

RECONSIDERING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED NEIGHBORHOOD RACIAL COMPOSITION AND WHITES' PERCEPTIONS OF VICTIMIZATION RISK: DO RACIAL STEREOTYPES MATTER?*

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Recent theoretical extensions of threat theory have posited that Whites frequently view Blacks as a criminal threat because of stereotypes linking race and crime. Several studies have found indirect support for this hypothesis and have shown that the percentage of neighborhood residents who are Black is positively associated with the perceptions of victimization risk and fear of crime by White residents. To date, however, little research has investigated whether, as theory would suggest, this relationship is either a consequence of or is contingent on Whites holding stereotypes of Blacks as criminals. In this article, we address this issue by examining whether racial typification of crime mediates or moderates the relationships between static and dynamic measures of neighborhood racial composition and the perceptions of victimization risk by Whites. The results offer mixed support for the threat hypothesis and show that racial typification of crime conditions the relationship between perceived changes in neighborhood racial composition and the

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perceptions of victimization risk by Whites, but neither explains nor influences the association between static measures of racial composition and the latter. The implications of the findings for threat theory and research are discussed.

Scholars have long theorized that levels of discrimination, prejudice, and social control will vary with the demographic composition of an area because members of the majority racial or ethnic group perceive large or growing minority groups to be threats to their economic interests and political power (e.g., Blalock, 1967; Blumer, 1958; Key, 1949). More recently, however, and concurrent with the emergence of crime as a dominant theme in public discourse about race, researchers have emphasized that White Americans also likely associate Black populations with criminal threat. The specific hypothesis has been that, because of racial stereotypes of Blacks as prone to criminality and violence, the mere presence of Blacks in an area will influence the perceptions of the prevalence and risk of crime by Whites and, in turn, increase their demand for crime control (Jackson, 1989; Liska and Chamlin, 1984; Liska, Lawrence, and Benson, 1981).¹

Several studies have provided partial tests of the criminal threat hypothesis by examining the effects of neighborhood racial composition on levels of perceived victimization risk and fear of crime. This research has generally shown that the perceptions of the amount and risk of crime by residents increase with the actual or perceived percentage of Blacks in the local area (e.g., Chiricos, Hogan, and Gertz, 1997; Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz, 2001; Covington and Taylor, 1991; Moeller, 1989; Quillian and Pager, 2001, 2010; Taylor and Covington, 1993). Most commonly, researchers have interpreted this relationship as evidencing the consequences of the widespread stereotyping of Blacks as criminals. For example, Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz (2001: 335) explained that their findings were indicative of “race coding,” which they described as “a kind of shorthand equation between blackness and crime.” Similarly, Quillian and Pager (2001: 748) concluded that their results suggested “that the strong mental association between race and crime has a powerful influence on perceptions of neighborhood crime

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1. We use the terms “racial stereotype” and “racial typification” interchangeably to refer to generalizations about Blacks. This usage is consistent with the description of racial typification of crime by Chiricos and Eschholz (2002: 402), who argued that the process wherein “crime is stereotypically portrayed as a Black phenomenon” can be termed “the racial typification of crime.” In our view, racial stereotypes and racial typification are not normative concepts. That is, our definition of stereotypes does not assume that generalizations reflect either accurate—statistical discrimination (Schwab, 1986)—or inaccurate—stereotype amplification (Quillian and Pager, 2010: 83)—assessments of the average characteristics of Blacks. Such a distinction is not important for our purposes in this article.

levels, beyond any actual association between race and crime.” In a later study that focused on crime-specific perceptions of risk, these investigators explained that their analyses yielded “striking evidence of the racialization of burglary and robbery risk” (Quillian and Pager, 2010: 99).

Notably, however, most prior studies of the relationship between neighborhood racial composition and perceived risk or fear of crime have not included a measure of the extent to which residents hold stereotypes of Blacks as prone to violence and criminality. Indeed, we are aware of only one previous investigation that has both included such a measure and examined whether it either mediates or moderates the relationship between neighborhood racial composition and perceptions and fear of crime. The findings of this study, an excellent but as yet unpublished dissertation that focused specifically on residents of Seattle neighborhoods, were mixed. The study yielded little evidence that a single-item measure of crime stereotypes—the perception that Blacks “tend to be more involved in drugs and gangs” than Whites—mediated the relationship between an objective indicator of neighborhood racial composition and either perceptions or fear of crime. Moreover, that research showed that an interaction term between the stereotype measure and racial composition was significant in models predicting fear of violent victimization and fear of burglary, but it was not significant in models predicting perceptions of neighborhood safety (Drakulich, 2009). These results led the researcher to anticipate the possibility that “racial crime stereotypes are not the mechanism connecting racial composition to fear and assessments of safety” (2009: 117).

The evidence to date, then, has not sufficiently demonstrated that the commonly observed relationship between the proportion of Black neighbors and the levels of perceived risk or fear actually reflects the hypothesized threat processes. An alternative explanation, for example, may be that the percentage of Blacks in a neighborhood affects White residents’ social ties with their neighbors and assessments of community cohesion (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2000, 2002; Costa and Kahn, 2003; Putnam, 2007; Stolle, Soroka, and Johnston, 2008). Evidence indicates that both of these factors can impact the perceptions of victimization risk and fear of crime by individuals (Gibson et al., 2002; Lee and Earnest, 2003; McGarrell, Giacomazzi, and Thurman, 1997; Rountree and Land, 1996a; Scarborough et al., 2010). It also is possible that causation runs in the opposite direction. The perceptions of crime that residents have, by influencing patterns of residential mobility, may shape the racial composition of neighborhoods (Hipp, 2010).

The goal of the current study is to further efforts to understand the often observed relationship between neighborhood racial composition and the perceptions of criminal threat by White residents by examining the extent to which the latter is explained by or contingent on the racial typification

of crime. In doing so, it answers recent calls for additional research that investigates the perceptions of victimization risk by individuals in connection with their endorsement of racial stereotypes (Quillian and Pager, 2010). This study also contributes to the racial threat literature by incorporating a measure of perceived growth in the size of the local Black population to test the possibility that changes in the size of minority groups “may be as or even more threatening than their absolute or relative size” (Liska, 1992: 186). Research has shown that Black population growth is positively related to a range of social control outcomes, such as changes in police force size (Chamlin, 1989), police killings of Blacks (Jacobs and O’Brien, 1998), and harsher sentencing outcomes (Wang and Mears, 2010), as well as to punitive attitudes toward criminals (King and Wheelock, 2007). Only one study to date, however, has included a measure of changes in neighborhood racial composition in models predicting perceptions of criminal threat. Additionally, those analyses were limited to data from the early 1980s and focused only on the effects of an index of unexpected increases in minority and youth populations in neighborhoods (Taylor and Covington, 1993).

A final contribution of this article is that it tests the ability of what has become known as the “ceiling effect” hypothesis (see Chiricos, Welch, and Gertz, 2004) to account for variation in the strength of the relationship between static and dynamic indicators of perceived neighborhood racial composition and perceived victimization risk across subsamples of respondents. The ceiling effect hypothesis is specific to public opinion research and predicts that racial threat indicators will matter most to individuals who would normally score lower on a given outcome variable (e.g., punitiveness, perceived victimization risk) because it is here that the former has more opportunity to influence attitudes. Supporting this hypothesis, Chiricos, Welch, and Gertz (2004) have demonstrated that southern residence, racial prejudice, and concern about crime are all strong predictors of punitive attitudes. Their study also showed that racial typification of crime was a significant predictor of punitiveness only among Whites who lived outside of the South, were less prejudiced, and who reported being less concerned about crime. Similarly, Taylor (1998) determined that southern residence was a strong predictor of negative views about Blacks. Correspondingly, her results revealed that racial composition was associated with traditional racial prejudice and “policy-related beliefs about Blacks” only among nonsoutherners. The current study extends this line of research by providing the first full test of the ceiling effect hypothesis as it applies to the relationship between racial composition and perceptions or fear of crime.

This article proceeds by considering the evidence regarding the racial typification of crime in America and then by reviewing the prior research on racial composition of place and perceptions of criminal threat. Next,

we develop several hypotheses about how, according to threat theory, racial stereotypes associating Blacks with crime should impact the effects of perceived neighborhood racial composition and of perceived changes in neighborhood racial composition on the perceptions of victimization risk by Whites. Finally, we test these hypotheses using survey data obtained from interviews conducted with two random samples of adults.²

RACIAL STEREOTYPES AND BLACK CRIMINAL THREAT

The belief that Blacks are disposed to behaviors that threaten public order and safety has been a racial stereotype in American society for centuries (Hawkins, 1995; Kennedy, 1997). Moreover, this generalization about Blacks has endured in the post-Civil Rights era (Devine and Elliot, 1995), even as beliefs in racial inferiority and the acceptability of disparate treatment under the law have diminished (Schuman et al., 1997). Indeed, if anything, the notion that Blacks tend to be criminals has become more prevalent during the last 50 years as a result of race-coded politics and the politicalization of crime, criminal justice policies and practices that have resulted in the disproportionate criminalization of Blacks, and racially biased depictions of crime in the media (Barlow, 1998; Hurwitz and Peffley, 1997; Mauer, 1999; Wacquant, 2001; Welch, 2007). For example, Chiricos, Welch, and Gertz (2004: 309) have suggested that these social developments led to the widespread racial typification of crime—a process that “essentializes race in terms of crime and crime in terms of race, thereby ‘demonizing’ blacks as the locus of threat.” Similarly, and for the same reasons, scholars have argued that in recent decades color has become “a proxy for dangerousness” (Kennedy, 1997: 136), and the term “criminal predator has become a euphemism for young, black males” (Barak, 1994: 137).

Consistent with these arguments, researchers have found substantial evidence that members of the public frequently associate Blacks with criminal danger. Studies have demonstrated, for example, that some of the most commonly endorsed characterizations of Blacks are those having to do with dangerousness, such as being aggressive, hostile, violent, or criminal (Devine, 1989; Devine and Elliot, 1995; Hurwitz and Peffley, 1997; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1998; Sniderman and Piazza, 1993). In addition, Tom Smith’s (1991, 2001) analyses of responses to a question on the 1990 and

2. Similar to other researchers who have examined the effects of neighborhood racial composition on residents’ perceptions of crime (Quillian and Pager, 2001), we use data from multiple samples in order to evaluate the robustness of findings and to assess whether slight variations in the operationalization of key measures affect the results.

2000 General Social Surveys (GSSs) that asked about different racial and ethnic groups' proneness to violence revealed that in both years respondents perceived Blacks to be the most violent group. The magnitude of the disparity between the perceived violence proneness of different racial groups was considerable. On average, respondents to the 1990 and 2000 GSSs reported that Blacks were 28 percent and 17 percent more prone to violence than Whites, respectively (our calculations). Similarly, a national survey conducted in 1999 found that 34 percent of those interviewed agreed that "black juveniles are more likely to commit crime than white juveniles" (Soler, 2000: 15). And a recent study found that a nontrivial number (15 percent) of Americans believed that Blacks "pose a greater threat to public safety than other groups" (King and Wheelock, 2007: 1263).

Research also has shown that Americans tend to overestimate the proportion of criminals who are Black (Bratton et al., 2007; Chiricos, Welch, and Gertz, 2004). For instance, on the 1991 National Race and Politics Survey, 37.5 percent of the 2,223 interviewed respondents believed that 60.0 percent or more of the people arrested in the previous year for violent crimes were Black. In reality, however, Blacks accounted for a much smaller percentage of violent crime arrests in 1990—only 38.4 percent (U.S. Department of Justice, 1991).³

According to the criminal threat hypothesis, a key consequence of the widespread stereotyping of Blacks as prone to violence and criminality could be the inequitable application of social control. In particular, scholars argue that the popular association of Blacks with crime, by fostering perceptions of threat in the context of minority presence or growth, may partially account for the disparate allocation and intensity of crime-control efforts across geographic areas (Jackson, 1989; Liska and Chamlin, 1984; Liska, Lawrence, and Benson, 1981). Two theoretical assumptions underlie this argument: 1) Racial composition influences the perceptions and fear of crime by individuals, and 2) this effect is largely a consequence of or is contingent on the latter holding stereotypes of Blacks as criminally dangerous. In the next section, we review the research that has tested the first of these assumptions. We then provide the first systematic test of the second.

3. This calculation is based on arrests for murder, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and other assaults. If one assumes that respondents were thinking only about arrests for serious violent crimes, and excludes arrests in the "other assaults" category, the proportion of arrested persons who were Black increases to 44.7 percent. Even so, the perception that Blacks accounted for 60.0 percent of those arrested for serious violent crimes would be an overestimation of 34.2 percent.

PRIOR RESEARCH ON RACIAL COMPOSITION OF PLACE AND PERCEPTIONS AND FEAR OF CRIME

Several studies have investigated the link between racial composition of place and the perceptions and fear of crime by individuals. This research has generally found that persons living in areas with larger proportions of Black residents tend to perceive more crime than do those living in locales with fewer Blacks, and these persons are, on average, more fearful of being victimized (Covington and Taylor, 1991; Drakulich, 2009; Liska, Lawrence, and Sanchirico, 1982; Myers and Chung, 1998; Oh and Kim, 2009; Quillian and Pager, 2001, 2010; Snell, 2001; Taylor and Covington, 1993). Quillian and Pager (2001), for example, analyzed data from three independent surveys, and they consistently found that the percentage of neighborhood residents who were Black was positively related to the perceptions of neighborhood crime controlling for the local crime rate and personal experiences with criminal victimization. A more recent study by these investigators showed that when nonracial environmental characteristics such as the area's per capita income and population density were included in the models, the zip code percentage Black was unrelated to the actual risk of residents being victimized, but it remained a significant predictor of White perceptions of victimization risk (Quillian and Pager, 2010).

Prior research also has demonstrated that subjective indicators of Black presence—namely, the perceived percentage of neighborhood residents who are Black and the perceived residential proximity of Blacks—are positively associated with crime-related perceptions and emotions (Chiricos, Hogan, and Gertz, 1997; Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz, 2001; Lizotte and Bordua, 1980; Moeller, 1989; Skogan, 1995; Stinchcombe et al., 1980). And as with those of objective indicators of racial composition, the effects of perceptual measures have remained significant in models that included controls for crime and the past victimization experiences of respondents (Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz, 2001; Lizotte and Bordua, 1980). Indeed, even studies that have used vignettes to gauge how fearful respondents would be in various hypothetical situations, a method that controlled for crime and disorder by design, have found that Whites report higher levels of fear when they encounter Black compared with White strangers in public settings (St. John and Heald-Moore, 1995, 1996).

It would be an overstatement, however, to report that studies have unequivocally found that racial composition of place has a significant effect on perceptions and fear of crime (see, e.g., Eitle and Taylor, 2008; Perkins and Taylor, 1996; Robinson et al., 2003; Thompson, Bankston, and St. Pierre, 1992; Wilcox, Quisenberry, and Jones, 2003). Indeed, the evidence to date suggests that the criminal threat associated with the size of the local Black population is context- and sample-dependent.

Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz (2001) found, for example, that among White Floridians, the perceived percentage of neighborhood residents who were Black only predicted perceived victimization risk for those who lived in the southern part of the state. Moreover, several studies have shown that objective and subjective indicators of neighborhood racial composition have either no effect on the perceptions and fear of crime by Blacks, or they exhibit a much weaker effect on the former in comparison with that for Whites (Chiricos, Hogan, and Gertz, 1997; Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz, 2001; Moeller, 1989; Quillian and Pager, 2001, 2010; for an exception, see Liska, Lawrence, and Sanchirico, 1982). A study by Ward, LaGlory, and Sherman (1986) further demonstrated the contingent nature of the effects of neighborhood racial composition; their results revealed that census tract percentage Black predicted perceived neighborhood safety only among respondents who had functional health limitations and were below the mean on perceived mastery.

Such findings of an inconsistent relationship between racial composition of place—actual or perceived—and perceptions and fear of crime in varying contexts and across subsamples of respondents are indicative of two other limitations of the extant research. First, most of the available evidence has derived from analyses of state or city data and, most commonly, from surveys of Floridians and those living in Seattle or Baltimore neighborhoods. Indeed, only three studies to date, and just one in the last 15 years, have analyzed data from a nationally representative sample (i.e., Quillian and Pager, 2010; Skogan, 1995; Stinchcombe et al., 1980). Second, few studies have assessed the effects of the Black percentage among subsamples of respondents, and even these investigations have generally divided the sample only by race and ethnicity (for exceptions, see Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz, 2001; Ward, LaGory, and Sherman, 1986).

These gaps in the research are notable for two reasons. First, they raise questions about the generalizability of the findings from prior studies of the relationship between racial composition and perceptions and fear of crime. Second, they leave unanswered the question of whether the ceiling hypothesis is applicable to that relationship. Recall that the ceiling effect hypothesis predicts that the effect of racial composition on levels of perceived risk and fear of crime, to the extent that this relationship is in fact a reflection of underlying threat processes, will be stronger among individuals who would normally have lower levels of perceived risk or fear (Chiricos, Welch, and Gertz, 2004). The limited evidence regarding the context- and sample-dependent nature of this relationship, which has shown that the latter is stronger among such groups as individuals with health limitations, seems to contradict this prediction. Yet without first determining whether the stereotype of Blacks as criminals explains or influences the effect of

racial composition on perceptions of crime, the implications of such findings for the ceiling effect hypothesis are unclear.

As mentioned at the outset, the additional limitations of the extant research have included the following: 1) In all but one instance (i.e., Taylor and Covington, 1993), researchers have focused exclusively on the effects of static measures of racial composition and 2) prior studies, except for Drakulich's (2009) as yet unpublished study of Seattle residents, have not incorporated indicators of the degree to which respondents actually hold stereotypes of Blacks as criminals, and thus, they have been unable to assess whether the hypothesized threat processes in fact underlie any observed effects of the Black percentage on crime-related perceptions and emotions.

THE CURRENT STUDY

This study tests four hypotheses, each of which addresses one of the previously discussed gaps in the existing research. First, given theoretical arguments that minority growth is especially threatening to Whites (e.g., Green, Strolovitch, and Wong, 1998; Liska, 1992; Olzak, 1992), and empirical evidence that changes in racial composition are consequential for both attitudes toward and levels of social control (Chamlin, 1989; Jacobs and O'Brien, 1998; King and Wheelock, 2007; Wang and Mears, 2010), we examine the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Both the perceived percentage of neighborhood residents who are Black and the perceived changes in the number of neighborhood residents who are Black will be positively related to the perceptions of victimization risk by Whites.

Note that we focus on perceptual measures of neighborhood racial composition in this study because, as Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz (2001: 323) observed in their discussion of the assumptions underlying the criminal threat hypothesis, "racial composition of place can only be consequential for social control if actors situated in those social circumstances are aware of the racial composition, concerned about it and respond in ways that mobilize control initiatives." In this sense, the process at the heart of the criminal threat hypothesis is the individual-level association of perceived risk or fear of crime with "the *perception* that blacks live nearby" (2001: 323, emphasis added).

The criminal threat hypothesis rests in large part on the assumption that large or growing Black populations are threatening because of the widespread conflation of race and crime (Jackson, 1989; Liska and Chamlin, 1984). However, there are two different ways in which the stereotype of

Blacks as criminals may be relevant for the relationship between neighborhood racial composition and perceptions of crime. First, the stereotype of Blacks as criminals may mediate this relationship. Blalock (1967: 166), for instance, predicted that the minority percentage will be related to “the intensity with which certain types of beliefs are held.” He further explained that the stereotype of Blacks as prone to criminality and violence is one such belief (1967: 167). Likewise, Liska, Lawrence, and Benson (1981: 423) observed that “nonwhites are frequently perceived by whites as a criminal threat, and that this perception is affected by the racial composition of a community.” Supporting this view, evidence from research examining views about crime policy shows that the perception that Blacks pose a greater criminal threat than other groups mediates the relationship between increases in county-level racial composition and punitive attitudes toward criminals (King and Wheelock, 2007).

Alternatively, the stereotype of Blacks as criminals may moderate the relationship between racial composition and perceived risk. Quillian and Pager (2001: 723–4) argued that the presence of Blacks, and especially young Black males, in a neighborhood will influence perceptions of neighborhood crime by activating preexisting stereotypes linking race and criminality. Similarly, but by focusing specifically on the role of the media in fostering the stereotype of Blacks as criminals, Eschholz, Chiricos, and Gertz (2003: 412) explained that “to the degree that television equates blacks with crime, it is possible that the more people living in high percent black neighborhood watch crime-related programs, the more the conception of social threat is mobilized in relation to the perceived racial composition of their neighborhood.” According to this line of reasoning, the extent to which neighborhood racial composition will serve as a cue to the amount of crime in an area is contingent on the degree to which an individual endorses the stereotype of Blacks as criminals. Here the assumption is that the degree of stereotype endorsement by an individual is largely a function of his or her exposure to media reports about crime, upbringing and social relationships, personal or vicarious experiences with criminal offenders, and other factors.

Given the theory and research discussed, then, we test the following two hypotheses regarding the intersection of perceived racial composition, racial typification of crime, and perceived risk:

Hypothesis 2: Racial typification of crime will mediate the relationships between both the static and the dynamic measures of perceived neighborhood racial composition and perceived victimization risk.

Hypothesis 3: Both the static and the dynamic measures of perceived neighborhood racial composition will be more consequential for risk perceptions among Whites who typify crime as more of a Black phenomenon.

Finally, the ceiling effect hypothesis predicts, and prior studies have found evidence of, a “ceiling effect” in racial and ethnic threat relationships, whereby indicators of threat have a larger impact on public opinion in contexts where the outcome variable would otherwise be low (e.g., Borg, 1997; Bratton et al., 2007; Chiricos, Welch, and Gertz, 2004; Taylor, 1998; Welch et al., 2011). For this reason, we expect the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: The effects of indicators of perceived Black criminal threat on perceived risk will be larger for individuals who would normally report a lower perceived risk of victimization.

Importantly, indicators of perceived Black criminal threat will here be represented by either racial typification of crime—if racial typification of crime mediates the relationships between static and dynamic measures of perceived neighborhood racial composition and perceived risk—or the statistical interactions between racial typification of crime and the static and dynamic measures of perceived neighborhood racial composition—if significant moderating effects emerge.

DATA AND METHODS

To test these hypotheses, we draw on data from two random telephone surveys of adults (18 years of age or older) that were conducted by public opinion polling firms in Tallahassee, FL. The first, administered by the Research Network between January and April 2005, interviewed 1,575 residents of the state of Florida. The second, directed by Oppenheim Research in the summer of 2010, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 961 respondents. In both surveys, trained interviewers employed the “most recent birthday” method to select at random a single respondent from within each household (Kish, 1965), and then they conducted the interviews using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). Supervisors closely monitored interviews, called back a proportion of completions to verify the accuracy of answers, and provided feedback, when needed, to interviewers to ensure consistent administration of the questionnaires.

The overall response rates, when calculated in accordance with the recommendations of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR; 2008), were 39 percent (survey 1) and 35 percent (survey 2). Although these response rates are lower than the ideal, they are comparable with those obtained in other published studies using telephone surveys (e.g., Edgell and Tranby, 2010; Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010; King and Wheelock, 2007). Moreover, they likely reflect the substantial decline in response rates that has occurred since the 1970s (Curtin, Presser, and Singer, 2005; Pew Research Center, 2004). Importantly, recent research has

shown that response rates are not significantly related to nonresponse bias in random telephone surveys (Curtin, Presser, and Singer, 2000; Keeter et al., 2000, Keeter et al., 2006). Additionally, the percentage of respondents who break off before completing the questionnaire is another important indicator of the potential for nonresponse bias in telephone surveys. And in both surveys, most (96 percent) of those who began the interview finished the questionnaire. For the reasons mentioned, then, we do not suspect that nonresponse bias is a serious concern in this study.

Although the number of completed interviews totaled 1,575 in survey 1, and 961 in survey 2, the sample sizes for our analyses were 1,273 and 743, respectively, because we excluded non-White respondents as a result of both their small numbers and our theoretical focus. The final samples had the following characteristics (survey 2 in parentheses): female, 58 percent (55 percent); 65 years of age or older, 32 percent (19 percent); college graduate, 41 percent (40 percent); annual household income of \$100,000 or more, 18 percent (21 percent); conservative, 37 percent (44 percent); and parent, 82 percent (81 percent). When compared with their respective populations, both samples evidenced a pattern of overrepresentation commonly observed in telephone survey research (Lavrakas, 1987); they included more females and older persons.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

The analyses included two measures of *Perceived victimization risk*. In survey 1, respondents were asked: "Regarding your own personal safety, how safe would you say that you feel being out in your neighborhood at night?" The response categories ranged from 1 = very safe to 4 = very unsafe. In prior studies, researchers have used similar questions to measure both fear of crime (Liska, Lawrence, and Sanchirico, 1982; Mears and Stewart, 2010; Taylor and Covington, 1993) and perceived victimization risk (Lee and Earnest, 2003; Rountree and Land, 1996a, 1996b; Wilcox, Quisenberry, and Jones, 2003). The latter interpretation, that the question taps general perceptions of risk, is likely more accurate (Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987). The descriptive statistics for this variable and those described below are presented in table 1.⁴

4. This measure of perceived victimization risk is slightly skewed (skewness = 1.14 and kurtosis = 3.60). Importantly, however, models estimated with the natural log of this variable are substantively and significantly the same as those reported in table 3 (available upon request). We thus include the original measure in order to facilitate interpretation of the results. The dependent variable in survey 2 is normally distributed (skewness = .78 and kurtosis = 3.05).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Survey 1 (FL 2005)		Survey 2 (U.S. 2010)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Dependent Variables				
Perceived victimization risk (1 = very safe, 4 = very unsafe)	1.67	.83	—	—
Perceived victimization risk (1 = not at all likely, 10 = very likely)	—	—	3.65	2.02
Independent Variables				
PRC percent Black (0–100)	12.80	15.81	12.84	15.99
Perceived increase in percent Black (0 = decreased, stayed the same; 1 = increased)	—	—	.30	.46
Racial typification (0–100)	45.23	15.98	41.10	16.14
Control Variables				
Female (0 = male, 1 = female)	.58	.49	.55	.50
Age (1 = 18–24, 2 = 25–34, 3 = 35–44, 4 = 45–54, 5 = 55–64, 6 = 65–74, 7 = 75+)	4.56	1.67	4.14	1.56
Education (1 = did not graduate high school, 2 = graduated high school, 3 = some college, 4 = graduated college, 5 = postgraduate work or degree)	3.29	1.11	3.23	1.11
Income (1 = up to \$49,999, 2 = \$50,000 to \$99,999, 3 = \$100,000 or more)	1.71	.76	1.79	.77
Parent (0 = none, 1 = one or more children)	.82	.39	.81	.39
Conservative (0 = not conservative, 1 = conservative)	.37	.48	.44	.50
Victim (0 = no, 1 = crime victim in the household)	.16	.37	.27	.45
Index crime rate (per 100,000)	—	—	3,426.07	1,425.24
Foreclosure rate (per 100 households)	—	—	2.71	3.37
Unemployment rate (per 100)	—	—	9.22	2.53
Northeast (0 = other, 1 = Northeast)	—	—	.18	.38
South (0 = other, 1 = South)	—	—	.34	.47
Midwest (0 = other, 1 = Midwest)	—	—	.28	.45
West (0 = other, 1 = West)	—	—	.20	.40
<i>N</i>	1,273		743	

ABBREVIATION: SD = standard deviation.

In survey 2, the questionnaire included a six-item question that gauged the cognitive assessments by respondents of the likelihood of criminal victimization. The survey question was as follows:

On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means not at all likely and 10 means very likely, how likely do you think it is that you or a member of your family will 1) have your car stolen; 2) have someone break into your house; 3) be beaten up or assaulted by strangers; 4) be robbed or mugged on the street; 5) be raped or sexually assaulted; and 6) be murdered?

We averaged responses across these items to create an index with an alpha coefficient of .89.⁵ This measure accords well with the recommendations by scholars regarding the measurement of crime-related perceptions and emotions (see Ferraro, 1995; Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987; Warr, 2000), and it is nearly identical to those used in many recent studies of perceived victimization risk (Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz, 2001; May, Rader, and Goodrum, 2010; Melde, 2009; Melde, Esbensen, and Taylor, 2009; Rader, May, and Goodrum, 2007).

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Substantial evidence indicates that Americans frequently overestimate the size of minority populations in the United States and that the magnitude of the distortion varies considerably across individuals (Alba, Rumbaut, and Marotz, 2005; Gallagher, 2003; Nedeau, Niemi, and Levine, 1993; Sigelman and Niemi, 2001; Wong, 2007). However, research shows that perceived neighborhood racial composition is more consequential for perceptions and fear of crime than the actual percentage of residents who are Black (Chiricos, Hogan, and Gertz, 1997). Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz (2001: 327) suggested that the explanation for this finding is that for neighborhood racial composition “to be relevant for criminal threat, it must first be perceived (or misperceived) and be understood as threatening.” We agree with these authors. Accordingly, and consistent with many prior studies of perceived risk and fear of crime, we include perceptual measures

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5. At the request of a reviewer, we estimated a series of regression equations predicting perceptions of crime-specific risk (available upon request). For example, in one instance, we regressed perceptions of robbery and burglary risk on racial typification of robbery and burglary while controlling for the other covariates. The results of the crime-specific models were largely the same as those reported in table 4. We therefore followed the lead of other researchers and took the index of risk perceptions as our dependent variable in order to minimize measurement error (e.g., Chiricos, Hogan, and Gertz, 1997; Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz, 2001; Eitle and Taylor, 2008; Melde, 2009).

of neighborhood racial composition (Chiricos, Hogan, and Gertz, 1997; Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz, 2001; Moeller, 1989; Skogan, 1995). In both surveys, then, *perceived (PRC) percent Black* was measured by the question: “When you think of people living within a mile of your home, what percent would you say are White . . . Black . . . Latino?”

Survey 2 also included a question that measured the perceptions by respondents of recent changes in the racial composition of their neighborhoods. The question asked: “When you think of people living within a mile of your home, would you say that the size of the following groups has increased, decreased, or stayed the same in the past 5 years . . . Whites . . . Blacks . . . Latinos?” Because few respondents reported a decrease in size of the Black population—6 percent—we created a dummy variable (*PRC increase in percent Black*) that classified individuals according to whether they believed this group had grown (0 = decreased, stayed the same, 1 = increased). Almost one third (30 percent) of respondents perceived that the number of Blacks living within a mile of their home had increased during the last 5 years.

To test the assumption that underlies the criminal threat hypothesis that large or growing Black populations affect perceptions and fear of crime because of stereotypes of Blacks as criminals, the analyses incorporated a measure of *Racial typification* of crime from each survey. Similar to the methods used in prior studies to tap the endorsement of racial stereotypes by individuals (Barkan and Cohn, 2005; Hurwitz and Peffley, 1997; Peffley and Hurwitz, 2007; Unnever and Cullen, 2010), we measure racial typification of crime continuously. This approach best allows us to gauge the extent to which respondents typify crime as a Black phenomenon. Specifically, we averaged across three items in survey 1 ($\alpha = .88$), and four in survey 2 ($\alpha = .87$), to create two indexes that indicated the degree to which respondents equated crime with Blacks. Respondents who answered “don’t know” to the racial typification questions were coded as missing and excluded from the analyses. Table 2 lists the individual items, their factor loadings, the mean perceived percentage for each item, and the actual percentage for each item based on victimization data and official statistics. Although the relevant issue for this article is not whether respondents overestimate or underestimate Black criminality, it is notable that in every instance respondents overestimate the involvement of Blacks in crime.

CONTROL VARIABLES

The analyses included controls commonly used in research on perceived risk and fear of crime (Chiricos, Hogan, and Gertz, 1997; Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz, 2001; Covington and Taylor, 1991; Eitle and Taylor, 2008; Ferraro, 1995; Gibson et al., 2002; Lee and Earnest, 2003; Mears and

Table 2. Racial Typification of Crime Survey Questions

Surveys	Factor Loading	Mean Perceived Percentage	Actual Percentage
Survey 1 (Florida)			
“If you think about crime and criminals, what percent of criminals who commit violent crime in the country are Black?”	.793	46.4	21.0 ^a
“When you think about people who break into homes and business when no one is there, what percent would you say are Black?”	.818	43.2	28.5 ^b
“When you think about people who rob people at gunpoint, what percent do you think are Black?”	.844	46.3	41.2 ^a
Survey 2 (United States)			
“When you think about people who break into homes and businesses, approximately what percent would you say are Black?”	.796	40.4	31.7 ^c
“When you think about people who rob other people at gunpoint, approximately what percent would you say are Black?”	.840	43.4	42.0 ^d
“When you think about people who sell illegal drugs, approximately what percent would you say are Black?”	.743	40.2	33.6 ^{c,e}
“When you think just about juveniles who commit crimes, approximately what percent would you say are Black?”	.774	40.8	31.3 ^c

NOTES: The questions also asked respondents what percentages of these crimes are committed by Whites and Latinos. Data on the actual percentages of these crime that are committed by Blacks were matched as closely as possible to the year in which the respective survey was conducted. Arrest data were used to construct rough, and likely exaggerated, estimates of the actual percentage of burglaries, drug abuse violations, and juvenile offenses committed by Blacks because the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) does not provide victim report data on race of offenders for these offenses.

^aSource: *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2005, Statistical Tables* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2006b).

^bSource: *Crime in the United States, 2005* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2006a).

^cSource: *Crime in the United States, 2009* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010).

^dSource: *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2008, Statistical Tables* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011).

^eArrest percentage is for the category “drug abuse violations,” which includes arrests for both sales and possession.

Stewart, 2010; Quillian and Pager, 2001, 2010; Skogan, 1995). Specifically, we incorporated the following control variables in the models: *Female* (0 = male, 1 = female), *Age*, *Education*, *Income*, *Conservative* (0 = liberal, moderate, 1 = conservative), *Parent* (0 = none, 1 = one or more children), and *Victim* (0 = no, 1 = crime victim in the household).⁶ *Age*, *Education*,

6. We include political ideology as a control variable in this study because researchers have recently begun to investigate its effects on perceptions and fear of crime

and *Income* were measured ordinally. The response categories for the *Age* measure were as follows: 1 = 18–24, 2 = 25–34, 3 = 35–44, 4 = 45–54, 5 = 55–64, 6 = 65–74, and 7 = 75 and older. *Income* was the total household income in the year prior to the respective survey, where 1 = up to \$49,999, 2 = \$50,000 to \$99,999, and 3 = \$100,000 or more. *Education* was coded as follows: 1 = did not graduate high school, 2 = graduated high school, 3 = some college, 4 = graduated college, and 5 = postgraduate work or degree.⁷ In survey 1, *Victim* was measured with the following question: “Have you or anyone in your household been the victim of a crime in the past 2 years?” The comparable question in survey 2 was as follows: “Over the past 5 years, has anyone in your immediate family been the victim of a crime?”

An ideal study of the relationship between racial composition and perceptions or fear of crime would control for both objective rates of crime and local economic conditions that may be associated with crime and social disorder (see Quillian and Pager, 2001). Although we could not attain neighborhood-level data for either survey, we could link the respondents in the national survey (survey 2) to their counties of residence. We thus employed the county-level *Index crime rate*, *Foreclosure rate*, and *Unemployment rate* as rough controls for the effects of crime and local economic conditions on the perceptions of victimization risk by individuals. Specifically, we used data obtained from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to compute the rate of index crimes in the respondent’s county per 100,000 inhabitants in 2008, the most recent year available. The foreclosure variable was measured as the percentage of households in a respondent’s county that experienced at least one foreclosure action in 2009. Consistent with prior studies (e.g., Rough and Massey, 2010), we used data from RealtyTrac (RealtyTrac Inc., Irvine, CA) to construct this measure. The unemployment variable was measured as the average unemployment rate in a respondent’s county in 2009. To correct for skewness, we used the natural logs of the foreclosure and unemployment variables in the regression models.

(Jordan and Gabbidon, 2010; Kort-Butler and Hartshorn, 2011; Mears and Stewart, 2010; Mears, Mancini, and Stewart 2009). Studies have found, for example, that conservatives are less likely to be dissatisfied with their personal safety (Jordan and Gabbidon, 2010), but they are more likely to be concerned about crime nationally (Mears, Mancini, and Stewart 2009).

7. At the request of a reviewer, we reran the analyses for the data from both surveys using sets of dummy variables for the age and education measures (available upon request). The results did not reveal any nonlinearity regarding the effects of these variables, and the findings for the key independent variables did not change. Note that the use of categorical measures of age (e.g., Mears et al., 2007; Mears, Mancini, and Stewart, 2009) and education (e.g., Chiricos, Welch, and Gertz, 2004; Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010) is common in social science research.

The analyses of the data from survey 2 also included the following controls for respondent's region of residence: *Northeast* (1 = Northeast), *South* (1 = South), and *West* (1 = West). *Midwest* (1 = Midwest) was the reference category. We incorporated these controls because prior research has found that levels of perceived risk and fear vary across geographic regions (Ferraro, 1995; Skogan, 1995). The distribution of respondents to survey 2 by region of residence was as follows: 18 percent resided in the Northeast, 34 percent in the South, 28 percent in the West, and 20 percent in the Midwest.

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

We used ordinary least-squares regression to estimate all models.⁸ Cases with missing values were dropped from the analyses using listwise deletion.⁹ We assessed multicollinearity among the predictor variables by examining the variance inflation factors (VIFs) for each equation. The evidence indicated that multicollinearity was not a problem in the current study, as the largest VIF was 1.62 (see Allison, 1999: 141–42). However, the Breusch–Pagan/Cook–Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity was significant, which indicated that the residuals were heteroskedastic. Accordingly, we estimated all models using robust standard errors. To both aid in the interpretation of interactions and reduce problems with collinearity between main effects and the product terms, we centered the two continuous independent variables prior to multiplication (see Aiken and West, 1991).

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8. In additional analyses (available upon request), we estimated the models for the data from survey 1 with a dichotomous version of the single-item measure of perceived victimization risk (0 = safe; 1 = unsafe). The results were substantively similar to those reported in table 3, and the same variables were significant. We opted to use the four-category version of this variable because we believe that meaningful differences exist between those who feel “very safe” and those who feel “somewhat safe.” This approach is common in studies employing measures based on this question (Lee and Earnest, 2003; Liska, Lawrence, and Benson, 1981, Liska, Lawrence, and Sanchirico, 1982; Mears and Stewart, 2010).
 9. In the full models for survey 1 and survey 2, the total number of cases with missing values totaled 275 and 111, respectively. Most cases excluded from the two samples were dropped for failing to report household income. To ensure that the results were not sensitive to attrition, we reran the analyses for both surveys after imputing missing values. Mean substitution and regression substitution (using Stata's [StataCorp, College Station, TX] `impute` command) produced substantively similar results, although in the analyses of data from survey 2, the coefficient for *Racial typification* became significant. This variable still, however, did not mediate or moderate the effect of *PRC percent Black* on perceived risk.

Table 3. Ordinary Least-Squares Regression of White Floridians' Perceptions of Victimization Risk on Perceived Neighborhood Racial Composition and Racial Typification of Crime (Survey 1)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
PRC percent Black	—	.009*** (.002)	—	.009*** (.002)	.009*** (.002)
Racial typification	—	—	.001 (.002)	.001 (.002)	.001 (.002)
Racial typification × PRC percent Black	—	—	—	—	8.59E ⁻⁰⁵ (1.09E ⁻⁰⁴)
Female	.284*** (.047)	.299*** (.047)	.291*** (.050)	.302*** (.050)	.303*** (.050)
Age	-.003 (.016)	.017 (.017)	-.004 (.017)	.017 (.018)	.017 (.018)
Education	-.069** (.024)	-.070** (.024)	-.066** (.025)	-.065** (.025)	-.065** (.025)
Income	-.161*** (.033)	-.137*** (.033)	-.173*** (.034)	-.145*** (.034)	-.144*** (.034)
Parent	.020 (.069)	.015 (.069)	.009 (.072)	.007 (.072)	.002 (.072)
Conservative	.002 (.050)	.026 (.049)	-.000 (.052)	.025 (.051)	.024 (.051)
Victim	.232** (.070)	.195** (.069)	.224** (.071)	.193** (.070)	.192** (.070)
Intercept	1.949*** (.112)	1.813*** (.114)	1.971*** (.117)	1.818*** (.118)	1.818*** (.118)
R ²	.089	.114	.095	.121	.121

NOTES: Presented are unstandardized coefficients (robust standard errors). $N = 997$.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

RESULTS

We begin first by evaluating the perceptions of victimization risk by White Floridians. Most of those residents interviewed in survey 1 (52 percent) reported that they would feel very safe being out in their neighborhoods at night, whereas far fewer respondents (15 percent) indicated that they would feel either somewhat unsafe or very unsafe in this situation. Table 3 presents the results of regression models predicting these perceptions. Model 1 in table 3 is our baseline model, and it shows that females, persons with less education, individuals with lower annual household incomes, and those who have been victimized in the past 2 years all tend to feel less safe being out in their neighborhoods at night. These results accord with findings from prior research on perceptions and fear of crime (Ferraro, 1995; Quillian and Pager, 2001).

Model 2 in table 3 includes the measure of perceived neighborhood racial composition. As in previous studies, perceived neighborhood racial composition is positively related to perceived victimization risk. Indeed, *PRC percent Black* has the second largest effect on perceptions of victimization risk ($\beta = .163$), being surpassed only by sex ($\beta = .180$). In model 3, we introduce the racial typification variable with only the controls, and then in model 4, we add it to the equation including perceived neighborhood racial composition. The coefficient for *Racial typification* is not significant in either model 3 or model 4, and the coefficient for perceived racial composition is not reduced in model 4. These results indicate that racial typification does not mediate the relationship between perceived neighborhood racial composition and perceived risk.

We next turn to the question of whether the effect of perceived neighborhood racial composition is conditioned by racial typification of crime. Recall that according to the criminal threat hypothesis, the perceived percentage of neighborhood residents who are Black should be more consequential for risk perceptions among individuals who hold stereotypes of Blacks as criminals. Model 5 in table 3 adds an interaction term between *PRC percent Black* and *Racial typification* to the regression equation. The coefficient for the interaction term is not significant, indicating that the effect of *PRC percent Black* is essentially the same regardless of the degree to which respondents conflate race and crime. The data from this survey provide no evidence, then, that the relationship between perceived neighborhood racial composition and perceived victimization risk is either a consequence of or is contingent on the stereotype of Blacks as criminals.

The second portion of the analyses examines the data from the nationally representative sample of adults who were interviewed in survey 2. Here we can both assess the net effects of perceived changes in neighborhood composition and address the question of whether the findings from the first survey are specific to Floridians. Table 4 presents the regression results predicting the perceptions of victimization risk by White Americans. By focusing first on the baseline model in table 4, we observe that the findings are similar to those observed for the Florida sample, with two notable exceptions: The coefficient for *Age* is significant and positive, and *Income* is not related to perceived risk. The evidence also indicates that perceived victimization risk is significantly higher among both individuals who reside in counties with higher crime rates and persons living in the South. In fact, the results show that southern residence ($\beta = .177$) is a stronger predictor of perceived risk than prior victimization experience ($\beta = .176$), sex ($\beta = .170$), or the local crime rate ($\beta = .115$).

Model 2 in table 4 incorporates the two indicators of racial threat, *PRC percent Black* and *PRC increase in percent Black*. Similar to the findings for the Florida sample, we observe that perceived neighborhood racial

Table 4. Ordinary Least-Squares Regression of Whites' Perceptions of Victimization Risk on Perceived Neighborhood Racial Composition, Perceived Changes in Neighborhood Racial Composition, and Racial Typification of Crime (Survey 2)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
PRC percent Black	—	.010*	—	.009	.009	.009
	—	(.005)	—	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)
PRC increase in percent Black	—	.355*	—	.339*	.341*	.303
	—	(.168)	—	(.165)	(.164)	(.162)
Racial typification	—	—	.007	.005	.005	— .003
	—	—	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.006)
Racial typification × PRC percent Black	—	—	—	—	$3.27E^{-05}$	—
	—	—	—	—	($2.59E^{-04}$)	—
Racial typification × PRC increase in percent Black	—	—	—	—	—	.027*
	—	—	—	—	—	(.012)
Female	.686***	.682***	.690***	.678***	.679***	.685***
	(.148)	(.148)	(.148)	(.147)	(.147)	(.146)
Age	.133*	.147**	.143**	.152**	.152**	.145**
	(.053)	(.053)	(.053)	(.054)	(.054)	(.053)
Education	-.167*	-.156*	-.157*	-.145*	-.146*	-.135
	(.071)	(.072)	(.072)	(.072)	(.072)	(.072)
Income	-.094	-.088	-.090	-.084	-.084	-.078
	(.102)	(.104)	(.103)	(.104)	(.104)	(.103)
Parent	-.121	-.166	-.147	-.164	-.164	-.161
	(.194)	(.197)	(.197)	(.199)	(.199)	(.200)
Conservative	-.006	.003	-.050	-.030	-.030	-.009
	(.158)	(.160)	(.159)	(.162)	(.162)	(.160)
Victim	.790***	.719***	.802***	.735***	.734***	.706***
	(.178)	(.181)	(.178)	(.181)	(.182)	(.181)
Index crime rate	$1.64E^{-04**}$	$1.38E^{-04*}$	$1.65E^{-04**}$	$1.38E^{-04*}$	$1.38E^{-04*}$	$1.36E^{-04*}$
	($6.14E^{-05}$)	($6.22E^{-05}$)	($6.21E^{-05}$)	($6.24E^{-05}$)	($6.29E^{-05}$)	($6.28E^{-05}$)
Ln foreclosure rate	-.179	-.197	-.164	-.179	-.178	-.197
	(.129)	(.130)	(.132)	(.132)	(.133)	(.131)
Ln unemployment rate	.273	.209	.248	.189	.192	.216
	(.310)	(.313)	(.312)	(.315)	(.314)	(.316)
Northeast	.083	.036	.071	.036	.037	.041
	(.221)	(.222)	(.225)	(.224)	(.225)	(.222)
South	.753***	.776***	.718**	.762***	.762***	.781***
	(.209)	(.213)	(.213)	(.216)	(.216)	(.214)
West	.280	.366	.312	.397	.395	.367
	(.229)	(.233)	(.232)	(.236)	(.237)	(.240)
Intercept	1.998*	2.085**	2.001*	2.062**	2.059**	2.000*
	(.773)	(.776)	(.779)	(.783)	(.782)	(.783)
R ²	.134	.150	.137	.150	.150	.159

NOTES: Presented are unstandardized coefficients (robust standard errors, clustered at the county level). N = 632 individuals, 456 counties.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

composition is positively related to perceived victimization risk. Inspection of the results also reveals, however, that *PRC increase in percent Black* is positively related to perceived risk. Thus, the findings support our first hypothesis and show that perceived victimization risk is significantly higher among both Whites who believe that a larger percentage of their neighbors are Black and those who report that the number of Blacks in their neighborhood has increased in the past 5 years.

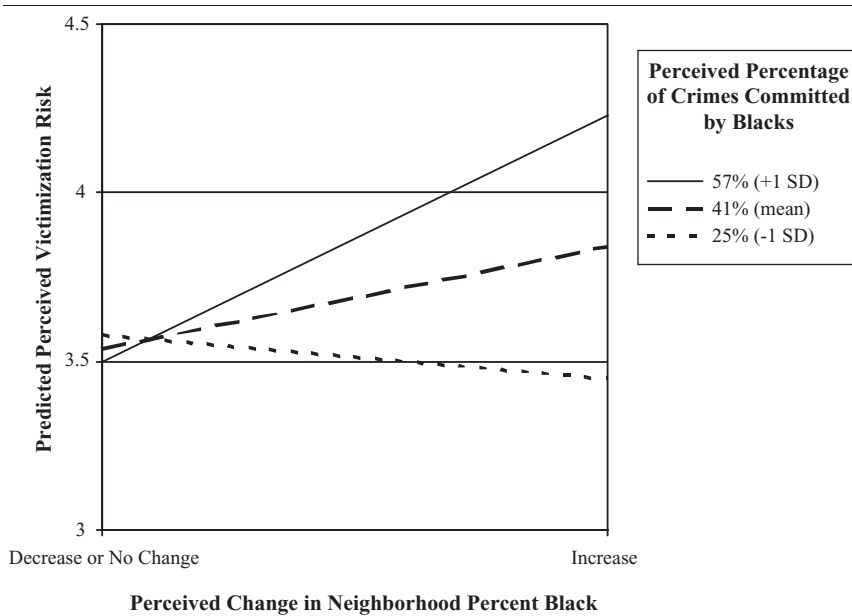
Clearly, the perceptions by Whites of the size of and changes in the local Black population are consequential for their assessments of the risk of crime, but what about their perceptions of the proportion of crime committed by Blacks? Model 3 adds the racial typification variable to the baseline equation. The coefficient for *Racial typification* is not significant. Moreover, the results of model 4, which also includes the static and dynamic measures of perceived racial composition, show that the inclusion of the racial typification variable has little effect on the size of the coefficients for *PRC percent Black* and *PRC increase in percent Black*, although it does reduce the significance level of the former from .038 to .074. Therefore, it seems that the degree to which Whites endorse the stereotype of Blacks as criminals is not by itself consequential for their perceptions of victimization risk. Nor does endorsement of this stereotype mediate the relationships between either of the racial composition measures and the latter.

Turning now to the interaction hypotheses, models 5 and 6 in table 4 test whether the effects of the perceived racial composition variables are conditioned by the stereotype of Blacks as criminals. As was the case for the Florida sample, the interaction term between *PRC percent Black* and *Racial typification* is not significant. Indeed, its estimated effect is essentially zero (see model 5 in table 4). In contrast, however, the results of model 6 in table 4 reveal that a statistically significant ($p = .024$) and positive interaction occurs between *PRC increase in percent Black* and *Racial typification*.¹⁰ Specifically, and consistent with our predictions, the findings show that the perception that the number of Blacks living in one's neighborhood has increased in the past 5 years is especially threatening to individuals who more strongly typify crime in racial terms. Moreover, when the racial typification of crime variable is at its mean (41 percent of crimes committed by Blacks), perceived Black population growth is associated, on average, with an increase of .303 in perceived risk of victimization ($p = .062$).

To illustrate this interactive effect better, we plot the predicted values for this interaction in Figure 1. This shows the effect of *PRC increase*

10. The addition of this interaction term significantly increased the explanatory power of the model ($F = 6.57, p = .011$). Including the interaction terms in models 5 and 6 in the same model does not change the results presented in table 4 (available upon request).

Figure 1. Whites' Perceptions of Victimization Risk: The Interaction of Perceived Changes in Racial Composition and Racial Typification of Crime (Survey2)



NOTE: Presented are predicted values from model 6 in Table 4, setting all additional variables at their means.

ABBREVIATION: SD = standard deviation.

in percent Black on perceptions of victimization risk at different values of *Racial typification*, holding all additional variables at their means. As shown in Figure 1, the perception that the number of Blacks living in one's neighborhood has increased over the past 5 years is *not* associated with higher levels of perceived risk among Whites scoring relatively low on the *Racial typification* index. Additionally, the evidence suggests that Black population growth is most criminally threatening to Whites who believe that Blacks commit the majority of crimes. Taken together, then, the findings regarding the interaction between perceived changes in neighborhood racial composition and racial typification of crime provide support for the criminal threat hypothesis.

The final portion of the analyses focuses on the "ceiling effect" hypothesis. Recall that according to this hypothesis, racial threat effects—here

Table 5. Disaggregated Analyses: Regression Coefficients for the Interaction Term Between Perceived Changes in Neighborhood Racial Composition and Racial Typification of Crime in Models Predicting Perceived Victimization Risk for Select Subsamples of Respondents (Survey 2)

Lower Perceived Risk		Higher Perceived Risk		Difference in Slopes	
Sample	<i>b</i>	Sample	<i>b</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i> value for <i>z</i> ^a
Males <i>n</i> = 291	.044* (.017)	Females <i>n</i> = 341	.007 (.014)	1.68	.047
Age < 45 <i>n</i> = 212	.035* (.017)	Age 45+ <i>n</i> = 420	.025 (.015)	.44	.330
College <i>n</i> = 454	.030* (.012)	No college <i>n</i> = 178	.015 (.024)	.56	.288
Nonvictim <i>n</i> = 456	.043** (.013)	Victim <i>n</i> = 176	.001 (.022)	1.64	.051
Low crime <i>n</i> = 312	.035* (.016)	High crime <i>n</i> = 320	.018 (.019)	.68	.248
Non-South <i>n</i> = 419	.034* (.013)	South <i>n</i> = 213	.004 (.022)	1.17	.121

NOTES: Robust standard errors, clustered at the county level, in parentheses. Estimates shown are from equations that include all additional independent and control variables. The included subsamples represent the significant predictors of perceived victimization risk in the baseline model (model 1 in table 4). The low-crime subsample includes respondents residing in counties with below the median index crime rates (i.e., index crime rate < 3,226.16). The high-crime subsample includes respondents residing in counties with index crime rates at or above the median index crime rate (i.e., index crime rate ≥ 3,226.16).

^aOne-tailed.

p* < 0.05; *p* < 0.01; ****p* < 0.001 (two-tailed).

represented by the interaction between perceived Black population growth and racial typification of crime—should be larger for those who would normally perceive lower risks of crime (see Chiricos, Welch, and Gertz, 2004). To test this prediction, we divide the sample on the basis of the variables that were significantly related to perceived victimization risk in the baseline model (model 1 in table 4), and then we estimate the regression equation including the interaction term (model 6 in table 4) separately for each subsample of respondents. Table 5 presents the resultant coefficients for the interaction between *PRC increase in percent Black* and *Racial typification*.¹¹ The findings are supportive of the ceiling effect hypothesis. Whereas

11. We also investigated the possibility that the effect of the interaction between *PRC percent Black* and *Racial typification* would vary among these subsamples of respondents. However, the coefficient for this product term was not significant in any model.

perceived victimization risk is significantly higher among females, older persons, those with less education, victims, individuals living in counties with higher crime rates, and southerners (see model 1 in table 4), the interaction between perceived changes in racial composition and racial typification of crime is only significant among males, younger persons, the better educated, nonvictims, individuals living in counties with lower crime rates, and those residing outside of the South. Only the differences between the slopes for females and males ($z = 1.68$, $p = .047$) and victims and nonvictims ($z = 1.64$, $p = .051$) are significant at the .10 level.¹² Even still, the weight of the evidence seems to suggest that the criminal threat hypothesis is most applicable to individuals who feel relatively safe from crime.

CONCLUSION

This study extends the research on the criminal threat hypothesis by testing the key theoretical assumptions on which the latter rests—namely, that Whites associate large or growing Black populations with an increased threat of crime, and that this association is to some extent explained or influenced by racial stereotypes of Blacks as prone to violence and criminality. Specifically, we use public opinion data from two random samples of adults to examine the relationships between perceptual measures of neighborhood racial composition and changes in neighborhood racial composition and the perceptions of victimization risk by Whites. We then assess whether, as predicted by the criminal threat hypothesis, these relationships are mediated or moderated by racial typification of crime. The analyses yield several important findings. Each finding is detailed in the subsequent discussion, followed by an overview of their implications for threat theory and research.

First, the analyses reveal that, consistent with the findings from prior studies (Chiricos, Hogan, and Gertz, 1997; Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz, 2001; Moeller, 1989; Skogan, 1995), perceived neighborhood racial composition is positively related to perceived victimization risk among both White Floridians and White Americans. We also find evidence that perceived changes in neighborhood racial composition influence the perceptions of the threat of crime by Whites. Specifically, the data from the second survey show that perceived victimization risk is significantly higher among respondents who report that the number of Blacks living in their neighborhood has increased in the past 5 years. The results, then, provide support for our first hypothesis and bolster the argument that Black population growth

12. We used the formula recommended by Paternoster et al. (1998) to test the null hypothesis that the coefficients for the interaction term were equal across subsamples.

may be as or even more threatening to Whites than racial composition of place (Liska, 1992: 186). Recall, however, that only one other study to date has evaluated the effect of a dynamic measure of racial composition on perceptions or fear of crime (i.e., Taylor and Covington, 1993). For this reason, future research is needed that evaluates the relationships between objective and perceptual indicators of changes in the size of the local Black population, ideally capturing variations in both the rates and quantities of change, and crime-related perceptions and emotions.

Second, and of particular relevance to the criminal threat hypothesis, our analyses show that racial typification does not mediate the relationships between either the static or the dynamic measure of perceived neighborhood racial composition and perceived risk. Additionally, we find that only the relationship between perceived changes in neighborhood racial composition and perceived victimization risk is conditioned by racial typification of crime. The interaction between the static measure and racial typification, in contrast, is not significant among respondents to either survey. That is, the findings provide no support for our second hypothesis and only partial support for our third hypothesis, and they indicate that only the relationship between perceived Black population growth and the perceptions of victimization by Whites reflects the hypothesized threat process—namely, the application of stereotypes of Blacks as prone to violence and criminality. Our results parallel those of several previous studies that have found that dynamic, but not static, measures of minority composition significantly predict attitudes toward and levels of social control (Chamlin, 1989; Johnson et al., 2011; King and Wheelock, 2007; Wang and Mears, 2010). The findings also suggest that, in contrast to typical interpretations (see, e.g., Chiricos, Hogan, and Gertz, 1997; Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz, 2001; Quillian and Pager, 2001, 2010), the often observed relationship between static measures of racial composition and perceptions and fear of crime may *not* be explained or influenced by the racial typification of crime.¹³

13. One could argue that the relationship between *perceived* neighborhood racial composition and perceived risk is a consequence of racial stereotypes in the sense that those who typify crime in racial terms also may be more likely to notice Blacks living nearby. That is, perceived neighborhood racial composition may mediate the relationship between racial stereotypes and perceived risk. Our results, however, do not support this argument. Racial typification of crime is not related to perceptions of victimization risk among respondents to either survey in models including only the control variables. Moreover, the bivariate correlations between *Racial typification* and *PRC percent Black* do not exceed .11 in either survey. And in survey 2, the bivariate correlation between *Racial typification* and *PRC increase in percent Black* is only .09.

The question remains, then, as to how, if not through criminal stereotypes, perceived neighborhood racial composition impacts the perceived threat of crime among Whites. One possibility is that neighborhood racial composition and, thus, perceived neighborhood racial composition may influence the interactions of Whites with their neighbors in a way that affects their perceptions of victimization risk. For example, Whites living in neighborhoods with larger Black populations may have more encounters and friendships with Blacks. The results of two recent studies suggest that having Black friends increases concern about and fear of crime for Whites (Mears, Mancini, and Stewart, 2009; Mears and Stewart, 2010). And this relationship may have little to do with racial stereotypes. Instead, as Mears, Mancini, and Stewart (2009: 539) explained, interracial contact, because Blacks are more likely to have personal and vicarious experience with criminal victimization, may have an educative function for Whites—engendering “an awareness . . . that crime is more pervasive than they otherwise would believe.”

Conversely, it also is possible that neighborhood racial composition influences perceptions of victimization risk by affecting levels of social capital. As Costa and Kahn (2003: 104) emphasized, people “prefer to interact with others like them because of shared interests, socialization to the same cultural norms, and greater empathy toward individuals who remind them of themselves.” Thus, Whites in racially mixed or predominantly Black neighborhoods may tend to be both more withdrawn socially and less involved in community activities and organizations (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2000; Costa and Kahn, 2003; Putnam, 2007). Such Whites also may be less likely to trust their neighbors or to perceive them to be willing to intervene to help others (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002; Stolle, Soroka, and Johnston, 2008). Research has shown that both social integration and perceptions of collective efficacy (i.e., neighbors’ trustworthiness and willingness to intervene) impact levels of perceived risk and fear of crime (Gibson et al., 2002; Lee and Earnest, 2003; McGarrell, Giacomazzi, and Thurman, 1997; Scarborough et al., 2010).

There are several other plausible explanations for the effect of perceived neighborhood racial composition on perceived victimization risk that involve mechanisms other than the racial typification of crime. To be sure, the impression that Blacks tend to be criminals is only one of many racial stereotypes that are pervasive in American society. Stereotypes of Blacks as lazy, poor, less intelligent, and dirty also are widespread (Devine, 1989; Devine and Elliot, 1995; Hurwitz and Peffley, 1997; Smith, 1991, 2001; Sniderman and Piazza, 1993). Because of such generalizations about Blacks, the size of the local Black population may indirectly affect perceived victimization risk by impacting the assessments by residents of

neighborhood problems other than crime, such as disorder and deterioration (Sampson and Raudenbush, 2004). It also may be, as Chiricos, Hogan, and Gertz (1997: 125) suggested, that having Black neighbors influences the perceptions of Whites about an area's degree of protection by law enforcement.

Of course, another possibility is that perceptions of victimization risk influence the kinds of people who move into and out of communities, and thus, structure the racial composition of neighborhoods. Hipp (2010), for example, found evidence that aggregated perceptions of crime are positively related to both the out-mobility of White neighborhood residents and the in-mobility of Blacks and Latinos, but they are negatively related to the in-mobility of Whites. In this sense, static measures of neighborhood racial composition, because of racial differences in transitional processes, would in some circumstances be capturing the end product of perceived risk-related residential turnover. For this reason, the relationship between neighborhood racial composition and perceived victimization risk may reflect reverse causation.

Partial support for three explanations listed earlier is found in Drakulich's (2009) unpublished study of Seattle residents. Specifically, his results show that, rather than through an interaction with criminal stereotypes, neighborhood racial composition affects perceptions of neighborhood safety by influencing the beliefs of residents regarding whether their neighbors would do something if kids in the neighborhood were misbehaving, perceptions of disorder, and assessments of the effectiveness of police. Still, additional studies are needed that explore these and other possible mechanisms through which neighborhood racial composition may influence perceptions of victimization risk and adjudicate between the competing explanations for the effect. As important, however, is the need for theoretical and empirical work that develops an understanding of why the processes through which static and dynamic measures of racial composition influence perceptions of victimization risk may differ and, in particular, why criminal stereotypes moderate the effect of dynamic, but not static, measures of racial composition on the latter. Our preliminary speculation on this matter is that Black population growth, because it is associated with an influx of *unfamiliar* Blacks, is a context in which racial stereotypes are more likely to be activated and applied. Stereotypes, after all, are likely most consequential for judgments and decision making in situations where information about the targeted individuals is lacking (Hamilton, Sherman, and Ruvolo, 1990: 56).

A final finding from our analyses is that the interaction between perceived changes in neighborhood racial composition and racial typification of crime is a significant predictor of perceptions of victimization risk only

among those subsamples of respondents who would normally feel relatively safe from crime, especially males and nonvictims. This finding supports the notion of a ceiling effect in racial threat relationships (see Chiricos, Welch, and Gertz, 2004). The ceiling effect hypothesis is particularly relevant for efforts to develop threat theory because it raises the possibility that the explanatory power of racial threat models varies across time and place. Our results, for example, suggest that it would be reasonable to anticipate that in recent years, which have been characterized by declines in both fear of crime (Saad, 2010) and actual victimization rates (Blumstein and Wallman, 2006), the opportunities for racial threat variables to influence the mobilization of social control may have increased. The findings from a recent analysis of data from 123 large U.S. cities lend support to this prediction. This study revealed that the relationship between racial composition and police force size was strongest in 2000, followed by 1990, and weakest in 1980 (Kent and Jacobs, 2005). Correspondingly, Gallup polls conducted in these years showed that the percentage of Americans who were afraid to walk alone in their neighborhoods at night was lowest in 2000, followed by 1990, and highest in 1980 (Saad, 2010). This issue warrants more attention, however, and would be best addressed with longitudinal data that permit analyses of changes in minority composition, levels of perceived risk and fear of crime, and levels of social control over time.

Before closing, it is important to address two potential limitations of this study. First, some readers might question whether our use of perceptual measures of racial composition limits the interpretability and meaningfulness of our findings. Clearly, perceived racial composition and objective percent Black are not fully interchangeable variables because the estimates by individuals of the size of the local Black population often are inaccurate and the degree of imprecision is not constant across persons (Alba, Rumbaut and Marotz, 2005; Wong, 2007). Moreover, factors such as time spent away from one's home, the race of a person's most proximate neighbors, how often one sees his or her neighbors, the type of neighborhood that a person lives in (e.g., wooded development vs. apartment complex), and an individual's racial attitudes (e.g., racial prejudice) likely influence perceptions of neighborhood racial composition.¹⁴ Precisely for

14. A reviewer suggested that racial attitudes such as racial typification of crime and racial resentment may interact with objective racial composition to influence perceptions about the percentage of neighborhood residents who are Black. To examine this possibility, we used the data from survey 2 to estimate several sets of models that took *PRC percent Black* and *PRC increase in percent Black* as the dependent variables. These models included the complete battery of predictors used

these reasons, however, we contend that our use of perceptual measures of racial composition represents a *strength* rather than a *weakness* of this study. Our contention is based on the fact that neither the size of the local Black population, nor changes in it, can be consequential for racial threat relationships unless they are first perceived (or misperceived) by area residents (Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz, 2001: 327). Additionally, the reality that factors other than the actual percentage of residents who are Black also influence assessments of neighborhood racial composition does not render our findings any less meaningful. For example, even if racially prejudiced persons are more likely to notice an increase in the number of Blacks living nearby, our results indicate that the degree to which they will feel criminally threatened by this demographic change still depends in part on the strength of the association between Blacks and crime in their minds.

Nonetheless, we provide supplemental analyses in the supporting information and in table S.1 in which we reestimate the models in Table 4 using objective measures of racial composition.¹⁵ The results that emerge include both differences and similarities when compared with those attained with the perceptual measures. Notable findings include the following: 1) Neither county-level racial composition nor changes in county-level racial composition are significantly related to perceived victimization risk, controlling for crime and economic conditions; 2) the coefficients for these variables are not impacted substantially by the inclusion of the racial typification of crime measure; 3) racial typification of crime does not interact with the static measure of racial composition to influence perceptions of risk; and 4) a significant positive interaction occurs between *Increase in county percent Black* and *Racial typification* ($b = .035$, $p = .027$), indicating that the effect of Black population growth on perceived risk is moderated by racial typification of crime. We suspect that the differences between the results presented in table S.1 and those shown in Table 4 are likely a result of racial segregation within counties and individual-level differences

in model 3 in table S.1, along with a five-item *Racial resentment* index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$) that paralleled those used by other researchers (e.g., Unnever and Cullen, 2010). In models not including interaction terms, neither the *Racial typification* measure nor the *Racial resentment* index emerged as a significant predictor of *PRC percent Black* or *PRC increase in percent Black*. In models including interaction terms between these two measures of racial attitudes and the two county-level measures of racial composition, the coefficients for the interactions were not significant. These results (available upon request) provide additional evidence that perceptual measures of racial composition are not simply tapping racial attitudes.

15. Additional supporting information can be found in the listing for this article in the Wiley Online Library at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/crim.2012.50.issue-1/issuetoc>.

in awareness of the county's demographic structure. Researchers seeking to build on our work should attempt to identify both the factors that influence the perceptions by individuals of the size and characteristics of the local Black population and the sources of discrepancies between the effects of perceptual and objective measures of racial composition on assessments of victimization risk.

A second limitation of our study is that we use survey measures to assess racial typification of crime. Thus, it is possible that bias associated with social desirability affects our findings (see Krysan and Couper, 2003). Note, however, that the use of survey measures to capture racial attitudes is the norm in social science research (e.g., Hurwitz and Peffley, 1997; King and Wheelock, 2007; Unnever and Cullen, 2010). Even still, future research is needed that evaluates how implicit racial prejudice (see Quillian, 2006) may mediate or interact with static and dynamic measures of racial composition to influence perceptions and fear of crime.

Two additional lines of inquiry worth pursuing are whether the assumptions underlying the criminal threat hypothesis hold for the relationships among ethnic composition, ethnic typification of crime, and perceptions and fear of crime, and whether the ceiling effect hypothesis is applicable to these effects. These avenues of research are particularly relevant given that Latinos are both the largest and the fastest growing minority group in the United States (Fry, 2008; Grieco and Cassidy, 2001). The limited amount of existing research on ethnic threat relationships suggests that objective and perceptual measures of neighborhood ethnic composition are, in some contexts, related to the perceptions and fear of crime by residents (Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz, 2001; Drakulich, 2009; Eitle and Taylor, 2008; Quillian and Pager, 2010). Evidence also is available that stereotypes of Latinos as prone to violence and criminality interact with aggregate levels of ethnic threat to influence attitudes toward crime control (Johnson et al., 2011; Welch et al., 2011). Future investigations that include measures of Latino presence and growth, ethnic stereotypes, and perceptions and fear of crime have the potential to illuminate the specific processes that underlie such relationships.

In sum, the current study shows that perceived Black population growth increases perceptions of victimization risk among Whites who hold stereotypes of Blacks as criminals. The results thus provide partial support for the criminal threat hypothesis—a leading explanation for the often observed relationship between racial composition of place and levels of formal social control. Stated differently, the evidence suggests that the stereotype of Blacks as criminals, to the extent that perceptions of victimization risk translate into pressure on authorities to control crime, may serve to both mobilize Whites and justify controlling responses in the context of Black population growth (see Blalock, 1967: 167).

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