Black Criminals and White Officers: The Effects of Racially Misrepresenting Law Breakers and Law Defenders on Television News

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Black Criminals and White Officers: The Effects of Racially Misrepresenting Law Breakers and Law Defenders on Television News

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Participants were exposed to a crime story embedded in a news-cast in a 3 (Officer Race—Black, White, or Race Unidentified) × 3 (Perpetrator Race—Black, White, or Race Unidentified) × 2 (Prior News Viewing—Heavy, Light) factorial design. Afterward, participants were asked the likelihood that the depicted officer and perpetrator were either White or Black. In addition, participants were asked how positively they viewed the officer who was featured in the story. Results revealed that race unidentified perpetrators were rated as having a high likelihood of being Black. In addition, heavy news viewers were more likely than light news viewers to express a high likelihood that the unidentified officer was White. Finally, heavy news viewers were more likely than light news viewers to have positive perceptions of unidentified officers, but not of Black officers featured in a newscast. The theoretical implications of these findings are discussed in light of cultivation and chronic activation.

A number of recent investigations have attempted to systematically document the occurrence of crime on television news with an eye towards uncovering the extent to which the crime portrayed in the news is racialized (Dixon, Azocar, & Casas, 2003; Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Entman, 1992, 1994; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, & Wright, 1996; Romer,

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Jamieson, & de Coteau, 1998). Many of these studies have concluded that news programs tend to misrepresent crime as a rampant problem and people of color as the law breakers responsible for the rise in crime (Gibbons, Taylor, & Phillips, 2005). These same studies have also provided evidence that the Whites featured in crime news often occupy positive roles as police officers (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b).

For example, Dixon and Linz (2000a) found that Blacks represented 21% of those individuals arrested for crime but were 37% of the perpetrators featured in crime news stories aired on Los Angeles news stations. Simultaneously, Whites were overrepresented as officers (69%) on local television news programs compared to the official employment reports (59%) of the Los Angeles area. Additional studies have found that this overrepresentation of Whites as police officers extends to both network news and crime-based reality television (about 91% on network TV vs. 80% in national official records; Dixon et al., 2003; Oliver, 1994). In sum, the prior research indicates that African Americans are associated with negative roles as criminals on television news whereas Whites occupy positive roles as officers. The current study was an experiment designed to determine whether news exposure might contribute to negative stereotypes of African Americans as criminals and positive perceptions of Whites as officers (Dixon, 2006a; Dixon & Maddox, 2005).

STEREOTYPING, CULTIVATION, AND CHRONIC ACTIVATION

Communication researchers, psychologists, and other scholars have for years contended that exposure to mass media imagery may have an impact on viewers' constructions of social reality (Gerbner, 1990). This general notion has often been termed the cultivation effect or hypothesis (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980, 2002). The general notion of cultivation can be applied to issues of stereotyping, crime news, and beliefs about racial groups. However, earlier work on cultivation received criticism for not specifying the underlying mechanisms related to cultivation outcomes (Potter, 1991, 1993). More recently, media effects scholars and psychologists have used theories of stereotyping, specifically chronic activation and accessibility, to assess the underlying mechanisms that may facilitate the cultivation effect (Shrum, 2002).

Prior News Viewing, Stereotypes, and Chronic Activation

Stereotypes are cognitive structures or categories that affect the encoding and processing of information (Hamilton & Trolier, 1986; von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & Vargas, 1995). These structures direct attention to some stimuli and away from others, influence categorization of information, help us "fill-in"

missing information, and influence memory (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Oliver, 1999). Social psychologists and media effects scholars have contended that stereotypes are more likely to be used if they have either recently or frequently been activated (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Hamilton, Stroessner, & Driscoll, 1994; Higgins, 2000). Much of the prior media effects research addressing racial stereotyping almost exclusively examines recency effects associated with the Black criminality construct (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998, 2000; Johnson, Adams, Hall, & Ashburn, 1997; Oliver, Jackson, Moses, & Dangerfield, 2004; Peffley, Shields, & Williams, 1996). That is, each Black criminal and White officer exemplar featured in the news should activate the stereotypical constructs linking Blacks with lawbreaking and Whites with law defending (Zillmann, 2002).

However, the frequency effects associated with long-term news viewing have received little attention. Frequency effects are important because, in alignment with cultivation processes, news exposure may facilitate the activation of stereotypes. Theoretically, the more these activated stereotypes are used, the more likely they are to be used in the future (Devine, 1989; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998, 2000; Gilliam et al., 1996; Oliver, 1999; Peffley et al., 1996; Power, Murphy, & Coover, 1996). Given the overrepresentation of Black criminals and White officers in crime news, frequent news viewing should increase the accessibility of these constructs when relevant judgments need to be made (Shrum, 1995, 2002).

Stigmatization and Stereotype Valence

The social cognition literature indicates that categorizing individuals as part of stigmatized social groups leads to the activation of constructs that implicitly link group members with various stereotypical traits (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Hamilton et al., 1994; Higgins, 2000; Livingston, 2001; von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & Vargas, 1997). Media scholars have utilized this theoretical concept to investigate whether exposure to African American criminals in the news activates a Black criminal stereotype used in subsequent decision making.

For example, Gilliam and his colleagues exposed participants to either a Black or White suspect in a newscast. Afterwards, they asked participants about their support for punitive crime policy. They found that exposure to Black rather than White suspects in the news led to increased support for the death penalty, three-strikes legislation, and the endorsement of dispositional factors as the cause of criminal behavior (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998, 2000; Gilliam et al., 1996). They argued that exposure to the Black suspect activated a construct linking Blacks with lawbreaking then used in subsequent decision making. Similar to Gilliam and his colleagues, most of the literature in both social psychology and in media effects has focused on stigmatized groups (e.g., African Americans) and negative stereotypical traits (e.g., criminality)

(Dixon, 2006a; Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Oliver, 1999; Oliver & Fonash, 2002; Oliver et al., 2004). Very little research has addressed non-stigmatized groups (e.g., Whites) and positive stereotypical traits (e.g., officers). The current study is designed to overcome this limitation.

STUDY INNOVATIONS: NEW TESTS OF CULTIVATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

Unlike prior research, the frequency effects associated with news viewing are directly assessed in the current study. Two tools are utilized to assess chronic activation. First, unidentified suspects and officers are featured in the manipulation. When presented with unidentified suspects or officers, participants might use multiple exemplars from prior news viewing to "fill-in-the blank" with stereotypical associations when making relevant judgments (Shrum, 1995, 2002; Zillmann, 2002). The identification of unidentified characters as either Black or White would provide evidence that these stereotypical constructs are highly accessible for news viewers. Such accessibility most likely results from the cultivation of stereotypical constructs through chronic activation while watching the news. Second, prior news viewing is directly measured and comparisons are made between the judgments of heavy and light viewers. If chronic activation influences decision making, heavy news viewers should be more likely than light news viewers to express high likelihoods that officers are White and perpetrators are Black when each is actually unidentified. Unlike most prior research, the current study can investigate how news cultivates and reinforces stereotypical linkages by using role identification (i.e., unidentified officers and perpetrators) to determine whether news viewers invoke the relevant racial stereotype in judgment.

Prior research has also not thoroughly examined whether exposure to media stimuli activates positive stereotypes of non-stigmatized groups. The current study extends prior work by investigating the effects of exposure to White police officers who are arguably representative of a non-stigmatized group and a positive stereotype (Dixon & Linz, 2000a; Oliver, 1994). The current study also seeks to replicate prior work by examining a stigmatized group and a negative stereotype (i.e., Black criminals) (Dixon, 2006a).

STUDY HYPOTHESES

In the current study participants are exposed to Black, White, or Unidentified perpetrators and Black, White or Unidentified officers and then asked to make judgments regarding the likelihood that the suspect and officer were Black or White. In addition, the extent to which participants hold positive perceptions of the officer is assessed. Likelihood judgments, memory assess-

ments and perceptions of depicted characters have all been used to assess the activation and accessibility of stereotypical constructs in prior media effects studies (Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Oliver, 1999; Oliver & Fonash, 2002; Peffley et al., 1996). Finally, prior news viewing is measured in order to determine whether news viewing increases the accessibility of both negative and positive stereotypical constructs. As described previously, study innovations include: a) the focus on negative and positive stereotypes of stigmatized and non-stigmatized group members, b) the use of unidentified perpetrator and officer conditions to assess chronic activation and cultivation effects, and c) the measurement of prior news viewing to directly assess chronic activation of stereotypical constructs.

Hypotheses

Based on the theories of stereotyping described above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Unidentified suspects will be perceived as likely being Black, and heavy news viewers will be more likely to hold this perception than light news viewers.

The above hypothesis essentially contends that participants will perceive race unidentified suspects as being likely Black based on prior activation and use of the Black criminal stereotype in previous news viewing contexts. In addition, prior news viewing should contribute to chronic accessibility of this Black criminal stereotype as a result of this chronic activation. As a result, heavy news viewers should be less "correct" when exposed to unidentified suspects, mistaking them for Blacks.

H2: Unidentified officers will be perceived as likely being White, and heavy news viewers will be more likely to hold this perception than light news viewers.

Similar to the process involved with Black suspects, prior association of Whites with law enforcement in the news may form a stereotype of officers as White. As a result, exposure to news presentations featuring unidentified officers should increase the likelihood perceptions that he is White. Furthermore, prior news viewing should increase the accessibility of the construct linking police officers with Whiteness which should accentuate these effects.

H3: Unidentified and White officers will be perceived more positively than Black officers, and heavy news viewers will be more likely than light news viewers to hold this perception.

Given that the news often overrepresents officers as Whites and depicts them as the stabilizing force against crime and criminals, both unidentified and White officers should be perceived more positively compared to Black officers (Dixon & Linz, 2000a; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978). Furthermore, heavy news viewing should increase the accessibility of the construct linking police officers with helpfulness.

METHOD

Participants

Two hundred and forty undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory Communication Studies course at a large mid-western university took part in this experiment. The sample was 76% White, 7% Black, 4% Latino, 11% Asian, and 2% "Other."

Stimulus Materials

A 20-minute news program was edited such that it contained an embedded crime story about a perpetrator who murders a police officer. Police are said to be on the hunt for the suspect. Both the officer and perpetrator were described as male. The story was manipulated such that the perpetrator and police officer were identified as either Black, White, or were left unidentified. The identification of the perpetrators and officers was created through the insertion of two photos—one for the perpetrator, the other for the officer. In the unidentified condition, no picture was shown. The photos were altered through computer editing so that the featured character would be perceived as authentically White or Black.

Similar methods have been used in prior studies to manipulate race (Gilliam et al., 1996). The approach addresses the criticism that differences seen on the outcome measures are due to other facial features or appearance variables between the Whites and Blacks featured, and not due to race. Such criticism is avoided because the same person with the same clothing and facial features is displayed in all conditions.

Pre-Test of Stimulus Materials

A pre-test was performed on the altered photos in order to insure that the characters portrayed in each picture actually appeared to be White or Black. The pre-test involved 34 undergraduate participants rating the extent to which they believed each model pictured was Black, White, Latino, or another race/ethnic group besides Black, White, or Latino. There were four photos tested. These included the digitally altered Black and White officer

photos and the digitally altered Black and White perpetrator photos. Each Black photo was subjected to three *t*-tests designed to assess whether the photo appeared: 1) more Black than White, 2) more Black than Latino, and 3) more Black than "Other." Similarly, each White photo was subjected to three *t*-tests designed to assess whether the photo appeared: 1) more White than Black, 2) more White than Latino, and 3) more White than "Other." In total, twelve *t*-tests were conducted. They revealed that participants did indeed perceive each photo as authentically Black or White (all *t*-values > 5.50, $p < .001$).

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to a 3 (Perpetrator Race—Black, White, or Race Unidentified) × 3 (Officer Race—Black, White, or Unidentified) video condition. Afterwards they were asked about their news viewing habits. A median split was conducted on the news viewing measure described below, and participants were separated into heavy and light news viewing groups. This yielded a 3 (Perpetrator Race—Black, White, or Race Unidentified) × 3 (Officer Race—Black, White, or Unidentified) × 2 (Prior News Viewing—Heavy, Light) between-subjects factorial design. 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 about what they had seen. After this brief orientation, participants watched a news program in which a crime story was embedded that featured a Black, White, or race unidentified perpetrator and officer. After viewing the news program, participants responded to a number of dependent measures and then to a prior news viewing measure that was embedded within a number of bogus memory items.

Prior News Viewing

In order to take into account prior exposure to television news, weekly television news viewing was measured. Unfortunately, there is no widely accepted validated measure of news viewing (Tewksbury, 2003). Therefore recent articles that assessed news viewing, race, and media effects were reviewed and a news viewing measure was culled from these studies (Dixon, 2006a, 2006b; Dixon & Maddox, 2005). The news viewing measure requires participants to fill out a viewing grid in which they indicate how many hours and minutes they spend watching TV news on each corresponding day of the week (e.g., Sunday, Monday, etc.). These numbers are then converted into minutes and summed across the 7 days for each participant ($M = 160.94$, $SD = 140.40$). The variable was used in order to assess the effects of prior news viewing on race and crime perceptions after exposure to the nine criminal/officer race

conditions by dichotomizing it and entering it as a third factor in the design. A median split was performed on the measure (median = 90.00 minutes) that divided participants into heavy and light prior news viewers. It should be noted that 90 minutes is a fairly low number, corresponding to less than 2 to 3 hours a week. However, the current study utilized a student sample, and students tend to watch smaller amounts of television news compared to non-student adults (Dixon, 2006b; Valentino, 1999; Zaller, 1992).

It should also be noted that the television news question was one of many demographic questions asked at the end of the participants' question-naire. In the definition and examples offered to participants, it was made clear that this question referred to traditional television news imagery that included both local and network news. This question was not an assess-ment of participant exposure to "fake news" programs or spoof programs such as *The Daily Show*. It might have been helpful to have created multiple items that independently assessed both local television news and television network news. Local television news has received a substantial amount of scrutiny in the literature regarding its portrayals of race and crime (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Entman, 1992; Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998, 2000; Gilliam et al., 1996). Indeed, most scholars acknowledge that crime news is a sta-ple of local news programming, but this sort of misrepresentation is not as apparent on network news (Dixon et al., 2003; Entman, 1994).

However, network news programming has also been accused of dis-torted race and crime portrayals (Dixon et al., 2003; Entman, 1994; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Gilens, 1996; Gilens, 1999; Iyengar, 1987, 1990, 1991). In addition, a few studies have demonstrated a link between exposure to these images and support for conservative public policies (Gilens, 1999). The cur-rent measure of television news exposure might be best viewed as a com-posite measure of one's overall television news diet (Gerbner et al., 1980, 2002). Given prior research in this area, this diet most likely includes dis-torted race and crime imagery from both local television news and network television news (Dixon et al., 2003; Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Entman, 1992, 1994; Entman & Rojecki, 2000).

In order to address the potential problems with dichotomizing news viewing in this fashion, continuous prior news viewing along with other potential confounding variables were entered as controls and assessed si-multaneously in complementary analyses to the main ones reported here using modified ANCOVAS. The controls used in the complementary analyses included: a) conservatism on a 1 (*liberal*) to 7 (*conservative*) scale, b) fam-ily household income on a 1 to 7 scale (less than $30,000; $30,000 to $40,000; $40,000–$60,000; $60,000–$80,000; $80,000–$90,000; $90,000–$100,000; more than $100,000), and c) racism or prejudice using a modified version of the Modern Racism Scale (MRS) (e.g., "Blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights"; 7 items; $\alpha = .82$) (McConahay, 1986). Although the income variable was skewed, it still could serve as a weak proxy for contact

with people of color given that society continues to remain segregated by race and class (Delgado, 1994).[1]

Each of the above-mentioned control variables has been used recently by media scholars and psychologists to tap into the constructs under investigation in the current study (Dixon, 2006a, 2006b; Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004; Valentino, 1999). However, before news viewing and the control variables could be employed in the complementary analyses, additional tests needed to be performed in order to determine whether the video manipulation influenced these self-reported measures. These tests revealed that the video condition had no effect on any of the controls or on reports of how much television news participants watched, (all *F*'s < 2.05 *ns*).[2]

Dependent Measures

Three dependent measures were used in this study. Each consisted of several Likert-type scale items ranging from 1 (*not very likely, definitely not, disagree*) to 7 (*very likely, definitely, agree*). Each of these dependent measures were adapted from prior studies of news stories and race judgments (Dixon, 2006b; Dixon & Maddox, 2005). One of the dependent measures asked participants the extent to which they held a positive view or perception of the featured officer (e.g., "How sympathetic do you think the police officer was?"; 7 items, $\alpha = .81$).

Two other measures were designed to assess the extent to which participants expressed a likelihood that the depicted perpetrator or officer was either Black or White. The first variable utilized two items to assess the extent to which participants perceived a high likelihood that the criminal featured in the crime story was Black (i.e., "How likely is it that the perpetrator was Black" & "How likely is it that the perpetrator was White—reverse coded;" $\alpha = .71$). The second variable utilized two items to assess the extent to which

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[1]With regard to the Modern Racism Scale (MRS), research has increasingly found that the MRS is correlated more with explicit rather than implicit attitudes and processes. Furthermore, the MRS may be associated more with political conservatism than racism (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Phelps et al., 2000). As a result, some participants may offer socially desirable responses to the MRS because of its explicit nature in order to appear less prejudiced (Devine, 1989; Fazio et al., 1995; Givens & Monahan, 2005). In the current sample, most participants did indeed find themselves on the low end of the scale ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.93$, $Mdn = 2.43$). However, participants who do not feel this need to control prejudice should be more likely to apply stereotypes to media stimuli, and this variable is designed to tap this explicit stereotype application orientation. As a result, meaningful comparisons can still be made between those individuals who feel free to endorse stereotypes about Blacks and those individuals 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). Moreover, the correlation between the MRS and conservatism should be attenuated by the inclusion of political ideology as a control variable.

[2]It should also be noted that there was no correlation between news viewing and prejudice, $r = -.09$, $p < .18$. These data provide more evidence for a cultivation/chronic activation/accessibility effect in the current study if news viewing interacts with the manipulated conditions to influence subsequent judgments because it rules out the alternative hypothesis that prejudiced people simply watch more news.

participants perceived a high likelihood that the officer featured in the crime story was White (i.e., "How likely is it that the police officer was White" & "How likely is it that the police officer was Black—reverse coded;" $\alpha = .77$). Each of these measures was surrounded by distracter items including perceptions of the anchor and story. In order to ensure that participants did not respond in a leading way, the question ordering for these two measures was counterbalanced. Two orders of the measures were created. In the first order, the "White" questions led. In the second order, the "Black" questions led.

The likelihood measures were used for three reasons. First, they allowed for the use of powerful statistical tests in order to detect differences, and in many cases the effects sizes associated with media effects studies that assess racial stereotypes are relatively small (Dixon, 2006a; Oliver et al., 2004; Valentino, 1999). Second, the likelihood question represents a perceptual judgment that is more reminiscent of the way in which people watch and think about the news. In other words, people are cognitive misers who do not usually attempt to count or recall the specific race of characters they encounter (Iyengar, 1987; Wicks, 1992). Instead, they usually use shortcuts and think in more generalist or probabilistic terms about what they watch. The likelihood questions are more reflective of this thinking. Third, the likelihood measures were also used to hide the true nature of the study. If participants had been asked for specific recall or memory judgments, it might have raised suspicion about the true nature of the study.

RESULTS

All statistical tests were conducted at the .05 significance level. A separate ANOVA with Perpetrator Race (Black, White, or Race Unidentified), Officer Race (Black, White, or Race Unidentified) and News Viewing (Heavy, Light) was performed on each of the dependent measures—perception of the likelihood that the perpetrator was Black, perception of the likelihood that the officer was White, and positive perceptions of the featured officer. All cells for the tests of the hypothesized two-way interactions contain ns of 17 to 22. The three-way interaction cells contain ns of 6 to 14.

Although not hypothesized, other two-way and three-way interactions might be meaningful if significant. For instance, in cases when a Black perpetrator is depicted, it may facilitate the invocation of the construct linking Whites with officers, and this might vary by news viewing level. The two-way interaction between depicted officer and perpetrator might also influence judgments. For example, when a Black perpetrator is depicted, participants may be more likely to say that the officer is White and have more sympathetic views of the depicted officer because Black perpetrators and White officer are overrepresented on TV news. Similarly, the depiction of White officers

might be more likely to invoke the Black criminal construct and increase the confidence that a given suspect is Black. However, low ns in the cells may hamper an investigating of these effects in the current study or may suggest that there is no evidence for such an interaction.[3]

Perceptions of Likelihood that the Perpetrator Was Black

The first hypothesis stated that unidentified suspects would be perceived as Black, and heavy news viewers would be more likely to hold this perception than light news viewers. In order to test this hypothesis, three sets of statistical tests were employed. First, a manipulation and measure check are reported using ANOVA, Scheffe post-hoc tests, and t-tests. Afterwards, these same tests were used to determine whether participants exposed to the unidentified perpetrator condition expressed a likelihood that the perpetrator was Black. Furthermore, ANOVA interactive terms and post-hoc analyses were utilized to determine whether heavy news viewers were more likely than light news viewers to hold these perceptions. Finally, the interactive terms in the ANOVA were used to determine whether there were interactive effects of the race of the officer on likelihood judgments of the perpetrator.

Manipulation and scale check. The ANOVA for perceptions of likelihood that the suspect was Black revealed a significant effect for the race of the featured perpetrator, $F(2, 154) = 36.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$. A Scheffe post-hoc analysis revealed that participants exposed to a Black perpetrator ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.45$) reported a higher likelihood that the perpetrator was Black compared to participants exposed to a White perpetrator ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.74$), $p < .001$. A one sample t-test was undertaken in order to determine whether the various perpetrator conditions differed from the midpoint (4.00) on the likelihood that the perpetrator was Black scale. A statistically significant difference on either side of the midpoint would allow us to further correlate the likelihood judgment with the perception of the perpetrator as either Black or White rather than undeterminable. Those participants exposed to a Black perpetrator ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.45$) significantly differed from the midpoint, $t(58) = 5.09$, $p < .001$. The midpoint test also revealed that White perpetrators ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.74$) were more likely to be perceived as White rather than Black or undeterminable, $t(52) = -2.56$, $p < .01$. These analyses suggest that the scale and the perpetrator conditions correctly manipulated and measured perpetrator race and racial perceptions.

Unidentified perpetrator effects. The ANOVA and Scheffe post-hoc analyses also revealed that participants exposed to a race unidentified perpetrator ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.16$) were more likely to express a likelihood that the perpetrator portrayed in the crime story was Black compared to participants exposed to a White perpetrator ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.74$), $p < .001$. There

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[3]In the one instance in which the main results differed from the complementary results, an explanation is offered.

were no statistically significant differences between participants exposed to a Black perpetrator ($M = 4.96$) and participants exposed to an unidentified perpetrator ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.16$), $p = .18$. Using the midpoint *t*-test, the unidentified condition ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.16$) did indeed differ from the midpoint of the scale, $t(60) = 3.17$, $p < .01$ further indicating that participants exposed to a race-unidentified criminal tended to perceive him as likely being Black.

Interactive effects of news viewing and suspect exposure. The ANOVA revealed that the interaction between news viewing and the race of the depicted perpetrator was not significant, $F(2, 154) = 0.19$, $p = .82$. This suggests that news viewing did not moderate likelihood judgments after exposure to the featured perpetrator.

Interactive effects of perpetrator race and officer race. Similarly, the ANOVA revealed that the interaction between the race of the depicted officer and the race of the depicted perpetrator was not significant, $F(4, 154) = 1.01$, $p = .41$. This suggests that likelihood perceptions of the race of the perpetrator were not influenced by the race of the officer.

Perceptions of Likelihood that the Officer Was White

The second hypothesis stated that unidentified officers would be perceived as White, and heavy news viewers would be more likely than light news viewers to hold this perception. Similar to the likelihood assessment for perpetrators, the assessment of officers involved several sets of analyses. These are reported below.

Manipulation and scale check. The ANOVA for perceptions of likelihood that the police officer portrayed in the crime story was White revealed a significant main effect for race of featured officer, $F(2, 154) = 38.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .33$. A Scheffe post-hoc analysis revealed that participants exposed to a White officer ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.44$) were more likely than participants exposed to a Black officer ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.59$) to perceive that the officer portrayed in the crime story was White, $p < .001$. Similar to the likelihood that the perpetrator was Black analysis, a midpoint (4.00) test was conducted on the likelihood that the officer was White scale using *t*-tests. The Black officer condition ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.59$), $t(56) = 6.15$, $p < .001$ differed from the midpoint indicating that the Black officer was perceived as likely Black. Furthermore, the White officer condition ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.44$), $t(56) = 4.40$, $p < .001$ also differed from the midpoint indicating that the White officer was likely perceived as White. These analyses suggest that the scale and the officer conditions correctly manipulated and measured officer race and racial perceptions.

Unidentified officer effects. Compared to participants exposed to a Black officer ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.59$), Scheffee post-hoc tests revealed that participants exposed to an unidentified officer ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.82$) had higher likelihood ratings that the depicted officer was White, $p < .001$. However,

participants exposed to White officers ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.44$) were also significantly more likely to perceive him as White compared to participants exposed to unidentified officers ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.82$), $p < .01$. Moreover, the midpoint *t*-tests revealed that likelihood ratings for unidentified officers ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.82$) did not significantly deviate from the midpoint (4.00), $t(56) = 0.82$, $p = .93$. These findings provide evidence that, overall, unidentified officers were rated as undeterminable.

Interactive effects of news viewing and officer exposure. However, the ANOVA also revealed an interaction between prior news viewing and the race of the officer, $F(2, 154) = 4.21$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .05$. Post-hoc LSD *t*-tests were used to explore the interaction. They revealed that after exposure to an unidentified officer, heavy news viewers ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.84$) were more likely than light news viewers ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.72$) to express a high likelihood that the officer was white, $t(54) = -1.97$, $p < .05$. There were no statistically significant differences between heavy and light news viewers exposed to White officers, $t(58) = -0.95$, $p = .37$, or Black officers $t(54) = 1.51$, $p = .14$ on likelihood judgments.[4]

Interactive effects of officer race and perpetrator race. The ANOVA revealed that the interaction between the race of the depicted officer and the race of the depicted perpetrator was not significant, $F(4, 154) = 0.92$, $p = .45$. This suggests that likelihood ratings regarding the officer's race was not dependent upon the race of the perpetrator featured in the video.

Positive Perceptions of the Featured Officer

The final hypothesis stated that exposure to unidentified and White officers would lead to more positive perceptions of the featured officer, and that heavy news viewers hold more positive perceptions than light news viewers.

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[4]The main effect of the featured officer on likelihood judgments that the officer was White was also revealed when news viewing was measured continuously and the income, ideology, and prejudice controls were entered simultaneously, $F(2, 143) = 11.64$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .14$. None of the covariates were statistically significant, (all *F's* < 1 *ns*). However, the interaction between news viewing and the depicted officer dropped to marginal significance once news viewing was measured continuously and the controls were entered into the analysis, $F(2, 143) = 2.23$, $p = .11$. In order to determine why this situation may have occurred, several statistical tests were conducted. First, the ANCOVA was re-run by including the continuously measured TV news viewing variable and excluding the controls. The ANCOVA again yielded an insignificant interaction, $F(2, 154) = 2.18$, $p < .11$. Next, the distribution of scores was re-examined in order to determine if there was some skew in the data that may have rendered the interaction insignificant. The TV news variable was slightly positively skewed, (Skew = 1.41, SE = .19). Therefore a square root transformation was undertaken to address the skew (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The transformation and subsequent transformations were not successful in rendering the distribution normal. In these circumstances, it is usually recommended to examine the variable dichotomously, something already undertaken in the main analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). In one final test, participants who saw an unidentified officer were selected and a correlation was run between the likelihood measure that the officer was white and television news viewing measured continuously. If news viewing leads to an increase in the perception that unidentified officers are most likely white officers, then the correlation should be positive. The analysis provided evidence for this conclusion ($r = .35$, $p < .01$).

This hypothesis was tested with ANOVA and post-hoc tests. The ANOVA revealed that there were no main effects for the race of the depicted officer or perpetrator on positive perceptions of the featured officer, (F's < 1, *ns*).

However, the ANOVA for positive perceptions regarding the featured officer did reveal a significant interaction between the race of the officer featured and prior news viewing, $F(2, 149) = 3.16$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Exploratory post-hoc LSD *t*-tests indicated that heavy news viewers ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.59$) were more likely than light news viewers ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.70$) to view the officer positively when he was unidentified, $t(53) = -1.95$, $p < .05$. Conversely, heavy news viewers were less likely ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.73$) than light news viewers ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.84$) to perceive the featured officer in a positive manner when he was depicted as Black, $t(31) = -2.78$, $p < .01$. There were no statistically significant differences between heavy ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.40$) and light ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.62$) news viewers exposed to White officers on positive perceptions of the officer, $t(55) = 1.66$, $p = .10$, though both groups appear to have a fairly positive view of White officers. This suggests that the news viewing helps facilitate the view of officers in a positive manner, except for when the officer is depicted as Black. Finally, there was no interaction between the race of the featured officer and perpetrator on positive perceptions of the officer, $F(4, 154) = 0.74$, $p = .56$, suggesting that perceptions of the officer were not dependent on the interaction between the depicted officer and perpetrator.

DISCUSSION

The current experiment was designed to test whether varying the race of perpetrators and officers in a newscast would have an impact on judgments regarding the officers and perpetrators portrayed in a crime story. The current study was also designed to uncover whether news viewing increased the accessibility of stereotypical constructs. The experiment revealed that participants perceived a strong likelihood that a suspect was African American even though he was unidentified. In addition, heavy news viewers were more likely than light news viewers to perceive a high likelihood of an officer being White when he was unidentified. Furthermore, heavy news viewers were more likely than light news viewers to have positive perceptions of the featured officer when he was unidentified. However, the converse was true when the officer was depicted as Black. Below the theoretical implications of this study are discussed.

Unidentified Suspects as Black Suspects

In general, participants exposed to a race-unidentified suspect expressed a high likelihood that he was African American. The implication is that uniden-

tified criminal suspects are assumed to be Black (Devine, 1989; Johnson et al., 1997). This finding provides some evidence for the chronic activation of the stereotype linking Blacks with lawbreaking in news programs that cultivates a perception of Blacks as lawbreakers (Gerbner et al., 2002; Shrum, 2002). Alternative explanations for the results, such as the notion that prejudiced people simply tend to watch more news, appear to be less likely given the complementary findings indicating that prejudice was not related to news viewing or to the manipulations in the current study.

It is well documented that television news consistently overrepresents African American criminality (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Perhaps the news overrepresents African American criminals to such a large degree that the cognitive association between Blacks and lawbreaking is perpetually reinforced. According to social psychologists and media effects scholars, certain constructs become chronically accessible if they have been frequently activated in previous contexts (Devine, 1989; Fiske, 1989; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Price & Tewksbury, 1997). Moreover, recent work has established that in certain cases, cognitive associations are so strong that simple exposure to a particular trait (e.g., criminality) may nonetheless elicit thoughts about a particular racial group (e.g., African Americans) (Eberhardt et al., 2004). Hence, the cognitive link between African Americans and crime may maintain high activation potential at all times as a result of prior activation via news exposure (Price & Tewksbury, 1997).

However, it should be noted that a direct measure of prior news viewing did not appear to moderate this particular effect. One explanation may be that news viewing's influence could not be observed in the current study because television news successfully cultivates a perception of perpetrators as Black for all viewers.[5] In summary, even though prior news viewing was not found to directly moderate the perpetrator findings, the results still theoretically appear to be related to chronic activation. The implication of the current study is that viewers exposed to crime news devoid of explicit racial identification will associate the lawbreaking they see with African Americans (Dixon, 2006a).

White Officers, Chronic Activation and Prior News Viewing

The most significant results of the current study may be that the process of news viewing contributes to a stereotype of officers as being both White and benevolent. Heavy news viewers were more likely than light news viewers to misremember an unidentified officer as a White officer and to view unidentified officers positively. There are at least three potential reasons for this effect.

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[5]In fact, both heavy ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.15$) and light viewers ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.18$) exposed to unidentified suspects had likelihood estimations that unidentified perpetrators are Black.

First, most citizens have little direct contact with police officers outside of the occasional traffic infraction (Delgado, 1994; Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003). Therefore, contact with the police is largely an experience shaped by media exposure. As a result, media depictions have the possibility of having a significant impact on viewers' perceptions of officers (Harris, 1999).

Second, content analyses of news programs have consistently found that Whites are significantly overrepresented as police officers (Dixon et al., 2003; Dixon & Linz, 2000a; Oliver, 1994). In addition, the news tends to focus on stories that portray society as chaotic and full of crime, usually perpetuated by African Americans (Dixon & Linz, 2000a; Kaniss, 1991; Klite, Bardwell, & Salzman, 1997; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997; Romer et al., 2003; Van Dijk, 1993). The heroes in most of these news stories tend to be the police officers who act as a stabilizing force against the anarchy created by African American perpetrators (Campbell, 1995; Hall et al., 1978). Positive hero imagery more than likely perpetuates a positive perception of the officers (Harris, 1999).

It should also be noted that this effect is most likely to occur in news imagery and not in entertainment programs. The news depicts police officers as reasonable and effective White interveners in society's chaos. Entertainment programs, meanwhile, tend to portray many officers as African Americans who are short tempered, domineering, and in positions of authority (Deroche & Deroche, 1991; Harris, 1999). Future research should continue to investigate whether the current set of findings extends to perceptions of Black officers in other television genres outside of the news.

Finally, the news may facilitate an impression of positive officers who are White due to chronic activation and multiple exemplars of White officers featured in news contexts. Stereotypical constructs are more likely to be used in the future the more they have been activated in the past (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Higgins, 2000; Shrum, 2002). Apparently, news viewing contributes to the frequent activation of the White officer 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 the White and unidentified officers they encounter in news programs. Diverse role portrayals may be the key to counteracting this effect over time (Dixon, 2006a; Hamilton et al., 1994; Hamilton & Trolier, 1986).

In addition, the kinds of tasks used in the experiment encouraged the use of the stereotypical constructs via an availability heuristic (Shrum, 1996; Shrum, 2002). When forced to make a difficult judgment (e.g., "remembering" someone not shown or making a judgment about someone not met), it was probably easiest for heavy news viewers to rely on these stereotypical constructs that seemed most familiar. The news typically airs unusual phenomena that portray the world as a threatening place with unfamiliar (e.g., Black) menacing characters and familiar (e.g., White) helpful characters, especially from the perspective of White viewers (Dixon & Linz, 2000a,

2000b; Hall et al., 1978). As a result, heavy news viewers have a number of exemplars featuring White officers from which to chose when making their judgments (Pritchard & Hughes, 1997; Shrum, 2002; Zillmann, 2002).

It should be noted that there are two other plausible alternatives besides chronic activation for the moderating effects of news viewing on perceptions of officers. One of them is that heavy news viewers are simply racists before they watch the news. In other words, a kind of selective perception may be at work (Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974). However, it is notable that the complementary results yielded these same interactions even after controlling for racism. In addition, though implicit stereotyping might play a role in the effects observed, explicit stereotyping and motivation to apply stereotypes to news stimuli do not appear to be explanatory factors in the current study. Most of the participants in the experiment scored at the lower end of the Modern Racism Scale that was utilized as a covariate in the complimentary analysis. This suggests that the participants were not explicitly prejudiced or predisposed to apply stereotypes to media stimuli. In fact, the opposite would be more likely. However, future research should attempt to employ implicit stereotype measures in order to investigate whether implicit stereotyping influences responses to crime news stimuli.

The second alternative explanation is that heavy news viewers are simply more attentive than light news viewers to news content, and they simply used the base-rate information derived from their prior news exposure to make their judgments. However, the reality is that people often ignore base rate information in lieu of stereotypes (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Higgins, 2000). In addition, the attentiveness argument might apply to the likelihood judgments, but it cannot account for why heavy news viewers were less likely than light news viewers to view an African American officer positively. The explanation that appears to fit best with the data is chronic activation. However, future studies should be dedicated to further investigating chronic activation and ruling out these alternative hypotheses. An overview of a few of these studies is offered below.

Limitations and Future Studies

The one-story manipulation is useful for understanding the extent to which specific elements of a news story might influence judgments. However, studies that mimic the actual television environment where White officers and Black suspects are overrepresented might reveal additional information about the effects of such content on viewers. Some scholars have begun to undertake studies that more specifically resemble the home viewing environment (Dixon, 2006a, 2006b; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Gilliam et al., 1996; Gilliam, Valentino, & Beckmann, 2002). Future studies might attempt to employ survey methodology to deal with this issue. These surveys might also

assist in attempting to understand the influence of news from a multivariate perspective.

Another area for future work includes an examination how Blacks react to racialized intergroup portrayals. Because so few people of color were able to be recruited for this study, this inter-racial 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?

In addition, future research should be undertaken to further study the extent to which prior news viewing might shape race and crime perceptions. The current study demonstrates that prior news viewing may influence race and crime judgments. The most likely theoretical explanation for this moderating power is tied to cognitive accessibility. One of the ways to continue to investigate this would be to attempt to replicate the current study with a non-exposure group in order to understand whether exposure to the news sets an occasion and primes participants to react in a biased way. If the current pattern of findings holds up, chronic news watching would remain the best explanation for the observed effects.

A complementary area that could be explored more in the future includes the interactive effects of the race of perpetrators and officers featured in a newscast. Although the current study attempted to explore these potential interactive effects, none of them was statistically significant. Most likely these null findings resulted from a lack of sample size. In addition, local news viewing and network news viewing were not assessed separately. This measurement problem might have also influenced the results. Future research should fully investigate this issue by utilizing multiple measures of news viewing and accessibility and testing them in the same study with larger samples.

Finally, process measures need to be further explored in future studies. The underlying mechanisms responsible for the moderating effects of prior news viewing need to be explored in future research. One approach might be to investigate accessibility using a speed of responding or recognition task. In addition, it might be possible that the perception that officers were White might actually moderate perceptions about the officer. Various analytical strategies such as mediational analyses could not be undertaken in the current study due to sample size and other issues. However, it should be undertaken in future research in order to answer these questions.

CONCLUSION

The current study provides three insights. First, it provides evidence that news viewers exposed to unidentified criminality will associate what they see with African Americans. Second, unidentified officers will be perceived

as being both White and positive figures among heavy news viewers. Third, chronic activation via news exposure can maintain and reinforce stereotypes.

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