

# Criminal Justice Students' Perceptions and Awareness of Racism and Discrimination

Race and Justice

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## Abstract

The recent focus on the controversial deaths of minorities at the hands of police officers has led to increased attention on racial bias among the law enforcement community. However, this focus does not extend to criminal justice students. Instead, research examining undergraduates' racial attitudes focuses on the general student body. In addition to reviewing literature related to criminal justice students' attitudes toward a variety of criminal justice and social issues, the current study used multiple regression analyses to examine racial and gender differences in a Southwestern University's criminal justice students' perceptions of and sensitivity to racism. Findings from the study indicate that male criminal justice students in the sample and White criminal justice students are more likely to have lower perceptions of racism than their female and non-White counterparts, respectively. Additionally, findings for criminal justice students' sensitivity to racism suggest that White male criminal justice students' sensitivity to racism only statistically significantly differs from non-White females with White males more likely to be less sensitive than non-White females. Furthermore, the current research provides a benchmark for research related to criminal justice students' perceptions of racism and discriminatory practices and their attitudes toward minorities. Results, study implications, recommendations, and future research are discussed.

## Keywords

perceived racism, discrimination, implicit bias, criminal justice students, minorities, racial attitudes, sensitivity to racism

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The deaths of Oscar Grant, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, and Philando Castile at the hands of police officers have led to increased criticism as well as a “crisis of legitimacy” for law enforcement and the criminal justice system (James, 2017; James, Fridell, & Straub, 2016; Jones, 2015; Nix, Campbell, & Byers, 2017; Paoline, Gau, & Terrill, 2016; Todak, 2017). Consequently, there has been an increased focus on diversity and implicit bias among members of the law enforcement community (Coon, 2016; Fridell, 2017; James, 2017; James et al., 2016; Nix et al., 2017). While much of the focus is on bias among active police officers, little attention has been paid to criminal justice students, many of whom indicate a preference for a career in law enforcement or as criminal justice personnel upon the culmination of their degree (Courtright & Mackey, 2004; Krimmel & Tartaro, 1999).

Although the focus is on law enforcement and the desire of many criminal justice majors to become police officers, it should be noted that many of these students ultimately work within the juvenile and criminal justice systems in a variety of roles. Furthermore, although there may be a limited portion of criminal justice students that go on to work in law enforcement, the number of police officers with some college education has grown steadily since the 1960s (Rosenfeld, Johnson, & Wright, 2018; see also Carter & Sapp, 1990; National Planning Association, 1978; Reaves, 2015). More specifically, Reaves (2015) indicates that in 2013, nearly one third of local police officers were employed by a department with college education requirements (p. 7). As such, it is important to examine criminal justice students’ sensitivity to and perceptions of racism and discriminatory practices as well as their attitudes because of the impact they may have at various points within the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Upon entering the profession, these students can significantly impact the lives of the citizens they serve, particularly minority communities that regularly encounter law enforcement. Specifically, research has demonstrated that racial bias and discriminatory attitudes held by criminal justice professionals, particularly police officers, can lead to negative interactions with minorities (Fachner & Carter, 2015; Fridell, 2017; Fryer, 2016; Goff, Lloyd, Geller, Raphael, & Gaser, 2016; James, 2017; Nix et al., 2017).

There is a growing body of literature examining criminal justice students’ attitudes toward issues such as sexual orientation (Cannon, 2005; H. A. Miller & Kim, 2012; Olivero & Murataya, 2001; Ventura, Lambert, Bryant, & Pasupuleti, 2004), ageism (Kane, 2006, 2007), hate crimes (A. J. Miller, 2001), and criminal rights (Hensley, Miller, Tewksbury, & Koscheski, 2003; Hensley, Tewksbury, Miller, & Koscheski, 2002; Lambert, 2004; Mackey & Courtright, 2000; McCarthy & McCarthy, 1981; Payne, Time, & Gainey, 2006; Tsoudis, 2000). However, to date, little research has focused on criminal justice students’ perceptions of and sensitivity to racism, which may influence their attitudes toward minorities. Given the negative impact that implicit bias and lack of sensitivity to racism can have on criminal justice professionals’ encounters with minorities and the policies these future practitioners and administrators may enforce and decide upon, it is important to examine criminal justice students’ perceptions of and attitudes toward racial issues. As such, the current study seeks to gain insight into students’ attitudes and

address the gap in the literature by examining perceptions of and sensitivity to racism in a sample of criminal justice students. Results from regression analyses and implications of the study will be discussed.

## Literature Review

Prior examinations of undergraduates' racial attitudes reveal that racial insensitivity is prevalent and that college students possess a hidden racial animosity often clouded by an appearance of racial tolerance (Biasco, Goodwin, & Vitale, 2001; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Hall, 2002; Harris, 2012; Kanter et al., 2017; Marcus et al., 2003; Vaccaro, 2010). Moreover, research has demonstrated that White male students are more likely to have negative attitudes toward minorities (Bierly, 1985; Qualls, 1992; Sidanius, 1993; Vaccaro, 2010), which have often been expressed as hostility toward minorities and minority issues.

While much of the existing literature examining undergraduate students' racial attitudes does not look explicitly at criminal justice students, there is a body of research that explores criminal justice students' attitudes and views on a number of issues. Much of this literature compares criminal justice students' attitudes to non-criminal justice students. Findings from some studies suggest that no differences exist between the two groups. For example, criminal justice and noncriminal justice students did not differ in their ethical orientations (Bjerregaard & Lord, 2005; Byers & Potters, 1997), levels of cheating (Eskridge & Ames, 1993; Lambert & Hogan, 2004; Tibbetts, 1998), how they defined justice (Wolfer & Friedrichs, 2001), attitudes about drug testing and zero-tolerance school policies (Benekos, Merlo, Cook, & Bagley, 2002), or their attitudes about the handling and punishment of terrorists (Lambert, Hall, Clark, Ventura, & Elechi, 2005). Similarly, no differences were found between criminal justice and noncriminal justice majors in their support for offender rehabilitation (Mackey, Courtright, & Packard, 2006) or in their support for providing access to cigarettes, college education programs, conjugal visits, psychological counseling, television, and weight lifting (Hensley et al., 2002, 2003).

Other research examining criminal justice students' attitudes has found that differences exist between criminal justice and noncriminal justice majors on several criminal justice and social issues. However, these findings are mixed with some literature suggesting that criminal justice majors hold less punitive attitudes. For instance, Payne, Time, and Gainey (2006) found that criminal justice students' views and attitudes toward Miranda warnings for suspects were more favorable than police and noncriminal justice majors. Similarly, Tsoudis (2000) noted that compared to students with different majors, criminal justice students were less supportive of harsh sentences and more supportive of defendants' rights and the belief that juveniles are different from adults. McCarthy and McCarthy (1981) concluded that criminal justice students displayed more supportive attitudes toward due process principles and offender rehabilitation efforts.

Although the literature above suggests that criminal justice students are less punitive, a larger and growing body of research proposes that criminal justice students

are more conservative, punitive, and less tolerant than students in other disciplines. Some research suggests that when compared to other majors, criminal justice majors were more dogmatic (Merlo, 1980) and displayed more authoritarian personalities (Austin & O'Neill, 1985). Additional research has found that criminal justice majors oppose gun control (Payne & Riedel, 2002), were more supportive of the death penalty (Farnworth, Longmire, & West, 1998; Lambert, Hogan, Moore, Moore, & Shanhe, 2008), and that they held more punitive views of punishment (Lambert, 2004; Mackey & Courtright, 2000).

Furthermore, another body of research suggests that criminal justice students displayed less emotional empathy for others (Courtright, Mackey, & Packard, 2005) and that they hold less tolerable attitudes toward marginalized groups (Austin & Hummer, 1994; Cannon, 2005; Golden, 1981; Kane, 2006, 2007; A. J. Miller, 2001; H. A. Miller & Kim, 2012; Olivera & Murataya, 2001; Ventura et al., 2004). Kane's (2007) comparison of criminal justice and social work majors' attitudes toward older adults found that criminal justice students held more ageist attitudes than their counterparts in social work. In a similar study, Kane (2006) concluded that for both social work and criminal justice students the inclusion of gender enhanced ageist attitudes. Golden (1981) and Austin and Hummer (1994) examined attitudes toward female police officers and both studies found that male criminal justice students held less favorable attitudes toward female police officers.

Several studies have examined criminal justice students' attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered persons. In their examination of criminal justice curriculum, homophobia and attitudes toward homosexuals among criminal justice students, Olivera and Murataya (2001) found that when compared to paralegal and noncriminal justice students, law enforcement (90% were male) and corrections students held more homophobic attitudes. Similarly, Cannon (2005) and Ventura, Lambert, Bryant, and Pasupuleti (2004) compared criminal justice and noncriminal justice undergraduate students' attitudes toward gays and lesbians. Results from both studies suggest that criminal justice students were more likely to hold negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians than their noncriminal justice counterparts and that these attitudes held as they progressed through their education. It was also noted that having a more negative attitude towards homosexuals was related to being male, more religious, and a criminal justice major.

To date, H. A. Miller and Kim's (2012) comparison of antigay/lesbian attitudes and homophobia levels of students pursuing a career as a police officer to those seeking employment in some other criminal justice-related field is the most recent research in this area. Similar to previous research (Cannon, 2005; Olivera & Murataya, 2001; Ventura et al., 2004), H. A. Miller and Kim's (2012) findings suggest that criminal justice undergraduates had higher levels of antigay attitudes than noncriminal justice students. Within the criminal justice sample, results indicate that law enforcement and other criminal justice students held similar levels of antigay attitudes.

At present, A. J. Miller's (2001) investigation into students' perceptions of hate crimes involving Jewish, African American, female, and sexual minority victims is, to our knowledge, the sole body of work related to criminal justice students' attitudes

about racial minorities. A. J. Miller (2001) used a sample of 706 participants from Criminal Justice and Sociology programs at institutions in six states. The students reviewed 20 crime scenarios and indicated whether the description depicted a hate crime. Findings from the research indicate that White-male noncriminal justice majors were less likely to perceive any of the scenarios as hate crimes. Females were less likely to be viewed as victims of hate crimes by non-White noncriminal justice majors. For criminal justice majors, A. J. Miller (2001) found that males were less likely to view sexual minorities and females as victims of hate crimes, whereas non-White criminal justice majors were less likely to regard scenarios with Jewish victims as hate crimes.

Overall, existing research provides a better understanding of criminal justice students' attitudes and tolerance toward marginalized groups. However, we must consider a possible reduction in the comparability of the studies in the literature review due to general changes in public acceptance of marginalized groups coupled with the wide time frame of the literature included in the review. Despite this drawback, two points of insight can be gained from the current body of literature. First, criminal justice majors tend to have less tolerant attitudes toward marginalized groups and their issues. Second, a review of the current body of literature suggests that variation in attitudes toward marginalized groups exists among criminal justice students.

Although important for advancing our knowledge of criminal justice students' attitudes, it should be noted that the literature the aforementioned observations are based on consists mostly of comparisons of criminal justice students to noncriminal justice students with H. A. Miller and Kim (2012) and A. J. Miller (2001) as the exceptions. Specifically, most of the existing research examining criminal justice students does not investigate differences in attitudes among members of different demographic groups (e.g., race, gender). Instead, H. A. Miller and Kim's (2012) within-group examination of criminal justice majors focused on differences based on student career paths. While A. J. Miller's (2001) research examines racial differences in both criminal justice and noncriminal justice students' perceptions, the study does not explicitly look at criminal justice students' attitudes about racial minorities or their perceptions of and sensitivity to racism.

Due to the lack of studies that have explicitly sought to gain insight into negative racial attitudes by examining perceptions of and sensitivity to or awareness of racism among criminal justice students, little is known or understood about criminal justice students' attitudes toward minorities or their sensitivity to racism. This is problematic because, as Staats and Patton (2013) argue, racist attitudes and bias lead to aloof interracial interactions, foster a lack of empathy, and lead individuals, particularly criminal justice professionals, to misinterpret minorities' behavior as aggressive or suspicious (see also James, 2017). Furthermore, proponents of policies aimed at diversification of criminal justice agencies may argue that one way to improve fairness and reduce negative relations between criminal justice professionals and minorities is to increase minority representation within these agencies. The authors of the current research do not disagree with this approach and acknowledge literature supporting this response (Sun & Payne, 2004; Welch, Combs, & Gruhl, 1988). There is,

however, literature which suggests that minority criminal justice professionals are just as punitive toward minorities as their White counterparts (Brown & Frank, 2006; Spohn, 1990) and that current research has failed to show differences between White and Black officers' behavior (see Paoline et al., 2016). Several explanations have been put forth in research examining racial differences in criminal justice professionals' behavior. The most notable explanations center on organizational socialization and minority criminal justice professionals' need to show that they identify with the profession and their need avoid the appearance of preferential treatment (see Alex, 1969; Barlow & Barlow, 2000; Brown & Frank, 2006; Leinen, 1984; Palmer, 1973; Paoline et al., 2016; Sun & Payne, 2004). However, it is possible that this punitiveness is due to negative attitudes driven by low perceptions of racism and discriminatory practices coupled with low sensitivity to racism that existed prior to an individual's indoctrination into the criminal justice profession, regardless of their status as a minority. As such, it is important to examine within-group differences in criminal justice students' perceptions of and sensitivity to racism as well as their attitudes toward minorities prior to their entrance into the profession to gain insight into whether negative perceptions of and interactions with minorities is due to previously held attitudes.

## The Current Study

Although it is a notable area of future research, the current analysis is not a direct examination of implicit bias and student attitudes toward minorities and the issues they face. We contend, however, that perceptions of and sensitivity to racism may indirectly impact students' attitudes and implicit racial bias. Specifically, low sensitivity to racism coupled with the inability to perceive certain behaviors, stereotypes, policies, and practices as racist and discriminatory may adversely influence the way an individual interacts with and views members from marginalized groups. Hence, it is possible that low perceptions of and low sensitivity to racism and discriminatory policies may indirectly manifest as negative racial attitudes and implicit bias. Thus, the current study set out to gain insight into undergraduate criminal justice students' attitudes by examining their sensitivity to and perceptions of racism and discriminatory practices.

Premised on the extant literature and the need to gain better understanding of criminal justice students' racial attitudes by examining their perceptions of and sensitivity to racism, the following hypotheses will be examined:

**Hypothesis 1:** Gender and racial differences will emerge in criminal justice students' perceptions of racism: (1A) Nonminority and male undergraduate criminal justice students will perceive racism at lower levels than minority and female criminal justice undergraduates, respectively. (1B) Additionally, White female criminal justice undergraduates will perceive racism at higher levels than White male criminal justice undergraduate students.

**Table 1.** Sample Characteristics.

Variable	Range	Number (%)	Mean	Median	SD
Gender					
Female	—	155 (47.8)	—	—	—
Male	—	169 (52.2)	—	—	—
Race-ethnicity					
Minority	—	140 (43.2)	—	—	—
Hispanics	—	75 (23.1)	—	—	—
African Americans	—	45 (13.9)	—	—	—
Other	—	20 (6.1)	—	—	—
White/nonminority	—	184 (56.8)	—	—	—
Gender × Race					
Non-White female	—	83 (25.6)	—	—	—
Non-White male	—	57 (17.6)	—	—	—
White female	—	72 (22.2)	—	—	—
White male	—	112 (34.6)	—	—	—
Age	18–39		21.94	21.00	2.70
Low perception of racism	4.00–20.00		14.06	14.00	2.81
Low sensitivity to racism	1.00–35.00		18.77	19.00	4.17

Note.  $N = 324$ .

**Hypothesis 2:** Criminal justice students' sensitivity to racism will differ based on gender and race: Minority and White female criminal justice students will be more sensitive to and aware of racism than their nonminority and White male counterparts, respectively.

## Method

### *Data and Participants*

Data for the current study are cross-sectional and were collected by administering an anonymous and voluntary self-report survey to 467 undergraduate students enrolled in criminal justice courses at a Southwestern University. An undergraduate student demographic breakdown for the university reveals that females comprise 58% of the population and that minority students make up 42% of the population (African Americans/Blacks = 17%, Hispanic = 17%, and Other = 8%). Descriptive statistics for the sample are presented in Table 1.

The researchers contacted the instructors for freshman through senior-level criminal justice courses in the College of Criminal Justice where the survey was administered. To limit the number of noncriminal justice majors included in the sample, the survey was only administered to students enrolled in the required courses for criminal justice majors. Each instructor was informed of the research purpose and invited to have their class participate in the study. Upon invitation, the researchers visited the classes and explained the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study. The

students who agreed to participate were asked to read and sign a consent form stating the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the responses they provided. Participants then completed a questionnaire that included items related to their university experiences and items from the Institutional Racism Scale (IRS; Barbarin & Gilbert, 1981). To ensure that there were no duplicate survey responses, consent forms were checked prior to the administration of the survey in each class. If examination of consent forms demonstrated a student enrolled in the course had taken the survey in a previous class, the student was not allowed to take the survey again.

With a response rate of 93.4%, the original sample for the current research started at 467 respondents. However, 96 noncriminal justice students were removed from the current sample due to the purpose of the study, which is to examine within-group differences of criminal justice students' attitudes. Thus, 371 criminal justice students remained in the sample. Preliminary data screening revealed 47 cases with missing data, which were removed from sample, leaving 324 criminal justice students.

### *Demographic Measures*

Three demographic measures were included in the analyses: sex, age, and race-ethnicity. Sex is a dichotomous variable (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*), and age is a continuous measure (ranging from 18 to 65). The frequencies for each minority group included in the sample were low and uneven when compared directly to the White racial category. Additionally, according to Bonferroni post hoc analyses, Black and Hispanic students were significantly different from White students in the sample, yet there were no statistically significant differences among the minority groups. Thus, to ensure there were enough cases in each category, particularly for the race and gender interaction variables, and because no significant differences existed among the minority groups, race-ethnicity, originally a five-category variable (Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, and Other) was recoded into a dummy measure (0 = *non-White*, 1 = *White*). The interaction between gender and race (non-White female, non-White male, White female, and White male), which were measured dichotomously (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*), was included in the analyses to determine whether White males differ from other groups in their perception of and sensitivity to racism.

### *Institutional Racism Scale (IRS) Measures*

The current analysis uses subscales from the IRS, which according to Barbarin and Gilbert (1981) is designed to "measure individual perceptions of self and organizational attributes with respect to institutional racism" (p. 159). As such, items from the subscales were designed to measure individual perceptions about racism in an environment. Furthermore, Barbarin and Gilbert (1981) utilized individuals (students, federal employees, and conference attendees) as the unit of analysis, and the authors contend that the use of the IRS and its subscales is a reliable measure of how individuals construe racism (p. 162).

Development of the Low Perception of Racism and Low Sensitivity to Racism Scales is based on statistical and theoretical considerations proposed by Barbarin and Gilbert (1981). More specifically, exploratory factor analyses were performed in IBM SPSS Statistics version 24 using the principle components extraction and varimax rotation methods to develop both scales. Results from the exploratory factor analyses indicate that the items included in the Low Perception of Racism Scale loaded onto one dimension and they had factor loadings .645 and above. The exploratory factor analysis for the Low Sensitivity to Racism Scale yielded similar results with factor loadings above .653 and all items in the scale loading onto one dimension.

*Low perception of racism.* The 4-item Low Perception of Racism Scale was developed from the Agency Climate for Racism Scale, which is a subscale of Barbarin and Gilbert's (1981) IRS. The original 6-item scale was based on interpersonal and decision-making processes as well as the reward system. According to its authors, the purpose of the scale is to "assess the acceptance of minorities, participation by minorities in decision-making, and respect for cultural diversity" (Barbarin & Gilbert, 1981, p. 150). Although prior use of the IRS and its subscales is minimal, the Agency Climate for Racism scale has been used to "examine institutional racism from the perspective of minorities" (Jeanquart-Barone & Sekaran, 1996, p. 478.) and to understand racism in organizations as perceived by African Americans (Watts & Carter, 1991).

Furthermore, the scale looks at policies and procedures related to the organization; however, the responses are based on individual perceptions. In other words, items included in the scale assess an individual's perception of the acceptance of minorities, respect for cultural diversity, and minorities' participation in organizational decision-making. Together, these items assess an individual's perceptions of policies and procedures that may be viewed as racist and discriminatory. These perceptions, which may be negative or positive, of racism as well as discriminatory policies and practices may provide insight into the respondents' attitudes toward minorities and their issues. As such, we contend that based on the development of the scale as a measure of individual perceptions and its subsequent use as a measure of perceived racism, items from the Agency Climate for Racism Scale can be used to better understand criminal justice students' perceptions of racism and their attitudes toward minorities and the issues they face.

For the current analysis, respondents indicated their level of agreement with statements (see Appendix A) on a Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly agree* (1) to *strongly disagree* (5). Higher scores indicated lower perceptions of racism and discriminatory practices. The initial 5-item scale, which was based on concepts presented by the original authors, was reduced to a 4-item scale due to low reliability and results from an exploratory factor analysis. As such, the internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) for the current scale is .66. The means and standard deviations for items included in the Low Perceptions of Racism Scale appear in Appendix A.

*Low sensitivity to racism.* The 7-item Low Sensitivity to Racism Scale used in this analysis was adapted from Barbarin and Gilbert's (1981) Indices of Racism Scale. The

original 8-item scale consists of items that the professional and popular literature consider racist and that were designed to assess an individual's sensitivity to or awareness of racism (Barbarin & Gilbert, 1981). Items in the Original scale refer to a workplace environment. Thus, statements from the Indices of Racism Scale that refer specifically to the workplace were adapted to better reflect a university setting. Respondents identified how much they felt certain statements (see Appendix B) were an indication of institutional favoritism toward certain groups. Items were answered on a Likert-type scale ranging from *always* (1) to *never* (5), with higher responses indicative of lower levels of sensitivity to or awareness of racism. Internal consistency for this scale has been established with a reliability coefficient of .63. The means and standard deviations for items included in the Low Sensitivity to Racism Scale appear in Appendix B.

### *Analytic Strategy*

To test the hypotheses for the current research, preliminary data screening, exploratory factor analyses (see discussion above), and multiple regressions were conducted. Preliminary analysis of the data indicated that there were no violations of linearity, normality, or homoscedasticity. Furthermore, the Low Perception of and Low Sensitivity to Racism Scales were examined for multicollinearity. The tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) for both scales were examined using the collinearity diagnostics function in IBM SPSS Statistics version 24 and neither scale was below acceptable levels. Thus, multicollinearity is not a problem. Finally, separate multiple regressions were conducted to examine criminal justice students' low perceptions of and sensitivity to racism. Results for these models are discussed below and presented in Tables 2 and 3.

## **Results**

The first multiple regression model, which uses low perception of racism as the outcome variable, examines the impact of sex, race-ethnicity, age, and lack of sensitivity to racism on criminal justice students' perceptions of racism and discriminatory practices (see Table 2—Model 1). Of the variables entered in the model, sex, race-ethnicity, and low sensitivity to racism were statistically significant. Male criminal justice students included in the sample are significantly more likely to have low perceptions of racism than female criminal justice students ( $b = .655, SE = .274$ ). Findings also indicate that in comparison to minority criminal justice students, White criminal justice students in the sample ( $b = 1.610, SE = .279$ ) are significantly more likely to have low perceptions of racism.

Table 2 (Model 2) presents the results for the second regression model, which includes the sex–race interaction variable. Results for this model show that non-White female criminal justice students ( $b = -2.237, SE = .354$ ), non-White male criminal justice students ( $b = -1.830, SE = .394$ ), and White female criminal justice students' ( $b = -.844, SE = .363$ ) perceptions of racism significantly differed from White male criminal justice students. Consistent with prior research examining racial attitudes

**Table 2.** Multiple Regression Models for Low Perception of Racism.

Variables	Model 1				Model 2			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i> Value	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i> Value
Gender (male)	0.655*	.274	.126	2.392	—			
Race (White)	1.610***	.279	.306	5.778	—			
Age	-0.020	.050	-.021	-0.400	-0.022	.050	-.023	-0.422
Low sensitivity to racism	0.092**	.033	.147	2.822	0.093**	.033	.149	2.863
Race and gender <sup>a</sup>								
Non-White female	—				-2.237***	.354	-.375	-6.323
Non-White male	—				-1.830***	.394	-.135	-4.645
White female	—				-0.844**	.363	-.268	-2.325
Model <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> (adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> )		.163 (.152)				.164 (.151)		

<sup>a</sup>Dummy variable with "White male" as the comparison group.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

**Table 3.** Multiple Regression Models for Low Sensitivity to Racism.

Variables	Model 1				Model 2			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i> Value	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i> Value
Gender (male)	.623	.469	.075	1.329	—			
Race (White)	.561	.497	.067	1.128	—			
Age	-.097	.085	-.062	-1.136	-0.091	.085	-.058	-1.065
Low perception of racism	.265**	.094	.166	2.822	0.269**	.094	.168	2.863
Race and gender <sup>a</sup>								
Non-White female	—				-1.239*	.634	-.130	-1.954
Non-White male	—				-0.017	.692	-.002	-0.214
White female	—				-0.133	.622	-.013	-0.024
Model <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> (adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> )		.055 (.043)				.060 (.045)		

<sup>a</sup>Dummy variable with "White male" as the comparison group.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

(Bierly, 1985; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994; Qualls, 1992; Sidanius, 1993; Vaccaro, 2010), this study found that White male criminal justice students have lower perceptions of racism, minority-related issues, and discriminatory practices than White female criminal justice students. Finally, results of Model 1 ( $b = .092$ ,  $SE = .033$ ) and Model 2 ( $b = .093$ ,  $SE = .033$ ) demonstrate that a positive relationship exists between criminal justice students' low sensitivity to racism and low perception of racism. Specifically, as criminal justice students' insensitivity to racism increases so does their low perception of racism score.

The results of our examination on the impact that gender, race-ethnicity, age, and low perception of racism have on criminal justice students' sensitivity to racism are presented in Table 3. For Model 1, only low perception of racism significantly

predicted low sensitivity to racism ( $b = .255$ ,  $SE = .094$ ). Therefore, as a criminal justice students' low perception of racism score increases so does their insensitivity to racism.

Results from Model 2 (see Table 3—Model 2), which includes the sex–race interaction variables, indicate a significant and positive relationship exists between low perception of racism and the low sensitivity toward racism score ( $b = .269$ ,  $SE = .094$ ). For the gender–race interaction variables, White male criminal justice students were significantly more likely to be less sensitive to racism than non-White female criminal justice students ( $b = -1.239$ ,  $SE = .634$ ). However, neither non-White male criminal justice students' nor White female criminal justice students' low sensitivity to racism significantly differed from White male criminal justice students (see Model 2). This finding suggests that non-White male criminal justice students' and White female criminal justice students' low sensitivity to racism were similar to White male criminal justice students included in the sample.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Despite evidence that racial bias, which may be influenced by racial attitudes, exists among criminal justice professionals (Sadler, Correll, Park, & Judd, 2012; Schlosser, 2013) and that this racial bias has a negative impact on minorities and the criminal justice system (Johnson, 2007; Tatar, Kaasa, & Cauffman, 2012; Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011), there is a dearth of research examining the attitudes of criminal justice students. The current research does not directly examine individual attitudes toward minorities; however, we contend that perceptions of and sensitivity to issues related to race and discrimination may penetrate an individual's attitudes, impact implicit bias, and their decision-making and behavior. Thus, we set out to gain insight into undergraduate criminal justice students' attitudes by examining their perceptions of racism and discriminatory practices as well as their sensitivity to racism. Results from the analyses provide partial support for the hypotheses proposed by the current research.

As expected, gender and racial differences emerged in the perceptions of the criminal justice undergraduates included in the sample. Specifically, we found that female criminal justice students were more perceptive of discriminatory practices aimed at the acceptance of minorities' issues than their male counterparts. The differences in male and female criminal justice undergraduates' perceptions of discriminatory practices aimed at minorities' issues may be due in part to gender socialization practices that lead women to promote interpersonal harmony and be more caring toward others (Giligan, 1982; Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, & Andrews-Guillen, 2003).

Another expected finding is that White male criminal justice students were less perceptive of discriminatory practices aimed at cultural diversity and minorities' issues than all other groups. While this finding may not be direct evidence of negative attitudes toward minorities and the issues they face, it suggests that negative racial attitudes and implicit bias may exist through the denial of discrimination and

minimization of racism. Research examining racial attitudes may provide possible explanations for this finding. For example, Robinson and Schwartz (2004) suggest that White males' attempt to maintain power and privilege may be related to their negative attitudes toward minorities. Cokley et al. (2010) suggest that because White males are the dominant group, it is in their best interest to support goals that maintain their social position. However, for women and racial-ethnic minorities, it is in their interest to endorse ideas, goals, and policies that support and promote diversity (Cokley et al., 2010). It is unknown, however, if Robinson and Schwartz's (2004) along with Cokley et al.'s (2010) suggestions about White males and White privilege is related to White criminal justice students' low perceptions of racism, discriminatory practices, and racial attitudes. As such, future research should consider examining the relationship between White males' attempt to maintain power and privilege, their perceptions of racism, and their negative racial attitudes.

Surprisingly, we found that White-males' sensitivity to racism was only significantly different from non-White females, with White males showing less sensitivity to racism. This suggests that White females' sensitivity to racism is similar to White males, which is possibly due to White females' low levels of racial awareness (Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994). Carter (1990) argues that while White females are more accepting of minorities and cultural diversity, they (White females) demonstrate low levels of racial awareness. As such, it is possible that White females may deny the importance of race, the evidence of racism, and exhibit racist attitudes and beliefs, thus demonstrating a lack of sensitivity to racism (see also, Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994).

The lack of a significant difference between White and non-White males' sensitivity to racism could be due to non-Black (White/Hispanic, Other) minority males' inexperience with differential treatment and racism. Research examining minorities' experiences with racism and differential treatment indicates that African American students report experiences with racism and differential treatment more frequently than Hispanic/Latino Americans and Asian American students (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; McCormack, 1995; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003). Consequently, it is possible that the similarity between White and non-White male criminal justice undergraduates' sensitivity to racism is due, in part, to non-Black minority males in the study that are less sensitive to racism due to a lack of experience with differential treatment. Future research in this area should separate the racial-ethnic categories to gain more insight into differences in racial attitudes among criminal justice students of color.

As previously discussed, we acknowledge that racial attitudes and implicit bias are not the primary focus of the current research. Nevertheless, we contend that low perceptions of and low sensitivity to racism may indirectly manifest as negative racial attitudes and/or as implicit bias and contribute to creating a racially hostile environment. Furthermore, we recognize that the findings from the current research may have ramifications beyond the classroom or a university environment. Specifically, it is possible that as criminal justice students with previously held racial bias and negative attitudes enter the profession and are then exposed to information and experiences that reinforce their attitudes, the bias and lack of sensitivity already present is likely to

strengthen and grow (James, 2017). However, the scope of the current research focuses primarily on criminal justice students' attitudes. Therefore, we present the implications of our findings based on the impact that perceptions of as well as sensitivity to racism, negative racial attitudes, and implicit bias may have on a criminal justice academic program environment.

Regarding criminal justice academic programs, findings from the current study are unfortunate and worthy of further examination because criminal justice students with low perceptions of and sensitivity to racism and discriminatory practices may inadvertently create a hostile racial climate for those minority students who do perceive racism. Research indicates that students who perceive a hostile racial environment are likely to experience racism-related stress (i.e., the discomfort felt by minorities who experience racism directly or vicariously through others; Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010), which is associated with deleterious physical, mental, and psychological health outcomes (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Reynolds et al., 2010). Additionally, researchers suggest that when combined with academic stress, racism-related stress inhibits academic engagement and contributes to high attrition rates for minority students (Chao, Mallinckrodt, & Wei, 2012; Marcus et al., 2003; Pieterse, Carter, Evans, & Walter, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2010).

As such, it is important for criminal justice programs to improve students' negative racial attitudes. Literature examining intergroup relations in higher education, the impact of curricular/cocurricular diversity activities on racial bias, and racial discrimination distress and campus racial climate provide suggestions that may help improve criminal justice students' perceptions of and sensitivity to racism and discriminatory practices. For instance, Engberg's (2004) critical examination of literature related to educational interventions on racial bias among college students provides evidence that multicultural courses, diversity workshops and training, and peer-facilitated interventions have shown positive effects on reducing racial bias among college students. Similarly, Denson's (2009) meta-analysis of diversity activities provides support for Engberg's (2004) review and it suggests that curricular/cocurricular diversity activities are effective for reducing bias among college students.

Multicultural course interventions along with diversity workshop and training interventions typically use didactic instruction, are content based, and are often explicit in their aim to reduce racial bias (Engberg, 2004). Additionally, multicultural course interventions aim to incorporate a diversity perspective into courses, whereas diversity workshops and training interventions are described as more interactive, short term, and make use of personal experiences with prejudice as a teaching/pedagogical tool (Engberg, 2004). Findings from Engberg's (2004) review of the educational intervention and racial bias literature, and Denson's (2009) meta-analysis suggests that multicultural courses were effective in increasing students' awareness of discrimination and in reducing their prejudice, bias, and negative attitudes toward minorities. Engberg (2004) also suggests that there is a cumulative effect for diversity workshops and training interventions impact on reducing students' racial bias.

While the aforementioned interventions are explicit and content-based, peer-facilitated interventions (e.g., peer-facilitated training, intergroup dialogue, collaborative learning) rely on participant contact and are based on experiential (e.g., role-playing) learning with the implicit aim of reducing racial bias (Engberg, 2004). Peer-facilitated training differs from the interventions discussed earlier in that peers are used to provide the instruction and training on issues related to racial bias. Intergroup dialogue promotes peer-facilitated communication across “diverse social identity groups (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation)” by focusing the dialogue on intergroup conflict and differences while debunking stereotypes and misinformation (p. 493). Overall, the examination of peer-facilitated interventions suggests effectiveness in reducing racial bias. However, it should be noted that the findings for peer-facilitated training may be anecdotal due to the small number of studies included in the review.

Although the interventions discussed may be effective at facilitating racial sensitivity and reducing racial bias on their own, we suggest that a combination of the interventions be used to improve criminal justice students’ racial attitudes. For instance, multicultural courses (which may already be in use for some programs) could benefit from curriculum that incorporates more of the experiential learning strategies used in peer-facilitated interventions. It may also be beneficial for criminal justice programs to consider integrating diversity curriculum throughout multiple courses in the major rather than as just a standalone course. Furthermore, rather than rely solely on instructor led classes that are content and lecture based, findings from Engberg’s (2004) review suggest that it may be useful for instructors to incorporate peer (i.e., student) led discussions and activities in which participants share their experiences with racial bias, discrimination, negative stereotypes, and the criminal justice system. Program-level initiatives that have been effective with counseling and psychology students (Kiselica, Maben, & Locke, 1999; Pettijohn & Walzer, 2008) include incorporating diversity councils, changing program policies to promote diversity, and providing diversity training activities that are discipline specific. It should be noted that the initiatives and interventions discussed here are not exhaustive and serve as suggestions for criminal justice programs as they move to improve students’ racial attitudes. For an in-depth examination of effective educational strategies to improve intergroup relations, instructors and administrators should review Engberg (2004) and Denson (2009).

Despite this study’s contributions, limitations exist that may limit the generalizability of the findings. First, internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ ) for each scale is below the commonly accepted level of .70, which could call into question the measures used in the current research. Although .70 is regarded by some as the commonly accepted minimal level for internal consistency (Nunnally, 1994; Streiner & Norman, 2003), others argue that .60 is the lowest cutoff point (Bowling, 2014). Furthermore, results from a factor analysis for both scales confirm that the items included in the final version of each scale are correlated and should be grouped together. Thus, we contend that internal consistency for both the Low Perception of Racism and the Low Sensitivity to Racism Scales has been established through

factor analysis and with reliability coefficients (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) above the lowest cutoff point of .60.

Furthermore, the variance for the low perception of racism and the low sensitivity to racism models is low, 16% and 6%, respectively. Despite low levels of variance, each model produced statistically significant results that can provide some insight into criminal justice students' attitudes as well as their perceptions of and sensitivity to or awareness of racism. For instance, the current research does not seek to make predictions, instead the point is to determine whether there is a relationship among race, gender, and low perceptions of racism in a group of criminal justice majors. Although small, the variance indicates that a relationship does exist, which should be further explored in future research. Despite the information gained from the current research, the results should be viewed with caution due to the potential issue with internal consistency combined with the small amount of variance reported for each model.

Second, the sample is limited to criminal justice students and does not include a noncriminal justice student comparison group which is consistent with H. A. Miller and Kim's (2012) examination of antigay attitudes among a sample of undergraduate criminal justice students. While the inclusion of a noncriminal justice student comparison group would be beneficial, there is a natural comparison of gender and racial/ethnic categories in the study. It should also be noted that low perceptions of and sensitivity to racism in criminal justice students compared to low or high perceptions of and sensitivity to racism among other groups does not negate the need to examine perceptions and sensitivity within this group with the ultimate future research goal of identifying approaches to improve police–community relations. Furthermore, given that criminal justice students from one university were included in the study, it is not known if they are representative of criminal justice students throughout the United States. Therefore, future research should examine the racial attitudes of criminal justice students at other universities to determine whether these findings are isolated or if they can be generalized to other areas.

Third, racial categories were collapsed into a dichotomous variable of White and non-White, with the latter consisting of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Other. As previously mentioned in the Discussion and Conclusion section, research examining minorities' experiences with racism and differential treatment indicates that African American students report experiences with racism and differential treatment more frequently than Hispanic/Latino Americans and Asian American students (Ancis et al., 2000; McCormack, 1995; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003). Although Bonferroni post hoc analyses indicate no significant differences exist among the minority groups, it is possible that some differences not captured by the test may be present and influencing the outcome of the analyses, particularly the finding that non-White males did not significantly differ from White-male criminal justice students. As such, while it was necessary to collapse the non-White racial groups into a single category due to the small size of each category, the findings related to the racial categories should be viewed and taken with caution.

the current study's singular examination of racial attitudes is similar to in approach and in line with other studies (Biasco et al., 2001; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994), we are neither able to identify the underlying factors associated with criminal justice students' perceptions of racism and attitudes toward minorities nor the impact of these perceptions and attitudes on future behavior. Thus, future research should include items that identify the correlates of criminal justice students' perceptions of racism and discriminatory practices as well as their attitudes toward minorities. Finally, research examining student attitudes provides a variety of suggestions for improving negative racial attitudes. However, the current research does not include an exhaustive list of suggestions or recommendations to improve criminal justice students' perceptions of and sensitivity to racism. While this is not a limitation of the current study, there should be future research devoted to a more thorough examination and discussion of strategies aimed at improving criminal justice students' perceptions, sensitivity to racism, attitudes, and implicit bias.

In sum, the current study examined racial and gender differences in criminal justice students' perceptions of and sensitivity to racism. Findings from the study indicate that criminal justice students exhibit racial and gender differences in their perceptions of racism and discriminatory practices, yet few differences exist in their sensitivity to racism. To date, this study is the only examination of criminal justice students' perceptions of racism, racial attitudes, and implicit bias. As such, this study contributes to literature in that it serves as a benchmark for research related to criminal justice students' sensitivity to and perceptions of racism and discriminatory practices.

## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Means and Standard Deviations of the Negative Racial Attitudes Scale.

Negative Racial Attitudes Scale ( $\alpha = .657$ )	Mean	SD
1. Few attempts have been made to alter services or organizational functioning to accommodate the cultural perspectives of minority groups.	3.324	1.018
2. Minority groups have little to say about decisions which affect the College of Criminal Justice.	3.586	0.942
3. Extensive changes have been made to make services (resources) accessible to minority persons. (RC)	3.657	0.878
4. The College of Criminal Justice goes out of its way to make minority group members feel accepted. (RC)	3.494	0.867

Note. (RC) Items with lower scores that were reverse coded, so that all items in the scale are consistent and in the same direction.

RC= Recoded Item.

## Appendix B

**Table B1.** Means and Standard Deviations of the Sensitivity Scale.

Sensitivity to Racism Scale ( $\alpha = .629$ )	Mean	SD
1. Seniority in the workplace as a major criteria for promotion	2.13	0.990
2. Disproportionately high suspension rates or dropout rates of minority students	2.84	0.929
3. Formation of separate minority student organizations	2.56	1.040
4. Low level of knowledge on the part of minority students about the College of Criminal Justice events and opportunities	2.90	0.970
5. Use of standardized tests for the awarding of scholarships	2.77	1.129
6. Desegregation of Black colleges	2.97	1.016
7. Higher insurance rates for urban areas	2.85	0.935

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