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Colorblind Ideology and Inheritance Status Predicting Wealth Inequality and Poverty Perceptions in the United States

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Background

Wealth inequality is a drastic and pervasive problem in the United States that is incredibly complex. The long-standing teachings of the American dream and that one must work hard to succeed can lead to thinking that individuals in poverty are responsible for their situations and made direct choices that led to their state of poverty (Gonzalez et al., 2022; Hoyt et al., 2021). This can decrease the public interest in helping those in poverty because of the attribution of blame onto people in lower wealth classes (Hall et al., 2014). Believing that success is easily obtained no matter what demographics you were born into can impact how people believe wealth inequality should be treated and handled (Lichter et al., 2002). There are many factors that contribute to wealth inequality and the perpetuation of it, and it is important to study how people justify and attribute the cause of wealth inequality.

The wealth gap between white families and racial minorities is significant in the United States. A statistical analysis of wealth inequality in the US found that even though the amount of wealth in individual households overall is growing, the growth rate varies based on race and ethnicity, along with other factors such as age and education. (Kent & Ricketts, 2024) In this analysis of finance data from 2022, White families owned 85% of total household wealth but comprised only 66% of households. Black families in turn owned only 2% of household wealth and encompassed 11% of households. This stark inequality can be better visualized through the fact that in 2022, Black families' median wealth was 16 cents for every dollar of White families’ median wealth. This gap comes from historical redlining of wealth and systemic racism of minority families that has not been correctly addressed today. It is incredibly difficult for families to overcome these gaps starting from a low socioeconomic status. Similar statistics apply to Hispanic families, with their wealth being 21 cents per 1 dollar of White family median
wealth. This same wealth gap is seen in the transmission of wealth through inheritance between varying races and ethnicities. There are estimates that around 42.9% of white people will receive a considerable inheritance in their lifetimes while only 16.7% of black people will (Strand et al., 2010). This is a considerable difference that has large implications for the state of wealth inequality in our country.

In previous research, it has been seen that colorblind ideology can function as a predictor for inequality-related beliefs and policies. In one study it was seen that higher colorblind racial ideology scores are correlated with lower support for redistributing resources to improve predominantly black schools (Sperling & Kuhn, 2016). Research has shown that white Americans tend to underestimate the racial wealth gap and that higher colorblind racial ideology is correlated with a greater underestimation of the racial wealth gap (Cortesi, 2023). That same study also found that the smaller the racial wealth gap is perceived, the less support individuals have for government policies that address the wealth gap. In government policies, it has been observed that colorblind thinking can negatively predict support for diversity, equity, and inclusion policies in a workspace (Leslie et al., 2020), and distributing funds towards those programs. This relationship is also seen in affirmative action policies and equitable employment opportunities (Awad et al., 2005). Colorblind racial ideology appears to be linked with wealth inequality and the perpetuation of the racial wealth gap.

**Introduction**

This article aims to focus on how colorblind racial ideology and inheritance status can predict the attribution of poverty to structural or individual causes, support for economic equality, and belief in the redistribution of wealth in the United States. Colorblind racial ideology is defined as race neutrality and the assumption that success and failure at the individual level is
due to personal strengths/choices and not due to racial inequality. This kind of thinking ignores the hundreds of years of structural racism and thinking that built the United States, and assumes that racism is a thing of the past, not impacting current economic and social standings (Collins & Walsh, 2024). The article will detail a study observing the relationship between colorblind racial attitudes and these wealth inequality relevant beliefs. How does colorblind racial ideology predict an individual's attributions for the cause of poverty, support for economic inequality, and support for wealth redistribution? Hypothesis one (H1) was that colorblind racial ideology would have a positive correlation with support for wealth inequality. This means that individuals who support colorblind racial attitudes will have an increased likelihood of also supporting the current state of economic inequality. Hypothesis two (H2) was that colorblind ideology will also have a positive correlation with individual poverty attributions, meaning that people who are colorblind are more likely to attribute poverty as an individual’s fault or actions directly leading to their financial state. On the other hand, it was hypothesized that colorblind ideology will have a negative correlation with structural poverty attributions (H3), meaning that people who have higher levels of colorblind ideology will be less likely to attribute poverty to a governmental or structural cause. This negative correlation was also hypothesized to be seen in colorblind ideology as a predictor for wealth redistribution (H4), as it is predicted that participants who use colorblind ideology will be less likely to support wealth redistribution from the government to lower SES communities.

It was also of interest to understand if an individual’s receival of inheritance or family wealth impacted the way they attribute poverty. It is known that higher socioeconomic status is associated with a higher quality of life for individuals (Nutakor et al., 2023). Wealth also tends to stay in families, as those with financial assets can pass those assets down to their offspring. The
likelihood of a person receiving inheritance is impacted by their race and ethnicity (Strand et al., 2010). People of color are much less likely to receive an inheritance or be of a higher socioeconomic status. The passage of generational wealth through inheritance is a major perpetuator of racial wealth inequality in the United States because of this. What is not as well studied is whether this receipt of inheritance impacts how people view poverty and wealth inequality. Does receiving an inheritance make an individual more likely to attribute poverty as an individual problem and not a complex multifaceted structural issue? It is hypothesized (H5) that people who have received an inheritance will be less likely to attribute the cause of poverty to structural inequality, and more likely to attribute it to individuals who made choices/took direct actions to become poor. It was also hypothesized (H6) that the receipt of inheritance would increase support for wealth inequality and decrease support for wealth redistribution. Lastly, it was hypothesized (H7) that inheritance status and colorblind ideology would be correlated, with those receiving an inheritance scoring higher on the colorblind racial ideology scale. This was done to compare the two predictor variables and see if there was a relationship between them.

**Methods**

The study used for this analysis was done on 300 participants (n=300). 73% of participants (n=220) identified as European American or White. 8% of participants (n=24) identified as African American or Black, 6% of participants (n=19) identified as Latino/Hispanic, 2% identified as another racial/ethnic identity, 1% identified as Asian or Asian American (n=3) and 8% of participants (n=25) identified as one or more racial/ethnic identities. Two participants identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, one identified as Native American/Alaskan Native, and one participant selected to not answer.
67% of participants (n = 202) identified as Female, and 33% of participants (n = 98) identified as Male. 15% (n = 45) of participants reported a household income of $150k or more per year, 18% (n = 53) of participants reported $100-149k per year, 36% (n = 107) of participants reported $50-99k per year, 31% (n = 94) of participants reported $49k or less per year, and one participant preferred not to answer. It is known that our participants' demographics are large contributors to the results found in this study.

The data used for this study was collected from Prolific, a survey site. The data was initially collected to understand how parents talk to their children about wealth and racial inequality in the United States. This analysis does not include results for discussions on wealth inequality with children but is a further analysis to understand how colorblind ideology and inheritance can function as a predictor for various aspects of wealth inequality, things we know are closely connected.

Likert scales assessing cognitive support/objection for these measures were given to study participants to gauge their beliefs around these issues. The Likert scales used in this study were reputable scales that have been evaluated for accuracy in gauging individuals' beliefs around wealth inequality, redistribution, poverty, and colorblind racial ideology. By using these scales, each participant’s general attitudes around each of these concepts were collected. Below is a guide to each scale, with the measurements and values used for analysis of each measurement. All scales were Likert-type response categories with disagreement and agreement being measured and coded quantitatively.

**Colorblind Racial Attitudes Scale**

The Colorblind racial attitudes scale was developed to evaluate participants' color-blind attitudes and the cognitive basis of this ideology (Neville et al., 2000). This scale used previous
work that defined aspects of color-blind racial attitudes to analyze unawareness of racial
privilege, institutional discrimination, and blatant racial issues. This scale is measured from 1 to
6, with 1 being strongly disagree and 6 being strongly agree (1=strongly disagree, 6=strongly
agree). See the Appendix for statements that participants were given for analysis using this scale.

**Support for Economic Inequality Scale**

The Support for Economic Inequality Scale or SEIS is a scale used to measure attitudes
of individuals towards economic inequality (Wiwad et al., 2019). It gauges individual levels of
support or opposition towards the current state of economic inequality in the United States. In
this scale which is intended to measure a spectrum of support for inequality, someone may
believe in complete inequality which is represented by wealth being held in one person’s control,
moderate inequality where some people are wealthy and some are poor, and no inequality where
no one has more wealth than another person. This is measured on a 7-point scale, with 1 being
strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). The
Asterisk next to some of the statements represents variables that were reverse-coded so that in
the dataset a larger number would represent stronger support for economic inequality (Wiwad et
al., 2019).

- Economic inequality is causing many of the world’s problems. *
- I am very disturbed by the amount of economic inequality in the world today. *
- We need to do everything possible to reduce economic inequality in the world today. *
- The negative consequences of inequality have been largely exaggerated.
- Economic inequality is not a problem.
The **Support for Redistribution of Wealth** scale is used to assess support for the redistribution of wealth to poor communities and the government guaranteeing quality of life for individuals. (Horowitz et al., 2020). This is measured on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 being nothing at all and 4 being a lot (1=Nothing at all, 4=A lot). Higher scores indicated greater support for government policies supporting the redistribution of wealth. No reverse coding was needed for this variable, as all questions already indicated a higher level of support with a higher number given.

- How much, if anything, should the government do to reduce poverty?
- How much, if anything, should the government do to reduce the gap between the rich and everyone else?
- How much do you think government policies and programs can do to reduce poverty in this country?
- How much do you think government policies and programs can do to reduce the gap between the rich and everyone else in this country?

**Poverty Attributions measurement**

The Poverty Attributions measurement is a 30-statement questionnaire gauging how individuals perceive people in poverty and what is most commonly the cause of poverty. (Nickols & Nielsen, 2011). The scale is divided into subscales for individual, structural, and factual poverty attributions about the causes/conditions of poverty. In this, participants can attribute poverty to structural causes that are out of individual control, or individual causes such as the choices/lifestyles of people in poverty. It is measured on a scale of 1 through 5 with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). See the Appendix for all statements participants were asked to assess their poverty attribution.
Inheritance Status Question

To gauge whether participants had received an inheritance or expected to, the following question was asked, and responses were recorded in the dataset.

Have you inherited financial resources from your parents, or do you anticipate an inheritance?

- Yes
- No

All 300 participants answered these survey measures in Prolific. The data was then uploaded into R-studio with each participant's response coded as the quantitative number corresponding with their answer. The appropriate statements as indicated above or in the Appendix were then reverse coded, so that in every measure a low number represented low support for that measure, while a high number would represent strong support. For inheritance status, participants who expected/had received an inheritance were separated from participants who did not. To assess participants' support for all of these measures in a single variable, composite scores were made using each Likert scale for each participant. Composite scores were assessed by adding up the value for each statement under a single measure and dividing this number by the total number of statements. This composite score is a numerical representation of the overall support of the individual for that given variable (economic inequality, colorblind racial attitudes, wealth redistribution, individual poverty attribution, and structural poverty attribution). Below is a table summarizing the statistics of these composite scores for each measure, and descriptive statistics proving that these data are normally distributed.
Table 1 Descriptive statistics for variables of interest.

For analysis of colorblind racial attitudes, linear regressions were run to see if colorblind ideology is a predictor for beliefs around wealth redistribution, support for wealth inequality, individual poverty attributions, and structural poverty attributions. Graphs of the data with a line of best fit were constructed, and statistical results are displayed below in a table. The dependent variables were centered and standardized before analysis.

For inheritance analysis, 2 level t-tests were used to analyze whether a participant's expectation to receive an inheritance predicted their attributions for poverty, support for wealth redistribution, support for economic inequality, and colorblind ideology. Out of 300 participants (n = 300), 74 participants expected to receive an inheritance while 222 did not. 4 participants did not answer. Statistical results of these t-tests are shown below in a table along with bar graphs to visualize the data and its significance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum value</th>
<th>Maximum value</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support for Inequality</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>n=300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Redistribution</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n=300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Attributions for Poverty</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>n=300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Attributions for Poverty</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>n=300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorblind Ideology</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>n=299</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Colorblind Ideology Predicting Wealth Inequality Beliefs

(H1) Results of the linear regression indicate that there is a significant effect between colorblind racial attitudes and support for economic inequality (p < 0.001, R² = 0.6073). There is a strong positive correlation between the variables.

![Figure 2](image.png)

*Figure 2* A linear regression of Colorblind Racial Attitudes as a predictor of Support for Economic Inequality.
(H2) Results of the linear regression indicate that there is a significant effect between colorblind racial attitudes and Individual Poverty Attributions (p < 0.001, R² = 0.3748). There is a moderate positive correlation between the variables.

Figure 3 A linear regression of Colorblind Racial Attitudes as a predictor for Individual Poverty Attributions.
(H3) Results of the linear regression indicate that there is a significant effect between colorblind racial attitudes and Structural Poverty Attributions ($p < 0.001$, $R^2 = -0.4426$). There is a moderate negative correlation between the variables.

![Figure 4 A linear regression of Colorblind Racial Attitudes as a predictor for Structural Poverty Attributions.](image-url)
Results of the linear regression indicate that there is a significant effect between colorblind racial attitudes and Support for Wealth Redistribution (p < 0.001, R2 = -0.3750). There is a moderate negative correlation between the variables.

Figure 5 A linear regression of Colorblind Racial Attitudes as a predictor of Support for Wealth Redistribution.
Table 2 Statistics of the linear regressions run between the predictor (colorblind ideology) and various outcome variables.

Through the linear regression analysis, correlations between colorblind racial ideology scores and wealth inequality beliefs were found. The predictor had statistically significant relationships with all the outcome variables. There was a positive correlation between colorblind racial attitudes and support for economic inequality as well as individual poverty attributions. There was a negative correlation between colorblind racial attitudes and support for wealth redistribution as well as structural poverty attributions. This was predicted by H1, H2, H3, and H4.
Inheritance Status Predicting Wealth Inequality Beliefs and Colorblind Racial Attitudes

(H5) Results of the two-level t-test indicate that there is a significant difference between Inheritance Status and Structural Poverty Attributions (p-value = 0.04151). There is also a significant difference between Inheritance Status and Individual Poverty Attributions (p-value = 0.01763).

*Figure 6* Bar graph of Inheritance Status vs mean Structural Poverty Attribution scores and mean Individual Poverty Attribution scores.
(H6) Results of the two-level t-test indicate that there is no significant difference between Inheritance Status and Wealth Redistribution Support ($p$-value = 0.5629). There is also no significant difference between Inheritance Status and Support for Economic inequality ($p$-value = 0.4014).

*Figure 7* Bar graph of Inheritance Status vs mean Wealth Redistribution Support Scores and mean Wealth Inequality Support scores.
(H7) Results of the two-level t-test indicate that there is no significant difference between Inheritance Status and Colorblind Racial Ideology (p-value = 0.8291).

Figure 8 A bar graph of Inheritance Status and Colorblind Racial Attitudes Score.
Table 3 Statistics of t-tests run between inheritance status and the mean of variables of interest.

In this analysis, it was observed that individuals who expect to receive an inheritance are less likely to attribute poverty to structural causes and more likely to attribute poverty to individual causes. Both relationships were statistically significant as predicted by the hypothesis (H5). Inheritance status was seen to have no association with an individual’s support for economic inequality (H6), support for wealth redistribution (H6), and colorblind racial ideology (H7). There was no difference in the mean value between groups seen depending on inheritance.

Discussion

Higher scores on the Colorblind Racial Ideology Scale predicted more support for economic inequality (H1), more individual attributions for poverty (H2), less support for wealth redistribution (H4), and fewer structural attributions for poverty (H3). These results were predicted by the hypotheses. Colorblind ideology was seen to be a significant predictor of individuals' wealth-relevant beliefs. Individuals who expected to receive an inheritance from their parents were less likely to attribute poverty to structural causes and more likely to attribute poverty to individualistic causes (H5). There was no significance in inheritance status predicting support for inequality (H6), colorblind ideology (H7), or wealth redistribution (H6).
These results could imply that having colorblind racial attitudes can lead to less empathy and drive to improve economic inequality, which is supported by other recent findings about privilege awareness and antiracist practices (Collins & Walsh, 2024). If white individuals do not consider racial diversity, they are less likely to be aware of their own privilege and actively participate in antiracist practices in their lives. The strongest relationship found was between colorblind racial ideology and support for economic inequality, meaning that individuals who do not believe race is a large contributor to success also tend to believe that economic inequality is not a problem.

This is logical as people who are colorblind may also be unaware of their privilege economically and believe that the current economic state does not need to change. Considering that white populations statistically hold more wealth than black populations in the United States, it makes sense that colorblind individuals would attribute poverty as something caused by individual choices, as they adopt the belief that all races have equal opportunities for success. If one does not believe that the way the country is structured impacts who holds wealth, then logically they would not care to redistribute wealth to those who are poor, as they believe that their poverty is their responsibility (Piff et al., 2020). Individual beliefs that everyone, no matter what race, has an equal chance of success in a country where that is not factually true, can lead to the persistence of the wealth gap due to individual attributes of poverty.

Inheritance status had no impact on wealth inequality and redistribution beliefs but instead impacted poverty attributions. Considering our study population was largely made up of individuals not expecting to receive an inheritance and individuals of a lower SES status, more research needs to be done. Future research could see if people in high socioeconomic classes who expect an inheritance have significantly different wealth inequality beliefs. Previous
research has shown that being of a higher socioeconomic class can decrease feelings of empathy and compassion for those who are struggling and can lead to a “If I can do it so can they,” mindset when it comes to poverty (Stellar et al., 2012; Koo et al., 2023). Knowing that white individuals and people in higher economic classes are more likely to receive an inheritance it is logical that those people are more likely to think everyone can succeed. These results imply it could be valuable to study this relationship further.

The effect of this study is limited due to population size. It is known that the demographics of this study population are a large contributor to the results. Future research on how different demographics are correlated to colorblind thinking and wealth inequality relevant beliefs would be beneficial. For example, studying how education level, sexual orientation, political status, race/ethnicity, gender, and age impact colorblind racial attitudes. The psychology of receiving an inheritance is a largely understudied area of psychology. Inheritance is a massive contributor to how wealth is distributed and transferred generationally (Strand et al., 2010), and knowing how wealth inequality beliefs differ in people who have inheritance is unbelievably valuable to psychology and sociology research.
References


Review, 89, 453-504.

Appendix

The statements for Likert assessment scales were used to assess participants’ beliefs for this study.

Colorblind Racial Attitudes Scale: The statements with an asterisk were reverse coded such that a higher number in all the statements represents a higher colorblind ideology (Neville et al., 2011). This was for ease of analysis using the data.

- Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich.
- 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. *
- It is important that people begin to think of themselves as American, and not African American, Mexican American, or Italian American.
- Due to racial discrimination, programs such as affirmative action are necessary to help create equality. *
- Racism is a major problem in the U.S. *
- Race is very important in determining who is successful and who is not. *
- Racism may have been a problem in the past, it is not an important problem today.
- Racial and ethnic minorities do not have the same opportunities as white people in the U.S. *
- White people in the U.S. are discriminated against because of the color of their skin.
- Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension.
• It is important for political leaders to talk about racism to work through or solve society’s problems. *
• White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin. *
• Immigrants should try to fit into the culture and values of the U.S.
• English should be the only official language in the U.S.
• White people are more to blame for racial discrimination than racial and ethnic minorities. *
• Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against white people.
• It is important for public schools to teach about the history and contributions of racial and ethnic minorities. *
• Racial and ethnic minorities in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.
• Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated incidents.
• Race plays an important role in who gets sent to prison. *

Poverty Attributions Measurement: There are 11 structural attribution statements, 17 individualistic poverty attribution statements, and 2 factual statements. The statements marked with an asterisk were reverse coded so that higher numbers indicate higher support for that poverty attribution. Statements marked with an A are structural attribution questions and those marked with a B are individualistic attributions. Statements marked with a C represent factual information (Nickols & Nielsen, 2011)

• People who are poor benefit from job training programs (A) *
• People who are poor would rather work than be on welfare (B) *
• People who are poor often have a substance abuse problem (B)
• Poor children are treated the same as other children in school (A)
• People are poor because of things that happen to them (A)*
• People who are poor have equal access to health care (A)
• Politicians care about people who are poor (A)
• Many people who are poor have a mental illness (A)
• People who are poor earn what they deserve (B)
• People who are poor attempt to get out of poverty (B)*
• People who are poor have a problem with learning (B)
• People who are poor are more likely to be children (C) *
• The business sector is concerned about people who are poor (A)
• People who are poor will fake illness rather than work (B)
• People who are poor are often ignored by everyone else (B) *
• The government provides enough free substance abuse programs for people who are poor
  (A)
• People who are poor save money (B) *
• Poor children have behaviour problems in school (B)
• The government does enough to help people who are poor (A)
• Many people who are poor lack social skills (B)
• People who are poor benefit from substance treatment programs (B) *
• People are poor because they dropped out of school (B)
• People who are poor are a drain on health care (A)
• People are poor because of the choices they make (B)
• People who are poor get out of poverty by selling drugs (B)
• People who are poor have the same opportunities to succeed as other Americans (B)
• Most people who are poor are adults (C)
• People who are poor spend their money on drugs or alcohol (B)
• People get out of poverty by succeeding in school (B)
• People who are poor do not work because they are lazy (B)