

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Priming Crime and Activating Blackness: Understanding the Psychological Impact of the Overrepresentation of Blacks as Lawbreakers on Television News

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Two experiments examined the extent to which U.S. viewers' perceptions that Blacks face structural limitations to success, support for the death penalty, and culpability judgments could be influenced by exposure to racialized crime news. Participants were exposed to a majority of Black suspects, a majority of White suspects, unidentified suspects, and noncrime news stories. In addition, participants' prior news viewing was assessed. In Study 1, heavy news viewers exposed to unidentified perpetrators were less likely than heavy news viewers exposed to noncrime stories to perceive that Blacks face structural limitations to success. In addition, heavy news viewers exposed to unidentified perpetrators were more likely than heavy news viewers exposed to noncrime stories to support the death penalty. In Study 2, participants exposed to a majority of Black suspects were more likely than participants exposed to noncrime stories to find a subsequent race-unidentified criminal culpable for his offense. In addition, heavy news viewers were more likely to exhibit the above effect than light news viewers. The methodological and theoretical implications of these findings are discussed in light of chronic activation and the priming paradigm.

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Prior investigations have concluded that local news programs in the United States often misrepresent Blacks as the primary perpetrators responsible for criminal activity (Dixon & Linz, 2000a; Entman, 1992, 1994; Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, & Wright, 1996; Romer, Jamieson, & de Coteau, 1998). For example, the study of local news by Dixon and Linz (2000a) found that Blacks were twice as likely as Whites to be portrayed as perpetrators, six times more likely to be portrayed as perpetrators than as officers, and overrepresented as criminals, representing 37% of the perpetrators depicted whereas comprising only 21% of those arrested according to crime reports.

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In this study, we attempt to understand the effect of long-term news viewing on the stereotyping of Blacks. A set of experiments independently assessed prior news viewing in order to understand whether racialized news exposure over time moderates the priming effect of exposure to Black criminals. Theoretically, we attempt to understand the role of chronic accessibility as a mechanism that explains the effects of long-term news exposure on the cognitive availability of a Black criminal stereotype.

Only recently have investigators assessed whether the portrayals of Blacks as criminals on television news have an impact on perceptions of Blacks and crime policy. Researchers have often used the priming paradigm to suggest that people may make judgments about race-related social policies based upon their racial perceptions (Armstrong & Neuendorf, 1992; Busselle & Crandall, 2002; Domke, McCoy, & Torres, 1999; Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Gilens, 1999; Valentino, 1999). This research typically utilizes theories, such as cognitive accessibility and spreading activation, informed by the social cognition and priming perspectives, which suggest that people use shortcuts derived from frequently or recently activated stereotypes in order to make relevant social judgments. These stereotypes are part of an associative network of related opinion nodes or schemas that are linked in memory, and activating one node in a network spreads to other linked nodes (Domke et al., 1998; Valentino, 1999).

In most cases, these prior studies have examined whether exposure to a single Black suspect influenced subsequent judgments (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998, 2000; Gilliam et al., 1996; Oliver & Fonash, 2002). Each of these prior studies demonstrates that media portrayals of Black criminals can prime stereotypes linking Blacks with criminality. However, these studies simply provide a contextual "media" replication of the prior work of social cognition researchers who have found that exposure to out-group members activates group-based stereotypes (Bargh, 1999; Devine & Monteith, 1999; Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997; Higgins, 2000). This research does not tell us much about the extent to which media portrayals themselves contribute to stereotyping.

The current study attempts to overcome this limitation and provide additional evidence that the process of news viewing reinforces a cognitive link between Blacks and lawbreaking. We assessed whether viewers' support for punitive crime policy and negative racialized beliefs could be influenced by seeing a majority of Black perpetrators in the news or having race not identified in a news program. We also independently assessed the effects of prior news viewing. The stimulus manipulations used in the current studies derive from the patterns of portrayals of race and news uncovered by prior research (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b).

Assessing the impact of prior news viewing

According to priming research, the activation of a stereotype increases the likelihood that this knowledge will be used in subsequent judgments (Bargh, 1999; Power, Murphy, & Coover, 1996). The more these cognitive structures are used to process information about out-groups, the more likely they are to be used in the future

(Devine, 1989; Domke et al., 1998, 1999; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Valentino, 1999). These structures or schemas direct attention to some stimuli and away from others, influence categorization of information, help an individual “fill in” missing information, and influence memory (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Oliver, 1999). Priming describes how these schemas or cognitive structures influence the interpretation of new information such that recently and/or frequently activated ideas come to mind more easily than ideas that have not been activated (Power et al., 1996; Price & Tewksbury, 1997).

Prior content studies have revealed that Blacks are linked with criminality more often than are Whites in news programming (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Therefore, heavy television news viewing should increase exposure to the overrepresentation of Blacks as criminals (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b). Theoretically, each instance of exposure to a Black rather than a White criminal should activate the stereotype of Black criminality, strengthening the cognitive association between Blacks and crime (Domke et al., 1999; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Shrum, 1996). As a result, heavy television news viewers should be more likely than light viewers to invoke a Black criminal schema when making relevant race and crime judgments.

In the current study, the extent to which prior television news viewing moderates the priming effect of news exposure to Black suspects is tested. In addition to the assessment of prior news viewing, a race-unidentified criminal suspects condition is included in the analysis as a complementary test of the effects of repeated news exposure. Given that Blacks have been linked with criminality so often in news programming, this repeated exposure to Black criminals in the news may lead to the activation of the construct linking Blacks with criminality. As a result, exposure to crime news devoid of racial identifiers may nonetheless elicit unfavorable thoughts about Blacks (Dixon & Linz, 2000a; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). When presented with illegal activity committed by unidentified suspects in a television news context, audience members might invoke the relevant construct linking Blacks with criminality and hence infer that the perpetrators are Black (Shrum, 1996).

Cognitive accessibility, racialized crime news, and social judgments

This study is concerned with understanding the extent to which news viewing over time contributes to a stereotypical association between Blacks and criminality that can be invoked under appropriate circumstances. However, we also attempt to replicate the work of prior scholars to better understand the extent to which simple exposure to Blacks in the context of crime news primes the Black criminal stereotype.

Effects of exposure to a majority of Black suspects

Under certain circumstances, television news imagery of a majority of Black criminals might prime or activate a “Black criminal stereotype” utilized in making social reality judgments regarding race and crime (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998, 2000; Gilliam

et al., 1996; Oliver, 1999; Oliver & Fonash, 2002; Peffley, Shields, & Williams, 1996). Price and Tewksbury (1997) argue that such priming is an outgrowth of cognitive accessibility effects. Specifically, recently activated constructs tend to be used in making subsequent judgments. The construct linking Blacks with criminality (i.e., the Black criminal stereotype) might be chronically accessible due to frequent past activation via social interaction and/or media exposure (Devine, 1989; Price & Tewksbury, 1997). Chronic accessibility suggests that after exposure to a majority of Black criminals in the news, the Black criminal stereotype may become automatically activated and subsequently used to make relevant judgments regarding both race and crime. Exposure to Black criminality may lead to an accessibility effect derived from a recently activated construct.

The automatic utilization of the construct in judgment occurs unless the viewer is not motivated or unable to inhibit its use (Bargh, 1999; Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996; Devine, 1989; Shrum, 2002). If a perceiver reflects, other constructs such as racial equality/tolerance might play a larger role in decision making than the activated construct (Devine, 1989; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Shrum, 2002). If no reflection occurs (usually due to a lack of cognitive resources) or the perceiver is unmotivated to reflect (due to high prejudice levels), she or he will automatically apply the stereotypic construct to relevant judgments (Bargh, Bond, Lombardi, & Tota, 1986; Bargh et al., 1996; Devine, 1989; Shrum, 2002). As a result, crime news featuring more Blacks than Whites could lead to the activation and use of a "Black criminal" stereotype spontaneously outside of conscious awareness (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998; 2000; Gilliam et al., 1996; Peffley et al., 1996).

In the current study, we test whether exposure to more Black than White suspects primes the Black criminal stereotype and influences subsequent social reality judgments. Similar to prior studies, we expect to find that exposure to a majority of Black criminals activates a schematic representation of Blacks linking them with criminality, resulting in the use of this recently activated construct for subsequent judgments unless perceiver reflection occurs.

Effects of exposure to unidentified criminals

In the current study, we go beyond replicating prior priming studies that assessed the effects of exposure to Black or White criminals in the news. We also study the long-term effects of news viewing on race and crime judgments. One way to test the extent to which news viewing as a process directly contributes to a cognitive association between Blacks and crime involves directly assessing the effects of news exposure to unidentified criminals (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). Repeated exposure to Black criminals in the news may lead to the activation of the construct linking Blacks with criminality. According to cognitive accessibility theory, subsequent exposure to criminality devoid of racial identifiers may be enough to invoke the Black criminal stereotype.

This activation would also occur automatically outside of conscious awareness as a result of chronic activation (Bargh, 1999; Devine, 1989; Shrum, 2002). If viewers

are not motivated to consciously reflect on their judgment, they are more likely to use the activated stereotype in their decision. In the current study, we utilize a race-unidentified condition to test whether participants “add in” racial information when none is present.

Prior news viewing and chronic accessibility

Besides the use of an unidentified criminals condition, we independently assess prior news viewing to understand the extent to which news exposure over time contributes to stereotyping by testing whether prior viewing might interact with immediate exposure to shape subsequent decisions. News viewing is part of a process that makes the construct or cognitive linkage between Blacks and criminality chronically accessible. As a result, heavy television news viewers might be even more likely than light news viewers to apply the black criminal stereotype to crime news as a result of chronic accessibility. This long-term effect should work such that exposure to either Blacks or unidentified criminals invoke a Black schematic representation. After news exposure to either Black or unidentified criminals, heavy news viewers should be more likely than light news viewers to activate and use their Black criminal stereotype to make social judgments. This effect will occur most often when participants are unable or not motivated to reflect on their decisions (Devine, 1989; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Shrum, 2002).

Effects of exposure to racialized crime news

The three potential effects of news exposure to a majority of Black criminals or unidentified perpetrators that might be moderated by prior news viewing are discussed below.

Blacks face structural limitations to success

Exposure to a majority of Black suspects or unidentified suspects may lower perceptions of whether Blacks face structural limitations in life that limit their success (Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993; Valentino, 1999). Such judgments are seen as affective reactions to Blacks as a group (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). These effects should be even more pronounced for heavy than light news viewers. Once the Black criminal stereotype is activated, it also activates a generalized schema of Blacks (Ford, 1997). The Black schema includes other stereotypical linkages besides criminality, such as the linkage between Blacks and irresponsibility or laziness. These cognitive linkages may influence judgments of whether Blacks face structural limitations in life that prevent success. As a result of schematic activation, respondents may be less likely to say that Blacks face structural limitations if they rely on their schema of Blacks that includes the stereotypical construct of Black laziness (Gilens, 1996b, 1999).

Death penalty support

Exposure to a majority of Black suspects may conjure notions of crime as a largely Black phenomenon that requires police intervention due to a Black predisposition

toward criminal activity (Hewstone, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979). These notions should be even more enhanced for heavy rather than light news viewers. These representations may increase support for the death penalty (Flanagan, 1996). Prior research shows that exposure to Black criminality in the news encourages the endorsement of punitive crime policy and is linked to a negative affective response to Blacks (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998, 2000; Gilliam et al., 1996; Valentino, 1999). This effect may be explained by spreading activation. Spreading activation suggests that the activation of the stereotype may lead to the activation of other related nodes or concepts in memory (Domke et al., 1999; Valentino, 1999). As a result of activation of the Black criminal stereotype, viewers may also come to have other notions activated such as “fear of crime” and “protection from criminal activity.” These notions may then be linked to support for the death penalty.

Culpability ratings of a race-unidentified suspect

Exposure to Black suspects or a number of unidentified suspects could also lead to harsher culpability judgments of a subsequent race-unidentified suspect. This effect should also be more pronounced for heavy news viewers. A number of studies have examined media priming effects by creating measures that required participants to render judgments of culpability or guilt after exposure to a priming stimulus (Johnson, Adams, Hall, & Ashburn, 1997; Peffley et al., 1996). In general, harsher dispositional culpability judgments of individuals or suspects unrelated to the media stimulus served as evidence of racial priming. Several of these studies utilized race-unspecified suspects in the judgment scenarios to reduce the potential social desirability effects of exposing participants to racial priming materials and then asking them to render unpopular judgments about Blacks.

Hypotheses

The current study seeks to understand the effects of long-term news viewing by investigating exposure to either a majority of Black suspects or a number of race-unidentified suspects and testing whether prior news viewing moderates the effect. Based on the priming paradigm and theories of stereotyping described above, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Exposure to more Black than White suspects in the news will lead to: (a) lowered perceptions that Blacks face structural limitations to success, (b) increased support for the death penalty, and (c) an assessment of greater culpability for a race-unspecified suspect.

These racialized portrayals prime the Black criminal stereotype. As a result of this activation, participants will use this stereotype to make social judgments about race and crime.

H2: Exposure to unidentified suspects in the news will lead to: (a) lowered perceptions that Blacks face structural limitations to success, (b) increased support for the death penalty, and (c) an assessment of greater culpability for a race-unspecified suspect.

This hypothesis contends that viewers will assume that race-unidentified suspects are Black based on prior activation and use of the Black criminal stereotype. As a result, exposure to race-unidentified suspects will cause a reaction almost identical to exposure to a majority of Black suspects.

H3: Prior television news viewing will moderate the effects of exposure to crime news.

As a result, as news viewing increases, exposure to Black or race-unidentified suspects versus noncrime stories will lead to: (a) lowered perceptions that Blacks face structural limitations to success, (b) increased support for the death penalty, and (c) an assessment of greater culpability for a race-unspecified suspect.

The above hypothesis predicts that all the priming effects discussed above will be more pronounced for heavy than for light viewers. Prior work suggests that Blacks may be repeatedly associated with culpability on television news (Dixon & Linz, 2000b; Entman, 1992, 1994; Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Exposure to this content may make the Black criminal stereotype more accessible to heavy than to light prior television news viewers, and this in turn should affect their social judgments regarding race and crime.

Study 1

This study was undertaken to determine whether prior television news viewing would moderate the effects of exposure to racialized crime news with regard to attitudinal judgments of race and crime. In the current study, we assessed whether participants believed that Blacks lacked opportunity in life. Perceptions of Blacks' lot in life have been used in past research as an explicit indicator of racial prejudice (Casas & Dixon, 2003; Devine, 1989; Devine & Elliot, 1995; Devine & Monteith, 1999; Gilens, 1996a, 1996b, 1999). This measure is closely associated with affective responses to Blacks including perceptions of whether Blacks are lazy or whether they face discrimination and institutional barriers to success (Gilens, 1996a, 1996b, 1999). In addition, support for the death penalty has been associated with racial hostility in prior law and policy studies (Flanagan, 1996; Lindman, 1989; Monahan & Walker, 1998). These dual-race- and crime-dependent measures and the moderating effects of prior news viewing were assessed in the current study.

Method

Stimulus materials

Several versions of a 20-minute news program were created through computer editing. This program consisted of local television news stories originally aired by a television station in the authors' local area. Each news condition was designed to look as much like a realistic television news program as possible minus the commercials. The program was edited to contain seven crime stories about murder and eight distracter stories (i.e., human interest stories which contained no violence, disaster,

or racialized coverage). The murder stories were four race–crime conditions that included (a) a majority of Black suspects condition (including a 6 to 1 and 3 to 1 ratio of Black to White perpetrators), (b) a majority of White suspects condition (including a 6 to 1 and 3 to 1 ratio of White to Black suspects), (c) a race-unidentified suspects condition, and (d) a noncrime (distracter) stories condition. The crime stories were randomly ordered and remained consistent throughout each of the four conditions except for the noncrime-story condition in which the crime stories were replaced with additional distracter stories.

The 3 to 1 ratio of Black to White suspects commonly found on television news was used as a baseline to create the conditions. The reverse ratio of White to Black suspects was then created. To investigate whether dosage played a part in priming effects, the 3 to 1 ratio baseline was doubled and 6 to 1 ratios of Black to White and White to Black suspects were formed. To replicate the work of prior scholars who utilized a single-race manipulation condition, single-Black and -White conditions were also created (Gilliam et al., 1996; Peffley et al., 1996).

Originally, the manipulation contained eight conditions. However, early analyses indicated persistent problems with multicollinearity (statistical tolerance levels below .5 for the manipulated conditions). As a result, the eight conditions were reduced to four: (a) a majority of Black suspects condition (i.e., 6 to 1 and 3 to 1 Blacks to White plus a single Black), (b) a majority of White suspects condition (i.e., 6 to 1 and 3 to 1 Whites to Black plus a single White), (c) a race-unidentified condition, and (d) a noncrime (e.g., fluff, distracter) condition. Analyses of these four conditions yielded parsimonious results free of multicollinearity problems.

The perpetrator for each crime story was introduced through the insertion of a photograph shown (no pictures were shown for the unidentified condition) for 3 seconds during the airing of each individual news story. The timing of the photo insertion suggested that there was little doubt regarding the perpetrator's guilt, and the computer editing was designed to make the insertion look as realistic as possible.

Pretest of stimulus materials

Seven pairs of photos were used to create the crime news conditions. Each pair contained one picture of a Black and one picture of a White. There were no other references to the suspects' race besides the inclusion or exclusion of these photos. A pretest was performed in order to ensure that any potential outcomes observed were not due to differences in how each of these suspects was depicted in these photos. Similar to a test utilized by Oliver (1999), 24 White participants rated the extent to which they believed each model pictured was dangerous or criminal. The pictured individuals were not described as suspects to the pretest raters.¹

Participants responded to two 7-point Likert scale items. The first assessed criminality (i.e., "In your opinion, how much does this person look like a criminal?") (*very much to not at all*). The second assessed dangerousness (i.e., "How dangerous do you think this person is?") (*very dangerous to not at all dangerous*). Afterward, each pair of photos was subjected to a paired sample *t* test in order to detect any

significant differences between the Black and the White models depicted in each pair. There were no statistically significant differences between the Black models and the White models on criminality or dangerousness.²

Design and participants

One-hundred and forty-eight male and female undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory Communication Studies course at a large midwestern U.S. university participated in this study and were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. The sample included 103 Whites, 7 Blacks, 25 Asians, and 13 participants who identified themselves as "other."

Procedure

Participants were brought into a laboratory and told that they would be participating in a study designed to assess memory for the news. They would be responsible for watching a news program and then answering a number of questions. Participants were randomly assigned to watch one of the manipulated news programs. All the crime stories used in the news program were about homicide.

After the viewing, participants responded to bogus memory items. Then, a "second experimenter" entered the room. Participants were told that because they had signed up for a 1-hour experiment, they would complete the hour by assisting the second experimenter with another task. The second experimenter explained to them that they were "pretesting" a questionnaire to determine how long it takes to fill out the battery of questions. At this point, they were administered the dependent measures followed by a background/demographic questionnaire that included distracter items, information about prior news-viewing habits, and the extent to which they endorsed stereotypes about Blacks. After completing these questions, they were thanked and debriefed.

Dependent measures

We used two dependent measures consisting of several Likert-type scale items ranging from 1 (*not very likely, definitely not, disagree*) to 7 (*very likely, definitely, agree*). The first measure was designed to assess the extent to which participants perceived that Blacks face structural limitations (e.g., "Black people do not have the same employment opportunities that Whites do"; 29 items, $\alpha = .80$). The second dependent variable was a single-item measure designed to understand the extent to which participants supported the death penalty (i.e., "I strongly favor the death penalty for anyone convicted of murder").

Demographics, controls, and moderators

After participants responded to the dependent measures, they were asked a number of subsequent questions in a demographic questionnaire included as controls and moderators during data analysis. First, gender effects were dummy coded in the current study. Males were coded as 1, and females were coded as 0. Second, participants provided their age in years.

Third, to take into account prior exposure to television news, weekly television news viewing was measured. Participants filled out a viewing grid indicating how many hours and minutes they spent watching television news on each corresponding day of the week. These numbers were converted into minutes and summed across the 7 days for each participant.³

Finally, we controlled for stereotype endorsement or prejudice. Prior research has suggested that stereotype endorsement may influence race and crime perceptions (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998, 2000). It is necessary to rule out stereotype endorsement as a confounding variable that could influence the relationships between news viewing, the race–crime conditions, and the dependent measures (Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974). Therefore, participants were asked to respond to a global Black stereotype endorsement measure that indicated their agreement with a number of common stereotypes associated with Blacks on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale (e.g., “Blacks are violent”; 29 items, $\alpha = .82$).⁴

Some participants may offer socially desirable responses to the Black stereotype endorsement measure and underreport the extent to which they endorse Black stereotypes on this explicit measure in an attempt to appear less prejudiced (Devine, 1989; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Givens & Monahan, 2005). However, participants who are not motivated to control prejudice and/or who feel comfortable expressing unpopular ideas will most likely find themselves on the higher end of this scale (Fazio et al., 1995). If enough participants feel comfortable reporting that they endorse stereotypes about Blacks, the measure will reflect an adequate amount of variance to undertake appropriate statistical analyses. As a result, meaningful comparisons can still be made between those who feel free to endorse stereotypes about Blacks and those who are hesitant to endorse these stereotypes for whatever reason (e.g., they genuinely reject them or they feel motivated not to appear to embrace them).⁵

Results

To assess the independent and moderating effects of prior television news exposure on the race–crime manipulations, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were undertaken. Gender (males), age, stereotype endorsement, and prior television news exposure were entered simultaneously on the first step of the analysis. The race–crime experimental conditions were entered on the second step simultaneously, with the noncrime news stories condition left out as a reference group. Multiplicative interaction terms of the race–crime conditions and prior television news viewing were created and entered on the third and final step. These measures were regressed on the two dependent variables: perceptions that Blacks face structural limitations and support for the death penalty. All statistical tests were conducted at the $p < .05$ significance level.

Perception that Blacks face structural limitations

The results for the perception that Blacks face structural limitations in the United States are displayed in Table 1. Those who endorsed Black stereotypes were less likely

Table 1 Study 1: Racialized Crime News Exposure and Prior TV News Viewing as Predictors that Blacks Face Structural Limitations to Success

Variable	β	R^2	R^2 change	F change
Step 1: Demographics and controls		.25	—	12.24***
Males	-.14			
Age	-.02			
Black stereotype endorsement	-.43***			
Television news exposure	.03			
Step 2: Race–crime manipulations		.25	.00	.17
Majority Black	.02			
Unidentified	.04			
Majority White	-.02			
Step 3: Race–Crime \times News		.31	.06	4.34**
Majority Black \times TV News	-.22†			
Unidentified \times TV News	-.37**			
Majority White \times TV News	-.12			

Note: Final model: $F(10, 141) = 6.50, p < .001, R^2 = .31$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. † $p = .07$.

to perceive of Blacks as facing structural limitations. There were no main effects of the race–crime manipulations. However, the Race–Crime \times TV News interaction terms assessed in the third step of the analysis revealed an interaction between heavy news viewers exposed to unidentified suspects versus heavy news viewers exposed to noncrime stories during the experiment ($\beta = -.37$).

This interaction is displayed in Figure 1. Apparently, as news viewing increases, the perception that Blacks face structural limitations decreases, but primarily for participants exposed to unidentified suspects in the news. Participants exposed to Black suspects in crime news show a similar smaller decline in this perception that is not statistically significant. However, participants exposed to noncrime stories demonstrated an increased perception that Blacks face structural limitations as television news viewing increased. Finally, the figure illustrates that there was no relationship between prior news viewing and those exposed to White suspects on perceptions that Blacks face structural limitations.

Support for the death penalty

The results for death penalty support are displayed in Table 2. In terms of the control/demographic variables employed, men and those who endorse Black stereotypes were more likely to support the death penalty compared to women and those who reject Black stereotypes. There were no main effects of the race–crime manipulations. However, the Race–Crime \times Prior TV News Viewing interaction terms assessed in the third step of the analysis revealed an interaction between prior television news viewing and those exposed to unidentified suspects ($\beta = .26$).

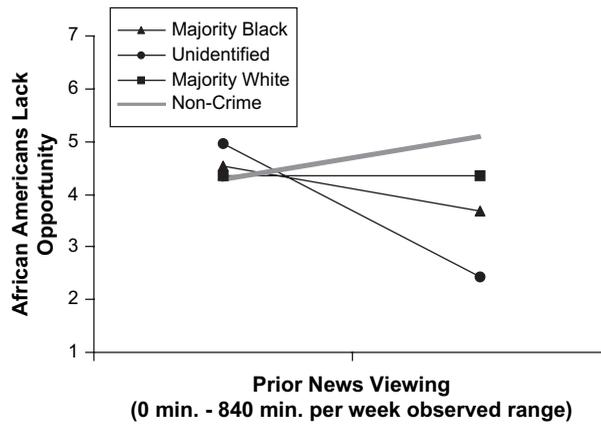


Figure 1 Study 1: Regression slopes denoting the interaction between race–crime news exposure and prior television news viewing on the perception that Blacks face structural limitations to success.

This interaction is displayed in Figure 2. Apparently, as news viewing increases, so does support for the death penalty, but only for participants exposed to unidentified suspects in the news. Participants exposed to noncrime stories neither increased nor decreased their support for the death penalty as a function of prior news viewing. Furthermore, participants exposed to a majority of White suspects slightly decreased their support for the death penalty as prior news viewing increased. Although not statistically significant, it should also be noted that the regression slope

Table 2 Study 1: Racialized Crime News Exposure and Prior TV News Viewing as Predictors of Support for the Death Penalty

Variable	β	R^2	R^2 change	F change
Step 1: Demographics and controls		.10	—	4.42**
Males	.17*			
Age	.11			
Black stereotype endorsement	.20*			
Television news exposure	-.02			
Step 2: Race–crime manipulations		.11	.01	.27
Majority Black	-.03			
Unidentified	-.08			
Majority White	-.02			
Step 3: Race–Crime \times TV News interactions		.16	.05	2.67*
Majority Black \times TV News	.08			
Unidentified \times TV News	.26*			
Majority White \times TV News	-.11			

Note: Final model: $F(10, 143) = 2.69, p < .01, R^2 = .16.$ * $p < .05.$ ** $p < .01.$

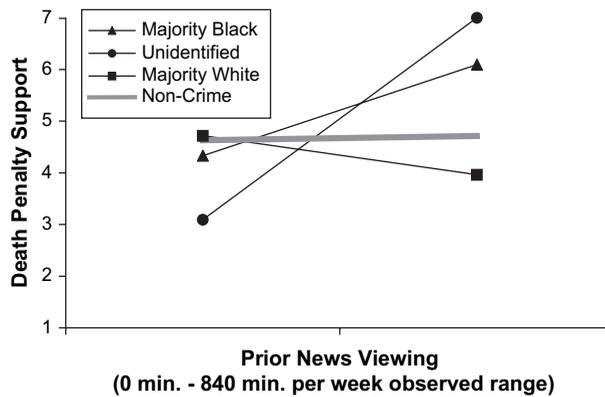


Figure 2 Study 1: Regression slopes denoting the interaction between race–crime news exposure and prior news viewing on estimations of death penalty support.

for those exposed to a majority of Black suspects also demonstrates an increase in death penalty support with increased prior television news exposure.

Discussion

In this study, we found no support for Hypothesis 1 or 2 that exposure to varying ratios of Black to White suspects or unidentified suspects in a newscast would directly prime a stereotype of Blacks that is used in subsequent judgments. However, we did find limited support for Hypothesis 3. Heavy prior television news viewers exposed to unidentified suspects were more likely to support the death penalty, and they were less likely to perceive of Blacks as facing structural limitations. Apparently, when exposed to a number of unidentified suspects, heavy news-viewing participants were more likely to apply a schematic representation of Blacks (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Oliver, 1999; Oliver & Fonash, 2002). This schema increased support for the death penalty and activated stereotypes of Black laziness, leading to an increased perception that Blacks do not face structural limitations. This interpretation appears buttressed by the moderate nonsignificant relationship between television news viewing and the dependent measures after exposure to a majority of Black suspects.

However, Study 1 leaves two significant and related questions unanswered: (a) why were there no direct effects of the manipulation? and (b) why did the moderating effects of prior news exposure only appear for the unidentified condition and not for the majority of Black suspects condition?

There are three possible related reasons for these outcomes. The first explanation could be related to the conservative test used in the analysis. After accounting for the variance explained by the interaction between the unidentified condition and the prior television news viewing, there was not much more variance that could be explained through the inclusion of the interaction between Blacks and news viewing. The relationships between news viewing and exposure to a majority of Black suspects and unidentified suspects were both in the predicted directions, though only the

unidentified interaction term was significant. It may simply be that the controls employed in the hierarchical regression were simply too conservative to reveal statistically significant results for both interactions.

The second explanation relates to the extent to which participants are aware of and willing to express socially undesirable biases (Devine, 1989; Devine & Elliot, 1995; Fazio et al., 1995; Givens & Monahan, 2005). An inability to reflect due to a lack of cognitive resources increases the likelihood that a schema will be used in processing (Devine, 1989; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). However, exposure to a majority of Black suspects followed by questions regarding racialized perceptions and the death penalty may have led to suspicion by participants and resistance to providing socially undesirable responses. For those participants exposed to a majority of Black suspects, they were asked directly how they felt about Black people after exposure to a number of Black murderers. The cue of both the suspects in the newscast and the questions asked may have caused participants to reflect more on their answers. As a result, participants provided either socially desirable responses and/or more tolerant answers that were in line with their preferred racial attitudes.

A third related explanation may be found in the dependent measures that were used in Study 1. Prior research has found support for more muted priming effects with college students when attitudinal judgments are made during the course of an experiment (Zaller, 1992). Many of the media priming studies that have relied on attitudinal judgments that included policy endorsement (e.g., death penalty support) and feeling thermometers (e.g., Blacks face structural limitations) as outcome measures have relied on nonstudent populations (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998, 2000; Gilliam et al., 1996; Valentino, 1999). Because race is often a controversial topic on college campuses, this may encourage socially desirable answers (Givens & Monahan, 2005). Most media priming studies utilizing college students have employed factual judgments or beliefs (e.g., response time, memory, and person perception) as outcome measures (Bargh, 1999; Fazio et al., 1995; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Study 2 was designed to incorporate such a measure and to further rule out possible alternative explanations for the finding that television news viewing moderates race and crime priming effects.

Study 2

Instead of attitudinal judgment about policies, Study 2 utilized a person perception measure (Devine, 1989; Peffley et al., 1996). Prior studies have examined media priming effects by creating measures that required participants to render judgments of culpability or guilt of unrelated targets after exposure to a priming stimulus. Some studies have utilized race-unspecified suspects in the judgment scenarios (Devine, 1989). This has been done in order to reduce the potential social desirability effects of exposing participants to racial priming materials and then asking them to render unpopular judgments regarding Blacks. In the current study, participants were exposed to the identical materials featured in Study 1 and then asked to render culpability judgments of an unrelated race-unidentified suspect.

In addition, Study 2 utilized two additional controls in order to rule out whether a third unrelated variable explains the moderating effect of prior television news viewing: income and conservative ideology.

Method

Stimulus materials

The same stimulus materials used in Study 1 were used in Study 2.

Design and participants

Two-hundred and seventy-seven male ($n = 94$) and female ($n = 183$) undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory Communication Studies course at a large mid-western U.S. university received course credit in exchange for their participation in the study. The sample included 194 Whites, 17 Blacks, 36 Asians, 8 Latinos, and 22 participants who identified themselves as “other.” Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four race–crime conditions.

Procedures

The procedures used in the current study were identical to Study 1.

Dependent measure

The dependent measure consisted of two items that consisted of 7-point scale items ranging from 1 (*not very likely*) to 7 (*very likely*). Participants were given a scenario that described a race-unidentified convict up for parole. The scenario was described to participants as follows:

Consider a case where a 25-year-old male prisoner in the Kentucky State Penitentiary recently had a parole hearing, hoping to be released early from his sentence for manslaughter. Even though he was described as a model prisoner, many people believed that it is impossible to rehabilitate criminals like him.

After reading the scenario, participants answered two questions about the suspect’s culpability and corrigibility (i.e. “In your opinion, how likely is it that prisoners like him can be rehabilitated?”—reverse coded and “How likely is it that prisoners like him will commit a violent crime in the future?”; $\alpha = .60$).

Demographics, control, and moderator

Similar to Study 1, gender effects were dummy coded in the current study. In addition, participants provided their age in years. Similar to Study 1, participants provided information regarding their news-viewing habits and endorsement of Black stereotypes (e.g., “Blacks are violent”; 29 items, $\alpha = .81$).

Two other moderators were assessed in order to further rule out possible third-factor influences on the moderating impact of news viewing on the race–crime news conditions. Prior work has suggested that ideology or conservatism might be related to race and crime judgments (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998, 2000; Gilliam et al., 1996; Valentino, 1999). Therefore, participants were asked where they would place their

political ideology on a 1 (*liberal*) to 7 (*conservative*) scale. In addition, participants were asked their total household income on a 1 (*less than \$30,000*) to 7 (*more than \$100,000*) scale (Armstrong & Neuendorf, 1992; Busselle & Crandall, 2002; Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998, 2000; Gilliam et al.; Valentino).⁶

Results

Similar to the methods used in Study 1, we tested the independent and moderating effects of prior television news exposure on the race–crime manipulations using hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Gender (males), age, stereotype endorsement, prior television news exposure, ideology, and income were entered simultaneously on the first step of the analysis. The race–crime experimental conditions were entered on the second step simultaneously, with the noncrime news stories condition left out as a reference group. Multiplicative interaction terms of the race–crime conditions and prior television news viewing were created and entered on the third and final step. These measures were regressed on the culpability ratings of the unidentified suspect. All statistical tests were conducted at the $p < .05$ significance level.

The results for the culpability ratings of a race-unidentified target are displayed in Table 3. In terms of the control/demographic variables employed, conservatives and those who endorsed Black stereotypes were more likely to rate the target as culpable compared to liberals and those who scored lower on the stereotype endorsement scale.

The second step revealed a main effect of the race–crime conditions. Participants who were exposed to a majority of Black suspects were more likely to find the subsequent race-unidentified lawbreaker more culpable and incorrigible than participants exposed to noncrime stories ($\beta = .25$). No other effects emerged on this step. However, the Race–Crime Manipulations \times Prior TV News Viewing interaction terms assessed in the third step of the analysis revealed an interaction between news viewing and those exposed to a majority of Blacks suspects versus those who saw noncrime stories during the experiment ($\beta = .23$).

This interaction is displayed in Figure 3. The direction of the coefficient and the display reveal a positive relationship between television news viewing and culpability ratings for the race-unidentified suspect after exposure to a majority of Black suspects. As prior news viewing increases, so do culpability ratings for the race-unidentified suspect, but only for those exposed to Black perpetrators in a newscast. In addition, there is no relationship between participants exposed to a majority of White suspects and prior news viewing in terms of culpability ratings. Furthermore, although not statistically significant, it should also be noted that the regression slope for those exposed to unidentified suspects is similar to those exposed to a majority of Black perpetrators in a newscast. Finally, although there appears to be a slightly negative relationship between news viewing and culpability ratings for participants exposed to noncrime stories, it simply reflects that the other conditions tend to show an increase in culpability ratings with increased news exposure.

Table 3 Study 2: Racialized Crime News Exposure, Stereotype Endorsement, and TV News Viewing as Predictors of Culpability

Variable	β	R^2	R^2 change	F change
Step 1: Demographics and controls		.06	—	2.63**
Age	.04			
Males	-.12			
Political ideology (conservatism)	.17**			
Income	-.02			
Stereotype endorsement	.12*			
Television news exposure	-.01			
Step 2: Race–crime manipulations		.09	.03	3.39**
Majority Black	.25**			
Unidentified	.02			
Majority White	.18			
Step 3: Race–Crime \times TV News interactions		.11	.02	1.81†
Majority Black \times TV News	.23*			
Unidentified \times TV News	.12			
Majority White \times TV News	.12			

Note: Final model: $F(12, 260) = 2.67, p < .001, R^2 = .11. *p < .05. **p < .01. †p = .14.$

General discussion

The current experiments tested whether exposure to either a majority of Black suspects or a number of race-unidentified suspects could affect perceptions of race and crime. In addition, we attempted to understand the extent to which prior news viewing could moderate these perceptions. Experiment 1 revealed that heavy news viewers exposed to unidentified perpetrators were less likely than heavy news viewers exposed to noncrime stories to perceive that Blacks face structural limitations. In addition, heavy news viewers exposed to unidentified suspects were more likely than heavy news viewers exposed to noncrime stories to support the death penalty. Study 2 found that participants exposed to a majority of Black suspects were more likely than participants exposed to noncrime stories to find a subsequent race-unidentified criminal culpable for his offense. This effect was moderated by television news viewing such that heavy news viewers exposed to a majority of Black suspects were more likely to find the race-unidentified lawbreaker culpable than heavy news viewers exposed to noncrime stories.

These studies provide some evidence of the long-term effects of news viewing that tends to overrepresent Black lawbreakers. Exposure to racialized crime news over time leads participants to view crime as a serious problem in society that requires severe punishment for offenders. In addition, exposure to racialized crime news shapes perceptions of Blacks and race relations and leads viewers to see criminal activity as a Black activity. Below, we discuss the general implications of these findings.

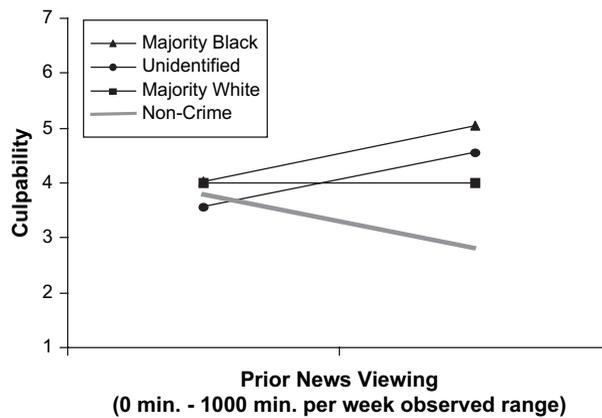


Figure 3 Study 2: Regression slopes denoting the interaction between race–crime news exposure and prior news viewing on estimations of culpability.

The Black criminal stereotype

We believe that these effects are driven by the priming of the Black criminal stereotype (Bargh et al., 1996; Henderson-King & Nisbett, 1996; Hewstone, 1990; Higgins, 2000; Pettigrew, 1979). Higgins (2000), Fiske and Taylor (1991), and Devine (1989) suggest that frequent activation of a stereotype might lead to chronic activation over time (e.g., automatic use of the stereotype). It follows then that multiple exposure to Black criminals in the news leads to repeated cognitive activation of the stereotype which in turn strengthens its use in perceptions of race and crime over time.

In order to counteract that effect, White perpetrators may have to be presented in greater numbers than they currently appear on television news (Gilliam et al., 1996; Romer et al., 1998). One interpretation of the findings is that exposure to a majority of Black suspects confirms the stereotype of Blacks as criminals, whereas exposure to a majority of White suspects or noncrime stories disconfirms this stereotype. News agencies might want to consider the extent to which their portrayals may be confirming or disconfirming viewers' notions about Blacks' propensity for criminal behavior when making decisions about which images of crime they will air and whether to air images of crime at all.

Unidentified suspects as Black suspects

Scholars have suggested that television news utilizes a script that associates crime with Blacks so much so that news viewers cognitively link criminality with Blackness (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). This was buttressed by the finding that heavy news viewers exposed to unidentified suspects were more likely than heavy news viewers exposed to noncrime stories to hold biased racial perceptions. Moreover, the findings for heavy news viewers exposed to unidentified suspects mimicked the pattern of findings for heavy news viewers exposed to a majority of Black criminals on all the three dependent variables. This suggests that increasing exposure

to television news leads to increased exposure to the Black crime script and subsequent activation of a Black criminal stereotype or schema. As a result of this frequent activation, the mere presence of criminality may produce negative thoughts about Blacks.

These findings suggest that media coverage of crime has become attached to our notions of race (Gilens, 1999; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978; Oliver, 1999). The current study clearly suggests that the cognitive association between Blacks and criminality is so strong that exposure to one elicits images of the other. Counteracting this phenomenon would require breaking this linkage, partly by encouraging media organizations to discontinue their practice of over-portraying Black criminality (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b).

Prior news viewing as a moderator

Prior research suggests that racial prejudice is the primary moderator of exposure to crime news. Political communication scholars have contended that those high in prejudice are more likely to demonstrate negative affective responses to specific suspects or crime policies (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998, 2000; Gilliam et al., 1996; Peffley et al., 1996). Some have also suggested that those low in racism are less likely to react in this way (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998; Gilliam et al., 1996). Although this prior work is theoretically interesting and important, the current potential of prior news viewing to also serve as a moderator of race and crime judgments is particularly revealing. Most notably, the moderating effect of news viewing was sustained even after controlling for stereotype endorsement. This suggests that the process of news viewing itself contributes to the frequent activation of the Black criminal stereotype, and over time, viewing news programming makes this stereotype more likely to be used in perceptual judgments. As a result, use of the stereotype begins to affect how heavy prior news viewers feel about crime policy and Blacks as a whole.

We should also note that this effect may not exclusively be a chronic activation effect. The effect might require both priming and chronic activation (Dixon, 2006a, 2006b). Recent work has uncovered that the association between some traits and racial groups may be so strong that exposure to either one may activate notions of the other (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004). Blacks and lawbreaking may be one of those associations. Exposure to unidentified criminals may have primed schematic representations of Blacks. Conversely, exposure to Black criminals had a similar effect. Both effects were then enhanced and moderated by prior encounters with Black criminals in previous news contexts probably via some exemplification process (Zillmann, 2002). When exposed to unidentified criminals or Black criminals, participants recalled the significant number of Black suspects encountered in prior news programming. The more the suspects encountered, the larger the effect. Future work will need to explore these relationships more thoroughly.

Limitations and future studies

Here, we outline several limitations of the current work and suggest specific additional studies that need to be undertaken in the future.

The interaction between racism and news viewing

The current study focused on the extent to which prior television news viewing served as a moderator of crime news' priming effect. Such an effect appears to exist independent of racism or stereotype endorsement. However, it is possible that racism and news viewing might interact to produce these effects. Due to a lack of power, this question could not be fully answered, but it should be investigated in future work.

In-group versus out-group membership

Another area for future work includes an examination of how Blacks react to racialized intergroup portrayals. Because so few people of color were able to be recruited for this study, this interracial comparison was not performed. Are people of color more or less likely to use a Black criminal stereotype moderated by news viewing while making social judgments?

Counterstereotypical imagery

More study of the role of counterstereotypical information is needed. If an increase in Black suspects can increase stereotyping, under what circumstances can an increase in White suspects decrease it? This study suggests that an increase in exposure to White suspects can decrease stereotyping under certain circumstances.

Long-term effects and survey work

The current experiments are helpful in illustrating the short-term effects that may eventually lead to the long-term effects observed in surveys (Potter, 1991; Shrum, 1996). However, we also believe that the current work can be complemented by survey research investigating other potential moderators of exposure to crime news. The implications of the current findings are that simply watching the news influences race and crime perceptions. A survey investigating the relationship between news exposure, racial attitudes, and other moderators could facilitate an examination of these phenomena.

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Notes

- 1 Seven pairs of photos were pretested. However, only six pairs (Black and White) and a single White photo were used in the manipulation. Participants were asked to recall the race of a suspect who was consistently identified as White by a single photo. We wanted to be sure that this White photo was similar to the six other White photos utilized in the manipulation. Therefore, this photo was included in the pretest and was matched with a Black photo, resulting in seven pairs of photos that were included in the pretest.

- 2 *t* tests and *p* values confirmed that there were no significant differences between the Black and the White photos utilized in the study. Pair 1: criminal, $t(23) = 0.59$, $p < .56$, dangerous, $t(23) = 0.48$, $p < .63$; Pair 2: criminal, $t(23) = 0.00$, $p < 1.00$, dangerous, $t(23) = 0.00$, $p < 1.00$; Pair 3: criminal, $t(23) = 0.55$, $p < .59$, dangerous, $t(23) = 1.30$, $p < .21$; Pair 4: criminal, $t(23) = 0.91$, $p < .37$, dangerous, $t(23) = -0.18$, $p < .86$; Pair 5: criminal, $t(23) = 0.67$, $p < .51$, dangerous, $t(23) = 1.20$, $p < .24$; Pair 6: criminal, $t(23) = .79$, $p < .52$, dangerous, $t(23) = -0.65$, $p < .52$; Pair 7: criminal, $t(23) = 1.10$, $p < .28$, dangerous, $t(23) = 0.24$, $p < .81$.
- 3 The television news question was one of many demographic questions asked at the end of the participants' questionnaire. Our measure of television news viewing might be best described as a composite measure of one's overall television news diet (Gerbner, 1980; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 2002). This diet most likely includes distorted race and crime imagery from both local television news and network television news (Dixon, Azocar, & Casas, 2003; Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Entman, 1992, 1994; Entman & Rojecki, 2000).
- 4 Stereotype endorsement and news-viewing habits are largely considered stable traits not susceptible to priming effects (Devine, 1989; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). For example, scholars have conceptualized racial attitudes as relatively stable belief systems that are in fact largely resistant to change (Hewstone, Hopkins, & Routh, 1992; Hewstone, Macrae, Griffiths, Milne, & Brown, 1994; Johnston & Hewstone, 1990; Park, Wolsko, & Judd, 2000; Richards & Hewstone, 2001; Wicks, 1992). Similarly, much of the work undertaken on news viewing suggests that news consumption is largely integrated into daily habits (Tewksbury, 2003). However, in order to verify that stereotype endorsement and news viewing were not affected by the manipulation, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were run with the original race-crime news conditions as the independent variable and Black stereotype endorsement and prior news viewing as the dependent variables. The prior news viewing ANOVA in Study 1 was not significant, $F(7, 159) = .40$, $p < .90$. However, the stereotype endorsement ANOVA, $F(7, 159) = 2.07$, $p < .05$, appeared to reveal a significant effect of race-crime condition. Liberal post hoc pairwise comparisons (i.e., Tukey tests) suggested that participants in the unidentified criminals condition were more likely to endorse stereotypes than those in the 6 White criminals to 1 Black criminal condition. However, more conservative post hoc tests (i.e., Scheffee) revealed no statistically significant differences between the conditions ($p < .09$). We surmised that this effect had to do with the dominance of men in the unidentified condition (i.e., 8 men to 4 women). Men ($M = 4.23$, $SD = .52$) were more likely than women ($M = 3.91$, $SD = .40$) to endorse Black stereotypes, $t(157) = 4.34$, $p < .001$. Once we controlled for the effects of gender, we ceased to find a difference for the effect of race-crime condition on the endorsement of stereotypes, $F(7, 148) = 1.87$, $p < .08$. Given that all of our analyses that utilized stereotype endorsement included this gender control variable, and that conservative tests of the effects revealed no differences between conditions, we did not alter the use of the stereotype endorsement variable in Study 1.
- 5 The correlation between news viewing and stereotype endorsement was not significant, $r(153) = -.14$, $p < .09$.
- 6 The correlation between news viewing and stereotype endorsement was not significant, $r(309) = -.04$, $p < .47$. The correlation between news viewing and ideology was not significant, $r(303) = .04$, $p < .48$. To check for the influence of the manipulations on our

control/moderating variables in Study 2, we ran one-way ANOVAs with the original race–crime conditions as between-subjects variables and the moderators/controls as dependent measures. Neither the stereotype endorsement ANOVA, $F(7, 302) = .98$, $p < .44$, nor the prior news viewing ANOVA, $F(7, 305) = 1.45$, $p < .19$, were statistically significant. In Study 2, two additional moderators, income and ideology, were assessed. These ANOVAs revealed that neither income, $F(7, 300) = .86$, $p < .52$, nor ideology, $F(7, 308) = 1.28$, $p < .26$, was statistically significant.

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