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## Racial Discrimination in Sweden and the US:

A Comparative Cross-Sectional Study

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### **Abstract**

Racial discrimination is one of the most fundamental forms of social inequality. It remains prevalent in major progressive democracies such as Sweden and the United States. Limited studies have examined how the two nations differ in a comparative cross-sectional design. This paper aims to understand experiences and opinions regarding ethnicity and discrimination to explore differences and similarities on these aspects in the United States and Sweden in university students. The current study also examines the importance of racial identity and the ideas of system justification and racial consciousness. Analysis of responses ( $n = 2307$ ) in a web-based questionnaire found that non-whites consider their racial/ethnic backgrounds to be more important to their identity compared to whites in both nations, Sweden defends system justification more than the United States, the 'American' identity is more open compared to 'Swedish' regardless of racial/ethnic group, and there is a higher self-reported racial discrimination rate in Sweden than the United States. University student responses were collected from 35 U.S. states and two universities in Sweden.

*Keywords:* Discrimination, racism, Sweden, US, comparison, cross-sectional study

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## Introduction

The idealistic notion that all men are created equal is not always put into practice when it comes to social structure and everyday life. Specifically, racial inequality is affecting major democracies like the United States and Sweden at a societal level. For centuries, racism has been setting people apart and contributing to conflict (Boynton-Jarrett, et al., 2021). Racial inequality, or racism, manifests itself in uneven distribution of resources, access to power, and marginalization of certain groups (David, et al., 2019). Racism is a term that is often used broadly and who can be considered racist is not always easily defined. If defined as prejudice or discrimination based on race, then anyone can be racist, including both the oppressors and the oppressed (Doane, 2006). However, if racism is discussed in terms of institutional power, then only members of the dominant group can be racist, i.e., whites in many parts of the world. The debate on whether all people can be racist depends on how it is discussed, and the type of racism being referred.

### *Levels of Racism*

Understanding the different types of racism is important in knowing how racism can be experienced. There are five types of racism: internalized, interpersonal, institutionalized, structural, and systemic racism (Boynton-Jarrett, et al., 2021). Internalized racism is accepting racial subordination and adopting negative beliefs and inferiority about one's own race because of white superiority ideology. Interpersonal racism involves prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice is making biased assumptions based on someone's race (Atkins, 2014). Discrimination is treating someone differently based on their race or ethnicity (Boynton-Jarrett, et al., 2021). This is typically what people think of when they think of racism, and it applies to the idea that members of any group can be racist (Doane, 2006). Institutional racism happens within societal institutions and networks of power, where discriminatory practices and unethical policies exist. An example is opposing admissions policy reforms aimed at diversifying student enrollment (Liu, et al., 2023). In a lawsuit against Harvard, a group of students claimed the university discriminated against Asian American students by accepting a low number of applicants (Hartocollis, 2018). Asian American students consistently scored higher than applicants of other racial or ethnic groups on SAT/ACT scores, grade point averages, and extracurricular activities, but their student "positive personality" ratings reduced their chances of being admitted (*Students*

*for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*). The lawsuit claimed the university violated civil rights laws by discriminating unfairly against Asian Americans to diversify student enrollment (Hartocollis, 2018). Harvard does so by admitting less qualified white, black, and Hispanic students, according to the lawsuit. Structural racism is the combined effects of racism based on history, culture, and ideologies in a society, resulting in practices benefiting whites (Boynton-Jarrett, et al., 2021). This refers to the idea that whites are “the norm” and have an advantage over other racial and ethnic groups. An example is the prominence of unequal race treatment in the US labor market. A study found that white sounding names are more likely to receive callbacks by employers than African American sounding ones, despite possessing the same experiences and qualifications (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). The study also found that employers paid more attention to higher quality resumes by whites than by blacks. Systemic racism is the way society is organized and different opportunities are provided to different groups based on racial hierarchy (Boynton-Jarrett, et al., 2021). It has to do with norms, ideologies, culture, history, and laws and policies presenting an unfair and unequal value on individuals and groups based on their race. Negative sociopolitical consequences of the model minority myth (the belief that Asian Americans are more high achieving in comparison with other racial minorities) and the belief that black Americans are less competent and lack education are examples of this (Yi & Todd, 2021; Quinn, 2020). Whites dominate the racial hierarchy and enjoy benefits at the cost of other groups. Even though institutional, structural, and systemic racism are sometimes used interchangeably, they all involve the same powerful and privileged group. For many whites, racism has to do with prejudice, but for most minorities, racism is either institutional or systemic (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

### *History of Racism and Power*

The root of racism lies within power (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017). Social oppression is intersectional and linked by balance of power and maintained by society’s categorization of people based on ethnicity and race (Boynton-Jarrett, et al, 2021). People have been primed to believe that whites are superior to people of color due to dominant narratives and the way society has been set up (Osta & Vasquez, 2021). Before Sweden became a “colorblind” nation, it was once a frontrunner of “scientific racism” in the Democratic West (Hübinette & Lundström, 2014). Colorblindness is the idea of race being irrelevant as both a concept and classification and

adopting a post-racial society (Hübinette & Tigervall, 2009). Scientific racism is the pseudoscientific belief that empirical evidence exists to support why one race is superior to another (Kuhl, 2002). In the 1930s, Swedish soldiers and officials were trained to believe that a nation's wealth, culture, and power depend on the preservation of good qualities of the [white] race (Hübinette & Lundström, 2014). They were advised that mixing with a "less powerful race" is one of the greatest threats to an "elevated people" (*Soldatinstruktion*, 1930<sup>1</sup>). Unsurprisingly, the Sweden Democrats, a right-wing, nationalist political party that has risen in power in recent years, emphasizes these types of ethnocentric roots and bases their ideologies on ethnic homogeneity and traditional values (Elgenius & Rydgren, 2017). The belief that immigrants are the primary cause of crime further divides the ethnic line in the nation. This is an example of the dominant narratives set up in Sweden. When the refugee immigration took over the labor migration in Sweden, there was an influx of immigrants from non-Western countries in the 1950s to the late 1990s (Hübinette & Lundström, 2014). Today, 15% of the Swedish population consists of a non-Western background (Hübinette & Lundström, 2014). Prior to the increase in immigration rate, Sweden was a mostly homogeneously white nation. With immigration came racialization, the ongoing process that differentiates people while enforcing power differences based on these established differences (Keskinen & Andreassen, 2017). In other words, racialization is a continuous process of racial divide or formation (Osanami Törngren, 2022). Racialization came from the different ways race turned into practices in society (Keskinen & Andreassen, 2017). Immigrants were believed to only benefit from the welfare system, but they don't contribute to it (Hübinette & Lundström, 2014). People were described by the color of their skin and immigrants, whether voluntary or involuntary, were perceived as different and undeserving (Gans, 2017; Osanami Törngren, 2022).

Meanwhile, in the United States, the American Immigration Act<sup>2</sup> was passed in 1925 (Jardina, 2014). The Act set strict immigration restrictions on non-white immigration from Asia and Eastern Europe, further reinforcing the idea that Northern Europeans are superior. With groups considered "less than", privileged groups had more access to resources, an important aspect of power (David, et al., 2019). This leads to an unequal distribution of opportunities

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<sup>1</sup> Manual for soldiers. Distributed more than a hundred thousand copies between 1929 to 1938.

<sup>2</sup> Immigration Act of 1924 prevented immigration from Asia and set quotas on immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe.

where some groups enjoy certain privileges more than others. In the American South, for example, there are considerable differences in Black-White poverty and general racial inequalities due to historical state institutions (Baker, R., 2022). Some of these institutions include slavery, the Union secession during the American Civil War<sup>3</sup>, and segregation. Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 declared freedom for slaves in the South (Fremon, 2014). In 1868, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution guaranteed equal rights to all US citizens, but blacks and whites were still separated (Fremon, 2014). It wasn't until 1896 that the Supreme Court ruled "separate but equal" in the decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. However, segregation and Jim Crow laws<sup>4</sup> continued to discriminate against blacks for years. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled to end racial segregation in public schools in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* and it wasn't until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that segregation ended (Fremon, 2014; Humphrey, 1997). While America's racial history may be largely familiar, Sweden's history of colonialism and slave trade have been mostly ignored (Keskinen & Andreassen, 2017). During World War II, many scholars in Sweden were supporters of the Nazi Party (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017). Even though Sweden and many Nordic countries benefited from imperialism, racism is rarely discussed because their colonial pasts are either overlooked or forgotten (Loftsdóttir, 2021). The US and Sweden have both shared similar histories, but how it shaped each nation differs significantly.

### *Race, Ethnicity, and Colorblindness*

Racial construct and how race is measured in the US and Sweden differ in more ways than one. Sweden was the first to explore the science of race and Carl Linnaeus created the first "scientific system" for race classification (Hübinette & Lundström, 2014). The scientific aspect of it is questionable, as he divided humans into four different classes using mostly geographic, but otherwise arbitrary measures (Saura, 2020). Anders Retzius measured the cranial structure (the main part of the human skull) of the Nordic, Finnish, and Sámi people (Saura, 2020). The Nordics were typically light-haired and tall, while the Sámi were dark-haired and shorter, and the Finnish were a bit of both. Ideas that the Nordic "race" were superior took precedence and

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<sup>3</sup> The Civil War was fought between the North (the Union) and the South (the Confederate) over increased slave states into the western territories (Parish, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation in public facilities and institutionalized disadvantages for African Americans living in the United States.

measures had to be taken to “preserve the purity” of the Nordic race (Saura, 2020). In more recent years, evidence has shown that human race taxonomy has no scientific foundation (Witzig, 1996). In fact, racial categories are social constructs and were formed because of socially accepted beliefs by a society without real evidence (Witzig, 1996). Race cannot be categorized by anything other than observable characteristics such as skin color. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is more than simply observable characteristics. There is often confusion between the difference between race and ethnicity. Ethnicity refers to people who share a common cultural heritage (e.g., common cultural characteristics include aspects like language and nationality) (Blank, et al., 2004). Ethnicity can also consist of social, religious, and dietary aspects that not only help identify individuals, but also explain why some ethnic populations are more prone to a disease (Witzig, 1996). In Sweden, many official texts have replaced the word, ‘race’ with ‘ethnicity’, as an attempt to encourage colorblind anti-racism (Wikström & Hübinette, 2021). In fact, from a Swedish perspective, racialization is used to highlight the concept of individuals belonging to different races as a construct, instead of a biological fact (Osanami Törngren, 2022). Here, race and racialization are equivalent, instead of race being an indicator and racialization being a process in which some people are stigmatized and discriminated against, while others gain privilege and power (Osanami Törngren, 2022). Once ‘race’ is constructed, it produces severe social impacts.

As mentioned, Sweden takes a colorblind approach and is one of the few nations that does not collect statistics on race and ethnicity, as an attempt to maintain the commitment of antiracism (Hübinette & Lundström, 2014; Strmic-Pawl, et al., 2018). A pilot study by the Institute for Future Studies found that Swedes who identify as ethnically white see race and ethnic data collection as the government attributing categories based on identity to residents in the state register, whereas minority Swedes of color are more open to it (Håkansson, et al., 2017). Despite the attempt to argue that biological race is nonexistent in Sweden, it does not erase the racism and discrimination that many minorities experience (Osanami Törngren, 2022). Regardless of the biological or taxonomic classification, race is a social-cognitive concept that affects attitudes and behaviors based on people’s perceptions (Blank, et al., 2004). The U.S. Census collects information on race and ethnicity in the United States every ten years to address social, political, and economic needs (Strmic-Pawl, et al., 2018). The data collected is anonymous and can help improve income gaps, make planning decisions about community



services, distribute Congressional seats, and allocate funding. Colorblindness in Sweden is tied to the belief that not seeing color erases racism. Similarly, in the United States, a colorblind perspective on race relations allows the dominant groups to use certain narratives of achievement ideologies to make white privilege invisible (Gallagher, 2003). Many Americans are still unaware of the adverse effects of being colorblind. When Barack Obama was elected president, for instance, many Americans became under the impression that they now lived in a “post-racial” America (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). This belief in and of itself reflects colorblind racism because many whites adopted the idea that a black president solved all issues regarding race in the country (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). Many people of color didn’t share the same view. Colorblind racism, so-called “new-racism”, is a new type of racial oppression in America, namely focusing on subtle and institutional discrimination (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). Opposing affirmative action, “blaming the victim” mentality (believing that blacks don’t work as hard, etc.), and claiming minorities are playing the “race card” are a few derivatives of colorblind racism. In the United States, modern racists also believe discrimination is an issue of the past, as “[ethnic minorities] enjoy the freedom to compete in the marketplace, their demands are unfair and societal institutions are giving them more than they deserve” (McConahay, 1986). Rather than acknowledging these views as racially insensitive, they believe everyone is equal and has the same opportunities because people are not separated by law. Modern racists don’t identify as prejudiced and claim to believe in equality, but their implicit bias and indirect anti-minority beliefs result in subtle and sometimes unconscious forms of discrimination (Cortina, 2008). Unless people identify as members of white supremacist groups, traditional racism, characterized by blatant hostility towards minority groups, beliefs that people of color are inferior, and opposing laws that protect people from discrimination are becoming less common (Cortina, 2008). Prejudice and discrimination persist today, but it is harder to pin down and combat newer forms of racism.

### *Measuring Race*

Race is usually measured by how one identifies themselves as in the United States, i.e., self-identification or self-reporting (Blank, et al., 2004). The US Census Bureau measures race by asking individuals to check a box that best describes their personal and cultural background (Winker, 2004). When indicating race and ethnicity, self-reporting is usually preferred (Winker,

2014). Race and ethnicity can also be measured by open-ended options where the individual fills in what they identify as, this also produces more accurate results (Winker, 2014). When measuring race, it is also important to note why it is being measured, as an important outcome of any study (Winker, 2014). Race and ethnicity are evolving. The way people think of their own racial statuses is affected by social and economic changes as well as societal norms. For example, after the Black Lives Matter<sup>5</sup> movement, three distinct patterns of white racial identification were identified by those interviewed in Minnesota: whiteness is insignificant and does not matter, whiteness is a liability and those who identify as white must prove they're not racist, and those aware of their white privilege (Cole, 2020). These types of white racial identities are not mutually exclusive. Likewise, white people in the United States also reported lower levels of white identity after the election of then-president Donald Trump compared to before (Jardina, et al., 2021). Prior to the 2016 election, 20% of whites described their racial identity as 'extremely important', whereas that percentage fell to only 12% post-election (Jardina, et al., 2021).

In Sweden, being Swedish is typically associated with a white racial identity (Hübinette & Lundström, 2011). Swedes of color, despite being born and raised in Sweden are still considered "foreigners" or "immigrants" in many aspects. The Swedish Statistical Office<sup>6</sup> considers those who are born in Sweden, but have both parents born outside of Sweden, of "foreign background" (Osanami Törngren, 2019). Despite speaking the language and being embedded culturally in Swedish, Swedish minorities often experience racial marginalization, especially those who don't pass as Swedish (Hübinette & Lundström, 2011; Osanami Törngren, S. (2022). Many mixed-raced Swedes who don't always fall into the "Swedish-passing" category (i.e., looking different from the white majority) have their Swedish identity questioned, despite one of their parents being of Swedish descent (Osanami Törngren, 2020). There is extensive literature examining the identities of ethnic minorities and mixed raced Swedes in Sweden (Hübinette & Tigervall, 2009; Osanami Törngren, 2020). Studies have also frequently focused on white racial identity in the United States (Jardina, et al., 2021; Croll, 2007), but few have focused on white racial identity in Sweden. This could be largely because white Swedes have

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<sup>5</sup> A political and social movement that highlights racism, social inequality, and discrimination experienced by African Americans.

<sup>6</sup> Government agency in Sweden that produces statistics on labor market, population, export, import, etc.

difficulty indicating belonging to a group based on skin color and their reluctance in discussing race (Håkansson, et al., 2017).

### *Racial Identification*

Racial identification is defined as a person's sense of belonging to a certain racial group and possessing attachment to that group based on mutual beliefs, feelings, and interests (Jackson, 1987). It is important to note that white American or Swedish populations have the option to choose which ethnicity they identify as, whereas ethnic minorities do not (Osanami Törngren, 2020). This is largely due to racial assignment. Osanami Törngren explains when the racial difference is not directly visible, people can identify or pass as the ethnicity of their choice. For example, an individual of Swedish-French descent can pick and choose what they identify as, whereas a Swedish-African individual will be scrutinized, if they are not white-passing (Waters, 1990). In this sense, someone's identity can be ascribed by others, i.e., not self-identified as mentioned earlier (Jenkins, 2014). One of the privileges tied to whiteness is being able to render one's race as "invisible" (DiAngelo, 2022). Furthermore, whites do not carry the social burden of race and they do not have to worry about being racialized (DiAngelo, 2022). In the United States, the Census Bureau found issues in assigning racial identity, and considers self-identification more reliable (Strmic-Pawl, et al., 2018). They believe that a person's self-identification is more accurate than someone else's perception.

In the United States, acknowledging white racial belonging is rare and white people usually enjoy an unconscious sense of racial affiliation (DiAngelo, 2022). Considering their privileged status, white individuals typically ignore and downplay the meaning of their racial membership (Ponterotto & Park-Taylor, 2007). According to Jardina (2014), generally, whites do not possess their own sense of racial identification. Instead of being taught to be aware of racial differences, whites are taught to ignore them (Ponterotto & Park-Taylor, 2007). As a result, it becomes harder to measure the racial identity of whites. Historically, African Americans have higher racial identity than any other racial group (69-85%) (Jardina, 2019). Racial identity can also vary based on an individual's definition of racial group membership (McClain, et al., 2009). For example, an individual's racial identity could be based on their definition of racial group membership, i.e., "I am black because society said so" or they could look at racial identity in the context of common interests, culture, and mutual circumstances (McClain, et al., 2009).

Explicit associations between whiteness and American identity have been found. A study found that in a series of implicit tests, white Americans were considered “more American” than African Americans and Asian Americans (Devos & Banaji, 2005). Like the current study, Devos & Banaji (2005) surveyed college undergraduates. A study by Jardina (2014) found a significant percentage of US citizens identifying as white associate ‘whiteness’ with ‘America’ one way or another. Associating ‘American’ with whiteness is like associating ‘Swedish’ with whiteness.

Racial or group identity is well conceptualized by Social Identity Theory (SIT). Social Identity Theory is a person’s understanding of who they are, based on social categories or groups (Stets & Burke, 2000; McClain, et al., 2009). In other words, it’s a sense of who they are based on group membership. Examples of social categories include African American, Democratic, or American. While categories as such increase a person’s sense of belonging, they also trigger discrimination when people believe the in-group is superior to the out-group (Mangum & Block, 2018). This is known as social comparison, one of the processes in forming social identity (Stets & Burke, 2000). Mangum & Block (2018) used social identity theory to identify five distinct components of American identity. They are as follows: Being born in the US, “being truly American” (having lived most of their lives in the US, speaking English, being Christian, having served in the military), American patriotism (identifying as a proud American, it brings joy to see a waving American flag, and being American is more important than identifying as x[race]), sociopolitical threat (adamant on English being the official language in the US, and voting is part of being truly American), and sociocultural threat (immigrants take jobs and it is better if different racial and ethnic groups maintain their distinct cultures). Incidentally, each of these components of the American identity were found to be positively correlated with opposing legal immigration (Mangum & Block, 2018).

The other process of social identity theory is known as self-categorization. Self-categorization is a very specific kind of social categorization where people identify their own social groups (Treppe & Loy, 2017). We Swedes, or we Americans are examples of self-categorization. To self-categorize, one needs to identify as that social category. An individual would attribute the group membership to their self-concept. While a person may be white, they don’t have to identify as this social category, they could identify as American, for example.

*Racial Consciousness*

There is a distinction between racial identification and racial consciousness. Racial identity has to do with awareness and identification within a group based on mutual feelings, culture, and familiarity. Racial consciousness has to do with identifying with a group and the ideology of its social status and how to collectively take measures to advance the group's interests (McClain, et al., 2009; Miller, et al., 1981; Jackson, 1987). Society has set up race to be a socially divided group, which means their members tend to experience racial group consciousness (McClain, et al., 2009). To be racially conscious means that an individual feels that their personal identity is inseparable from their racial group. Literature has shown that white individuals are historically not race-conscious (Miller, et al., 2009). Whites generally do not have to worry about the color of their skin. One of the reasons behind this is there is a lack of structural obstacles for whites to overcome in society, e.g., unless affirmative action is in place, there are few employers that are less likely to hire whites because of the color of their skin (Jardina, 2014). On the other hand, minorities face this reality due to structural racism. For example, black racial consciousness is high because African Americans have had a lot more to fear (Jardina, 2019). However, from a political viewpoint, Jardina (2019) argues that in recent years, the levels of racial identity and consciousness of whites is rising. With presidential slogans like, "Make America Great Again"<sup>7</sup>, white voters are encouraged to be partial to their own group. Whites have been the dominant group in American history so far, but in a few generations, this population could shrink, as diversity continues to grow (Jardina, 2019). Due to their power and status, it is hard to say whether whites will begin to view their race the way minorities do.

### *Discrimination and Unfair Treatment*

Interpersonal racism, or discrimination have been common long-standing experiences of many minorities. In the Nordic countries, literature has shown that non-white individuals encounter discrimination, exclusion, and the constant need to justify or prove they are part of the Nordic (Loftsdóttir, 2021). Though there are many types of discrimination, in terms of race, discrimination is defined as the differential treatment of an individual based on their ethnicity or race in a formal or informal interaction (Shen & Dhanani, 2015). Discrimination based on ethnicity and skin color can take the traditional form of racism, or more subtle forms, such as

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<sup>7</sup> A political slogan popularized by Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign.

microaggression (Wolgast & Wolgast, 2021). Microaggressions are subtle, daily actions in the form of verbal or behavioral insults against minorities (Sue, et al., 2007). They are a type of racist behavior that can be difficult to manage and identify due to their subtle nature. More traditional forms of racism are identified as stereotypes based on ethnicity and skin color, leading to harmful ways racialization takes place in society (Wolgast & Wolgast, 2021). Stereotypes derive from implicit bias and when taken into consideration, cause unfair practices and treatment of minorities. Implicit bias is unconsciously associating stereotypes and attitudes towards a group of people (Osta & Vasquez, 2021). For example, if blacks are stereotyped as ‘lazy’ and ‘unambitious’, then it could lead to preference-based discrimination where an employer chooses to not hire someone based on their ethnicity or skin color (Wolgast & Wolgast, 2021). Biased and unfair decisions in the hiring process can have damaging results. Racialized experiences of ethnic minorities in the hiring environment and encounters, in general, can have negative impacts on their overall health. Experiences of discrimination can result in higher psychological stress, anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation (Hwang & Goto, 2008).

Racialized experiences can also contribute to a system justification perspective. With this perspective, people begin to rationalize and adapt to the status quo instead of their own beliefs and group interest (Jost, et al., 2004). System Justification Theory presumes that people defend the social order that is set up in a way that disadvantages their group because they believe it is inevitable (Van der Toorn & Jost, 2014). Social order refers to the existing economic, social, and political systems in place. In a way, they internalize inferiority and this belief stems from an attempt to avoid the burden of stress triggered by a racialized social system (Jost, et al., 2004; Wolgast & Wolgast, 2021). This burden cannot be avoided in the long run because it will continue to contribute to the subordination of certain groups, making change more difficult in the long term (Van der Toorn & Jost, 2014). The higher the score on system justification, the more they “defend” the system and don’t want it to be changed.

There are many ways to measure racial discrimination. Previous literature has used experiments to measure racial discrimination. Bertrand & Mullainathan’s (2004) field study provided race-related cues on job applications to find out whether employers are more inclined to hire one race over the other. Laboratory studies on racial discrimination can be very effective if well executed and designed, however, it can be very difficult to accomplish (Blank, et al., 2004).

In a prime laboratory study by Word, et al., (1974), white interviewers (participants) were found to exhibit nonverbal discriminatory behaviors towards black interviewees (confederates) with less warmth and greater discomfort, higher rates of speech errors, and shorter interview time overall. However, laboratory studies are limited in time and can provide biased results (Blank, et al., 2004). Participants can feel pressured to answer in a certain way due to time constraints or feelings of anxiety. Due to these constraints, the current study uses developed instruments to measure racial discrimination. Researchers have made major breakthroughs in developing instruments to measure perceived racism or discrimination in recent years (Atkins, 2014). Surveying allows participants to make their own assessments of perceived discrimination.

## **The Current Study**

### *Aims and Objectives*

The current research aims to understand experiences and opinions regarding race and ethnicity, and discrimination to explore differences and similarities on these aspects in the United States and Sweden in university students. The study will also examine the importance of racial identity and evaluate the levels of system justification and compare colorblind racism. Four hypotheses will be tested concerning race and identity in the respective countries.

1. The first hypothesis anticipates non-whites to identify with their racial identity to a higher extent than whites in both countries. They are more aware of their own race and consider their race and ethnic background to be very important to their identity. A white individual may not always consider their race to be an important aspect of their identity, as consistent with existing literature.
2. Hypothesis 2 predicts non-whites are more likely to oppose system justification and find society to be generally unfair. Non-whites are more likely to believe that society needs to be restructured and more needs to be done to combat racial discrimination.
3. The third hypothesis focuses on the extent in which the individual's identity feels represented by 'Swedish' or 'American'. Because Sweden has historically been a homogenous country consisting of one racial group, 'Swedish' is a generally closed identity. Closed in the sense that only whites whose parents were also born and raised in Sweden typically identify as Swedish. In the United States, 'American' is an open identity. Considering the history of the United States, the heterogeneous population, and

many feeling represented by the terms, African American, Asian American, Native American, etc., American is a claimed identity by many living in the United States. Because of the widely attributed American identity, it is predicted that the American sample identifies with their national identity to a greater extent than the Swedish sample. The difference between the countries should be particularly large for non-whites.

4. With Sweden's claim as a colorblind nation and its refusal to discuss and include race, it is hypothesized that they will score higher on colorblind racism. Colorblind racism is also prevalent in the United States, where it plays a role in modern racism, but it doesn't claim to colorblindness the same way Sweden does. Non-whites in both nations are likely to score lower on colorblind racism because they believe race does matter in society.
5. The final hypothesis is exploratory; with the purpose of exploring the differences in discrimination and levels of stress in the non-white population in Sweden and the United States. The differences and similarities in the American and Swedish samples will be examined to understand how discrimination affects the respective populations. White privilege will also be explored, as a conceptual equivalent of racial discrimination. In both countries, whites will be assessed in the level of awareness and understanding of white privilege.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participation consisted of students ( $n = 2307$ ) across universities in Sweden and the United States. 823 of which came from private and public universities in the United States. The racial/ethnic composition of the sample is illustrated in Table 1. The entire sample ranged between 18 to over 70 years (see Table 2). The participants were recruited through social media (i.e., Reddit, Instagram, and Facebook), word of mouth, email outreach to universities across the nation, and student email lists obtained by universities. Initially, 118 relevant college organizations (*Black Student Union, Asian American Student Association, College Republicans, etc.*) were sought out across the U.S., but after low response rates, outreach was made to colleges and universities directly (psychology department, staff, research administration, faculty, etc.). At least one university from each state was contacted for recruitment for a total of 60 colleges across the United States. There was no basis in selecting the university, but many flagship



colleges were contacted, a few historically black colleges, community colleges, as well Ivy League universities. It was important to maintain a balance between private and public universities to obtain a representative sample. The study included respondents of all races and ethnic backgrounds. In Sweden, email lists of students were obtained from Malmö University and Dalarna University. Most of the U.S. participation came from the University of Wisconsin Madison, with respondents also residing in California and Illinois, among other states<sup>8</sup>. By agreeing to participate in the anonymous survey, respondents confirmed they were over the age of 18 and understood the sensitive data collected is both anonymous and confidential. Participants had to be currently enrolled in a college or university at the time of participation. The selection of participants was based on availability and convenience.

**Table 1**

*U.S. and Swedish Racial/Ethnic Composition*

| <b>U.S. Ethnic Groups</b>         | <b>Counts</b> | <b>% of Total</b> |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Hispanic/Latino                   | 54            | 6.6%              |
| Native American or Alaskan Native | 3             | 0.4%              |
| Asian or Pacific Islander         | 138           | 16.8%             |
| Black or African American         | 34            | 4.1%              |
| White/Caucasian                   | 517           | 62.8%             |
| Mixed race                        | 55            | 6.7%              |
| Other                             | 18            | 2.2%              |
| Prefer not to answer              | 4             | 0.5%              |
| <b>Swedish Ethnic Groups</b>      | <b>Counts</b> | <b>% of Total</b> |
| White                             | 804           | 54.2%             |
| Middle Eastern or North African   | 136           | 9.2%              |
| Black                             | 72            | 4.9%              |
| East Asian                        | 60            | 4.0%              |
| South Asian                       | 48            | 3.2%              |
| Latin American                    | 96            | 6.5%              |
| Southeast Asian                   | 53            | 3.5%              |
| More than one group               | 152           | 10.2%             |
| Other                             | 36            | 2.4%              |
| Prefer not to answer              | 28            | 1.9%              |

*Note.* The American and Swedish samples were accumulated separately because of the difference in ethnic groups.

<sup>8</sup> Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming.

**Table 2***Frequency of Age Range*

| <b>Age Range</b> | <b>Counts</b> | <b>% of Total</b> |
|------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 18 – 20 years    | 461           | 20.1%             |
| 20 – 25 years    | 610           | 26.6%             |
| 26 – 30 years    | 419           | 18.3%             |
| 31 – 35 years    | 230           | 10.0%             |
| 36 – 40 years    | 188           | 8.2%              |
| 41 – 45 years    | 160           | 7.0%              |
| 46 – 50 years    | 58            | 2.5%              |
| 51 – 55 years    | 70            | 3.1%              |
| 56 – 60 years    | 52            | 2.3%              |
| 61 – 65 years    | 15            | 0.7%              |
| 66 – 70 years    | 12            | 0.5%              |
| Over 70 years    | 15            | 0.7%              |

*Measures*

The web-based survey platform, Qualtrics, used for the questionnaire, and was conducted in English and Swedish. The questionnaire consisted of 65 – 77 questions, depending on ethnic identification and spanned across various subscales, some of which varied depending on the respondent's racial identification (e.g., demographics and racial or ethnic background), Identity, System Justification, Colorblindness, Schedule of Racist Events, and White Privilege. All items were composed of existing instruments and were evaluated on 5 to 10-point Likert-scales (i.e., *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*). The survey uses display logic, so it is customized to the ethnic background of the respondent and the questions differ depending on the person's identification. The study is conducted in accordance with regulations of research ethics. Given the limited time frame, the study used non-probability and convenience sampling methods focusing on undergraduate and graduate students for accessibility.

*Identity.* Jardina's (2019) concise three-question survey was originally designed to measure the racial identity of whites. This was extended to include all ethnic backgrounds to explore how important one's race/ethnicity is to one's identity, to what extent the respective group have a lot to be proud of, and how much they have in common with each other. In addition to their ethnic backgrounds, respondents are also asked to answer the same questions about their nationality. Reliability score for this subscale in the current study is  $\alpha = .63$  for the Swedish sample and  $\alpha = .70$  for the American sample.

*System Justification.* The System Justification Scale measures how fair respondents consider society on a nine-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 9 = *strongly agree*) (Kay & Jost, 2003). A high rating on an item indicates society functions as it should, while a low rating suggests a lot of changes need to be made for society to be considered fair. Two items on this scale are reversed-scored ('American society needs to be radically restructured' and 'Our society is getting worse every year'). Previous reliability score for System Justification Scale is  $\alpha = .87$  (Kay & Jost, 2003). In the current study, reliability scores are  $\alpha = .81$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ , respectively.

*Colorblindness.* The Colorblind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS) measures colorblind racial attitudes, the belief that race does not and should not matter (Neville, et al., 2000). It consists of 20 items on a five-point Likert scale, ten of which are reverse scored. The higher the score, the higher levels of colorblindness one exhibits. The scale has a reliability score of  $\alpha = .91$  and retest reliability of  $\alpha = .68$  (Schooley, et al., 2019). The current study has high reliability scores ( $\alpha = .89$ ,  $\alpha = .95$ ).

*Schedule of Racist Events.* The Schedule of Racist Events (SRE) explores experiences of racism over the course of a lifetime and how each incident has affected the individual (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). This 18-item scale divides each question into three parts, i.e., 'How many times have you been treated unfairly by [coworkers, neighbors, strangers, etc.]', followed by 'How many times in the *past year*?', 'How many times in your *entire life*?', and 'How stressful was this for you?' on a six-point Likert scale. The SRE addresses how one appraises racist events and frequency. The reliability of each item are as follows:  $\alpha = .95$  for recent racist events,  $\alpha = .95$  for lifetime racist events, and  $\alpha = .94$  for appraised racist events (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). In the current study, the Swedish sample has reliability scores of  $\alpha = .95$ ,  $\alpha = .95$ , and  $\alpha = .96$ . The American sample had reliability scores of  $\alpha = .94$ ,  $\alpha = .94$ , and  $\alpha = .95$ . This scale only pertains to respondents who identify as non-white.

*White Privilege.* The White Privilege Scale is a five-item scale that assesses the level of white privilege awareness (McIntosh, 1989; Swim & Miller, 1999). This scale has a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5) and is based on McIntosh's (1989) index of privileges. The higher the score on the White Privilege Scale indicates increased awareness of inequality. This concise scale has a high reliability score of  $\alpha = .72$ . An example of an item is 'My race is an asset to me in everyday life' (Swim & Miller, 1999). The current study

has high reliability scores ( $\alpha = .91$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ). The scale only pertains to respondents who identify as white.

### *Statistical Analysis*

A series of statistical tests were performed to assess the relationship between race, racial identity, system justification, and colorblindness. Group comparisons were conducted using analyses of variance (ANOVA) and t-tests (independent samples and one-samples). All data analyses were performed using the statistical software, Jamovi (The Jamovi Project version 2.3.26) and SPSS for Windows. Data was exported from Qualtrics and transferred to Jamovi for computation, scoring, and analysis. Descriptive statistics were performed to examine the distribution of demographic variables including age, sex, and racial/ethnic background. Effect sizes were calculated using eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ). Cronbach's alpha was calculated as the reliability coefficient for each subscale. Reliability coefficients were calculated separately for the Swedish and American sample because of the expected difference in how the groups would respond to each subscale.

### **Results**

*Hypothesis 1.* A two-way ANOVA was used to test the effects and interaction effects of race (white and non-white) and country (Sweden and the United States) with how important race is to one's identity. Results indicated that race had a large main effect,  $\eta^2 = 0.23$  (see Table 3). Race had a significant main effect on the dependent variable,  $F(1, 1970) = 611.3, p < .001$ . Levene's Test was used to test the homogeneity of variance  $F(3, 1970) = 5.03, p = .002$ . Given the large sample sizes, the result from the Levene's test was followed up by looking at the within group estimations of population variance in all four groups. The results indicated that the largest and the smallest estimation differed only by a factor of 1.3. Since ANOVA is robust to differences of this size, and violations of the assumption lead to increase of Type II error, the decision was made to proceed with the analysis using ANOVA. Data was checked for the assumption of normality of the residuals, and the results showed that the assumption was met (Skewness and kurtosis were between  $-.5$  and  $+.5$ ). Non-whites considered race to be significantly more important to one's identity ( $M = 19.5, SD = 5.77$ ) than whites do ( $M = 13.1, SD = 6.05$ ). Country only had a small main effect ( $\eta^2 = .01$ ) on the importance of race to one's identity,  $F(1, 1970) = 19.9, p < .001$ .

**Table 3**

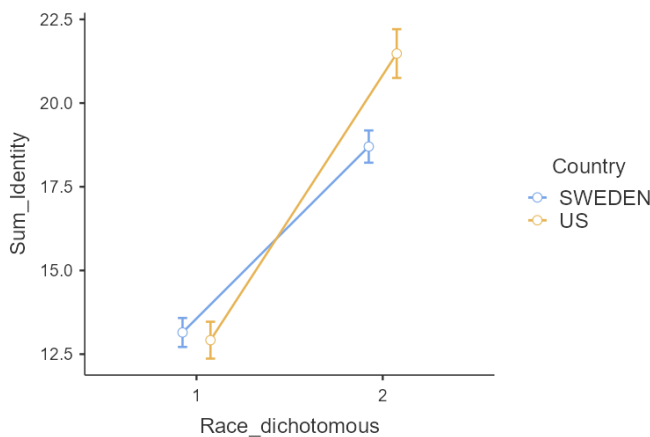
*Two-way Analysis of Variance in Importance of Race to Identity*

|                            | <b>Sum of Squares</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>Mean Square</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>p</b> | <b>η<sup>2</sup></b> |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|----------|----------------------|
| Country                    | 690                   | 1         | 689.7              | 19.9     | < .001   | 0.008                |
| Racial Dichotomy           | 21159                 | 1         | 21159.4            | 611.3    | < .001   | 0.233                |
| Country * Racial Dichotomy | 961                   | 1         | 961.0              | 27.8     | < .001   | 0.011                |
| Residuals                  | 68188                 | 1970      | 34.6               |          |          |                      |

There is also a significant interaction between racial dichotomy and country,  $F(1, 1970) = 27.8, p < .001, \eta^2 = .011$ . However, the interaction effect was small. Race was slightly more important among non-whites in the United States ( $M = 21.5, SD = 5.2$ ) than those in Sweden ( $M = 18.7, SD = 5.79$ ). Figure 1 demonstrates this effect. Hypothesis 1 is supported by these results.

**Figure 1**

*Importance of Race to Identity by Racial Dichotomy and Country*



*Note.* ‘Important to identity’ scores by race dichotomous variables where 1 represents ‘white’ and 2 represents ‘non-white’.

*Hypothesis 2.* To test for the effects of race and country on system justification, a two-way ANOVA was performed. The results revealed that country has a statistically significant effect on system justification,  $F(1, 1961) = 261.42, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$ . The effect size was large (see Table 4 for the ANOVA table in detail). Levene’s Test was used for the assumption check,  $F(3, 1961) = 8.70, p < .001$ . Given the large sample sizes, the result from the Levene’s test was

followed up by looking at the within group estimations of population variance in all four groups. The results indicated that the largest and the smallest estimation differed only by a factor of 1.2. Since ANOVA is robust to differences of this size, and violations of the assumption lead to increase of Type II error, the decision was made to proceed with the analysis using ANOVA. Data was checked for the assumption of normality of the residuals, and the results showed that the assumption was met (Skewness and kurtosis were within -.5 and +.5). Participants in the Swedish sample score significantly higher on system justification than participants in the United States. Race does not have a significant effect on system justification,  $F(1, 1961) = 1.46, p = .23, \eta^2 = .001$ .

**Table 4**

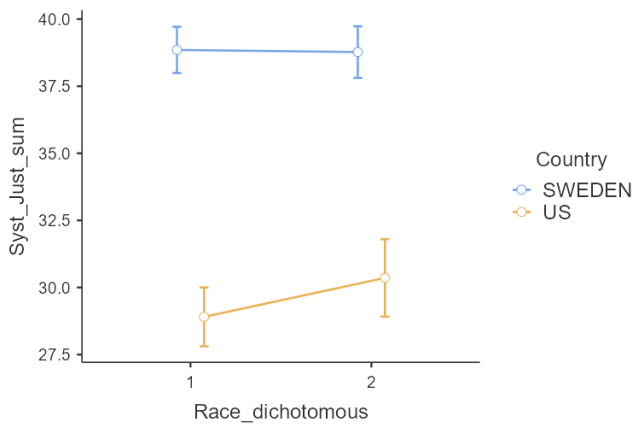
*Two-way Analysis of Variance in System Justification*

|                            | <b>Sum of Squares</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>Mean Square</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>p</b> | <b><math>\eta^2</math></b> |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|----------|----------------------------|
| Racial dichotomy           | 200                   | 1         | 200                | 1.46     | 0.227    | 0.001                      |
| Country                    | 35824                 | 1         | 35824              | 261.42   | < .001   | 0.117                      |
| Country * Racial dichotomy | 249                   | 1         | 249                | 1.82     | 0.178    | 0.001                      |
| Residuals                  | 268733                | 1961      | 137                |          |          |                            |

Results revealed that there is not a significant interaction effect between race and country on system justification,  $F(1, 1961) = 1.82, p = .18, \eta^2 = .001$ . In the United States, though insignificant, whites scored slightly lower on system justification ( $M = 28.9, SD = 13.1$ ) than non-whites ( $M = 30.4, SD = 11.8$ ). Figure 2 demonstrates this difference. These results do not support Hypothesis 2.

**Figure 2**

*System Justification by Racial Dichotomy and Country*



Note. ‘System Justification’ scores by racial dichotomy and country, where ‘white’ is indicated by 1 and ‘non-white’ is indicated by 2.

*Hypothesis 3.* A two-way ANOVA was conducted to test the effects of race and country with the extent in which people feel represented by the nationalities, ‘Swedish’ and ‘American’. Results showed there was a significant effect of race, and the extent people consider themselves American or Swedish,  $F(1, 2267) = 434.01, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$ . The effect size for race is large. There is a significant effect of country on the extent of American/Swedish describes their identity,  $F(1, 2267) = 5.14, p = .023, \eta^2 = .002$ . The effect size, however, is small. Levene’s test was used for equality of variances,  $F(3, 2267) = 58.7, p < .001$ . Given the large sample sizes, the result from the Levene’s test was followed up by looking at the within group estimations of population variance in all four groups. The results indicated that the largest and the smallest estimation differed only by a factor of 1.5. Since ANOVA is robust to differences of this size, and violations of the assumption lead to increase of Type II error, the decision was made to proceed with the analysis using ANOVA. Data was checked for the assumption of normality of the residuals, and the results showed that the assumption was met (Skewness and kurtosis were between -.5 and +.5). Whites claim nationality ( $M = 8.38, SD = 2.53$ ) to a significantly higher extent than do non-whites ( $M = 5.55, SD = 3.36$ ). There was also a significant interaction between country and race on representation by nationality,  $F(1, 2267) = 8.04, p = .005, \eta^2 = .003$  (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

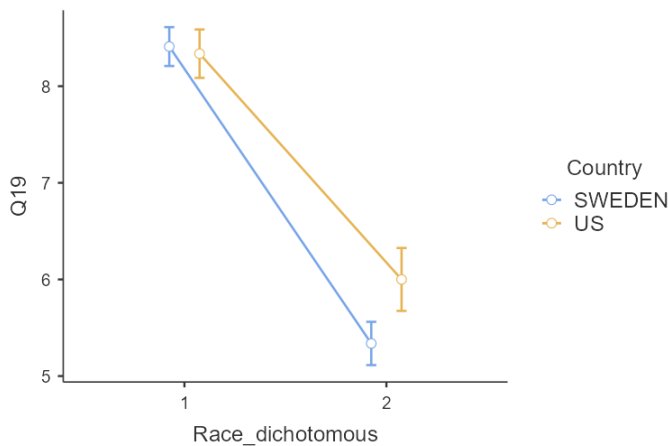
*Two-way Analysis of Variance in the Swedish and American Identity*

|                            | <b>Sum of Squares</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>Mean Square</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>p</b> | <b>η<sup>2</sup></b> |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|----------|----------------------|
| Country                    | 43.4                  | 1         | 43.36              | 5.14     | 0.023    | 0.002                |
| Racial dichotomy           | 3658.9                | 1         | 3658.93            | 434.01   | < .001   | 0.160                |
| Country * Racial dichotomy | 67.8                  | 1         | 67.77              | 8.04     | 0.005    | 0.003                |
| Residuals                  | 19111.9               | 2267      | 8.43               |          |          |                      |

In Sweden, whites ( $M = 8.41, SD = 2.61$ ) identified significantly more with Swedish identity than non-whites ( $M = 5.34, SD = 3.18$ ). In the United States, whites ( $M = 8.34, SD = 2.40$ ) identified significantly more with American identity than non-whites in the United States ( $M = 6.00, SD = 3.68$ ). Figure 3 demonstrates this effect. Non-whites in the United States identified with the national identity slightly more than non-whites in Sweden.

**Figure 3**

*Swedish and American Identity by Race and Country*



Note. The extent of which ‘Swedish’ and ‘American’ describes one’s identity by country and race, where 1 indicates ‘white’ and 2 indicates ‘non-white’. Q19 is ‘To what extent do you identify as American/Swedish?’

To ensure that the difference between the samples did not merely reflect a difference in how long the participants have lived in Sweden or the U.S., another analysis was conducted to examine only those who were born in the respective countries. A two-way ANOVA was done to test the effects of race and country on national identity on this new sample. Results showed that there was a significant effect of race on claim of nationality,  $F(1, 1681) = 157.1, p < .001, \eta^2 =$



.08 (see Table 6 for detailed ANOVA table). The effect size is medium. There was also a significant effect of country,  $F(1, 1681) = 16.3, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01$ , and an interaction effect of race and country  $F(1, 1681) = 33.4, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$ . Levene’s test was used to test the assumption of homogeneity of variance,  $F(3, 1681) = 19.4, p < .001$ . Given the large sample sizes, the result from the Levene’s test was followed up by looking at the within group estimations of population variance in all four groups. The results indicated that the largest and the smallest estimation differed only by a factor of 1.7. Since ANOVA is robust to differences of this size, and violations of the assumption lead to increase of Type II error, the decision was made to proceed with the analysis using ANOVA. Data was checked for the assumption of normality of the residuals, and the results showed that the assumption was met (Skewness and kurtosis were between -.5 and +.5). In Sweden, whites ( $M = 8.85, SD = 2.16$ ) identified significantly more with the national identity than non-whites ( $M = 6.57, SD = 2.78$ ). In the United States, whites ( $M = 8.63, SD = 1.92$ ) also identified more with the national identity than non-whites ( $M = 7.72, SD = 2.41$ ). The same pattern occurred, as demonstrated in Figure 4. Non-whites born in the United States identifies significantly higher with their national identity than non-whites born in Sweden. Based on these results, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

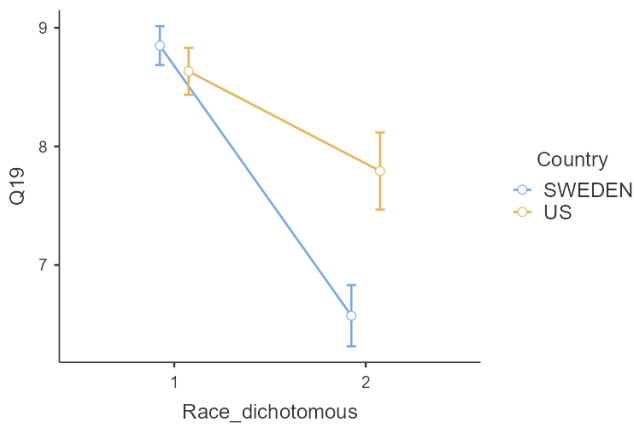
**Table 6**

*Two-way Analysis of Variance in Swedish and American Identity by Country of Birth*

|                          | <b>Sum of Squares</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>Mean Square</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>p</b> | <b><math>\eta^2</math></b> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|----------|----------------------------|
| Race dichotomy           | 788.3                 | 1         | 788.29             | 157.1    | < .001   | 0.083                      |
| Country                  | 81.6                  | 1         | 81.58              | 16.3     | < .001   | 0.009                      |
| Race dichotomy * Country | 167.4                 | 1         | 167.42             | 33.4     | < .001   | 0.018                      |
| Residuals                | 8433.4                | 1681      | 5.02               |          |          |                            |

**Figure 4**

*Swedish and American Identity by Country and Race (birthright)*



*Note.* The extent of which those who were born in Sweden/US identifying with the national identity, 1 is ‘white’ and 2 is ‘non-white’. Q19 is ‘To what extent do you identify as American/Swedish?’.

*Hypothesis 4.* A two-way ANOVA was conducted to test the main effects of race and country, as well as their interaction effects, in colorblind racism. Results show that there is a significant effect of country on colorblind racism,  $F(1, 1932) = 139.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$ , suggesting a large effect size. Levene’s homogeneity of variances test was used,  $F(3, 1932) = 21, p < .001$ . Given the large sample sizes, the result from the Levene’s test was followed up by looking at the within group estimations of population variance in all four groups. The results indicated that the largest and the smallest estimation differed only by a factor of 1.5. Since ANOVA is robust to differences of this size, and violations of the assumption lead to increase of Type II error, the decision was made to proceed with the analysis using ANOVA. Data was checked for the assumption of normality of the residuals, and the results showed that the assumption was met (Skewness and kurtosis were between  $-.5$  and  $+.5$ ). Sweden ( $M = 58.3, SD = 17.5$ ) scored significantly higher on colorblind racism than the United States ( $M = 47.2, SD = 21.5$ ). Figure 5 demonstrates this effect. Race did not have a significant effect on colorblind racism and there was not a significant interaction effect, indicating there was no combined effect for race and country on colorblindness. The ANOVA table can be found in Table 7. These results only partially support Hypothesis 4 because a main effect of race was not found.

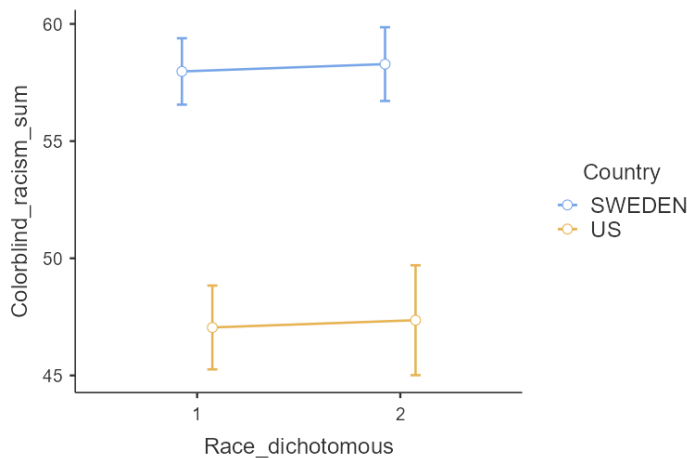
**Table 7**

*Two-way Analysis of Variance in Colorblindness by Country and Race*

|                  | <b>Sum of Squares</b> | <i>df</i> | <b>Mean Square</b> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | $\eta^2$ |
|------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Country          | 50210.74690           | 1         | 50210.74690        | 139.321  | < .001   | 0.067    |
| Racial dichotomy | 40.66017              | 1         | 40.66017           | 0.113    | 0.737    | 0.000    |
| Country *        | 0.00219               | 1         | 0.00219            | 6.08e-6  | 0.998    | 0.000    |
| Residuals        | 696284.60195          | 1932      | 360.39576          |          |          |          |

**Figure 5**

*Colorblind Racism by Race and Country*

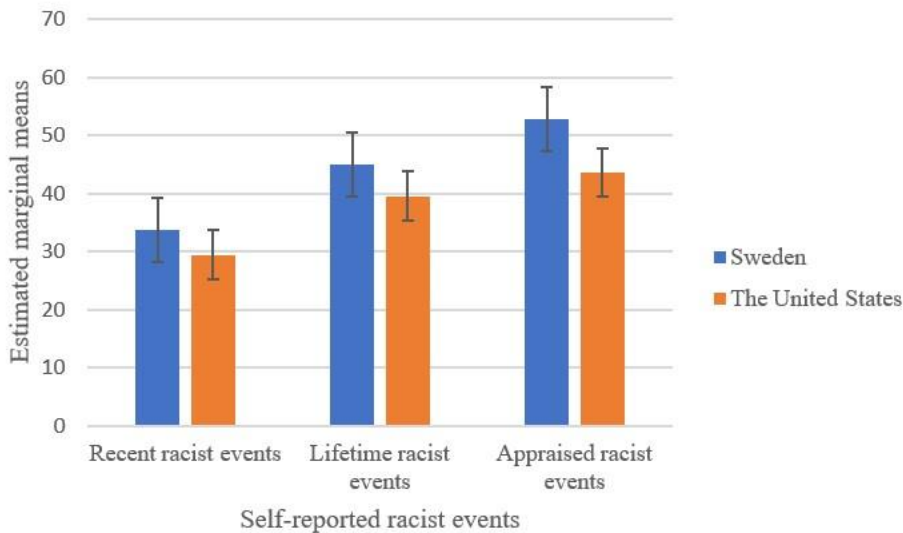


Note. The scores of colorblind racism by race (white and non-white) and country, where 1 indicates ‘white’ and 2 indicates ‘non-white’.

*Hypothesis 5.* To explore the differences in racist experiences of non-whites in Sweden and the United States, the subscales of the Schedule of Racist Events (‘Recent racist events’, ‘Lifetime racist events’, and ‘Appraised racist events’) are scored in each respective sample separately before comparison. Landrine & Klonoff’s (1996) original scale is scored by summing the items across for the ‘Lifetime racist event’ factor (Greer, 2011; Greer, et al., 2012). In the current study, the sum is calculated for each subscale and one-sample t-tests were conducted to assess the means. An independent samples t-test was also conducted to see whether the means differ between Sweden and the United States (see Table 8). Statistically significant differences

were found among recent, lifetime, and appraised racist events with moderate effect sizes. Levene’s test of homogeneity of variances suggested equal variances cannot be assumed. Non-whites in Sweden reported on average higher on all subscales, recent racist events, ( $M = 33.7, SD = 18.5$ ),  $t(590) = 44.3, p < .001$ , lifetime racist events, ( $M = 45.0, SD = 20.6$ ),  $t(582) = 52.7, p < .001$ , and appraised racist event, ( $M = 52.8, SD = 26.7$ ),  $t(574) = 47.5, p < .001$ , than those in the United States (Figure 6 demonstrates this). In the United States, recent racist events, ( $M = 29.4, SD = 15.1$ )  $t(221) = 29.0, p < .001$ , lifetime racist events, ( $M = 39.5, SD = 18.3$ ),  $t(219) = 32.1, p < .001$ , and appraised racist events ( $M = 43.6, SD = 22$ ),  $t(215) = 29.1, p < .001$ , were lower. The sample size was significantly lower in the US ( $n = 221$ ) than in Sweden ( $n = 590$ ).

**Figure 6**  
*Estimated Marginal Means for Self-reported Racist Events*



*Note.* ‘Recent racist events’ represent racist events in the past year, where error bars signify 95% confidence interval. ‘Appraised racist events’ indicate the amount of stress experienced by the respondent as a result of the racist event.

**Table 8**

*Independent Samples T-Test of the Sums of Recent, Lifetime, and Appraised Racist Events*

|                         |                    | <b>Statistic</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>p</b> | <b>Mean difference</b> | <b>SE difference</b> |                  | <b>Effect Size</b> |
|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------|----------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Recent Racist events    | Student's <i>t</i> | 3.47             | 477.77    | 0.002    | 4.68                   | 1.35                 | Cohen's <i>d</i> | 0.243              |
| Lifetime Racist events  | Student's <i>t</i> | 3.35             | 438.39    | < .001   | 5.68                   | 1.60                 | Cohen's <i>d</i> | 0.273              |
| Appraised Racist events | Student's <i>t</i> | 4.97             | 465.58    | < .001   | 9.26                   | 1.86                 | Cohen's <i>d</i> | 0.363              |

*Note.*  $H_a \mu_{\text{SWEDEN}} \neq \mu_{\text{US}}$ . Equal variances are not assumed.

The second portion of the hypothesis evaluates white privilege. An independent samples t-test was performed to compare white privilege between Sweden and the United States. A statistically significant difference was found among the two countries on white privilege,  $t(1059) = -6.68, p < .001$ . Levene's test of homogeneity of variance revealed equal variances cannot be assumed,  $F(1, 1059) = 7.50, p = .006$ . Results indicated that the lower group, Sweden, ( $M = 16.6, SD = 6.05$ ), and the higher group, the United States, ( $M = 19.1, SD = 5.64$ ), differed significantly in white privilege with a moderate effect size, Cohen's  $d = -0.42$  (see Table 9 for the detailed t-test). Figure 7 helps visualize this difference.

**Table 9**

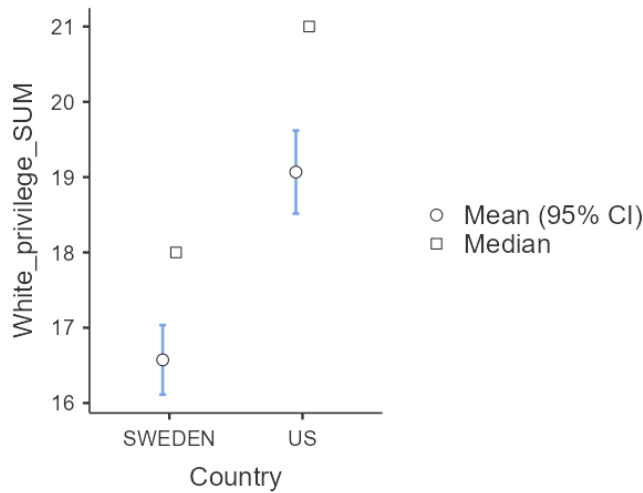
*Independent Samples T-Test of the Sum of White Privilege*

|                 |                    | <b>Statistic</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>p</b> | <b>Mean difference</b> | <b>SE difference</b> |                  | <b>Effect Size</b> |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------|----------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| White Privilege | Student's <i>t</i> | -6.79            | 892.49    | < .001   | -2.49                  | 0.37                 | Cohen's <i>d</i> | -0.423             |

*Note.*  $H_a \mu_{\text{SWEDEN}} \neq \mu_{\text{US}}$ . Equal variances are not assumed.

**Figure 7**

*White Privilege by Country*



*Note.* Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

**Discussion**

Based on these results, it is evident that matters around race, especially discrimination, system justification, colorblind racism, racial consciousness, and identity between Sweden and the United States, in terms of experiences and self-reporting, are generally different, though some aspects are similar. It is important to point out that the current study had a sample that consisted mostly of university students, so the results may vary should the study be adults in general. The output of university students tends to point in a more progressive direction (Woessner & Kelly-Woessner, 2020).

Unsurprisingly, non-whites are more racially conscious and identify with their ethnic or racial identity compared to whites. In the United States and Sweden, whites typically don't have to worry about their skin color, and it may not be an important aspect of who they identify as. For non-whites, they are aware it is the first thing people notice and they may be treated a certain way because of it. In the United States, for example, Black Americans must be racially conscious because of police killings of their unarmed counterparts, and Asian Americans faced a lot of anxiety from hate crimes as a result of having been scapegoated for COVID-19 (Cole, 2020; Tessler, et al., 2020). In Sweden, as a predominantly homogeneously white country, there are visible differences between whites and non-whites, where non-whites receive questions or claims

regarding their ethnic background more so than whites. These results suggest that the experiences of whites and non-whites emphasize different levels of racial consciousness, as a result of societal challenges some minorities face.

As far as system justification, it was predicted that non-whites are generally more likely to find society to be unfair compared to whites and structural changes need to be made for it to reflect equality for all groups. A significant difference emerged between the two nations in terms of this hypothesis. In Sweden, both whites and non-whites scored higher than the United States on system justification. There was not a significant difference between whites and non-whites in system justification levels in Sweden. Motivations and rationales for system justification differences vary, a possible explanation is people in Sweden are generally satisfied with the egalitarian system and are in favor of preserving the welfare state. Another reason is that some items on the system justification scale don't measure what it is supposed to measure, e.g., measuring national attachment instead of system justification (Owuamalam, et al., 2019). Another critique is the scale cannot accurately conduct a cross-country comparison on system justification because the construct mean values in the countries cannot be compared (Vesper, et al., 2022). It should also be noted that the 'system justification' subscale is very general, and does not focus on racial or gender issues, but just society in general. Results indicated in the United States, whites are slightly more inclined to oppose system justification than non-whites. One possible explanation is the sample consisted of many progressive and left-leaning respondents demanding structural change. Another possible justification is that the sample did consist of right-wingers, who are just as likely as left-wingers to demand social change, but for different reasons. For example, right-wingers could oppose the status quo by strongly suggesting restricting immigration (Liekfett & Becker, 2022). These types of changes that focus on increasing advantages for the privileged groups are known as reactionary social changes, and they are more likely to be promoted by right-wing individuals (Becker, 2020). The sampling issue is another possibility. The sample was likely biased and non-representative of university students of both nations. Non-white groups were clustered together because each individual racial or ethnic group was too small for comparison or render any meaningful statistical analyses.

Ethnic backgrounds aside, many groups also feel closely represented by their nationality. It is a fair assessment, as culture and norms are a large part of one's identity (Wan, et al., 2007).

Many people also consider affiliation to where they were born, grew up, and education as part of their claim to identity (Hua & Wei, 2016). Unsurprisingly, no significant differences emerged in the extent to which whites in Sweden and the United States identify as ‘Swedish’ and ‘American’. In both countries, they identified very highly with these nationalities. Non-whites, on the other hand, identified significantly less than their white counterparts. Further, non-whites in the United States identified more closely as American than did non-whites in Sweden, suggesting that the American identity in the United States applies to many, regardless of ethnicity. These results can imply that American is an identity readily adopted by association. Recent immigrants aside, many Americans are descended from multiple ethnic, racial, and geographic origins and native-born citizens adopt Americanized identities such as ‘Asian American’ or ‘Hispanic’ (Perez & Hirschman, 2009). It allows them to identify with their national and ethnic origin. Though acculturation is also encouraged in Sweden, many youths of migrant backgrounds label themselves *invandrare* (immigrant) despite being born and raised in Sweden due to racialized judgment (Behtoui, 2021), further suggesting that identifying as Swedish is associated with being white.

With racial colorblindness being widespread in so many aspects of Sweden, it may come as no surprise that it was prevalent in the findings of this study. Sweden scored significantly higher on colorblind racism compared to the United States. The high scores may indicate that many in Sweden are blind to the extent of racialized inequalities in Sweden. It could also suggest that they do not believe, or experienced, Sweden as a society characterized by racial inequalities. There was no difference between the racial groups in this belief, indicating that colorblind racism doesn’t just exist within whites, but it can be a propagated ideology, leading to one country exhibiting more of it than others (Burke, 2017).

The study found that the level of racial discrimination was higher in Sweden than in the United States. The results of the self-reported questionnaire showed non-whites in Sweden experienced higher levels of some type of racism in the past year, lifetime, and appraised stress levels as a result from the racist event compared to the United States. In the United States, only 16.8% identified as Asian or Pacific Islander, 6.6% as Hispanic/Latino, 4.1% as Black/African American, and other minority groups constituted an even smaller portion of the final sample. Similarly, the highest percentages of non-white groups in the Swedish sample were 9.2% Middle



Eastern/North African, 6.5% Latin American, and 4.9% Black. A higher number of minority groups in both samples could have yielded different results in the possibility that non-white groups experience different levels of discrimination, or that one group experiences higher discrimination in one country, but lower in the other. In the current sample, both samples indicated high levels of stress as a result of a racist event, suggesting that wellbeing is affected when they are confronted with racism in their daily lives. In the United States, a large portion of the sample came from Wisconsin, a historically blue Midwestern state. It is likely that increased responses from the East and West coasts as well as red states from the South would have produced more representative results. Previous literature has detected higher levels of racial discrimination (Greer, 2011; Greer, et al., 2012; Landrine, & Klonoff, 1996). The Schedule of Racist Events (SRE) has ordinarily measured the frequency of racist events experienced by Black Americans, contrary to the current study, which measured the experiences of all non-white groups. Middle Easterners/North Africans have been the largest groups of immigrants in Sweden for the past 20 years (Behtoui, 2021). Because this group was larger than the proportion of Black Americans in the United States sample, it may explain the higher reported racist events. Asian Americans, which constituted 16.8%, for example, may not experience the same type of racist events indicated in the SRE.

White privilege was found to be significantly higher in the United States than in Sweden. This can be attributed by the fact that white privilege is much more talked about in the United States than Sweden. White privilege is usually associated with colorblind racism, in that to acknowledge that one's race is privileged also goes hand in hand with acknowledging colorblind racism exists. Although this was not investigated in the current study, future studies should explore whether there is a correlation between these two factors. The current study found that Sweden, which scores highest on colorblind racism and lowest on awareness of white privilege, *also* scores highest on experiences on racial discrimination. Colorblind ideology has been found to foster negative outcomes even when race-neutral language is used (Plaut, et al., 2018). Interestingly, this also applies to non-whites in Sweden; they score high on colorblind racism, but also report higher experiences of racial discrimination than the United States.

### *Limitations*

Generalizability is one of the major limitations of the current study. Obtaining a representative sample when it comes to cross-sectional studies under a limited period of time is usually difficult. With more time, future research should include large enough samples to conduct between-group comparisons in both countries. Even though the large enough sample overall contributed to high internal validity, reaching higher respondents in each state would improve generalizability. Recruitment through online outreach may not always reflect the desired population that is being studied. The study specifically sought currently enrolled students; however, it did not prevent participants who were currently employed from taking the survey. A probable explanation for the differences that have been found between the two countries is sampling effects, i.e., more racially aware, and progressive participants supporting social change participated from the United States. There was also a lack of control of who could take the survey. Survey fatigue is another possible limitation. This was reflected in the number of incomplete surveys.

### **Conclusion**

With the different histories of race and its historical background, identity and ethnic relations have been shaped very differently in Sweden and the United States. Sweden's relatively recent history of immigration and its colorblind ideology suggest it doesn't have a firm grasp on racial dynamics. The United States, as a nation built on immigration, and race as something embedded in many aspects of society, still has a long way to go to solve its racial issues. The current study found increased self-reported prevalence of racist events in a country where colorblind racism and low white privilege are dominant. These findings suggest that the roles of these factors are associated with discrimination and understanding them helps recognize factors that are linked to this type of prejudice. Interventions are needed to address racial inequalities and challenging colorblind ideologies is a good start. Recognizing privileges, one's own biases, and validating the experiences of minorities are other important ways to promote equality.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A:

1. Identity (nationality)
  - a. To what extent do you identify as American?
  - b. To what extent would you say Americans have a lot in common with each other?
  - c. To what extent do you feel Americans in this country have a lot to be proud of?
2. Identity (racial/ethnic background) – *only pertains to non-white respondents.*
  - a. To what extent do you identify as [*racial/ethnic background*]?
  - b. To what extent would you say [*racial/ethnic background*] have a lot in common with each other?
  - c. To what extent do you feel [*racial/ethnic background*] have a lot to be proud of?

### Appendix B:

White Privilege – *only pertains to white respondents.*

- i. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the statement below (1 – *Strongly disagree*, 5 – *Strongly agree*):
  1. White people have certain advantages that minorities with regards to ethnicity/skin color do not have in American society.
  2. The fact that I am White gives me certain privileges in American society that I have not really earned.
  3. My experience is that being perceived as White opens many doors in everyday life for White people in the United States.
  4. I do not believe that White people in the United States have any advantages or privileges due to their ethnicity/race. (*reverse scored*)
  5. My race is an asset to me in everyday life.

### Appendix C:

System Justification

- i. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements about American society (1 – *Strongly disagree*, 9 – *Strongly agree*):

1. In general, you find society to be fair.
2. In general, the American political system operates as it should.
3. American society needs to be radically restructured. (*reverse scored*)
4. The United States is the best country in the world to live in.
5. Most policies serve the greater good.
6. Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness.
7. Our society is getting worse every year. (*reverse scored*)
8. Society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve.

*Appendix D:*

Colorblindness

- i. Below are a number of statements about conditions in American society. As honestly as you can, indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement. Be as open and honest as you can, as there are no right or wrong answers (1 – *Strongly disagree*, 6 – *Strongly agree*).
  1. Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich. (*reverse scored*)
  2. Race plays a major role in the type of social services (such as type of health care or day care) that people receive in the U.S.
  3. It is important that people begin to think of themselves as American and not African American, Mexican American, or Italian American. (*reverse scored*)
  4. Due to racial discrimination, programs such as affirmative action are necessary to help create equality.
  5. Racism is a major problem in the U.S.
  6. Race is very important in determining who is successful and who is not.
  7. Racism may have been a problem in the past, it is not an important problem today. (*reverse scored*)
  8. Racial and ethnic minorities do not have the same opportunities as white people in the U.S.
  9. White people in the U.S. are discriminated against because of the color of their skin. (*reverse scored*)

10. Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension. (*reverse scored*)
11. It is important for political leaders to talk about racism to help work through or solve society's problems.
12. White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.
13. Immigrants should try to fit into the culture and values of the U.S. (*reverse scored*)
14. English should be the only official language in the U.S. (*reverse scored*)
15. White people are more to blame for racial discrimination than racial and ethnic minorities.
16. Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against white people. (*reverse scored*)
17. It is important for public schools to teach about the history and contributions of racial and ethnic minorities.
18. Racial and ethnic minorities in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin. (*reverse scored*)
19. Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations. (*reverse scored*)
20. Race plays an important role in who gets sent to prison.

*Appendix E:*

Schedule of Racist Events (SRE) – *only pertains to non-white respondents*

- i. We are interested in your experiences with racism. As you answer the questions below, please think about your ENTIRE LIFE, from when you were a child to the present. For each question, please circle the number that best captures the things that have happened to you. Answer each question TWICE, once for what has happened to you IN THE PAST YEAR, and once for WHAT YOUR ENTIRE LIFE HAS BEEN LIKE.

Use these numbers:

Circle 1 = If this has NEVER happened to you

Circle 2 = If this has happened ONCE IN A WHILE

Circle 3 = If this has happened SOMETIMES

Circle 4 = If this has happened A LOT

Circle 5 = If this has happened MOST OF THE TIME

Circle 6 = If this has happened ALMOST ALL OF THE TIME

1. How many times have you been treated unfairly by teachers and professors because of your race/ethnicity?
  - a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
2. How many times have you been treated unfairly by your employers, bosses, and supervisors, because of your race/ethnicity?
  - a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
3. How many times have you been treated unfairly by your coworkers, fellow students, and colleagues because of your race/ethnicity?
  - a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
4. How many times have you been treated unfairly by people in service jobs (store clerks, waiters, bartenders, bank tellers, and others) because of your race/ethnicity?
  - a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
5. How many times have you been treated unfairly by strangers because of your race/ethnicity?
  - a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)

6. How many times have you been treated unfairly by people in helping jobs (doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, case workers, dentists, school counselors, therapists, social workers, and others) because of your race/ethnicity?
  - a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
7. How many times have you been treated unfairly by neighbors because of your race/ethnicity?
  - a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
8. How many times have you been treated unfairly by institutions (schools, universities, law firms, the police, the courts, the Department of Social Services, the Unemployment Office, and others) because of your race/ethnicity?
  - a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
9. How many times have you been treated unfairly by people that you thought were your friends because of your race/ethnicity?
  - a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
10. How many times have you been accused or suspected of doing something wrong (such as stealing, cheating, not doing your share of the work, or breaking the law) because of your race/ethnicity?
  - a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
11. How many times have people misunderstood your intentions and motives because of your race/ethnicity?
  - a. How many times in the past year?



- b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
12. How many times did you want to tell someone off for being racist, but didn't say anything?
- a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
13. How many times have you been really angry about something racist that was done to you?
- a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
14. How many times were you forced to take drastic steps (such as filing a grievance, lawsuit, quitting your job, moving away, or other actions) to deal with some racist thing that was done to you?
- a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
15. How many times have you been called a racist name?
- a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
16. How many times have you gotten into an argument or a fight about something racist that was done to you or done to somebody else?
- a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?
  - c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)
17. How many times have you been made fun of, picked on, pushed, shoved, hit, or threatened with harm because of your race/ethnicity?
- a. How many times in the past year?
  - b. How many times in your entire life?

c. How stressful was this for you? (1 – *Not at all*, 6 – *Extremely*)

18. How different would your life be now HAD YOU NOT BEEN treated in a racist and unfair way? (1 – *Same as now*, 6 – *Totally different*)

a. In the past year?

b. In your entire life?