?” The coding for this measure was “1=less than $25,000-$49,000,” “2=$50,000-$74,000,” “3=$75,000 to $99,000,” and “4=$100,000 or more.” Next, following the logic that minorities are disproportionately likely to reside in disordered communities (see, e.g. Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004), and thus Whites who also live in these communities might experience greater amounts of IC by dint of their residence, the survey contained several questions designed to measure the extent of neighborhood disorder. Drawing on prior studies, we asked respondents a series of questions related to their neighborhood: “Thinking about where you lived during the 5 years prior to college, how much would you say each of the following was a problem?” “Trash and litter lying around?” “Neighborhood dogs running loose?” “Graffiti on sidewalks and walls?” “Vacant houses and unkempt lots?” “Unsupervised youth?” “Too much noise?” “People drunk or high on drugs in public places?” “Abandoned cars or car parts lying around?” In each instance, respondents could report, “1=not a problem at all,” “2=a minor problem,” “3=somewhat of a problem,” or “4=a serious problem.” The responses to these eight questions were used to create an index (Cronbach’s alpha=0.86); index values ranged from “8” (relatively low levels of disorder) to “30” (very high levels of disorder).

Finally, we controlled for racial identity. This variable might serve as a valid proxy for racial prejudice, a moderator which per scholars has been salient for understanding racialized crime perceptions (T. L. Dixon, 2006). For instance, in a review of studies examining race, McDermott and Samson (p. 249) observed the links between White identity and racism—“White pride has historically been predicated upon a denigration of non-Whites” (other scholars have also noted the importance of examining racial identity on views about minorities—Block, Roberson, & Neuger, 1995; Carter, Helms, & Juby, 2004; Gushue & Constantine, 2007). Thus, one
perspective is that the racial identities of Whites form in response to racial superiority, and so, stronger racial identities among Whites might drive racialized views about non-Whites. Our measure of it was derived from a question that asked how often the respondent thinks about having a racial identity. The coding was “1=never,” “2=seldom,” and “3=very/somewhat frequently.”

Analysis

Focusing on a sub-sample of White students, we tested the effects of contact on views about Black criminality by estimating several ordinal regression models. First, the outcome measure—Whites’ perception of the amount of Black offending—was regressed on a specific contact measure (campus, store, recreation, work, neighborhood, knowing three minorities by name, having a close friend who is minority, having dated a minority, and reporting more than average contact). Each model controlled for the effects of age, sex, income, community disorder, and racial identity. A second set of analyses explored whether IC has diffuse effects—that is, they tested whether such contact should affect stereotypical perceptions about minorities along many, other non-crime specific dimensions—whether Blacks are lazy, experience difficulty staying employed, are less truthful, and more reckless (see e.g., Pettigrew, 1998). Specifically, the goal here is to investigate the possibility that, in contrast to the diffuse effects hypothesis, IC may have a unique effect on Whites’ perceptions of Black criminality because the stereotype of Blacks as criminals is thought to be deeply ingrained in the minds of many Whites (Devine, 1989; Quillian & Pager, 2001). To this end, we examined whether IC affected beliefs in general stereotypes about Blacks (a multi-item measure that combines the above four stereotypes). As with the other analyses, the stereotype measure was regressed on different indicators of IC. The final and third set of ordinal models examined whether multiple types of contact impacted the racial typification of crime or the endorsement of general stereotypes. The reasoning behind this analysis is to assess how the total amount of contact, and not just one specific type, influenced
views about Blacks.

**Findings**

Turning first to perceptions about Black offending, we see in Table 1 that the average response of 1.38 indicates that most Whites overestimate the amount of Black offending, for more than one offense type (violent crime, robbery, and burglary). When the focus is on general racial stereotype endorsement, fewer respondents appear to hold biased views. The mean of 0.99 suggests that the average respondent endorsed close to one non-criminal stereotype about Blacks.

Examination of Table 1 also shows the extent to which Whites have experienced IC. Here, several notable findings stand out. First, the most prevalent type of contact involved simply knowing minorities—95 percent of the sample reported knowing three minorities on a first-name basis. The next most common type of contact was campus or school interaction (88 percent of respondents reported talking to more than two minority individuals while on campus). A substantial number of respondents (80 percent) also reported having contact with minorities during recreational activities (e.g., sports). Close to two-thirds of the sample reported store, employment, or residence contact. By far, the least amount of contact involved intimate and close relationships. A slight majority (59 percent) of students revealed that at least one of their six closest friends was minority. Only 38 percent of individuals admitted having ever dated outside their race or ethnicity. The least common type of contact involved above-average contact—only 34 percent of the sample reported having contact that was outside what they perceived as the typical amount. In addition to these individual contact measures and as discussed earlier, a multi-item variable consisting of eight of them, “Total Amount of Contact,” was also developed. Here, we see that, on average, Whites reported experiencing close to six types of IC.

Insert Table 1 about here

We now examine the effects of specific types of IC on beliefs about Black criminality.
Inspection of Table 2 reveals an interesting pattern. In particular, only four contact measures—employment, knowing three minorities by name, close friendship, and dating—were statistically significant, and in each instance the effect was to reduce the belief that Blacks are offenders. This finding lends support to a critical assumption of the contact theory and our main hypothesis—namely, that contact with minority individuals should reduce the endorsement of stereotypical beliefs about them among Whites. However, unlike what we hypothesized—that any type of contact should affect views about Black criminality—the study findings suggest that this is not the case. We found, for instance, that some types of contact exerted no statistically significant effect on beliefs about Black offending. In addition, although we had initially theorized that certain types of contact which occurs in competitive settings (e.g., school/employment) might perpetuate biased views of Blacks, no negative or stereotype-increasing effects of contact emerged in any of the models (on the contrary, experiencing IC in the workplace actually reduced the racial typification of crime).

What, then, accounts for the differential effects of contact? One possible explanation centers around the nature and setting of these interactions. Although some scholars contend that experiencing IC in the workplace might foster competition among Whites and Blacks and therefore reinforce negative stereotypes about Blacks (Blalock, 1967), a competing view exists. It suggests workplace contact might serve to increase acceptance of diversity, and therefore, lead to reduced stereotype endorsement. For example, Estlund’s (2005, p. 80) observation—“the typical workplace is a hotbed of sociability and cooperation, of constructive and mostly friendly interactions among co-workers day after day”—implies a “we are in this together” logic—where Whites endorse greater acceptance of minority co-workers due to the shared experience of having worked together; this type of experience also appears to satisfy the criterion that contact serve as a pleasant experience to have its most influential, positive impact on views (Amir, 1969; Islam & Hewstone, 1993). Moreover, the “workplace=competition” hypothesis was initially developed at a time (Blalock, 1967) when occupations were highly racially segregated. There is evidence that workplaces have grown significantly more racially and ethnically diverse in recent decades.
(Cascio, 2003; Toossi, 2006). Accordingly, under both of these rationales, IC in the course of employment might not threaten Whites to the degree that it had in prior years.

A second identified correlate of reduced stereotypical crime views was being familiar with at least three minorities. As initially theorized, this type of IC is associated with a reduction in the racial typification of crime. Although this relationship does not appear to be as intimate as others (e.g., close friendship, dating relationship), it may function to increase Whites’ “proximity” to Blacks (see e.g., Kinder & Mendelberg, 1995, p. 419)—a factor that has been associated with reduced stereotypical views among Whites.

The effect of close friendship, the third significant type of contact, is consistent with a larger empirical literature that has revealed friendship to be “a critical variable in the formation of racial attitudes” (Johnson & Jacobson, 2005, p. 397). Pettigrew (1997, p. 173) explains why: “[Friendship across group lines] involves long-term contact, rather than brief first encounters. It is likely to meet all the key conditions of the contact hypothesis. And it occasions affective as well as cognitive processes.” It should be noted, however, that another theory about close friendship exists—it may, according to some scholars be too “personalized.” Stated differently, Whites might assume that their minority friends serve as the “exception rather than the rule,” and thus friendship might do little to reduce stereotypical views about all minorities (Van Laar, Levin, Sinclair, & Sidanius, 2005, p. 342). The analyses presented here do not support that argument. Rather, close friendship represents a unique type of interaction that appears to have significantly stronger and negative effects on beliefs in racial stereotypes than more casual types of contact (e.g., talking to minority students on campus).

One of the least likely types of contact reported by Whites involved interracial/interethnic dating—the fourth and final significant IC effect in the criminality models. Inspection of Table 2 shows that students who dated outside their race or ethnicity attributed significantly less crime to Blacks. This finding is consistent with a larger body of work indicating that interracial/interethnic dating affects stereotypical opinions about minorities along many dimensions. Dating appears, as Yancey and Yancey (1998, p. 346) have observed, to “bring
together individuals from different cultures.” This process in turn “may lead to a greater appreciation of the partner’s culture . . . promoting healthy racial relations through martial assimilation.” Not least, dating, perhaps beyond close friendship, typically involves a familial and romantic element which arguably may be especially influential in shaping opinions about out-group members. Although scholars have cautioned that “we have yet to identify the unique challenges that might arise as such relationships develop” (Eastwick, Richeson, Son, & Finkel, 2009:1266), our findings provide some initial clues about dating effects—namely, it is associated with reduced stereotypical views about Blacks as offenders.

Insert Table 2 about here

Does this pattern hold when the focus is on predicting other, non-crime related stereotypes? The answer here is “yes” and “no.” On the one hand, results from Table 3 generally parallel a central finding from Table 2—IC is associated with reduced stereotypical views about Blacks. However, unlike findings observed in the criminality models, here, all types of contact appear to reduce stereotypical views about Blacks. What then accounts for these disparate findings?

Such types of contact may provide opportunities to dispel general stereotypes about Blacks (e.g., in the neighborhood setting); however, these five additional contact effects do not extend to views about Black criminality. Put differently, the analyses presented in Table 3 suggest that the effects of various forms of IC may not be uniform across different stereotypical beliefs.

Insert Table 3 about here

We turn to our third and final set of analyses which tested whether the total amount of IC impacted crime-related and non-crime stereotype beliefs. Results from these models indicate that each increase in IC reduces both crime-related perceptions of Blacks and general, non-crime related stereotype endorsement. That is, Whites with a greater amount IC were significantly less likely to endorse either stereotype—those related to criminality or general racialized views.

Insert Table 4 about here

**Conclusion and Implications**
Overall, our results support Allport’s (1954, p. 268) argument that “contacts that bring knowledge and acquaintance are likely to engender sounder beliefs concerning minority groups, and for this reason contribute to the reduction of prejudice.” In particular, four types of contact—employment, knowing three minorities by name, close friendship, and dating—stand out as significant predictors of reduced prejudicial views about Black criminality.

Despite arguments that IC might actually increase stereotypical views of Blacks, the analyses revealed no support for this view, and, in particular, the argument that greater contact with minority individuals in competitive settings (e.g., the workplace, residence) significantly increases negative perceptions about Blacks.

Findings from a second set of analyses examining general, non-crime stereotype endorsement point to the possibility that the effects of diverse forms of IC are variable across different stereotypical beliefs (i.e., all types of IC reduced non-crime stereotype endorsement, whereas only four types impacted views about Blacks’ propensity to offend). A final and third set of analyses found support for the contention that total amount of contact is particularly robust in predicting a reduction in Whites’ endorsement of crime-related and general stereotypical views about Blacks.

We turn now to the implications of this study. Other theoretical perspectives (e.g., racial threat) have greatly increased understanding of the “race as crime” phenomenon, especially as it applies to public opinion about criminal justice policies. Missing from such studies has been, however, an emphasis on the extent to which actual contact—workplace, neighborhood, school, and intimate relationships—that Whites have with Blacks which may affect their stereotypical views about Blacks as criminals. The omission is notable because scholars, such as Unnever and Cullen (2009, p. 284), have recently called for “efforts to create broader theoretical models that integrate the major findings on why individuals differ in their punitiveness.” Moreover, studies have shown that both racial attitudes and stereotypes of Blacks are key factors in explaining Whites’ support for “get tough” crime policies (Chiricos et al., 2004; Unnever & Cullen, 2010).
Holding racially prejudiced views (e.g., that Blacks are lazy, unpatriotic) is a factor also linked to a disturbing phenomenon—per Barkan and Cohn (1998, p. 750) it “motivates Whites’ approval of excessive police violence.” More generally, recent research has demonstrated as well that IC actually increases the perceived salience of crime—a factor predictive of punitiveness (Hogan, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2005; Unnever & Cullen, 2010)—among Whites (Mears, Mancini, & Stewart, 2009; Mears & Stewart, 2010). These findings in combination with the current study’s finding that IC influences views about Black criminality suggest a need for future research that explores the extent to which IC may indirectly or directly affect Whites’ attitudes about crime policy.

Additionally, our results indicate that a greater theoretical focus on the nuances of contact—their type, nature, and setting—is needed. We find that having work-related, less intimate (knowing three minorities), and intimate contact with minorities had strong and consistently positive effects on Whites’ views about African Americans. This outcome stands in contrast to findings from other studies (such as racial threat) which have revealed that some types of contact (e.g., economic, residential) may reduce positive opinions about Blacks (King & Wheelock, 2007; Taylor, 1998). Because few studies have been conducted focusing on a range of contact effects, and potential moderators of them (e.g., media consumption, prejudice), on perceptions of crime and offending, it is not clear what might explain these differential effects of contact. Future studies thus are needed to establish the conditions under which negative or positive effects of perceptions about Black criminality result from IC.

Ideally, further investigations of contact theory will be able to test its key tenet—that interaction with out-group members reduces stereotypes about certain groups—on a range of populations and in a number of different settings. Although recent work indicates that college students are similar to the general public in many respects (Wiecko, 2010), there may be significant differences in the amount and types of contact they experience on a daily basis, which in turn, might affect their perceptions about race and offending. We suspect that, if anything, our focus on college students enrolled in criminology and criminal justice classes biases our analysis toward null findings, because of such respondents’ higher than average levels of educational
attainment and exposure to accurate information on crime and criminal justice. Nevertheless, future investigations are needed that examine the generalizability of our results to wider populations.

An additional line of inquiry worth pursuing is whether the contact perspective applies to other crime-related stereotypes. Notably, in this study we found that the effects of various forms of IC vary across different stereotypical beliefs (e.g., crime-specific stereotypes versus general ones). This point is relevant because stereotypes exist beyond that of the Blacks-as-criminal view. For example, scholars have noted that large swaths of the public seem to hold a prominent stereotype about offenders—that nearly all will recidivate (see, generally, Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000; Roberts, Stalans, Indermaur, & Hough, 2003). This view appears especially prevalent when the focus is on certain types of offenders (e.g., sex offenders—Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007). Indeed, a recent study investigated this idea and found that exposure to former offenders reduced stigmatizing attitudes about other ex-offenders; contact in fact was the strongest predictor of such views about this population (Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010). Notably, however, the study did not evaluate the effects of different types of contact on attitudes toward ex-offenders, nor did it assess views about specific types of offenders. It is possible that different types of contact with offenders may have varying effects on views about the former—indeed, Hirschfield and Piquero (2010, p. 45) emphasize that this line of inquiry “merit[s] future research.” It may also be possible that contact with a specific type of offender (e.g., sex offenders) is required to reduce stigmatizing attitudes toward that particular group of criminals. Of course, the opposite conclusion might be true—interactions with offenders, at least under some circumstances, might increase the perception among the public that they will eventually reoffend. Thus, extending the contact perspective to studies of crime and justice could reveal nuances in public views about offenders.

The extension of the contact hypothesis to studies of perceptions about crime and offenders may be new, but a key tenet of the theory—that contact reduces prejudice is not. Over six decades of research has offered substantial support for the theory. Our study contributes to that
large body of work by highlighting that the type and amount of contact dictates the degree to which Whites endorse racialized views of crime.

**Notes**

1 In measuring the stereotypes of Blacks as violent offenders, robbery offenders, and burglary offenders, we opted to use a question asking about the proportion of Blacks who commit these crimes rather than one asking explicitly about Blacks’ propensity for crime and violence for two reasons. First, we believe that respondents may feel more comfortable answering the former, because it does not ask respondents to report their opinions about *all* Blacks—a request that would more directly convey the potential for certain replies to be perceived as racially intolerant. Thus, this approach may help to protect against social desirability bias. Second, we believe this approach will reduce measurement error because many individuals will likely find it easier to quantify the racial makeup of criminal offenders than different racial groups’ proneness to violence or criminal propensity.

2 “More than average” contact was not included in the index since it measures perceptions about the extent of contact (compared to others) and not necessarily type of contact.

3 The test of parallel slopes was not significant in any of the models (presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4) indicating that we should not reject the null hypothesis of parallel slopes; thus, the parameter estimates can be assumed to be similar across the contrasts from lower to higher levels of the outcome variable (see e.g., Roncek & Swatt, 2006). Multicollinearity did not appear to bias study results. Tolerance levels for all models were consistently above 0.90 and variance inflation factor (VIF) values did not exceed 1.10.

4 As an anonymous reviewer observed, our measure of interracial dating is limited. It does not specify the race of the person who the respondent dated, and so combines those who have dated Blacks with those who have dated members of other racial groups (e.g., Asians). Thus, our findings likely provide only a conservative estimate of the effect of IC dating on the endorsement of stereotypes about Blacks.
References


D.C.: Author.


offenders and community protection policies. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy, 7*, 1-25.


Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
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Table 2. Ordinal Logistic Regression of the Endorsement of the Stereotype of Blacks as Criminals on Types of IC
(Sample=Whites Only)

<table>
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<th>IC</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
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Controls
- Age                 | 1.30*   | 1.28*   | 1.27*   | 1.31*   | 1.27*   | 1.29*   | 1.26*   | 1.28*   | 1.29*   |
- Male                | 0.94    | 0.95    | 0.95    | 0.95    | 0.94    | 0.89    | 0.96    | 0.90    | 0.96    |
- Income              | 1.10    | 1.10    | 1.11    | 1.10    | 1.11    | 1.12    | 1.093   | 1.13    | 1.10    |
- Neigh. Disorder     | 0.96    | 0.96    | 0.97    | 0.97    | 0.97    | 0.96    | 0.96    | 0.97    | 0.97    |
- Racial Identity     | 1.26    | 1.28    | 1.28    | 1.32*   | 1.29    | 1.34*   | 1.30*   | 1.26    | 1.26    |
- Intercept 1<sup>a</sup> | -0.26   | 0.20    | 0.10    | 0.09    | 0.04    | -0.81   | -0.19   | 0.06    | 0.15    |
- Intercept 2          | 0.57    | 1.02    | 0.92    | 0.90    | 0.87    | 0.02    | 0.65    | 0.90    | 0.97    |
- Intercept 3          | 1.33    | 1.77    | 1.67    | 1.66    | 1.63    | 0.78    | 1.41    | 1.66    | 1.73    |
- Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> | 0.04    | 0.04    | 0.04    | 0.05    | 0.04    | 0.05    | 0.06    | 0.05    | 0.04    |

*<i>p</i> < 0.05  **<i>p</i> < 0.01  ***<i>p</i> < 0.001 (two-tailed).

<sup>a</sup> With a four-level dependent variable, ordinal logistic regression produces three intercepts.

Note: Odds ratios are presented. N = 494.
Table 3. Ordinal Logistic Regression of the Endorsement of General Racial Stereotypes on Types of IC
(Sample=Whites Only)

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<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.14</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.61</td>
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<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.48</td>
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<td>0.85</td>
<td>2.07</td>
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<td>Pseudo R²</td>
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<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p ≤ 0.05  **p ≤ 0.01  ***p ≤ 0.001 (two-tailed).
a. With a four-level dependent variable, ordinal logistic regression produces three intercepts.

Note: Odds ratios are presented. N = 494.
Table 4. Ordinal Logistic Regression of the Endorsement of the Stereotype of Blacks as Criminals and General Racial Stereotypes on Respondents’ Total Amount of IC 
(Sample=Whites Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1: Blacks as Criminals</th>
<th>Model 2: General Racial Stereotypes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Amount of IC</td>
<td>0.83***</td>
<td>0.72***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>1.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1.47</td>
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<td>Income</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.08</td>
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<td>Neigh. Disorder</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>1.01</td>
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<td>Racial Identity</td>
<td>1.30*</td>
<td>1.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercept 1(^a)</td>
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<td>-0.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercept 2</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercept 3</td>
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<td>0.94</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pseudo R(^2)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p ≤ 0.05  **p ≤ 0.01  ***p ≤ 0.001 (two-tailed).
a. With a four-level dependent variable, ordinal logistic regression produces three intercepts.

Note: Odds ratios are presented. N = 494.