ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: TESTING THE INCORPORATION OF RACIAL THREAT AND CONTACT THEORIES TO UNDERSTAND PREJUDICE

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The history of the United States has been plagued by racial violence whenever the demographically dominant race (most often white) has come into contact with an "outgroup" (typically any other race, but often Black). Research has repeatedly indicated that at the heart of lethal interactions are racial stereotypes and prejudice; yet, knowing this has not lowered the rates of racial violence in the US. If criminology intends to address the rising instances of racial violence in this country, there needs to be a strong foundational understanding of the mechanisms behind prejudice. Criminology has joined sociology in researching Blalock's racial threat theory (1967) – one possible explanatory model for racial prejudice. However, there are numerous shortcomings to this theory. I argue that a promising path forward is to address some of the gaps in racial threat theory by integrating elements of Allport's contact theory (1954) – a widely researched and supported framework within psychology. The current study examines the potential for such interdisciplinary/intertheoretical frameworks by identifying complementary findings within the extant literature for each theory. Crucial patterns and overlapping

developments among literature on the two theories were identified and integrated into a more expansive theoretical framework than either theory on its own. Some of the patterns identified include a population threshold at which the relative size of a population of color no longer maintains a positive, linear relationship with expressions of racial threat (a development in racial threat literature), and the findings that initial experiences of interracial contact are likely prejudice inducing in white subjects, but subsequent contact experiences are likely prejudice reducing in effect (a development in contact theory literature). Hypotheses were then offered to test this proposed framework, and subsequent analyses were run using data from the Seattle. Specifically, average anti-Black prejudice levels were compared between four categories of white respondents: respondents living in *highly racially heterogeneous* areas but had *low levels of contact*; respondents living in areas of *low racially heterogeneity* and had *low levels of contact*; respondents living in *highly racially heterogeneous areas* and had *high levels of contact*; and respondents who lived in areas *of low racial heterogeneity* but had *high levels of contact.* The results indicated support for the hypotheses proposed, which translates to a justification for further examining the expanded theoretical framework. In the study's conclusion, the implications of the research and findings on specifically further interdisciplinary work is discussed.

TESTING THE INCORPORATION OF RACIAL THREAT AND CONTACT THEORIES TO UNDERSTAND PREJUDICE

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

From the time Europeans first set foot on the North American continent and encountered indigenous groups, racially motivated violence has been a pervasive element of intergroup contact in this region. Specifically, conflict in the form of racial violence perpetrated by the white population towards other racial groups. Throughout history, the development of the United States was contingent on such forms of racial violence. Some examples include the often-fatal relocation/removal of Native Americans (Equal Justice Initiative 2016), and the forced labor of enslaved Africans/African Americans deemed racially inferior (National Museum of African American History and Culture N.d.). These are just two instances of the United States' significant history of violent conflict resulting from intergroup contact. Centuries later, racially motivated violence is still a central issue in the United States. Although it takes on different forms, such as what we now identify as hate crimes and phenomena such as reckless racism, it is nonetheless devastating in its impacts (Yankah 2021).

One indicator of the rate of racially motivated violence in the United States is tracking hate crimes. A hate crime is defined as an (often violent) illegal act wherein the motivation for committing the crime is based on a bias against a specific characteristic of the victim (Department of Justice 2019). Such characteristics can include a "victim's perceived or actual race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability." In 2020, FBI reported hate crimes reached a 12-year high (Equal Justice Initiative 2021). Of these instances of hate crimes, the category with the largest increase was that of racially motivated violence. Given that hate crimes involve the intentional targeting of a victim based on the prejudice or bias of the perpetrator, they often carry with them a profound impact on not only the

direct victim(s) but also the broader community that identifies with the characteristic for which the original victim(s) was targeted (Craig 2002; Department of Justice 2019).

However, despite the far-reaching and detrimental consequences prejudicial racial violence has been shown to produce, many argue that the legal definition of a hate crime is too narrow, making it exceedingly difficult to prove in court (Yankah 2021). One example of a type of racial violence that is not always covered by a hate crime classification is instances of reckless racism, meaning a perpetrator disregards their use of excessive force on a victim due to the victim's race (Yankah 2021). States have different laws concerning what qualifies as a hate crime. However, reckless racism is an example of a type of violence that is not always counted in that category and, therefore, not counted when examining rates of racial violence. Knowing that our best indication of racial violence rates is hate crime data, and that hate crimes are often narrowly defined and disproportionately challenging to convict, the rise in hate crimes in recent years most likely coincides with a significant number of uncounted instances of racial violence (Pezzella, Fetzer, and Keller 2019). Given this, racial violence prevention requires far more attention in the world of criminology than it currently receives.

Racial violence and hate crimes are traditionally rooted in fear, stereotypes, and prejudice (Kopytowska & Baider 2017). To see examples of this, we need to look no further than one of the highest-profile recent cases of the murder of a Black man, Ahmaud Arbery, at the hands of three white men. The men underwent a murder trial, during which they testified that their actions were motivated by the belief that Arbery was a criminal -- a stereotype widely attributed to young Black men (Fausset 2022a; Welch 2007). They were found guilty of murder, but the verdict was not explicitly addressing whether their actions were motivated by racial prejudice. To prove racial prejudice was the determining factor in the murder, the men underwent a federal

hate crime trial. These men, who accosted Arbery with racial slurs during their pursuit of him, have previously been public about their racist ideologies. On February 22, 2022, a jury found the three men guilty of committing federal hate crimes (Fausset 2022a). Specifically, they officially established that racial prejudice was the motivating factor behind their violent pursuit and subsequent murder of Ahmaud Arbery (Baker 2022). Their federal convictions are arguably the most public recent examples of racial prejudice's ability to produce lethal outcomes (Fausset 2022b; Yankah 2021).

In light of all of this, a worthy object of investigation in the field of criminology is to examine indicators of prejudice. There are numerous theories surrounding racial prejudice and the conditions under which it thrives. Two theories in particular are especially relevant when examining racial prejudice in the context of intergroup exchange: racial threat theory and contact theory. The current research presents an integrated theoretical framework to increase explanatory power in understanding the impact of racial heterogeneity in conjunction with intergroup contact on prejudice. To do this, elements of racial threat theory and contact theory are used to inform hypotheses predicting individual level prejudice based on neighborhood level racial heterogeneity and individual level interracial contact. The motivation here is to illuminate the need for interdisciplinary research, as scholars from different disciplines have been testing broadly the same phenomena for decades. Previous research on racial threat theory and contact theory has remained relatively fixed in scope, utilizing only the tools and explanations provided by each theory's respective disciplines. However, both theories have had significant advancements and answered questions that research on the other theory is still asking.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Argument

Racial threat theory and contact theory both broadly hypothesize that level of exposure to a population of people of color in a given area will impact the way said group is perceived and treated by the white population; however, at first glance, they seem to come to different conclusions. At a basic level, racial threat theory asserts that the greater the population of people of color, the more the white population will perceive them as an economic, political, and/or symbolic threat (Blalock 1967). In response, the theory posits that said white population will tighten social controls so that the population of color's economic, social, and political mobility is limited (Blalock 1967). Conversely, contact theory suggests that interracial contact is a factor in reducing prejudice and increasing intergroup empathy (Allport, 1954). In this case, higher populations of people of color would correspond with more opportunities for contact and, by extension, a more unified social order that is not dependent on the racial majority's social control efforts.

Despite the fact that racial threat theory and contact theory seem to be examining the same phenomena and coming to different conclusions, very few studies have looked at the theories in context of each other to understand why this may be the case. One problem that has contributed to this lack of cohesion is the fact that studies done on each are in large part uniquely associated with distinct disciplines. Racial threat theory exists primarily in the worlds of sociology and criminology, while contact theory is concentrated primarily in the field of psychology. These different disciplines are generally looking at the same phenomena (the social, attitudinal, and behavioral impacts of an increased presence of an "outgroup"); however, they present distinct processes that could account for this. I propose that a theoretical model which

incorporates the findings of the two theories into one cohesive framework is the best option going forward.

Literature Review

Racial Threat Theory

Racial threat theory (sometimes referred to as racial threat hypothesis) originated in Blalock's 1967 work "Toward a Theory of Minority Group Relations" (Blalock 1967). In this, Blalock suggested that the relative size of a population of people of color within a majority white area will be associates in white residents' perception of the people of color as a political, economic, and social threat to their power. According to his theory, the more people of color in a given area, the more the white respondents would perceive them as a threat. As a result of this increase in perceived threat, the white population were hypothesized to respond by tightening social controls, including furthering criminalization of residents of color to maintain the power structure. This relationship, according to Blalock, would hold true until the population of people of color grew large enough to obtain sufficient political, economic, and/or social capital to combat these oppressive conditions. The theory has been extensively tested, yet evidence concerning Blalock's propositions has been mixed, with different studies finding positive and negative, linear, and non-linear relationships (or even no relationship) between racial demographics and various outcome measures.

For its part, racial threat literature falls squarely within the existing norms of sociological/criminological research. Typically, the studies examining the phenomena present a particular hypothesis (racial threat) that is operationalized in a consistent manner (the presumption that the presence of residents of color in a defined area is associated with the perceived threat of white residents), and this hypothesis is tested by looking at the relationship

between racial demographics and various outcomes that the researcher(s) hypothesize will be impacted by such threat. If there is a positive relationship between the size of the population of color and the outcome measure, it is presumed to indicate support for the racial threat theory. Many of the measures used to indicate racial threat are population level, numerical outcomes, such as discrepancies in stop and frisk policing (Ferrandino 2015); police force size (Stults and Baumer 2007); police resource allocation (Holmes et al. 2008); state-level jail and prison sentences (Wang and Mears 2010); federal sentencing decisions (Feldmeyer & Ulmer 2011); the assignment of habitual offender status (Caravelis, Chiricos, and Bales 2011); and intake, adjudication, and judicial decisions within juvenile court proceedings (Leiber, Peck, and Rodriguez 2016). This method of using a diverse set of population-level variables as a proxy measurement to study one specific phenomenon raises the question of whether any of these variables are genuinely representative of the presence of "racial threat".

A smaller body of racial threat literature focuses on individual-level outcomes, such as tests of individual prejudice as impacted by demographic characteristics. Such studies have sought to explore micro-level processes, such as examining fear-inducing prejudicial attitudes and perceptions of criminal threat and neighborhood crime levels, in mediating the gap between minority population size and discriminatory social control practices (Dollar 2014). Other studies have examined the connection between racial demographics and prejudicial attitudes as measured through surveys and telephone interviews (Quillian 1995; Wang 2012). Such studies have yielded significant results to the advancement of racial threat theory. For example, Quillian (1995) found that group threat (as measured by economic condition and size of a relative size of population of people of color) explains the majority of the variation between prejudicial attitude levels, while individual-level factors commonly thought of as determinants of prejudice (such as

education level, marital status, or age) do not explain variation in prejudice levels. These findings indicate a need for further research on determinants of prejudice within the fields of criminology.

The studies on racial threat discussed in this paper up until this point all share a distinct quality: they examine racial threat outcomes in the context of "actual" or objective measures. However, there have been interesting and informative studies examining racial threat outcomes in the context of perceptual measures. Such studies interrogate the power of perception on individual level attitudes and behaviors. For example, one study found that the greater the relative size population of color in a given area, the higher the white residents will perceive crime rates, independent of actual crime rates (Quillian and Pager 2001). Other studies have taken this line of thought even further, finding that the perception of the size of an "outgroup" alone (in this study's case, immigrant population size) is just as (or more) influential on their perceived status as a criminal threat than actual population size (Wang 2012). These studies demonstrate that research into racial threat theory has not only revealed previously untested mechanisms such as prejudicial attitudes that connect population size and changes in social control measures, but has also revealed an extension of the theory, finding that we do not only see these prejudicial impacts as a result of actual population demographics but also as a result of perceived racial demographics - a variable that is more arbitrary and subject to manipulation.

A final theme among the literature on racial threat theory is the emergence of non-linear and curvilinear relationships, in which once the population of people of color reaches a certain size, there is either no longer a relationship or there is a negative relationship between the size of the population of people of color and the white population's perceived threat. Interestingly, when Blalock first proposed racial threat theory, he hypothesized that the relationship between

interracial attitudes and interracial exposure would be non-linear. According to him, there would be a positive relationship between perceived threat of white residents towards people of color and interracial exposure up until a certain undefined threshold, at which point the slope would decrease substantially (Blalock 1967). The rationale behind this assertion was that once the population of color achieved some level of saturation within the overall area, they would hold sufficient political and economic capital to combat the social control forces tightened against them.

Few studies have examined this latter part of his theory that extends beyond the initial positive relationship between prejudice and interracial exposure. However, there are some crucial works which have found the existence of a non-linear or curvilinear relationship as originally hypothesized by Blalock. One example of this is Stults and Baumer's study (2007) which found that when examining police force size across geographical areas with varying levels of racial heterogeneity, the size of the Black population was positively correlated with police force size until the population ratios reached a "tipping point". This tipping point occurred when Black residents accounted for a quarter of the overall population. Beyond this point, the size of the Black population no longer correlated with police force size (Stults and Baumer 2007).

This idea of a population threshold or "tipping point" is a repeated theme found in racial threat literature. Another study whose results indicated reason to question the existence of a linear relationship as previously hypothesized found that the relationship between police force size and the size of a Black population is curvilinear (Jackson & Carroll 1981). In this study, when Black residents accounted for 0-10% or over 50% of the overall population, the relationship between the size of the Black population and police expenditures was negative. In contrast, when Black residents accounted for 10-40% of the population, there was a nonlinear,

positive relationship with an increasing slope (Jackson & Carroll 1981). While these studies did find evidence in support of Blalock's original assertion that racial threat phenomena would be non-linear, their results did not go as far as to produce an explanation for why this may be the case (nor, in turn, were they able to explicitly support Blalock's propositions concerning political/economic capital). Understanding the mechanisms behind this relationship is crucial in the sense that it may help explain why racial threat theory, used on its own, has found very mixed support.

Contact Theory

As an independent variable in racial threat literature, minority population size has not been consistently proven to produce feelings of racial threat. Therefore, the divergent outcomes between worsening and bettering social relations are likely not exclusively due to the size of the population of people of color. Contact theory research has demonstrated the potential ability to fill this gap in racial threat literature, seeking explanatory power over the micro-level processes by examining *how* the changes in minority population size are associated with changes in individual dispositions towards an "outgroup". Intergroup contact theory is considered one of the most extensively researched and highly supported theories in the field of social psychology, garnering attention worldwide. It was initially proposed in Allport's work "The Nature of Prejudice" (1954), in which he proposed that intergroup prejudice would be reduced if contact between diverse racial groups occured under reasonably favorable conditions.

What contact theory research has to offer to reconcile the discrepancies in results concerning whether size of population of people of color is associated with bettering or worsening interracial attitudes/behaviors is the idea that the manifestations of racial threat seem to be associated more specifically with whether or not intergroup contact takes place, which

could counteract the increased perception of threat. The theory is not discounting the proposition that increased racial heterogeneity may lead to increased perceptions of threat (and by extension, prejudicial attitudes and behaviors), but that this outcome could be mediated by the presence of intergroup contact, which has the ability to counteract negative attitudes. If this is the case, contact theory could potentially explain the reasons behind previously unexplained phenomena in racial threat literature such as the above-mentioned presence of curvilinear relationships and tipping points associated with demographic ratios (Jackson & Carroll 1981; Jackson 1986; Stults and Baumer's 2007).

In terms of defining contact, the most significant development within contact literature for the purposes of this study is the work distinguishing between intergroup interaction and intergroup contact. Intergroup interaction has been proposed as an atomic unit of intergroup contact in the sense that within intergroup interaction studies, researchers typically examine short or stranger interactions (MacInnis and Page-Gould 2015). In contrast, intergroup contact studies typically examine long-term contact between people of different groups. Given that contact literature is most heavily situated in the field of psychology, it can provide significant insight into the internal processes taking place when assessing prejudice – a contribution for which sociology and criminology have a more limited capacity.

Psychologists have used various methods to measure the physiological, cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to interracial interaction/contact experiences which may offer crucial context to the macro-level processes being examined in racial threat literature. In general, intergroup interaction studies have found that initial, stranger interactions produce negative outcomes such as interracial anxiety and discomfort (Stephan and Stephan 1985; Hyers & Swim, 1998; Littleford et al., 2005; Shelton, 2003), avoidance of further interactions (Mallett et al.,

2008; Plant & Devine, 2003), a threatened social identity (Shelton, Richeson, & Vorauer, 2006), and physiological responses reflective of feelings of threat (Blascovich et al., 2001; Mendes et al., 2002; Page-Gould et al., 2008). The consequence here is that intergroup interaction can be stressful, lead to anxiety, and predict increased intergroup bias (Paolini et al. 2006). However, intergroup contact has been shown to decrease intergroup biases and prejudice and increase intergroup empathy. The contact research presented hereafter is referring to the process of intergroup contact as opposed to intergroup interaction.

Contact literature has been well established in the realm of social psychology, measuring between-group interactions as they relate to intergroup prejudice. In the most rigorous meta-analysis on contact theory to date, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) found strong support for the theory's assertion that intergroup contact typically reduces intergroup prejudice through their examination of 713 independent samples from 515 studies. One significant point made in this study is that contact theory literature must measure actual experiences of contact, which is not a prerequisite for racial threat literature (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Where the norm in racial threat literature is to use population ratios and proximity data to represent racial heterogeneity, the researchers who performed the meta-analysis discount the assertion that such measures have any explanatory power within a contact theory context since they do not prove that any experience of contact actually occurred (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). For instance, there may be a far larger population of people of color in county A of Maryland versus county B. However, county A may be characterized by distinctly high rates of racial segregation such that people of various racial groups do not actually interact. Technically this higher rate of people of color in a given area means there is more opportunity for intergroup contact; however, that opportunity could be mediated by structural forces such as racial segregation and individual dispositions

associated with a history of conflict, polarizing politicians, and economic stability of the "in-group," (Pettigrew, Wagner, and Christ 2010). This highlights the necessity for future studies on intergroup contact experiences to include measures of actual contact in their analyses. Given the consistency in findings among contact literature, the inclusion of this variable could shed light on the discrepancies we see in the results of racial threat literature.

When examining the effects of contact, various studies have focused more specifically on the impacts of contact on prejudice as expressed by perceptions of criminality. This provides a strong jumping-off point for criminologists to engage in this research. These studies have defined "contact" differently; however, they all examine individual-level relationships. Such studies have used measures that tap into the presence of close interracial friendships and interracial intimate relationships as well as whether (and how frequently) white subjects participated in activities with people of color (Mears, Mancini, and Stewart 2009; Mancini et al. 2015; Drakulich 2012). They have also examined the outcomes of contact through various measures that similarly are used as racial threat outcome measures, such as concern about crime (Mears, Mancini, and Stewart 2009), beliefs of Black criminality (Drakulich 2012; Mancini et al. 2015), stereotype endorsement (Mears, Mancini, and Stewart 2009), "color-blind" racial attitudes (Priester, Pitner, and Lackey 2019), and perceptions of safety (Drakulich 2012).

Integrated Framework:

Considering the extensive research discussed, a reasonable hypothesis emerges: level of contact could be a mediating factor between population size of people of color and intergroup attitudes/behaviors. With this, it cannot be assumed that contact is always an outcome of proximity or population ratios. This would explain why racial threat research has had such mixed results while contact research presents more consistent outcomes when the criteria of "contact" is

actually met. Nevertheless, racial threat theory still likely maintains its explanatory power in the distinct situations where people of color make up a significant ratio of the population, but there is no increase in intergroup contact. In these cases, contact is not present to mediate perceptions of threat, so measures of perceived minority threat may grow.

If contact is the mediating factor associated with the turning point found in racial threat literature, we would expect that when controlling for contact level, racial heterogeneity and prejudicial attitudes and behaviors would have a positive, linear relationship. Though, it is important to understand that according to contact literature, a certain threshold of quality and or quantity of contact must be met, as intergroup interaction would likely exacerbate prejudicial attitudes/behaviors while intergroup contact would likely mitigate them. Knowing this, it becomes crucial that level of racial heterogeneity and level of contact be looked at in context of each other to provide a theoretical framework that can more accurately predict prejudice then either racial threat or contact theories could on their own.

Chapter 4: Current Research

Research on racial threat and contact theories is vast in scope; however, most studies more narrowly cover perceptions held by the white population concerning a specific population of color -- usually a Black population. Latino populations have been grouped into racial threat theory (alternatively labeled ethnic or minority threat); yet the literature on their role in this phenomenon is less studied and has resulted in less consistent findings. Because of this, the current research focuses on a white population's prejudice towards a Black population. In light of the lessons learned through the research available among distinct disciplines, the current study includes measures of actual experiences of contact as an independent variable, which is considered both as a possible mediating factor between racial heterogeneity and prejudice, as well as in conjunction with measures of people of color population size (the racial heterogeneity indicator) which constitutes the primary independent variable. This study also examines prejudicial attitudes, which is used as the dependent variable seeing that literature on contact theory specifically focuses on this, and literature on racial threat theory has also found a strong basis in this area. Given this interdisciplinary context and framework, at the census tract level, my hypotheses are:

H1: When controlling for contact effects, racial heterogeneity will have a positive, linear relationship with prejudice.

H2: Level of racial heterogeneity and level of contact will be associated with respective prejudice-influencing processes.

- High racial heterogeneity – perceived economic/political threat (associated with higher prejudice levels)
- Low racial heterogeneity – no significant effect on prejudice
- High interracial contact – intergroup contact effects (associated with lower prejudice levels)

- Low interracial contact – intergroup interaction effects (associated with higher prejudice levels)

H3: The relationship between racial threat and racial prejudice will be conditioned by level of contact and reflected in relative prejudice levels between categories (displayed in *Table 1*). This is due to the processes mentioned in H2.

Table 1. Hypothesis 3 - Relative Average Prejudice Levels

	Low Racial Heterogeneity	***High Racial Heterogeneity***
Low Interracial Contact	*Category 1* **Average prejudice level between those of Categories 2 and 3** • No significant racial threat effect • Interracial interaction	*Category 2* **Highest average prejudice level** • Perceived economic/political threat • interracial interaction
High Interracial Contact	*Category 3* **Lowest average prejudice level** • No significant racial threat effect • Interracial contact	*Category 4* **Average prejudice level between those of Categories 2 and 3** • Perceived economic/political threat • Interracial contact

H3a: White respondents who fall into *Category 2* will have the highest average anti-Black prejudice level.

H3b: White respondents who fall into *Category 3* will have the lowest average anti-Black prejudice level.

H3c: White respondents who fall into *Categories 1* and *4* will have average anti-Black prejudice levels below those in *Category 2* but above those in *Category 3.*

Chapter 5: Data/Measures/Methods

Data

The current study tests the above stated hypotheses using survey data on individual level interracial contact, neighborhood level racial heterogeneity, and individual level racial prejudice. Specifically, this is achieved by using secondary data collected in the Seattle Neighborhoods and Crime Survey (SNCS), which is a cross-sectional survey with data collected between 2002-2003. In the SNCS, researchers collected three different samples by conducting telephone surveys for households throughout Seattle's 123 census tracts. Taken together, the samples collectively represent 4,904 respondents. However, for the purposes of the current study, white respondents were selected for, cutting down the available sample size to 3,936 respondents.

The value of this data source for the concepts being examined in the current study is that the researchers included a census tract indicator for each respondent. This means that in future research, census data concerning racial demographics can be incorporated as an additional measure of racial heterogeneity to supplement the included self-report survey questions that asks about the racial demographics in the respondents neighborhoods. Integrating census data would be possible given that the survey question asks respondents about the racial make-up of their neighborhood, which would hypothetically be reflected in census measures since the size of a census tract is roughly comparable to that of a neighborhood. This is an interesting opportunity to explore the value of perceptual versus objective measures of racial heterogeneity as reflected in prejudicial attitudes. However, the SNCS researchers randomized the census tract level indicators for anonymity purposes, so the current study was not able to utilize this opportunity. With the data available, the current study is most accurately described as examining differences

in individually reported levels of racial prejudice between respondents according to their self-reported level of interracial contact and perception of their neighborhoods' racial heterogeneity.

Measures

Being that the current study utilizes secondary data, the measures in the survey were not collected specifically to examine the variables being analyzed here; however, some of the existing measures tap into the ideas and can act as proxies. *Table 2* presents the operationalizations for the dependent and independent variables for visual reference. The dependent variable, anti-Black prejudice, was measured using the survey question that asks to what degree respondents agree with the statement: "African Americans tend to be involved with drugs and gangs." Respondents answered on a Likert scale ranging from "1 - Strongly Agree", "2 - Agree", "3 - Disagree", to "4 - Strongly Disagree". This measure has previously been used to measure racial bias (Gearhart et al., 2019), and it fits in with other literature on racial threat theory that classifies racial criminalization and fear of crime as manifestations of perceived threat. Given the current socio-political context discussed at the beginning of this paper, this measure of prejudice is deeply linked to the potential for racial violence, aligning with stereotypes and criminalization of specifically Black men that date back to the establishment of the US.

Table 2. Operationalizations of Variables

Variables	Operationalizations
Dependent Variable	
Prejudice	"Frequency of mentioned activities with a member of a different race"
Independent Variables	
Racial Heterogeneity	"Number of neighbors that belong to African American Ethnic Group"
Contact	Agreement with the statement "African Americans tend to be involved in drugs and gangs"

The primary independent variable in the current study is racial heterogeneity, which is represented by the responses to the survey question in the SNCS that asks respondents to indicate

how many of their neighbors are Black. Respondents answered on a Likert scale of "1 - Nearly All", "2 - Over Half", "3 - Some", or "4 - Hardly Any". To align with the above stated hypotheses which specifically examine the condition of high racial heterogeneity, the four original response categories were recoded into "high racial heterogeneity" and "low racial heterogeneity". Respondents were assigned to the high racial heterogeneity category if they answered that "at least half" or "nearly all" of their neighbors were Black. The logic behind this is that in previous racial threat studies, the "threshold" where the relationship between prejudicial attitudes/behaviors and racial demographics switched from positive to negative was found to be when around 50% of the population was comprised of people of color (Jackson 1989). There have also been relevant findings that have located this threshold instead at about 25% (Stults and Baumer 2007); however, the response categories available for the racial heterogeneity measure did not have an obvious option to indicate that about a quarter of the respondent's neighbors were Black, so this could not be tested.

The secondary independent variable is level of intergroup contact, as measured by responses to the survey question asking about the frequency in which respondents took part in any of a designated list of activities with members of a different race. The activities mentioned require some degree of mutual exchange and a qualitatively significant interaction. Specifically, respondents were asked how often they engage in any of the following activities with a member of a different race:

- Watching a neighbor's home
- Borrowing tools or small food items from a neighbor
- Having dinner or lunch with a neighbor
- Helping a neighbor with a problem
- Asking a neighbor about personal matters
- Saying hello or talking to a neighbor
- Participating in a block activity sponsored by the Seattle Police Department
- Participating in some other block activity.

Respondents answered on a Likert scale of “1 - Often”, “2 - Sometimes”, or “3 - Never”. Given that the current study’s hypotheses are specifically examining outcomes based on respondents’ high versus low level of intergroup contact, the response categories required recoding to create a dichotomous variable. However, there is no agreed-upon threshold in the existing literature concerning the amount of contact that would lead to prejudice-reducing effects. What *is* known, is that often, initial interracial interactions lead to increased intergroup anxiety, and it takes multiple, quality interactions to constitute a prejudice-reducing effect (MacInnis and Page-Gould 2015).

Since a specific contact threshold is unknown, the current study recodes the contact variable in two different ways, each having different qualifications for high levels of intergroup contact and low levels of intergroup contact. Here after, “Condition 1” will be used to denote the situations in which only the white respondents who indicated having “often” participated in a set list of activities with a member of a different race were recoded as having high levels of interracial contact, where white respondents who indicated "sometimes" or “never” having participated in said activities with a member of a different race were recoded as having low levels of interracial contact. In contrast, “Condition 2” will be used to refer to the situations in which white respondents who indicated having “often” or “sometimes” participated in said activities were both recoded to represent high levels of interracial contact, while only the white respondents who indicated having “never” participated in the activities with a member of a different race were recoded as having low levels of interracial contact.

Methods

To test the first hypothesis, I examined the existence and strength of a relationship between neighborhood racial composition and white respondent's racial prejudice independent of any

potential impacts intergroup contact may have had. I did this by running a partial correlation between the racial heterogeneity and the prejudice measures, controlling for the contact measure. Since the hypotheses specifically refer to white respondents' prejudice towards Black individuals/groups, I selected for respondents who answered that they were white elsewhere in the survey. After selecting for these specific conditions and excluding respondents who had not responded to all the relevant survey questions, the sample size was reduced to 1,922 responses available for the analysis.

In order to examine the third hypothesis, I ran independent samples t-tests to compare the mean anti-Black prejudice levels between four specific conditions:

- White respondents who lived in areas of ***low*** *racially heterogeneity* and experienced ***low*** *levels of interracial contact* (Condition 1: n=1190; Condition 2: n=419)
- White respondents who lived in areas of ***low*** *racially heterogeneity* but who experienced ***high*** *levels of interracial contact* (Condition 1: n=374; Condition 2: n=1145)
- White respondents who lived in areas of ***high*** *racially heterogeneity* but experienced ***low*** *levels of interracial contact* (Condition 1: n=212; Condition 2: n=165)
- White respondents who lived in areas of ***high*** *racially heterogeneity* and experienced ***high*** *levels of interracial contact* (Condition 1: n=149 Condition 2: n=296)

When performed in SPSS, the t-tests revealed the mean anti-Black prejudice levels for each category displayed in *Table 1*, as well as whether the differences between the prejudice levels associated with each of the four categories was statistically significant. By doing this, the average prejudice levels of respondents for each category can be ranked against the other categories, thereby determining the relative conditions that could be more or less conducive to prejudicial attitudes. The relative average prejudice levels were compared between categories for both Condition 1 and Condition 2.

As for the second hypothesis, the current study does not test directly whether or not the processes at play responsible for differing prejudice levels definitively are perceived economic/political threat and interracial contact/interaction. The results, therefore, only address whether or not the prejudice levels reflect the hypothesized relative levels, not whether or not this is due to the hypothesized processes.

Chapter 6: Findings

Hypothesis 1

As demonstrated in *Table 3*, The results of the partial correlation between racial heterogeneity prejudice were highly statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction. However, the relationship was notably weak, with an R-value of .093. Given this, these findings do not support my first hypothesis which predicted that when you don't take into account individual experiences with intergroup contact, the larger the Black population in a given neighborhood, the more prejudice the white individuals would hold towards Black individuals or groups. It also does not support racial threat theory at large.

Table 3. Partial Correlation between Racial Heterogeneity and Prejudice when Controlling for Contact (n=1,922)

		Prejudice
Racial Heterogeneity	*Pearson Correlation*	*0.093*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	*0.000*

Hypothesis 3

In terms of the third hypothesis, the first piece of relevant information to look at is the mean prejudice levels among the different respondent categories originally introduced above in *Table 1*. It is crucial to note here that because of how the scale for the prejudice measure was constructed, for the purposes of this study, a *higher mean* as reported in *Table 4* is associated with a *lower level of prejudice*. The results in *Table 4* represent the mean prejudice level for each of the four respondent categories for both Condition 1 and Condition 2. The categories are compared against each other within each Condition.

Under Condition 1, the category of respondents who had the highest average prejudice level were those who reported living in areas of high racial heterogeneity and who had high levels of interracial contact. The next highest average prejudice level was in respondents who reported living in areas of high racial heterogeneity who had low levels of interracial contact.

Importantly, the difference between the mean prejudice level for these two categories was only .01, and, as reported in *Table 5a*, this difference was not statistically significant. In contrast, respondents who had the lowest average level of racial prejudice were those who reported living in areas of low racial heterogeneity and experienced low levels of interracial contact. Those with the next lowest average prejudice levels were those who reported living in areas of low racial heterogeneity but experienced a high level of interracial contact. However, similarly to those who lived in highly racially heterogeneous areas, the average prejudice levels of those who lived in areas of low racial heterogeneity only differed by .03 depending on their contact level, and this difference was not statistically significant.

Table 4. Mean Levels of Prejudice by Levels of Contact and Racial Heterogeneity

				Condition 1		***Condition 2***	
				N	***Mean***	***N***	***Mean***
Racial Heterogeneity	*Low*	***Contact***	*Low*	1190	2.40	419	2.32
			High	374	2.37	1145	2.42
	High	***Contact***	*Low*	212	2.22	65	2.14
			High	149	2.21	296	2.23

NOTES: Condition 1 = Respondents who answered "often" to contact measure coded as "high contact". Condition 2 = Respondents who answered "often" or "sometimes" to contact measure coded as "high contact"

According to Hypotheses 3a and 3b, those who fell into the category of living in highly racially heterogeneous areas but who had low levels of interracial contact were predicted to have the highest levels of prejudice, while those who lived in areas of low racial heterogeneity but had high levels of interracial contact were predicted to have the lowest. As displayed in Table 5a, this was not supported in the results for Condition 1; however, the difference between the prejudice level in the predicted lowest category and the actual lowest category was not statistically significant. The same is true for the prejudice level in the predicted highest category versus the actual highest category. What is interesting is that the difference in prejudice level between the

category that was predicted to have the highest level and the category that was predicted to have the lowest level *was*, in fact, statistically significant. In this case, the difference between prejudice levels according to level of contact was not statistically significant until it was also between different levels of racial heterogeneity.

Table 5a. T-tests of Prejudice by Levels of Contact (Condition 1) and Racial Heterogeneity

	High Heterogeneity / Low Contact		***Low Heterogeneity / High Contact***		***High Heterogeneity / High Contact***	
	t	*Sig.*	*t*	*Sig.*	*t*	*Sig.*
Low Heterogeneity/Low Contact	3.812	.000	.670	.503	3.492	.001
High Heterogeneity/Low Contact	–	–	-2.756	.006	.199	.842
Low Heterogeneity/High Contact			–	–	2.690	.007

NOTE: Condition 1 = Respondents who answered "often" to contact measure coded as "high contact".

Under Condition 2, the results more directly supported the original hypotheses. As demonstrated in *Table 4*, respondents who reported living in areas of high racial heterogeneity, but experienced low levels of interracial contact had the highest average prejudice level relative to the other categories, which is consistent with Hypothesis 3a. Consistent with Hypothesis 3b, respondents who reported living in areas of low racial heterogeneity, but experienced high levels of interracial contact had the lowest levels of prejudice. As shown in *Table 5b,* this difference in average prejudice levels *was* statistically significant. The average answer between these categories differed by .28 points, which is relatively substantial given that the scale for the prejudice level only spanned from 1-4, and 88.7% of those who responded to the measure selected either 2 or 3, while only 11.3% selected 1 or 4.

As seen in *Table 5b*, among all the categories, the only categories that did *not* have a statistically significant difference in prejudice levels was between respondents who lived in areas of high racial heterogeneity but had different levels of interracial contact. One possible

explanation for this worth noting is that those two categories being compared (level of contact for respondents in highly racially heterogeneous areas) had the lowest sample sizes. *Table 4* shows that of respondents in highly racially heterogeneous areas, only 65 respondents indicated having low levels of interracial contact, and only 296 indicated having high levels of interracial contact. Generally, with this being the case, the findings under Condition 2 strongly align with Hypotheses 3, 3a, 3b, and 3c.

Table 5b. T-tests of prejudice by Levels of Contact (Condition 2) and Racial Heterogeneity

	High Heterogeneity / Low Contact		***Low Heterogeneity / High Contact***		***High Heterogeneity / High Contact***	
	t	*Sig.*	*t*	*Sig.*	*t*	*Sig.*
Low Heterogeneity/Low Contact	2.185	.029	-2.815	.005	1.872	.062
High Heterogeneity/Low Contact	–	–	-3.524	.000	-1.081	.280
Low Heterogeneity/High Contact			–	–	4.565	.000

NOTE: Condition 2 = Respondents who answered "often" or "sometimes" to contact measure coded as "high contact"

Chapter 7: Discussion

Conclusions

The results as indicated above are interesting in that they are not explicitly in support of this theoretical framework that proposes using the processes introduced in racial threat and contact literature together; however, what the results do suggest is that it is worth further explanation. It is possible that the different prejudice levels among categories was due to chance rather than the proposed prejudice increasing influences of political/economic threat and intergroup interaction and prejudice decreasing influences of intergroup contact. Without testing Hypothesis 2, it is impossible to say. Further research should run regression analyses to examine to what extent these proposed processes played in the prejudice outcomes. This would likely require an interdisciplinary effort in creating measures that would be more appropriate. However, before this would even be possible, a definitive threshold that differentiates between intergroup interaction and intergroup contact would need to be established.

If Hypothesis 2 was tested and supported, there could be significant and more specific lessons taken from the current results. For instance, first, we may be able to infer that contact does mediate the effects of racial threat. Additionally, the differing results between Condition 1 and Condition 2 potentially could hold explanatory power over the level at which the previously mentioned contact threshold occurs. In that case, the differing results may indicate that just "sometimes" having interracial experiences would be enough to fall into the category of intergroup contact as opposed to interaction and have a prejudice reducing effect. If this were true, we would expect that by grouping respondents who indicated "sometimes" having these interracial experiences into the low racial heterogeneity category, this category would represent respondents experiencing both intergroup interaction and intergroup contact effects, which

would impact the average prejudice levels. This could help explain why there was no statistically significant difference in prejudice levels between contact levels found in Condition 1 when there was in Condition 2.

What is important about this research is that it looks at how individual and societal level processes interact, reinforcing the idea that neither level acts alone. The creation and maintenance of racial prejudice is too complicated a process to be understood in full by any individual theory. Research across numerous disciplines has examined this phenomenon repeatedly and produced important findings on what factors may be at play. Only two of these factors are tested here – racial heterogeneity and contact. However, it is becoming clearer that factors such as class, education level, political surroundings, etc. are crucial elements to consider. When racial prejudice studies do acknowledge a wider range of possible factors, they typically use them as controls. However, the current research suggests that by using them as controls, we lose the perspective of how they may be interacting with each other to influence the outcome of racial prejudice. This is a crucial proposition in the current research.

Limitations

This study had numerous limitations that could have significantly impacted the findings. To start, secondary data is not ideal for measuring the specific phenomena being tested. The racial heterogeneity measure relied on the respondents' perception of their neighborhoods' racial composition. While it is true that previous racial threat studies have found that perceptual measures of racial composition could have an equal or even stronger impact on racial prejudice than objective measures (Wang 2012), the current study would have been stronger if both objective and perceptual measures were included. Additionally, there was a very low response

rate to the racial heterogeneity measure. Since cases were excluded listwise, this significantly cut down the number of cases available for the analyses.

As for the contact measure, some limitations included the fact that the question itself was asking about experiences with a member of *any* different race, not with specifically Black neighbors, which was the relationship I was studying. Again, there has been previous literature that found support for the idea that interactions with any other race may help reduce a subjects' proclivity to racial stereotypes in general and change the way they perceive any "outgroup," not just the one in which the person they interacted with belongs to (Emerson, Kimbro, and Yancey 2002). However, more research is needed on this, so the current study would have benefitted from a more focused question concerning interactions with Black neighbors specifically. In addition to this, the question asks about the frequency of engaging in a set list of activities. However, the activities on the list seem to have qualitatively distinct values among them in terms of contact experience. For instance, while both situations are included in the list, there would likely be a significant difference in experience between saying hello to a neighbor of a different race as you pass by them on the street versus having dinner together. Given this, the current study would have benefited from a contact measure that asked about more uniform types of contact.

Finally, the racial prejudice measure was important in that it asked about a specific stereotype that is deeply relevant to the current socio-political circumstances in the United States; however, there are undoubtedly ways it could have been stronger. For instance, having a question that more broadly measured prejudice would have been useful given that racial threat theory not only theorizes threat in terms of criminalization but also perceptions of economic and political threat. Prejudice can include more than attitudes about crime. This is the nature of using

secondary data – that there will not be measures that perfectly align with the research question. However, each measure chosen had some amount of backing in the extant literature from either racial threat theory or contact theory.

Implications

Considering the aforementioned limitations, further research into the interaction between racial threat and contact theory is warranted. It is striking how closely the literature on the two phenomena overlap, yet few studies explicitly use the theories in context of each other. On the contrary, there is a substantial amount of literature on racial threat theory that will mention the potential importance of contact in the processes being studied but will not specifically invoke findings from contact theory research that would give them an empirical basis for such claims. Similarly, literature on contact theory will discuss the potential for racial demographics to dictate likelihood and quality of contact but will not invoke any of the lessons learned from racial threat research.

This study used exclusively quantitative methods in an attempt to integrate two theories that often are studied in distinctly different disciplines: racial threat in criminology/sociology and contact in psychology. Research in each theory's respective discipline took divergent paths to answer a parallel question: what are the factors that are associated with/indicate risk for racial prejudice. I argue that the theories are now at a point where they can converge. Racial threat theory literature has increasingly been seeking to answer why changes in racial demographics are associated with changes in prejudice. Contact theory has increasingly been seeking to understand why contact will induce different psychological processes – sometimes resulting in interracial anxiety while other times resulting in interracial empathy. The psychological processes being examined in contact literature will likely be invaluable in understanding the nuances in

interactions within the racial demographics being studied in racial threat literature. Moreover, the racial demographics studied in racial threat literature have much to offer regarding population threshold where segregation is more challenging to maintain, making contact more likely.

The most effective way to integrate the two theories is to come up with study design that complements each discipline. Psychology has much to offer in the realm of qualitative methods and the psychological processes that are evoked when a subject encounters someone from an "outgroup". This could be done by incorporating psychology's ability to study physiological, affective, cognitive, and behavioral measures of prejudice while criminology/sociology could be examining the macro-level implications. There exists enough literature and knowledge across disciplines that, if integrated, could hold significant explanatory power over the factors that impact prejudice which we currently do not understand. This likely requires interdisciplinary theoretical as well as methodological integration. Given the extensive complementary literature on the two theories and the supportive results from the current study, using racial threat theory and contact theory in tandem as a starting point could be a valuable avenue to pursue.

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