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PERCEPTIONS OF CRIMINALITY: AN EXPERIMENT ON RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER STEREOTYPES

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Sociology

by
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B.A., Emory University, 2011
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To my grandfather, Charles Speight, who has always believed in me. I love you the most.

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Abstract

The study of perceptions of criminality is significant in sociology due to its sociopolitical implications for our criminal justice system. Race, class, and gender disparities in this system influence prejudices in the American public, which in turn allows the perpetuation of inequality. Using an intersectional approach, this research seeks to interpret how race, class, and gender intersect to create and shape perceptions of criminality. Conducting an experiment on approximately 500 undergraduate students at a southern university during the Spring 2015 semester, subjects are shown a series of photographs and asked to select who, out of the individuals depicted, they believe to be criminals. Findings suggest that perceived class is a strong determinant of criminality, with race and gender effects as well. This study proposes that results are shaped by the workings of the criminal justice system, media portrayals of criminals, and the particular significance of our current social and political environment.

Introduction

Perceptions of criminality in terms of an intersectional approach to race, class, and gender stereotypes are highlighted in the current study. Focus on the workings of our criminal justice system has been widespread in sociology, with much emphasis placed on racial and class biases in every step of the judicial system, from being charged to convicted and sentenced, to the likelihood of recidivism (see, for example, Alexander 2010).

Much research utilizes self-report surveys, official data, and victimization surveys, however there are limitations with each (Mosher 2011). This study seeks to add to the extant literature through utilizing an experimental methodology in order to gather evidence on public perceptions of the image of a criminal. These perceptions are significant, because they can justify the prejudicial workings of the justice system in the public's view and can thus perpetuate inequalities based on race, class, and gender.

Though people of color, men, and lower class individuals are disproportionately represented in the system, this is not because lower class persons or persons of color *commit* more crimes but rather they experience discrimination within the justice system (Goffman 2009; Mosher 2011; Reiman 1998). While some argue that blacks actually do commit more crimes (Verdier and Zenou 2004), I assert that this disparity is due to a lack of resources that forces these communities and individuals to be more vulnerable to the attention of police, prejudice and bias (Goffman 2009), as well as our prison-industrial complex.

The United States is the world leader in prisoners per capita, with 2.2 million people in jail or prison at any given time, an increase of 500% over the past 30 years (The Sentencing Project 2013). This creates a national social problem, as the majority of inmates reenter society with little to no resources to succeed. As Kontos (2010), argues, "The absurdity of treating people like wild-caged animals for however many years and then expecting them to return as productive members of society is hard to miss when confronted with the reality of prison life" (2010:576). Our prison industrial complex functions in a way that perpetually disenfranchises particular groups in our society. With a shift towards privatization, prisons are multi-billion dollar, for-profit institutions. These institutions run on a capitalist basis – bodies are needed in prisons in order to increase profits. Fashing-Varner et al. (2014) state that the prison system is not in "crisis," nor is it "broken," but rather, "the system is functioning as it was intended – to disenfranchise many (predominantly people of color) for the benefit of some (mostly white), based on economic principals of the free market" (2014:410). Racial disparities can be clearly seen in mass incarceration rates - the likelihood that a white man will be imprisoned in his lifetime is 1 in 17. For Latino men, the likelihood increases to 1 in 6, and for black men, the likelihood is even greater, with 1 in 3 black men being imprisoned in their lifetime (The Sentencing Project 2013).

These factors, as well as media portrayals of criminals, enhance and reproduce the public perception of the "myth of the criminalblackman" (Russell-Brown 2009) and the "welfare queen" stereotype (Hancock 2004; Foster 2008), creating a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the public perceives criminals based on stereotypes of race, class, and gender, thereby justifying the persistence of these prejudices and inequalities in the criminal justice system. In other words, since lower class individuals and persons of color are more likely to be targeted by the police and charged, convicted, and sentenced for a crime (Pager 2007; Welch 2007), the public perceives these groups of people as more likely to be criminals. Though much emphasis has been placed

on the criminal justice system in sociology, little research utilizes an intersectional approach to public perceptions of criminality.

The current study contributes to research on public perceptions of criminality by utilizing an experimental methodology to test how approximately 500 undergraduate students at a southern university during the Spring 2015 semester perceive criminals based on race, class, and gender. Instead of viewing these groups separately, it is important to understand how they intersect to create unique modes of oppression, as well as to understand the significance of public perception in recreating prejudice evident in the criminal justice system. The results indicate that perceived class is a strong determinant of perceptions of criminality with race and gender effects as well.

Stereotypes

What is a stereotype? A stereotype is considered a subcategory of generics – broad categorizations about a group that lack qualifying words such as "some" or "most" (Beeghly 2015). "Birds fly" is an example of a generic - while this is true for some birds, it is not true for all (e.g. penguins, ostriches, and chickens). Stereotypes, on the other hand, are generalizations about a *social group* that allow expectations about an individual to be formed based on group membership (Beeghly 2015) – "black men are criminals," "poor people are lazy," and "women are weak" are some examples of stereotypes common in our society. These mental "shortcuts" can have profound influences on people's ideas and expectations, regardless of if they are expressed, and aid in producing implicit, or unconscious, biases (Beeghly 2015). Activating a stereotype consists of three steps: first, a person is labeled as a member of a particular social group; second, characteristics of that person are assumed based on this group membership; and third, judgment and behavior towards that person are affected by these assumed traits (Muller and Rothermund 2014). These stereotypes are spread through many facets of society, such as politics, the media, and everyday social interactions (Hurwitz and Peffley 1997).

Racial stereotypes are persistent in terms of crime, leading to the "myth of the criminal black man," a term coined by Katherine Russell-Brown in her work on race and crime. Studies have shown that exposure to different media outlets can exacerbate and reaffirm negative racial stereotypes, linking blacks to criminality (Dixon and Linz 2000) and that eyewitness accounts of a crime are clouded by the (incorrect) assumption that perpetrators are typically black (Osborne 2014). Common stereotypes of black women include the "welfare queen," or someone who relies on government assistance out of laziness and a poor work ethic, or the "angry black woman," which depicts black women as aggressive, overbearing, and illogical (Ashley 2014). These and other common stereotypes are persistent throughout society and affect individual judgments of broad social groups. Because the focus of this research is perceptions of criminality, the following sections discuss stereotypes in media portrayals of criminals, as well as inequalities in our criminal justice system based on race, class, and gender.

Crime and the Media

Different media and news outlets, such as local and national television, newspapers, tabloids, and social media, can have a profound effect on perpetuating stereotypes in relation to race, class, and gender. Exposure to stereotypic news portrayals can influence and aggravate implicit and explicit biases in the audience (Arendt and Northup 2015; Park et al. 2007) and can reaffirm and perpetuate negative attitudes and interpersonal relationships in terms of race, class, and gender.

Dixon and Linz (2000) suggest that television news outlets focus on what they define as "blue collar crime," otherwise known as "street crime," compared to "white collar" or "suite" crime. "Street vs. Suite" crime reporting and visibility are in stark contrast to one another. Where street crime involves incidents such as burglary, drug use, or petty theft, suite crimes are much less visible and include "the full range of frauds committed by business and government professionals" (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2016). These two types of crimes are policed differently, and Dixon and Linz (2000) argue, "the vast majority of crimes reported on television news may be considered 'blue-collar crimes'" (2000:149) and suggest that, while "White-collar crime is typically committed by White, male, wealthy, and politically powerful offenders" (2000:150), blue collar crime is more likely to suggest black perpetrators to a viewing audience (2000) due to the disenfranchisement of people of color and disparate opportunities in our economic system based on race.

Many see suite crime as less serious than street crime (Perri 2011). These crimes are more likely to be perceived as nonviolent, one-time incidents by the public, the judicial system, and academics together (2011). Though statistically, suite crime has been reported to cause victims an estimated loss of $250 billion annually compared to $17.6 billion for street crimes (Rosoff et. al 2004), the public tends to believe that suite crime is relatively harmless (Holtfreter 2008) – public fear is much greater for street crimes, due in part to the focus and attention placed on them (Dixon and Linz 2000). Reiman (1998) argues, "The fact is that the label 'crime' is not used in America to name all or the worst of the actions that cause misery and suffering to Americans. It is primarily reserved for the dangerous actions of the poor" (1998:51). Though more citizens die due to unhealthy or unsafe work conditions than what we as a society consider to be murder, Reiman (1998) argues that this is because our labels of "crime" are socially constructed – we decide what is labeled a crime, what we think of as crime, and who is labeled a criminal (1998).

Media portrayals of crime enhance public opinion of the criminal as poor and/or non-white. If the media consistently represent lower class individuals or ethnic minorities as criminals, this can have an impact on public perception, furthering the stereotype that lower class persons of color are dangerous or unlawful. Bjornstrom et al. (2010) find that 69% of stories focusing on black individuals were about crime compared to only 28% of news stories about whites. Further, they found an over-reporting of black perpetrators and underreporting of racial minorities as victims of crime (2010). This, they argue, furthers white fear of crime, as white individuals are more likely to be seen as victims and less likely to be seen as perpetrators (2010).

Dixon and Linz (2000) show that television news portrayals of criminals are disproportionately non-white, while portrayals of law enforcement officials are disproportionately white. In one study, using news broadcasts from Los Angeles and Orange County, they find that blacks were almost 4 times as likely to be shown as criminals than police

officers. For felonies, blacks were more than twice as likely to be represented compared to whites and three and a half times more likely to be shown as criminals than police officers (2000). Findings further suggest that the representation of minorities as criminals is disproportionate to arrest rates. For example, 25% of felony arrests were of African Americans, while 44% of news portrayals of felons were black (2000). They argue that this misrepresentation on television news stations can create a cognitive link between blacks and crime, perpetuating viewers' negative stereotypes of racial minorities as criminals (2000). Further, whites were significantly more likely to be depicted as police officers – while only 59% of officers in Los Angeles and Orange County were white, 69% of officer depictions on television news were white (2000).

Russell-Brown (2009), in studying media portrayals of different racial groups, argues that blacks are "the face of crime in America" (2009:14), though the majority of those arrested and/or imprisoned are white (2009). These portrayals of blacks as criminal create an unconscious bias in the American public. She states,

> The onslaught of criminal images of Black men cause many of us to incorrectly conclude that most Black men are criminals… Regardless of race, the person most people fear is a young, Black man. This is what I refer to as the myth of the criminalblackman (2009:14).

Further, though in today's media there are more positive portrayals of blacks than ever before, as well as the inclusion in mainstream media of accomplished black celebrities such as Oprah, Beyonce, Neil Degrasse Tyson, and Morgan Freeman, Russell-Brand (2009) argues that these images and celebrities "transcend" race, and in this case, black celebrities become "colorless" (2009). Those who embody the criminal stereotype, however, maintain their blackness and recreate bias in the viewing audience (2009). Dixon (2015) similarly argues, "consumption of network news leads to higher levels of racial prejudice, perceptions of Blacks as poor, and perceptions of Blacks as intimidating" (2015:35).

Going further, Dixon and Linz (2000) find an underrepresentation of Latino/as as both victims of crime and police officers. They suggest that this is due to a focus on other negative stereotypes versus criminality (e.g. immigrant status) and show that Latinos were more likely to be seen as immigrants when depicted on network and cable news than is true in society – 97% compared to 47% (2000). Russell-Brown (2009) argues that Latinos are often portrayed as outsiders and foreigners in the media and are overlooked when considering racial bias, since much focus is placed on black/white relations. She states, "Latinos are also second in line – behind African Americans – as the face of the feared American criminal" (2009:11). Because of the focus on black men as criminals in multiple media outlets, I expect photographs of black males to be selected most frequently out of any grouping.

Race and Crime

Much research emphasis has been placed on the link between race and crime; statistically, ethnic minorities represent a disproportionate amount of inmates (both previous and current)(Pager 2007), with blacks currently comprising almost 38% and whites comprising 59% of the prison population (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2016), though they represent 13% and 77% of the U.S. population, respectively (US Census 2014). While some argue that blacks do indeed commit more crimes than whites (Verdier and Zenou 2004), findings frequently show that racial prejudice can be seen in the attitudes of both law enforcement officials and American citizens in general (see, for example, Brown 2013). Though it has never been proven that ethnic minorities commit more crimes than whites (see, for example, Katz 2000), this misconception remains prevalent (Quillian and Pager 2010).

In *The New Jim Crow,* Alexander (2010) argues that the criminal justice system operates on class and racial biases reminiscent of slavery and Jim Crow era laws. At every stage of the criminal justice system, laws that are forms of "legalized discrimination" (2010:7) disproportionately affect black individuals. Not only are black and lower class individuals more likely to be charged and convicted of a crime, but they are also more likely to experience harsher sentences than their upper class or white counterparts (Alexander 2010; Reiman 1998). Once released, those with felony convictions are burdened with laws that make it difficult to reintegrate into general society – they are often denied government aid such as housing and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and are stripped of their right to vote and to serve on a jury of their peers (Alexander 2010; Pager 2007).

Businesses are allowed to ask job applicants if they have ever been convicted of a felony, and those with a felony conviction are much less likely to be hired or even considered for the job (Doty 2013). Checking this "black box" (2013) creates added difficulty in securing employment, especially gainful employment (Pager 2007; Travis et. al 2014). This is significant, considering approximately 600,000 inmates are released each year (Pager 2007) and must reintegrate into their neighborhoods and communities. While some argue that criminal history is pertinent for potential employers to be aware of, it can lead to discriminatory practices that further disenfranchise ex-inmates (Bible 2013). In response to this, efforts to "ban the box" have been gaining momentum, with many states enacting laws restricting employers from asking job applicants about criminal histories (Entin 2015).

Not having steady employment is particularly problematic for ex-offenders, as this can violate parole requirements and put the individual in danger of returning to prison (Goffman 2009). Further, extensive court and parole fees, as well as mandatory and frequent meetings with a parole officer, disproportionately affect low-income individuals who may not have the ability to pay these fees or have reliable transportation to their parole meetings (Alexander 2010). Being incapable of fulfilling any one of these requirements is enough to find oneself back in prison (Goffman 2009; Mosher 2011).

The "War on Drugs" is one example of how laws disproportionately target low-income, majority minority communities (Bobo and Thompson 2006). Katz (2000) shows that racial groups tend to consume illegal drugs at equal rates, with statistics showing that drug users are approximately 75% white and 13% black, proportionate to the racial composition of our society, whereas 75% of those incarcerated for drug charges are black (2000), a wildly disproportionate

statistic. Going further, incarceration rates show that the likelihood that a black male will go to jail at some point during his life is 1 in 3, whereas for whites, the likelihood is 1 in 25 (2000).

Evidence consistently shows that racial groups use illicit substances at very similar rates, and that the "War on Drugs" began when illegal drug use was actually on the decline (Welch 2007). Welch (2007) argues that many laws can be viewed from a racialized lense, specifically drug laws and the War on Drugs. The heavily disparate policies for crack cocaine and pure cocaine can be used as examples here. While some argue that crack cocaine is more dangerous than pure cocaine (Hatsukami 1996), which can be used as justification for the disparate sentencing laws behind these two forms of the same drug, Welch (2007) explains that cocaine was prevalent in the white community long before crack became common, but since crack was popular mostly among lower class blacks, harsher penalties were enacted, which can be seen as an example of white fear of minorities, as well as specific laws being racialized and prejudicial (2007). Though Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act in 2010, reducing the disparate mandatory sentences for crack and cocaine from 100:1 to 18:1 (American Civil Liberties Union), the disparity between sentences for two forms of the same drug is still great and actively racialized.

"Zero tolerance" policies in middle and high schools were first implemented in 1989 and have since been utilized in every state in the country. These policies include mandatory suspensions and expulsions for students engaged in gang activity, fighting, and the possession of illicit substances (Mosher 2011) and are part of what is termed the "school to prison pipeline." As Mallet (2016) states, the pipeline is defined as "a set of policies and practices in schools that make it more likely that students face criminal involvement with the juvenile courts than attain a quality education" (2016:15). These practices include zero tolerance policies for violence and drug possession, metal detector screenings and random searches, and lead to suspensions and expulsions, as well as the involvement of juvenile officials and courts in what would be considered minor infractions, such as truancy, "acting out" in classrooms, and fighting involving students that pose little to no threat to school safety (2016). Though implemented partially in reaction to school shootings such as Columbine, they largely affect schools with a high population of minority and low-income students, leading to racial, gender, and class disparities in suspensions, educational attainment, and juvenile arrests (Monahan and Torres 2010). Though efforts have been made to adjust the policies in order to reduce these discrepancies, as Schept, Wall, and Brisman (2015) state, these adjustments merely "enable ongoing juridification, policing, and incarceration of a racialized and classed youth" (2015:110).

New York's famous "Stop and Frisk" policies are another example of racial bias in the criminal justice system. Under these laws, anyone "suspicious" (an intentionally vague concept) may be stopped by a police officer at any time and for no reason at all. In 2011, NYPD officers made 685,724 stops, with nine out of ten people stopped being innocent of any crime (New York Civil Liberties Union 2011). "Stop and Frisk" policies were ineffective in reducing firearms on the street, the intended purpose, with 99.9% of stops resulting in no guns being retrieved (New York Civil Liberties Union 2011). Racial disparities in stops were dramatic – black and Hispanic individuals were disproportionately more likely to be frisked and have police force used against them while being less likely than whites to be found with a weapon (New York Civil Liberties Union 2011). Gelman et al. (2007) analyzed 72% of stops due to Stop and Frisk policies from January 1998 to March 1999 and found that 84% of stops targeted black and Latino(a) individuals, though they comprised only 50% of the city's population (2007). Similarly, the New

York Civil Liberties Union found that, in precincts with black and Hispanic populations of 14% or less, these racial groups accounted for 70% of stops (2011).

One of the justifications for this discrepancy is that police are more likely to patrol in low-income areas that are known to have higher crime rates. Since these areas have a disproportionate number of minorities, police reason that the numbers are logical and do not represent racial bias in the policing system (Gelman et. al 2007). However, once the proportion of crimes committed by racial minorities was controlled, non-white individuals were still more likely to be stopped. Interestingly, the likelihood that a stop would lead to an arrest was reversed – non-whites were *less* likely to be charged and arrested for a crime when stopped than whites. Gelman et al. (2007) argue that white arrests were more efficient, meaning whites were stopped fewer times in comparison with other ethnicities, leading to higher arrest rates. Conversely, stops for blacks and Hispanics were less efficient, which lead to lower arrest rates (2007). Because of persistent racial stereotypes and the current state of our criminal justice system in terms of racial prejudice, I expect photographs depicting ethnic minorities to be selected more frequently than photographs depicting whites.

Gender and Crime

Little research has been dedicated to women in the criminal justice system, with studies in criminology tending to place their emphasis on women as victims as opposed to perpetrators of crime, with a particular focus on violent and sexual victimization (Van Wormer and Bartollas 2000). Though the female incarceration rate and prison populations have increased at rates much greater than their male counterparts (Gowdy et al. 2003), the overall percentage of women in prisons is currently only 6.7% (Federal Bureau of Prisons 2016). Between 1975 and 1995, women's arrest rates increased by 6%, with primary arrests shifting from crimes such as forgery, larceny, prostitution, and embezzlement to larceny and drug-related offenses (Gowdy et al. 2003). Some racial differences between black and white women are shown in the existing research, though much of the literature tends to examine race and sex as independent of one another (Baskin and Sommers 2013). Juvenile delinquency data shows that girls are a growing population of those arrested for violent crimes such as simple and aggravated assault, with increases from 21% to 33% and 15% to 24%, respectively, between 1980 and 2000 (Steffensmeier et al. 2005).

These increases in arrests and prison populations have drawn the attention of feminist scholars, with some disagreement as to how to study and incorporate women into the field of criminology. Some argue that there is no need for a separate discussion - that women and men can and should be studied together, while others argue that new theories that incorporate women into the study of crime are necessary, as females have differing motivations for criminal activity when compared to males (Van Wormer and Bartollas 2000). Because of the focus on women as victims as well as the low percentage of women in the criminal justice system as prisoners or ex-offenders, I expect photographs of women to be selected as criminal less frequently than those of men.

Class and Crime

There are certain inherent challenges when researching class and socioeconomic status due to measurement decisions. Indicators are usually centered on concepts of prestige and resources, such as occupational prestige, educational attainment, income, labor earnings, and wealth, as well as cultural attributes such as dress (Diemer et al. 2013). Objective social class and perceived social class can vary, however, due to an absence of clear and objective class identities in the general public, as well as limitations in measurement selection (Bottero 2004).

Much focus in the literature discusses race and class simultaneously, as race and class are strongly tied to one another, meaning racial minorities are disproportionately more likely to be members of the lower classes (Reiman 1998; Wilson 2003). This does not inherently suggest that all class-based prejudice, particularly in the criminal justice system, is also racial prejudice. Wealthier individuals have greater resources to avoid criminal convictions, as well as to reduce their charges or sentences (Reiman 1998). Reiman (1998) argues that affluent individuals are "weeded out" of the criminal justice system through a funneling process and states, "the criminal justice system functions from start to finish in a way that makes certain that the offender at the end of the road in prison is likely to be a member of the lowest social and economic groups in the country" (1998:102).

Often, research on the relationship between social class and delinquency focuses on official court records, juvenile detention center populations, and prison inmates (Mosher 2011). Understandably, this research schema is limited in that the populations being studied are comprised of those who have been formally reprimanded for delinquent or criminal behavior - this is not indicative of who *commits* crimes but rather who is *arrested* for them (Reiman 1998). The disproportionate amount of lower-class individuals in the system is due in part to police focus on street crimes, as well as a lack of resources among the lower SES population (Reiman 1998).

Official crime statistics, as well as victimization and self-report surveys, can be misleading when it comes to true rates of crime (Mosher 2011). Reiman (1998) argues that the general public perceives violent crimes as typically perpetrated by the poor, and thus see prison populations, in which lower SES individuals are disproportionately represented, as reflective of the "Typical Criminal" and the "Typical Crime" (1998:102). Tittle and Villemez (1977) state,

> Since much of the criminality of higher-status persons may be less visible than that of lower-status individuals, and since several class linked variables influence the probability that there will be official intervention even when crime is known, it is very likely that official criminal statistics distort the true relationship between social class and criminality (1977:479).

Questioning the link between class and crime, they researched 26 self-report studies and found that 50% found no relationship between class and crime. Further, only 35% found a *general* negative relationship, and 15% found a negative relationship but only for specific subcategories of individuals (Tittle and Villemez 1977).

Chambliss's (1973) ethnography, "The Saints and the Roughnecks" (1973), explores the differential treatment between two groups of high school boys. He found that the "Saints," six white, upper middle class, male students, engaged in as much delinquent behavior as the

"Roughnecks," six lower-class male students. However, the upper middle class boys were perceived as respectable, polite, and "good" kids (1973:193). These individuals were frequently truant, drank heavily over the weekends (often driving while intoxicated), and engaged in vandalism and petty theft. Chambliss (1973) notes that during his time observing the two groups, the "Saints" never came into legal penalties for their delinquency. Chambliss (1973) suggests that this is due to visibility – the "Saints'" delinquent acts were often hidden from view of the community, because they had greater resources to hide their illegal conduct than the lower class "Roughnecks." Agnew (2009) argues that people were biased in their perceptions of the two groups of boys, since the "Saints" were often respectful and apologetic when caught in delinquent behavior, and the "Roughnecks'" actions were perceived more negatively, since the community saw their behavior as indicative of lower-class "troublemakers" (2009:60).

These class disparities in the workings of the criminal justice system, as well as the public's perception of particular crimes, highlight another key component of discrimination – the targeting of "street" crimes as opposed to "white-collar" crimes. Because of the focus on street crimes in the criminal justice system, as well as the disproportionate amount of lower-class individuals in jails and prisons, I expect photographs depicting "lower class" individuals will be selected more frequently than photographs depicting "upper class" individuals.

An Intersectional Approach to Perceptions of Criminality

Originally coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality is an analytical approach that proposes that race, class, and gender are not mutually exclusive categories, but rather must be understood in conjunction with one another (Choo 2010; Acker 2006; Ramsay 2013). Patricia Hill Collins (1993) states, "each of us lives within a system that vests us with varying levels of power and privilege" (1993:36) and further argues:

> We need new visions of what oppression is, new categories of analysis that are inclusive of race, class, and gender as distinctive yet interlocking structures of oppression. Adhering to a stance of comparing and ranking oppressions – the proverbial, 'I'm more oppressed that you' – locks us all into a dangerous dance of competing for attention, resources, and theoretical supremacy (1993:26).

No one is simply oppressed or privileged (Choo 2010; Acker 2006; Ramsay 2013). Depending on time and circumstance, one category of oppression may be more significant than others, but this does not diminish the necessity of acknowledging that race, class, and gender interlock to create these systems of oppression (Collins 1993). Methodologically, intersectionality "sees everything as interactions, not 'main effects'" (2010:136).

Often utilized in feminist scholarship, and considered to be one of the most important theoretical contributions of women's studies (McCall 2005), intersectionality became a means by which to study how race, class, and gender intersect in women's lives to produce or limit power (Davis 2008; Acker 2006; Ramsay 2013). Important for black feminist scholarship, Crenshaw (1991) argues that, "Because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both" (1991:1244). In this way, women of color are forced to confront oppression from two, sometimes oppositional, categories that create a "dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and white women seldom confront" (1991:1252). As Crenshaw (1989) states, "With Black women as the starting point, it becomes more apparent how dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis" (1989:140). In this way, she continues, focus is placed on the privileged members of each group, black men and white women (1989), and nearly erases the experiences of marginalized members, in this case, black women. This, argues Crenshaw (1989), creates a distorted view of racism and sexism that favors the privileged members of each group.

Critics have argued that intersectionality is imperfect and vague (Davis 2008), but Davis (2008) proposes that it is precisely this vagueness that makes it so productive, stating that, "its lack of clear-cut definition or even specific parameters has enabled it to be drawn upon in nearly any context of inquiry" (2008:77). For the purposes of this research, intersectionality is utilized to understand how race, class, and gender intersect to influence perceptions of criminality – it is not enough to see race, class, and gender as separate and exclusive categories, but they must be understood in conjunction with one another to develop a clearer image of how criminality is perceived. Patricia Hill Collins (1993) argues, "Even if we never have any contact with members of other race, class, and gender groups, we all encounter images of these groups and are exposed to the symbolic meanings attached to those images" (1993:34). These images are pervasive in

our culture, through the media and other outlets, and they create assumptions and biases that recreate stereotypes in perceptions of criminality, as well as in other fields of inquiry, but while it is important to understand how race, for example, influences this perception, no category can be taken alone with the expectation of a complete picture. This kind of analysis would be inherently limited. For example, a lower class white man may be considered more likely to be a criminal than an upper class black woman; however, determining this perception based on only race, class, *or* gender will not produce a complete understanding of these results. Disregarding any one of these categories is troublesome, but utilizing only one will create a picture that is at best vague and incomplete, and at worst, incorrect – if race is taken alone, it will seem as though a white individual is more likely to be perceived as criminal than a black individual; if gender is taken alone, it will seem as though men are more likely to be perceived as criminal than women, and if class is taken alone, it will seem as though lower class individuals are more likely to be considered criminal than their upper class counterparts. Taken together, however, we can understand how these categories intersect to produce a clearer picture and a more in-depth analysis of those results. Intersectionality is underutilized in research on crime and public perceptions of crime by race, class, and gender. This study addresses this gap by utilizing intersectionality in conjunction with perceptions of criminality in order to expand our understanding on how race, class, and gender intersect to create unique views and ideas of who is considered criminal –it is not race, class, *or* gender that influences public perceptions of a criminal but rather race, class, *and* gender.

Research Design and Methods

The perceptions of criminality study is designed to examine how the intersection of race, class, and gender influence perceptions of criminality. In order to accomplish this, subjects are asked to decide whom they believe to be a criminal based on photographs displayed in a PowerPoint presentation for one second each. The photographs are obtained through social media on a voluntary basis with all but three volunteers being recruited from another state in order to minimize the likelihood of recognition by respondents. Due to the limited availability of volunteers, however, 3 are recruited from the sociology graduate department at the university the study was conducted. When this was necessary, volunteers were only considered if they had not matriculated at the university before graduate school and had no direct ties to the undergraduate population (e.g. through teaching, tutoring, or campus clubs). Two of the three volunteers are eliminated from the analysis of this study, which will be discussed further in the proceeding sections.

Each volunteer is instructed to take two photographs, with clothing selection being the only variation between the two. The clothing in each photograph is intended to signify perceived class. In order to represent this, I ask volunteers to wear business attire in one photograph and some of their older or worn clothing for the other, suggesting jeans and tank tops or t-shirts as examples. In the “upper-class” photographs, this manifests as male volunteers typically wearing suits, blazers, or button-downs and female volunteers typically wearing dresses or blouses. Female volunteers typically wear makeup and more extensively styled hair for the upper-class photographs. For the lower-class photographs, volunteers wear t-shirts and tank tops, some with a few holes. Jeans are typical as well, and female volunteers typically do not wear makeup (or wear much less makeup) and maintained somewhat more disheveled hair.

Each photograph varies only in clothing choice (as well as makeup and hair style for female volunteers). Volunteers are instructed to stand upright in front of a plain background with their hands at their sides, looking directly into the camera and making no facial expression (e.g. no smiling). The photographs are from the waist up and are cropped before the study in order to create greater uniformity. Excluding simple edits (such as cropping and centering), the original photographs are not altered in any way. Photo quality varies somewhat by volunteer, but this will be discussed further in proceeding sections of this paper.

A total of 27 volunteers are recruited, with 5 racial/ethnic groups being represented – black, white, Hispanic, Asian, and Middle Eastern. Each racial group consists of 5 volunteers, with the exception of white volunteers, whose group totals 7. Within these groups, gender is represented as equally as possible. For the black and Hispanic volunteers, 3 of the 5 volunteers are men (60%); of the Asian and Middle Eastern volunteers, 2 of the 5 are men (40%); and of the white volunteers, 3 of the 7 are men (43%). In total, 48% of the volunteers are men and 51% are women. Ages of volunteers vary little and range from approximately 25 to 35, and thus age is not a variable utilized in this research. Photographs depicting Asian and Middle Eastern volunteers are eliminated from the analysis due to clothing choices. While Asian and Middle Eastern males’ clothing differences are strong enough to visually suggest a class difference in dress, this is not the case for Asian and Middle Eastern female volunteers. Because the focus of this paper is on intersectionality, eliminating class or gender from the equation is not desirable, and the volunteers are thus eliminated from the analysis.

The photographs are then separated into two PowerPoint presentations, with every respondent seeing one of the two photographs per volunteer – the "upper class" photograph or the "lower class." Perceived class is represented as equally as possible in both presentations (48%/52%). The order of volunteers is initially randomized but remains the same throughout the study, with each undergraduate course seeing the same sequence of volunteers. Limitations due to this decision will be discussed in the concluding sections. Figure 1 displays example photographs of volunteers.

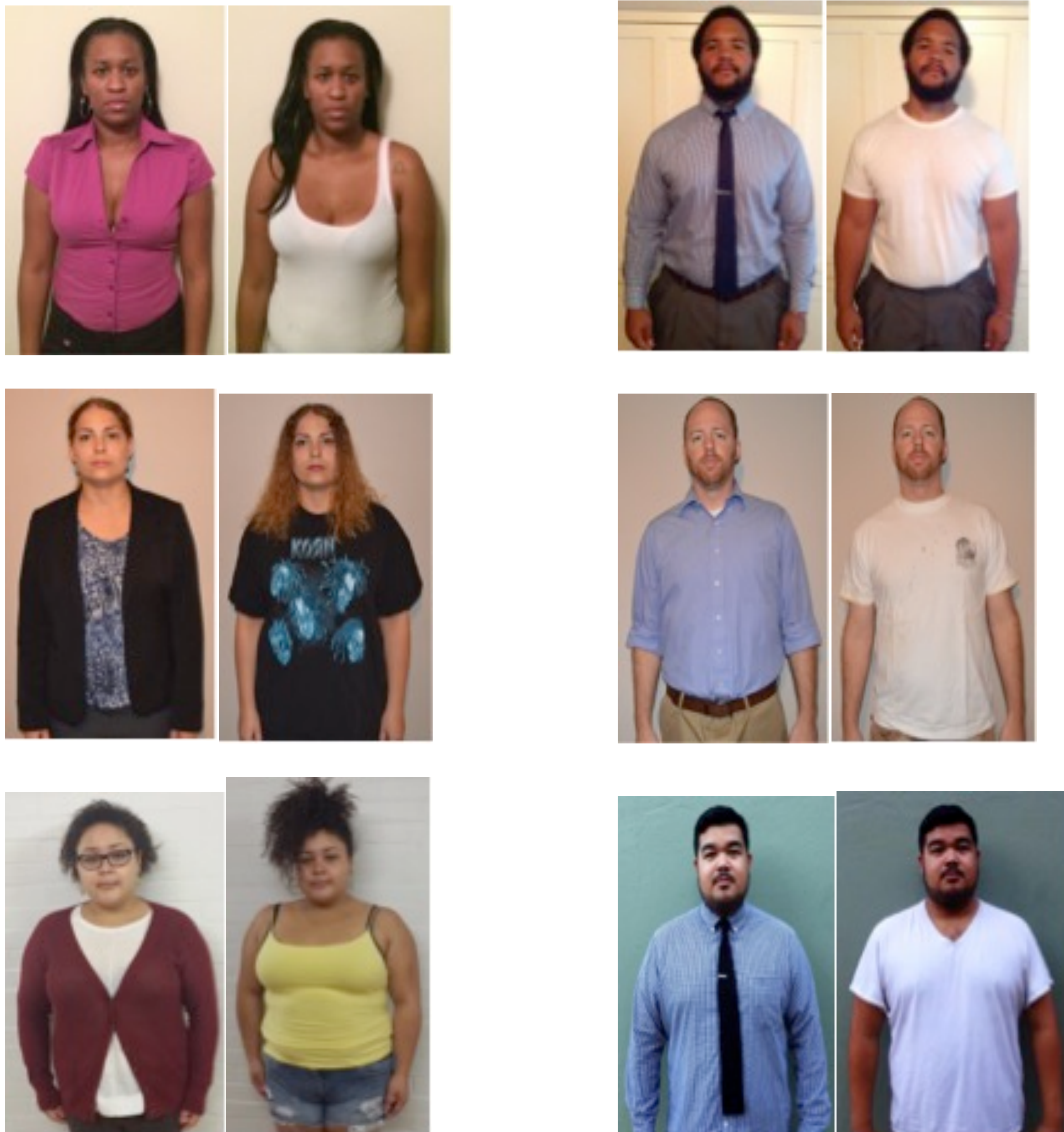

Figure 1: Example Photographs of Volunteers

Study

The study itself is a PowerPoint presentation posed as a true/false quiz. Subjects are given a response sheet with demographic information on the front and 27 true or false response options for each of the photographs on the back. Before the photographs are shown, respondents are told that some of the individuals in the photographs are criminals, while some are not, and instructed to choose whom they believe to be a criminal based on an immediate, or "snap," judgment. No other information regarding criminality or what it means to be a criminal is given in order to comment on the prejudicial understanding of what a criminal "looks like."

To the subjects, I pose that, as a researcher, I am arguing that a person can determine, with reasonable accuracy, whether or not a person is a criminal simply by looking at them, further stating that, should the students think too long about their selections, they are more likely to be incorrect. Respondents are told before the study begins that, in order to achieve the accuracy of a "snap" judgment, each photograph would be shown for exactly one second. Once they view the photograph, a screen appears on the PowerPoint reminding the respondents what number they are on, and they are given 5 seconds to make their selection before the next photograph appears on screen.

The decision to pose the study as a true/false quiz is to encourage respondents to believe that there is a correct and incorrect answer for each photograph, and the decision to show each photograph for only one second on screen is to force the respondents to choose as quickly as possible, minimizing the likelihood of social desirability bias. The presentation in its entirety, including demographic information, takes approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Sample

The sample is gathered from undergraduate courses exceeding an enrollment of 100 at a large university in a mid-sized southern city during the Spring 2015 semester. The classes are selected as follows.

A randomized list of all undergraduate classes exceeding an enrollment of 100 students (a total of 182 classes) is utilized to gather the sample. Emails are sent to the professor of each class as it appears in the randomized list, with the intention of gathering a sample of approximately 500 undergraduate students. Of the 30 professors emailed, 6 agreed to the study (20%), 12 did not respond (40%), and 9 refused (30%). The other 3 professors (10%) did not commit one way or the other.

In total, the sample is comprised of 454 undergraduate students with the majority being white, female, republican, middle class or affluent, and between the ages of 18 and 20. The 6 classes vary by subject, though most are in the social sciences and humanities, with one in science. With the exception of one upper-level course, all courses are either introductory courses or lower-level major courses, due in part to the sampling strategy. Table 1 displays the demographics of respondents.

Table 1: Demographics of Respondents

Age	Race	Gender	Political Affiliation	SES
18 (22%)	White (74%)	Women (67%)	Republican (42%)	Affluent (45%)
19 (42%)	Black (14%)	Men (33%)	Democrat (20%)	Middle Class (40%)
20 (19%)	Asian (5%)		Independent (16%)	Working Class (12%)
21 (9%)	Hispanic (4%)		Undecided (19%)	Poor (3%)
22+ (9%)				

Analytic Strategy

I use logistic regression to determine the likelihood of stating that the individual in the photograph is a criminal based on the race, gender, and perceived class of the individual in the photograph. Because my central assertion is that race, class, and gender interact, I include a three-way interaction term between race, class, and gender while also controlling on characteristics of the respondents based on five demographics – age, race, gender, social class, and political affiliation. Given that three way interaction terms can be difficult to interpret, I show predicted probabilities holding all other variables at their mean. Two models are created, one with no interaction between race, class, and gender and one with a 3-way interaction:

Model 1: logit crim i.femalep i.upclassp i.racep i.age i.race i.female i.sesord i.polaff if racep!=2 & racep!=4, cluster(caseid)

Model 2: logit crim i.racep##i.femalep##i.upclassp i.age i.race i.female i.sesord i.polaff, cluster(caseid)

Data/Results

When race, class, and gender are not considered from an intersectional viewpoint, results show that white volunteers were significantly more likely to be selected as criminal compared to black and Hispanic volunteers (a difference of .092 and .111, respectively); lower class volunteers are significantly more likely to be selected as criminals than upper class volunteers (a difference of .21); and there is very little variation by gender (a difference of .02). From these results, white individuals are more likely to be perceived as criminal than black and Hispanic individuals, and there is no gender disparity in perceptions of criminality, which is why an intersectional approach is needed to shed a greater light on these results. Chart 1 shows the predicted probability of being selected as criminal by race, class, *or* gender.

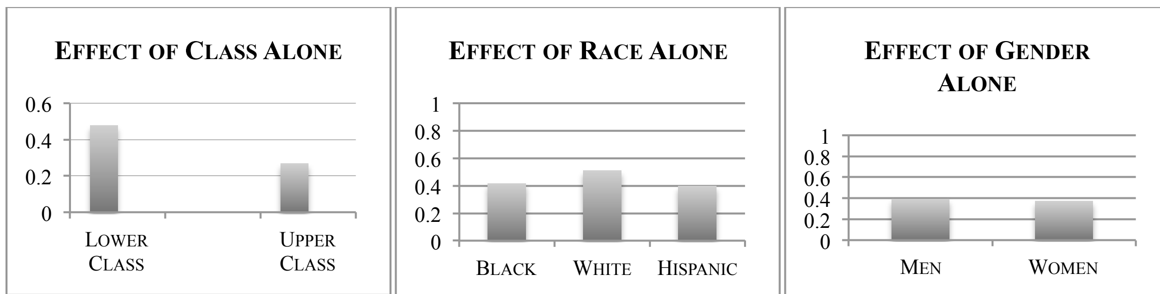

Chart 1: Predicted Probability of being selected as criminal on Race, Class, or Gender

Results from the 3-way interaction of race, class, and gender show that, for all races and both genders, photographs depicting lower class individuals were more likely to be considered criminal than photographs depicting upper class individuals. Lower class black women are selected as criminal almost 90% of the time, the most out of any grouping, while upper class black women are selected less than 30% of the time, a gap of 60% based on perceived class. Lower class black men, on the other hand, are the least likely of any group to be selected as criminal (35%). Analyses suggest that perceived class is an important factor in whether or not someone is selected as criminal. The probabilities of an upper class volunteer of any race or gender being selected as criminal range from .184 to .326 (a difference of .142), whereas the probabilities of a lower class volunteer being selected range from .347 to .871 (a difference of .524), showing that, not only is the range smaller for upper class volunteers, but lower class volunteers were universally and significantly more likely to be perceived as criminals when compared to upper class volunteers. When comparing volunteers of the same race and gender grouping, the smallest of these class differences is among Hispanic women (.118). The largest is among black women (.604) - while upper class black women show a similar probability of being selected as criminal as other upper class volunteers, lower class black women are much more likely to be selected as criminal than any other grouping, with the smallest disparity being .151 and the largest being .524. The probability that a lower class black female would be selected as criminal is .871, significantly and largely more likely than any other group.

When holding race constant, gender disparities are greater for lower class photographs when compared to upper class photographs – upper class white men and women show the smallest gender disparity of any racial group (a difference of only .01). The difference increases to .038, however, for lower class white men and women. Upper class black men and women

show a gender disparity of only .083. On the other hand, the largest disparity is between lower class black men and women, a substantial increase from .083 to .524. For upper class Hispanic men and women, men are more likely to be selected as criminal by a margin of only .05, but this disparity increases to .208 when comparing lower class Hispanic men and women. Thus, gender has a stronger effect for lower class volunteers than upper class volunteers. In most cases, men are slightly more likely to be considered criminal when compared to women. This is not the case for black male volunteers, which I will discuss later.

When holding gender constant, racial differences are also smaller for the upper class compared to lower class. For example, upper class white females are slightly more likely to be considered criminal than upper class black and Hispanic females (a small difference of .058 and .049 respectively), whereas lower class white females are considerably *less* likely to be selected as criminal compared to lower class black females (.188) and *more* likely compared to lower class Hispanic females (.288). Chart 2 and Table 2 display the predicted probability of being selected as criminal by race, class, and gender.

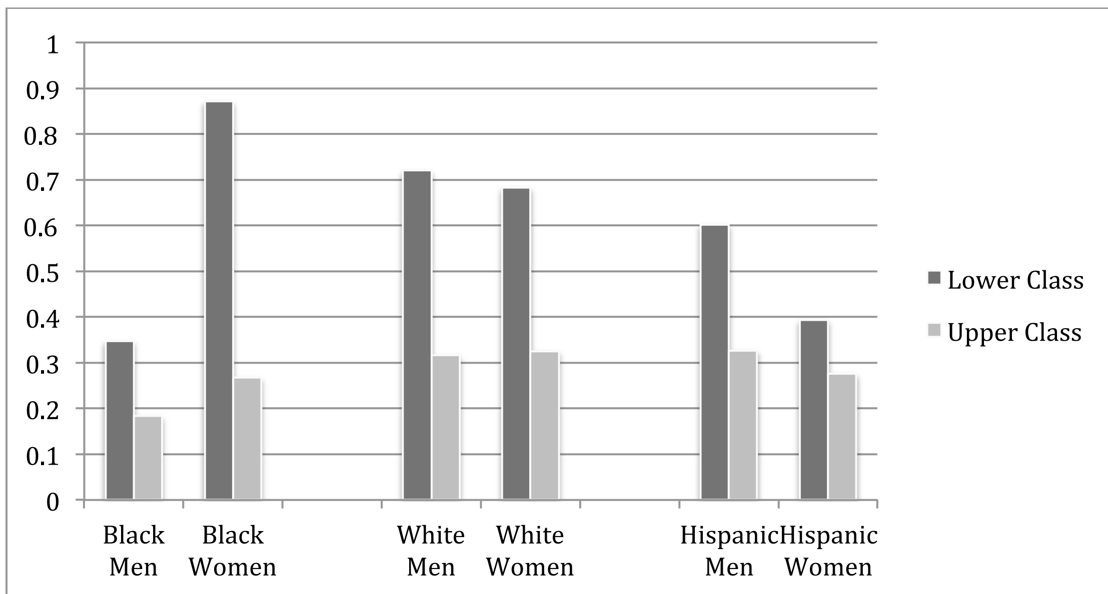

Chart 2: Predicted Probability of Being Selected as Criminal by Race, Class, and Gender

Table 2: Predicted Probability of Being Selected as Criminal by Race, Class, and Gender (*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001)

Race/Gender	Lower Class	95% CI	Upper Class	95% CI
Black Men	0.348***	.31-.385	0.184***	.155-.212
Black Women	0.871***	.84-.902	0.267***	.227-.308
White Men	0.72***	.685-.755	0.316***	.278-.354
White Women	0.683***	.652-.713	0.325***	.291-.359
Hispanic Men	0.602***	.57-.634	0.326***	.294-.358
Hispanic Women	0.394***	.349-.439	0.276***	.235-.317

Analysis/Discussion

Results show that lower class photographs are significantly more likely than upper class photographs to be selected as depicting a criminal when controlling for race and gender. I suggest that this is due to our current focus on "street crimes" versus "suite" or "white-collar crimes." When considering an image of a criminal, subjects imagine "street crimes" such as theft and robbery, as well as drug crimes and violent crimes. Our criminal justice system as well as the media focus more heavily on "street crimes" due to their greater visibility and the vulnerability of those targeted. This adds to the disparity of lower class and minority populations being more likely to be charged and convicted of a crime as well as encouraging the public's perception of criminals being of lower class and minority status.

Regardless of race, men and women wearing suits or dresses are considered to be "respectable" and thus not criminal when compared to men and women wearing t-shirts and jeans. Keep in mind that respondents were not given a definition of what a criminal is - without a definition from the researcher, respondents created an image of what a "criminal" looks like, and, I suggest, imagined "street" rather than "suite" crime and thus, lower class individuals. Also important is to consider that almost no subjects responded with either all affirmative or negative responses – almost every subject *believed* that they can choose a "criminal" by looking at a photograph, and they universally and strongly favor lower class photographs to upper class when making their selections.

The most striking results may be those of black volunteers. Black males are the least likely out of any grouping to be selected as criminal. In fact, lower class black males are about as likely to be selected as a criminal as upper class volunteers, whereas upper class black males are the singular group least likely to be selected as criminal. It is possible to interpret from these results that black males are not typically perceived as criminal; however, I propose another explanation.

Our current social and political climate is beginning to place greater emphasis on racial prejudices in our criminal justice system. With police shootings of unarmed black men being the focus of much media attention, and the fairly recent rise of the Black Lives Matter campaign, race relations and racial inequality are now at the forefront of our sociopolitical climate, with presidential candidates including criminal justice reform and racial disparities in their platforms, as well as news outlets and social media covering the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, and Walter Scott, and many other black men who were fatally shot by police within the past three years. With police killing blacks at rates similar to Jim Crow era lynchings (Karabel 2015), protests have erupted throughout the nation as a call to action, along with backlash directed at the movement (the popular phrase, "All Lives Matter," for example). I suggest that subjects do not select black men as criminal not because they do not believe it to be so, but because they understand the implications. The close proximity subjects had to one another, which I will discuss further in my limitations, could have led to a social desirability bias in that subjects are aware of the implications of stating that a black man is a criminal in our current climate, regardless of class.

The same is not true for black women, however. While upper class black women are second only to upper class black men in being the least likely to be perceived as criminal, lower class black women are by far the most likely out of any group to be considered criminal. I attribute this to two things – persistent stereotypes of poor black women (the "angry black

woman," for example) and the focus on black men when considering racial prejudices in the criminal justice system. Since the study was conducted, the media has placed more focus on the mistreatment of black women by police officials. With the deaths of black women at the hands of police, such as Sandra Bland and Gynnya Mcmillen, the conversation is no longer about black males alone, but black females are receiving some focus as well. However, at the time the study was conducted, this was not the case, and I suggest that the social desirability bias is limited to black males.

Gender differences are most prominent for black volunteers. Though there is some variation between Hispanic males and females, particularly in the lower class, white males and females are almost equally likely to be considered criminals. The disparity is greater for lower class white photographs, but it is still minute. Thus, gender matters little for white volunteers when controlling for class but is considerable and significant for lower class black and Hispanic volunteers. These results suggest that an intersectional approach is necessary when considering perceptions of criminality based on race, class, and gender.

Limitations/Directions for Future Research

There are certain limitations inherent in this study. First, the study is conducted at a single university in the course of one semester in 2015. The sample is representative of the university's undergraduate population in terms of race, with the university's study body being 75.5% white, 11.7% black, 5.8% Hispanic, and 3.9% Asian, but women are oversampled (51.3% of the general population compared to 67% of respondents). Due to convenience and availability, only 6 classes participated in the study, with the topics of courses favoring the arts and social sciences. The large class sizes and close proximity to other subjects could lend to a social desirability bias; however, the photographs being shown on screen for such a short time should minimize this likelihood. Future research should seek to distribute a similar study in a more isolated setting.

Second, age is not used as a variable in perceptions of criminality. Volunteers ranged in age from approximately 25 to 35, and few age differences are physically apparent. Because of the focus on the interaction of race, class, and gender, age is not a desired variable and is thus not included. Future research should include a wider range of ages and consider how life stage affects perceptions of criminality.

Third, the photographs themselves vary somewhat in picture quality, and clothing choices are left up to the volunteers with minor input from the researcher. This is done in order to create variation in clothing and appearance, as well as to ensure that volunteers are accurately representing their clothing styles and preferences. Though clothing choices may affect results, it is expected to be minor, and picture quality, though varying, is not extreme enough as to suggest a major impact on the findings of this research. Future research should maintain uniformity in picture quality and consider how color and pattern of clothing might reduce or increase the likelihood of being selected as criminal.

Fourth, due to availability of subjects and time constraints, the order of the photographs does not change. The initial decision to maintain the same order of photographs for all initial administrations of the study was made in order to reduce variation and potential error in results due to different classes receiving modified versions of the initial presentation. Each class is shown the same sequence of photographs, eliminating any variation in responses between classes based on order of pictures shown. Future research, when considering a more isolated setting, should repeatedly randomize the order of the photographs in order to ensure that placement in the series has little, if any, effect.

Implications

In sum, this research shows the importance of considering race, class, and gender through an intersectional viewpoint, particularly in regards to the public's perceptions of criminality. Results show that it is not race, class, *or* gender that influences perceptions of criminality, but the intersection of race, class, *and* gender. The utilization of an experimental methodology is also important, as it can give insights on perceptions and stereotypes that other methods, such as surveys and interviews, cannot. Respondents believed they could perceive criminality in an individual based solely on a photograph displayed for one second, and race, class, and gender stereotypes of criminality are present in and guide their selections.

This may have far-reaching implications for media responsibility, our criminal justice system, policing practices, and criminal punishment, which affect certain groups to a much greater extent than others. These stereotypes and prejudices are significant for our society, as they alter the life chances of certain members of our population. With inequalities and discrimination shown in our criminal justice system, as well as media outlets encouraging these stereotypes of a criminal as poor and/or black, public perceptions are influenced and molded into reproducing a dangerous stereotype that limits opportunities for some groups while creating and continuing barriers to freedom and a quality of life deserved by every American citizen.

Policy implications that can be drawn from this study include considerations of laws and policies that disproportionately target and affect lower class and minority citizens. Our society's current focus on street crimes lends to heavy policing in low-income, majority minority communities as well as an overrepresentation of these populations in our judicial system. The "War on Drugs" and disparate policies in mandatory sentencing for crack and powder cocaine disenfranchises blacks and the lower classes, creating large populations of individuals who cannot vote or serve on a jury of their peers, effectively silencing them in our nation's political climate. Going further, media responsibility for reproducing stereotypes in the American public that can then justify and encourage the prejudicial workings of our criminal justice system should be considered. Responsible reporting is a necessity, and it is important to advocate for media responsibility. This particular policy may be difficult to implement, as there are implications with freedom and speech and information. Care and consideration of these rights must be at the forefront of any policies that arise.

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Appendix A: OR Models

Characteristics of Photographs	OR Model 1	OR Model 2
RACE (VS. WHITE)		
Hispanic	-0.426***	-0.533***
	(0.061)	(0.105)
Black	-0.516***	-1.583***
	(0.055)	(0.116)
GENDER (VS. MALE)		
Female	0.193***	-0.179
	(-0.047)	(0.107)
CLASS (VS. LOWER CLASS)		
Upper Class	-1.4***	-1.726***
	(-0.059)	(0.126)
CLASS X RACE (VS. LOWER CLASS WHITE)		
Upper Class Hispanic	-	0.579***
		(0.154)
Upper Class Black	-	0.861***
		(0.167)
CLASS X GENDER (VS. LOWER CLASS MALE)		
Upper Class Female	-	0.221
		(0.165)
GENDER X RACE (VS. WHITE MALE)		
Hispanic Female	-	-0.669***
		(0.158)
Black Female	-	2.73***
		(0.183)
CLASS X RACE X GENDER (vs. LOWER CLASS WHITE MALE)		
Upper Class Hispanic Female	-	0.389
		(0.224)
Upper Class Black Female	-	-2.288***
		(0.26)

Appendix B: IRB Approval

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

TO: Michael Barton
Sociology

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: August 7, 2014

RE: **IRB#** E8877

TITLE: Perceptions of Criminality: An Experiment on Race, Class, and Gender Stereotypes

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review Date: 8/6/2014

Approved ____X____ **Disapproved**__________

Approval Date: 8/6/2014 **Approval Expiration Date:** 8/5/2017

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2a,b

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable): __________

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable) _________

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. SPECIAL NOTE:

**All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb*

Vitae

Trish Davis is a graduate student in the sociology department at Louisiana State University. She received her bachelor's degree in sociology from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, and her work centers around social problems, namely, race, poverty, and criminology. She is currently applying to the Peace Corps and hopes to spend her career in the nonprofit sector.