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## Viewer Ethnicity Matters: Black Crime in TV News and Its Impact on Decisions Regarding Public Policy

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*Content analyses have consistently documented the disproportionate portrayal of Black Americans as criminals in the news. This experiment examines the impact of such portrayals on consumers by investigating the relationship between viewer ethnicity, viewing Black criminal suspects in the news, and beliefs related to public policy. Participants viewed a 30-minute local newscast containing crime stories featuring a majority of Black suspects, White suspects, or no crime stories. Those exposed to crime stories featuring a majority of Black suspects were more likely to rate a nondescript inmate as personally culpable (i.e., unable to be rehabilitated). An interaction between participant ethnicity and treatment condition revealed that ethnic minority group members who view a majority of Black criminals demonstrated significantly lower police support than other participants. These data suggest a complex relationship between exposure to Black crime, racial/ethnic-group membership, and crime-related perceptions and have implications for priming and spreading activation.*

Despite the potential for television to serve educational outcomes (Ball & Bogatz, 1970), the quality of TV content has long been criticized for failing to

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offer a diverse, prosocial range of characters and behaviors (see Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi, 2015). For example, concerns consistently have been raised regarding the portrayal of racial and ethnic minority groups and the implications of exposure to these depictions (e.g., Dixon, 2009). A substantial body of content analytic work has demonstrated that news and entertainment programming offer largely negative depictions of diverse groups, varying based on the type of content and the particular group (Tukachinsky et al., 2015). Moreover, a growing number of studies have documented adverse effects of exposure to stereotypical portrayals on both ethnic minority and majority audiences (see Mastro, 2009 for review). Among the most consequential issues addressed in this work is the impact of exposure to criminal portrayals of people of color in the news on perceptions of ethnic minority groups and crime policies (e.g., Dixon & Azocar, 2007; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Valentino, 1999). It is clear from this research that exposure to news that intersects crime and race/ethnicity influences racial/ethnic and crime-related judgments and beliefs. Furthermore, evidence is mounting regarding the connection between media coverage of marginalized groups and public policy (e.g., Castañeda, Fuentes-Bautista, & Baruch, 2015). Still, effects have varied between studies, suggesting that additional research is needed to provide clarity into the features of audiences and media messages that are most influential in this relationship. Building on previous findings, the present study provides further evidence regarding the relationship between exposure to Black criminality in the news and public policy beliefs. In so doing, these data assist in untangling the relationship between exposure to problematic content, viewer ethnicity, and policy decisions.

### *Issues of Race and Ethnicity in Mass Media*

Although television news purports to present *reality*, an examination of the depictions of race and ethnicity in the news undermines this assumption. Whereas some racial and ethnic groups are seemingly absent from mass media (Leavitt, Fryberg, Covarrubias, & Perez, 2015), other groups face different issues regarding media coverage. Most analyses of the news suggest that Blacks, primarily males, are overrepresented as criminals and misrepresented in this content in many ways. For example, numerous studies of television news have found that Black individuals appear as criminal suspects more often than police officers (e.g., Dixon, 2006; Dixon, Azocar, & Casas, 2003; Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Entman, 1992, 1994; Romer et al., 1998). They are also portrayed as criminal suspects more often than Whites. Indeed, Romer et al. (1998) found that in Philadelphia, the three major news stations (ABC, NBC, and CBS) portrayed Blacks as criminals more often than victims; with all three stations reporting Whites as victims more often than criminals. Importantly, this presentation of Blacks as criminals is inconsistent with real-world statistics. Dixon and Linz (2000a, 2000b) found

that Blacks are overrepresented as criminal suspects but underrepresented as victims in news programs when compared to actual crime reports. Similarly, Dixon et al. (2003) reported that in network news, Whites were overrepresented as victims and Blacks were underrepresented as police officers compared to real-world crime reports and employment records. In sum, news consistently connects individuals who are Black with criminality in a manner that is both disproportionate with other ethnic groups and with real-world statistics. These works laid the foundation for important experimental investigations of exposure to such news content and decisions about public policy.

### *Effects of Exposure to Stereotypical Crime News*

A growing body of research has established a relationship between exposure to Black criminality and decisions about public office and public policy. For example, studies have shown that viewing these criminalized depictions of Blacks in the news promotes harsher guilt attributions about hypothetical criminal suspects (e.g., Dixon, 2006; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Johnson, Adams, Hall, & Ashburn, 1997; Oliver, 1999; Oliver & Fonash, 2002). Exposure to such crime news stories also appears to prompt increases in support for authority figures (e.g., Dixon, 2009; Eschholz, Blackwell, Gertz, & Chiricos, 2002; Valentino, 1999). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that political stances on crime and other race-related political issues (e.g., welfare) can be linked to exposure to negative, stereotypic depictions of Black Americans in the media (Domke, 2001; Domke, McCoy, & Torres, 1999; Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Gilens, 1996; Jeffries, 2002; Valentino, 1999). For example, Dixon (2006) found that heavy television news viewers exposed to a news program featuring mostly Black suspects, were more likely than light viewers of news to rate a nondescript male suspect as culpable for his alleged crime.

Alongside guilt attributions, support for law enforcement officers is also affected by exposure to news coverage that disproportionately links Blacks with crime (e.g., Dixon, 2006, 2009; Eschholz et al., 2002; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Johnson et al., 1997; Oliver, 1999; Oliver & Fonash, 2002; Valentino, 1999). Specifically, more positive evaluations of law enforcement and increased support for the police have been associated with viewing news coverage of racial criminality (Dixon, 2009; Eschholz et al., 2002). However, this relationship appears to be moderated by viewer ethnicity, at least in some cases. A few studies have found that the effects of exposure to news depictions of race and crime are distinctly different for White audiences than for racial/ethnic minority group audiences. For example, Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) found that Whites expressed stronger support for punitive crime measures after exposure to a crime news story featuring a Black suspect; however, no such effect was observed among Black media consumers. Similarly, Valentino (1999) found that White participants exposed to

stereotypical crime news increased their support for the Republican Presidential candidate (seen, as a political party, as tougher on crime), but that Blacks' political preferences were not affected by such exposure. In contrast to these results, other studies have found that *both* Whites and people of color show stronger support for punitive punishment after exposure to racialized crime news (Dixon, 2006; Dixon & Azocar, 2007). This study aims to shed light on the seemingly inconsistent role of viewer race/ethnicity in this context by differentiating between simple priming effects and spreading activation effects in response to exposure to racialized news coverage of crime.

### *Priming and Spreading Activation*

Cognitive accessibility theories such as priming have often been used to explain the effects of stereotypical news portrayals. These theories suggest that mental shortcuts emerge from frequently or recently activated stereotypes that are used to make relevant social judgments (Dixon, 2006). Stereotypes are a part of a network of related nodes that are linked in memory. The activation of one node often spreads to others in the network; therefore, exposure to Black criminals in the news might create the notion, within viewers, that Black individuals are innately criminal. When the link between Black and criminality is activated (potentially by exposure to stereotypical news) viewers might make policy decisions based upon this activated association. Policy judgments are based on nodes more remote from the prime than guilt attributions, and therefore are influenced through a process of spreading activation.

The distinction between the two types of priming effects can help make sense of the seemingly inconsistent findings regarding the moderating role of viewers' ethnicity. For example, Dixon (2006) found that stereotype endorsers who viewed a majority of Black criminal suspects were more likely to demonstrate a priming effect regarding death penalty support; however, these differences were not moderated by participant ethnicity. Dixon and Azocar (2007) reported similar findings regarding uniform increased support for punitive measures (i.e., regardless of viewer ethnicity). Though Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) found that Whites expressed stronger support for punitive crime measures after exposure and Blacks did not, there is an abundance of data suggesting that judgments about criminality are altered by exposure, independent of viewer ethnicity. On the other hand, only White participants exposed to stereotypical crime news increased their support for Republican candidates, who were arguably seen as stringent law enforcers (Valentino, 1999). It seems that racially problematic news coverage is strong enough to prime notions of Black criminality leading to more harsh beliefs about crime and punishment; however, White viewers are more likely to demonstrate the spreading activation of this prime to decisions about law enforcers.

*Study Overview and Hypotheses*

One possible explanation for why racial/ethnic differences inconsistently moderate the priming effects of exposure to racialized crime news might be related to the decision that the viewer is being asked to consider. In other words, certain kinds of policy judgments related to stereotype activation might affect ethnic minority and majority groups similarly (e.g., those about crime and criminality); whereas, other decisions (e.g., those about public law enforcers) might not function in the same manner. This study marks a step forward in understanding when racial/ethnic differences in the viewer might influence public policy judgments. Specifically, we argue that there are meaningful differences between decisions regarding criminality versus law enforcement when decisions are driven by viewer ethnicity.

Previous work suggests that, regardless of viewer ethnicity, exposure to a majority of Black criminal suspects in the news will lead to increased attributions of guilt in a nondescript individual in an unrelated scenario (Dixon, 2009; Oliver, 1994). This hypothesis has been supported by a handful of studies to date and should be replicable.

**Hypothesis 1:** Regardless of participants' ethnicity, viewers exposed to local news featuring a majority of Black criminal suspects will be more likely to rate a nondescript individual as personally culpable for his crimes.

Although stereotypes might operate outside of conscious awareness, in some situations stereotype application is a more conscious process (Dixon, 2006). Many public policy judgments (e.g., support for candidates, law enforcers, or specific policies) rely on this more thoughtful process. When a viewer evaluates a judgment more thoroughly, stereotypes might be less likely to be employed in the decision-making process. In other words, activated stereotypes might have less of an impact upon decisions about public policy. In this case, *more* than exposure to Black criminality might be needed in order for activated stereotypes to, consciously or not, affect a subsequent decision. Here, the viewer's ethnicity is likely to play a role. As noted previously, Valentino (1999) found that the ethnicity of the viewer influenced presidential candidate support. Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) found that only Whites increased their support for punitive measures after exposure to Black crime. In other words, Whites appear to be impacted differently than members of racial/ethnic minority groups regarding certain public policy decisions, specifically those related to support for punitive measures and political/authority figures.

**Hypothesis 2:** The effect of exposure to local news featuring a majority of Black criminal suspects will be moderated by viewer's ethnicity, such that White's policy decisions, but not members of ethnic/racial minorities, will be influenced.

## Method

### *Participants*

This experiment was completed with 180 college undergraduate students from communication courses at a large Midwestern university. Participants ranged from 18 to 23 years of age ( $M = 20.43$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ) and included 117 Whites, 20 Black Americans, 16 Latino/Latina/Hispanic Americans, and 14 Asian Americans. Thirteen participants selected “other” to represent their ethnicity. For analyses, participants were coded as White ( $n = 117$ ) and Non-White group members ( $n = 63$ ). Participants of the different ethnic groups were evenly distributed across conditions. Grouping participants this way is consistent with previous literature (e.g., Dixon, 2006), but may also be justified by the tendency to problematize portrayals of most racial/ethnic groups in the media, often in a deviant or criminal manner (e.g., Mastro, 2009). One hundred and twenty-eight participants were male and 52 female. Participants received minimal course extra credit (less than 1% of their final grade) for their participation.

### *Procedure*

Participants were invited to a computer lab to take part in an information-seeking study about local news. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions. Each group viewed seven crime stories within a single 30-minute local television news broadcast (complete with sports and a weather report). Participants saw either a majority of Black suspects within the seven crime stories (six Black and one White suspect), a majority of White suspects (six White and one Black suspect), seven racially unidentified suspects, or a number of noncrime stories (no crime). After they viewed the entire newscast, each participant completed a questionnaire containing the remaining variables of interest.

### *Stimulus Material*

All groups received (nearly) identical news broadcasts, with one difference; the pictures of the criminal suspects in the crime stories were manipulated. Of the seven crime stories contained in each newscast, one group received six stories portraying White suspects and one portraying a Black suspect. A second group received a six to one ratio of Black to White suspects within their seven crime stories. A third group viewed the same crime stories with the suspects image replaced with a racially irrelevant graphic. The final control group did not receive any crime stories at all—the crime stories were removed entirely and replaced with unrelated filler stories (e.g., a story about the discovery of dinosaur remains) to maintain equal length treatments. Seven pairs of photos were pretested and used to

create the manipulations. Each photo pair contained one picture of a Black person and one picture of a White person. To produce the experimental conditions, a photo of either a Black or White person was taken from the pair and included in each crime story. There were no other references to the suspects' race/ethnicity aside from the inclusion or exclusion of the photos. Following the procedure in Oliver (1999), a pilot study was performed ( $N = 24$ ) to ensure that any potential outcomes could not be attributed to differences in the perceived dangerousness, as gleaned from these photos. Participants in the pilot study responded to two seven-point Likert-type questions assessing perceived criminality ("In your opinion, how much does this person look like a criminal?") and dangerousness ("How dangerous do you think this person is?"). Each pair of photos was subjected to a paired sample  $t$ -test to detect any significant differences between the Black and White models depicted in each pair. There were no statistically significant differences between the Black models and the White models on criminality or dangerousness (all  $p$ -values for  $t$ -tests were between .24 and 1.0).

#### *Demographic and Control Variables*

After being assigned groups, participants viewed the 30-minute newscast and completed a questionnaire containing several variables of interest.

*Ethnicity.* Participants reported their ethnicity which was then coded as White and Non-White, consistent with previous work in the field (e.g., Dixon, 2006).

*Political ideology.* Participants were asked about their political ideology on a one (strongly liberal) to seven (strongly conservative) Likert-type item ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ).

*Racism.* Racism was assessed using a revised version of the Modern Racism Scale (MRS) including eight items (e.g., "Discrimination against Blacks is no longer a problem in the United States,"  $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ). The MRS is designed to be a nonreactive measure of racism. The items are considered nonreactive because there is no clear consensus on the socially desirable response due to the fact that there is a plausible nonprejudiced explanation for endorsing the position scored as prejudiced on the scale. The MRS has been validated using more traditional racial attitudes (McConahay, 1986) and was modified and updated to improve the relevance of the featured items for the present study. It should be noted that this measure is not without controversy, but we believe it is still the best available measure of racist beliefs (see Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Henry & Sears, 2002; Sears, Henry, & Mark, 2005).

*News consumption.* Participants were asked to report how many hours a week they watched TV for news ( $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ), read the newspaper for news ( $M = 1.82$ ,  $SD = .65$ ), and listened to the radio for news ( $M = 1.29$ ,  $SD = .72$ ).

### *Dependent Variables*

*Guilt attribution.* This measure was designed to assess the degree to which participants believed a racially unidentified inmate was personally culpable for his crimes (i.e., the person was innately criminal, as opposed to a victim of his circumstance). A male inmate was chosen for consistency across conditions; though, future research may be improved by employing both males and females within manipulations and measures. Participants were presented with a scenario containing a nondescript criminal going up for parole. No evidence regarding this person's guilt or innocence was presented. The scenario stated that the inmate was a model prisoner who was incarcerated for manslaughter and up for early parole because of good behavior. Manslaughter was chosen because it represented a crime that could be interpreted as intentional or accidental and it was a crime similar to those in the manipulated newscasts. Then, participants were asked to assess this unrelated inmate's ability to be rehabilitated ("Consider the 25-year-old male convict who is up for parole, how likely is it that he can be rehabilitated?") and the likelihood of him again committing a similar offense ("Consider the 25-year-old male convict who is up for parole, how likely is it that he will commit a violent crime in the future?"; two items,  $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ,  $\alpha = .70$ ).

*Support for the police.* This scale was designed to measure general police support without the use of race-related items (e.g., "People exaggerate when they say that most police are corrupt"). Assessments were made on seven-point Likert-type items ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" (three items,  $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ).

## **Results**

To assess the impact of exposure to Black crime in television news on guilt attribution and support for the police, two multiple regression analyses were completed (one predicting guilt attribution and one predicting support for the police) with all variables entered in blocks (in the order presented in Table 1), starting with demographic variables. Ethnicity was dummy coded (1 = White, 0 = non-White) and each media exposure condition was dummy coded using the *No Crime* condition as the comparison group similar to other work in this area (e.g., Dixon, 2006). Ethnicity and condition variables were multiplied to create the interaction terms. This methodology follows the approach of a number of

**Table 1.** Predicting Guilt Attribution and Police Support

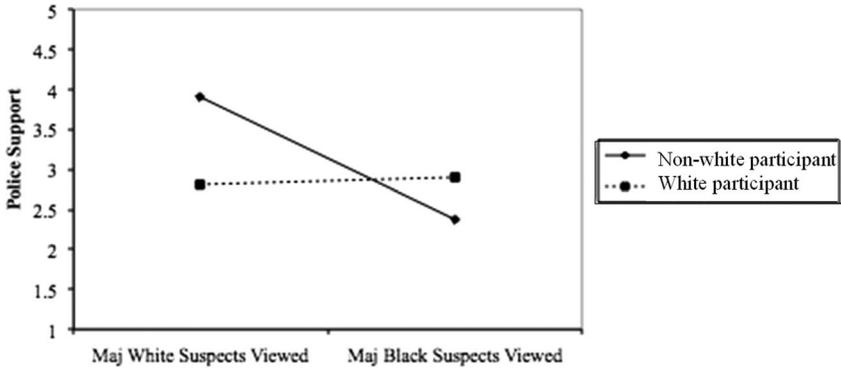
Predictors	Dependent variables			
	Guilt attribution		Police support	
	$\beta$	$p$	$\beta$	$p$
Demographic and control variables				
Age	-.06	.42	-.09	.25
Sex	-.19*	.02	-.15	.06
Ethnicity	-.06	.73	-.14	.41
Political ideology	.09	.26	.21**	.01
Racism	.07	.41	.11	.17
TV news exposure	-.15	.07	.10	.21
Newspaper exposure	-.07	.45	.05	.60
Radio news exposure	.13	.14	-.06	.50
Criteria				
Experimental conditions				
Majority Black suspects	.41*	.04	-.36	.06
Majority White suspects	.03	.88	-.16	.35
Unidentified suspects	.10	.60	-.13	.49
Interactions				
White x Maj Black suspects	-.27	.19	.41*	.04
White x Maj White suspects	-.02	.92	.20	.22
White x unidentified suspects	.01	.98	.18	.34

*Note.* Guilt Attribution Entire Model:  $F(14, 165) = 1.57, p = .09, R^2 = .12$ ; Police Support Entire Model:  $F(14, 165) = 2.53, p = .003, R^2 = .18$ ; \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p = .01$ .

previous investigations of media priming studies, and it allows for the additional control of potential third variables within an experimental context (Dixon, 2006; Dixon & Azocar, 2007; Valentino, 1999). Results are presented and followed by a discussion of this study's import, limitations, and some potential directions for future research.

### *Guilt Attribution*

Our first hypothesis predicted that participants exposed to a majority of Black suspects would be more likely to rate a nondescript individual as personally culpable for his crimes. As predicted, participants who viewed a majority of Black suspects claimed that a nondescript inmate was less likely to be able to be rehabilitated than those in the control condition (see Table 1). In addition, females were more likely to rate this inmate as personally culpable, a finding consistent



**Fig. 1.** Regression slopes denoting the interaction between participant ethnicity and crime news exposure on police support ratings.

with previous research (e.g., Johnson et al., 1997). No other variables were significant predictors of guilt attribution. Furthermore, no significant interactions were uncovered regarding participant ethnicity and experimental condition (or other group memberships of the viewer). In other words, racial/ethnic group membership did not impact the relationship between exposure and guilt attribution assessments.

### *Support for Police*

Hypothesis 2 predicted that Whites would be more likely than racial/ethnic group members who viewed a majority of Black suspects to exhibit support for the police. The predicted interaction between participant race/ethnicity and treatment conditions was significant (see Table 1); however, when decomposed, it was revealed that racial/ethnic minorities who viewed Black crime showed significantly less support for the police than White participants (see Figure 1). White's support for the police appears to have been unaffected by viewing predominantly White versus predominantly Black criminal suspects in these data. On the other hand, racial/ethnic participants revealed significant differences in police support depending upon the treatment condition such that police support was higher when viewing White criminals and significantly lower after viewing a majority of Black criminals. Thus, these data do not support the proposed interaction in Hypothesis 2. Conservatives were also found to be more supportive of the police than liberals (see Table 1), a finding consistent with previous research (e.g., Iyengar, 1987; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

## Discussion and Conclusions

The present study was designed to examine the effects of exposure to portrayals of Black Americans as criminals in local television news coverage—a persistent, disproportionate theme in television and print news. In the following, we discuss both the practical and theoretical implications of each finding. Then, limitations and future research directions are discussed.

### *Guilt Attribution*

Regardless of the participant's ethnicity, viewing a majority of Black criminal suspects was linked to higher ratings of personal culpability (see Table 1) when compared to those who viewed no crime stories. In other words, local television news which featured a majority of Black criminals led to the belief that an unrelated, nondescript criminal suspect was less likely to be able to be rehabilitated. We believe our measure captured participant's tendency to assign blame for a crime to the individual (e.g., dispositional causes), as opposed to any circumstances that might have led to the crime (e.g., situational causes). This phenomenon is most commonly termed attribution error (Perloff, 2009). Attribution errors not only include connecting negative behaviors in outgroup members to the individual's personal character, but also include attributing positive behaviors to outgroup members' circumstances (Pettigrew, 1979). In the absence of any evidence regarding the crime committed, these data suggested that those who saw a majority of Black criminal suspects were more likely to make internal attributions (i.e., connected negative behaviors to the character of an individual) than those viewing no crime stories.

Because previous research has shown that local television news tends to portray Blacks as criminals more often than law defenders, more often than victims, and more often than in reality (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b), one might suggest that heavy news consumers, regardless of ethnicity, would be moved to make judgments in line with traditional attribution errors; however, these data do not support the notion that previous news consumption is related to guilt attributions. Unlike exposure to the news prime, all analyses conducted here returned null findings regarding a relationship between overall news consumption rates and guilt attributions. Although prior studies have found overall news viewing to moderate such effects, this result has not been consistent (Dixon, 2006; Dixon & Azocar, 2007). Perhaps the current study's measure of overall news consumption was simply not effective in accurately capturing news exposure. On the other hand, given the low levels of news consumption reported by these participants, perhaps their exposure was simply too low to influence judgments. Future research should continue to include news consumption as a moderator of the effects of exposure to

problematic race-related content on public policy decisions, to help provide clarity into if/how the type and quantity of ongoing exposure influences these processes.

Our data also indicated that women were more likely than men to make dispositional attributions, regardless of exposure to the prime when evaluating the crime suspect. Although this finding is congruent with previous work (Johnson et al., 1997), the link between sex and guilt attribution certainly warrants further scrutiny.

### *Support for the Police*

Previous work suggests that exposure to racialized crime news may (in some cases) have a different effect on White viewers than racial/ethnic group viewers. Contrary to existing findings, the data from the current study indicated that only racial/ethnic minorities who viewed a majority of Black criminal suspects offered decreased support for the police. One particular implication warrants attention, in light of this result. Previous research has noted that negative attitudes toward the police are more likely to exist among racial/ethnic minorities (Eschholz et al., 2002). It is possible that these attitudes emanate from real and perceived perceptions of police bias against Blacks (and other racial/ethnic groups) and/or the sense that the Black community is overpoliced (Dixon, Schell, Giles, & Drogos, 2008). When considered from this perspective, these data suggest that negative perceptions of the police might surface and impact decision making in ethnic minority groups after viewing such racially problematic news content.

Further research should examine whether other public policies and support for other public officials follow these trends, and should attempt to discern how and why group memberships influence this process. Our data and reading of the literature suggest that guilt attribution is impacted by exposure to racialized portrayals of crime, regardless of a viewer's racial/ethnic group; however, group membership matters when the decision is about public persons and law enforcement. Researchers need to continue to investigate the implications of exposure to problematic media content on different types of real-world outcomes to see if these results hold up under different conditions and in different contexts. For example, how might exposure to other racialized news stories (e.g., immigration) influence judgments about a wider array of social policies and/or political decisions? Or, how might exposure to these persistent, problematic narratives in the news (and across the media landscape) influence racial/ethnic group's perceptions about themselves and their groups in society and subsequently influence behaviors such as voter turnout? Certainly more clarification is warranted regarding: (a) which types of public policy decisions and actions are impacted by viewing problematic depictions of race/ethnicity; (b) which are likely to be moderated by viewer attributes; and (c) what are the psychological implications of exposure.

Future research also should explore whether the medium matters. Researchers have established that different outlets serve different functions for media consumers and that the reasons people bring to their media exposure also might define what they take away from that experience (Ruggiero, 2000). Because most of the research addressing the priming effects of exposure to racialized media depictions of crime focuses on news (e.g., Dixon, 2008a, 2008b), much less is known about how messages about crime in other content areas (e.g., entertainment programs such as crime dramas, reality television), influence audience's policy positions. It is important that researchers interested in race-related priming broaden the range of media and message types as it is theoretically plausible that effects will be varied. Research also suggests that certain racial groups continue to be associated with radicalized discourse on the Internet (e.g., Muslims as terrorists; Josey, Hurley, Hefner, & Dixon, 2009). Broadening the research focus to a greater array of groups, media, and public policies, will be critical to future research.

### *Considerations and Limitations*

Like all studies, this one is not without its weaknesses. First, comparisons between those viewing Black criminal suspects and those viewing White criminal suspects were not significant for either dependent variable tested herein. In other words, even though those who viewed a majority of Black criminal suspects were more likely to make personal guilt attributions than those who viewed *no crime stories*, those viewing Black crime did not significantly differ from those viewing a majority of White criminal suspects (i.e., the comparison group in our analysis received no crime stories). Even so, those viewing a majority of White crime did not show significant increases in personal guilt attribution whereas those viewing Black crime did. Accordingly, these findings seem to cautiously suggest that Black criminality, in particular, makes the relationship between exposure and guilt attributions meaningful. Future research should endeavor to clarify this explanatory process. Fortunately, research indicates that such harmful effects can be minimized (e.g., Ramasubramanian, 2015; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015), given exposure to the appropriate portrayal and/or intervention strategy. Also worthy of note, the sample size for participants of color ( $n = 63$ ) in this study was small. This number was sufficient for us to detect differences; however, small sample sizes may present effects that are unstable. Future work would benefit from a large number of diverse participants.

Although there is much researchers have learned when it comes to issues of media and race and ethnicity, this area of inquiry still remains underexamined, calling for ongoing research into the processes and effects linked with exposure to media depictions of diverse groups (Tukachinsky, 2015). Those involved with shaping public policy and those concerned with improving societal dynamics would be well-served to better understand which public policies and decisions are

impacted by media depictions of race/ethnicity and which features of the consumer matter to better predict, explain, and understand public policy decision making.

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Depictions of race on television news programs can strongly influence support for police among non-white viewers, research shows. "Black men and women -- particularly black men -- are over-represented as criminals or criminal suspects on TV news, and under-represented as law enforcement or authority figures, and as victims of crime," says the lead author of a paper on the research. "We wanted to see what affect these representations have on audiences of different races." Share: FULL STORY. The paper, "Viewer Ethnicity Matters: Black Crime in TV News and Its Impact on Decisions Regarding Public Policy," is published online in the Journal of Social Issues. make a difference: sponsored opportunity. But public opinion on issues of racial inequity is unmistakably trending toward greater convergence across lines of race and ethnicity. Pew's survey this month also found that four-fifths of adults younger than 30 expressed positive views toward Black Lives Matter, significantly more than any older age group, with little difference again between the views of Whites and people of color. Similarly, in an online study of younger adults released last week for the liberal organizing group NextGen America, the Global Strategy Group, a Democratic polling firm, found broad support for the Black Lives Matter movement across every racial and ideological segment of those generations except for the one-fifth who identified as pro-Trump Republicans, says Andrew Baumann, who conducted the survey. Viewer ethnicity matters: Black crime in TV News and its impact on decisions regarding public policy. Journal of Social Issues, 71(1), 155-170. CrossRefGoogle Scholar. Ikenobe, P. (2011). Conceptualizing racism and its subtle forms. Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 41, 161-181. CrossRefGoogle Scholar. The Opportunity Agenda. Media Representation and Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys. Retrieved March 22, 2018, from <http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/Media-Impact-onLives-of-Black-Men-and-Boys-OppAgenda.pdf>. United Nations Department of Public Information. (2015). International Decade for People of African Descent (IDPAD). Retrieved December 20, 2015, from <http://www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade/>. Viewer Ethnicity Matters: Black Crime in TV News and Its Impact on Decisions Regarding Public Policy. Ryan J. Hurley, J. J. Jensen, A. J. Weaver, T. Dixon. Psychology. 1 March 2015. Content analyses have consistently documented the disproportionate portrayal of Black Americans as criminals in the news. This experiment examines the impact of such portrayals on consumers by Expand. 25. A free platform for explaining your research in plain language, and managing how you communicate around it so you can understand how best to increase its impact. Ethnicity, Crime News, and Policy Decisions. Ryan J. Hurley, Jakob Jake Jensen, Andrew Weaver, Travis Dixon. Journal of Social Issues, March 2015, Wiley.