

Skin Tone, Crime News, and Social Reality Judgments: Priming the Stereotype of the Dark and Dangerous Black Criminal¹

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An experiment examined the extent to which viewers' emotional discomfort with a crime story and perceptions and memorability of a perpetrator and victim could be influenced by the race and skin tone of the perpetrator portrayed in a newscast. Participants were exposed either to a White, light-skinned Black, medium-skinned Black, or dark-skinned Black perpetrator. In addition, participants provided self-reports of their news viewing habits. Results revealed that heavy television news viewers were more likely than light viewers to feel emotional discomfort after being exposed to the dark-skinned Black perpetrator. Heavy news viewers also had favorable perceptions of the victim when the perpetrator was Black, regardless of skin tone. Results also indicated that all participants, regardless of prior news exposure, found the perpetrator more memorable when the perpetrator was a dark-skinned Black male. The methodological and theoretical implications of these findings are discussed.

A number of recent investigations have concluded that news programs often systematically misrepresent Black Americans as the perpetrators of crime and Whites as the victims of crime (Dixon, Azocar, & Casas, 2003; Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Entman, 1992, 1994; Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, & Wright, 1996; Romer, Jamieson, & de Coteau, 1998). For example, Dixon and Linz (2000a, 2000b) examined the portrayal of Blacks and Whites in crime reports and television newscasts in the Los Angeles area. Blacks were overrepresented as perpetrators on television news (37%) compared to arrest reports (21%). Similarly, Blacks were underrepresented as victims on television news (23%) compared to crime reports (28%). These findings are in stark contrast to the ways in which Whites were portrayed on television news (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Romer

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et al., 1998). Whites were underrepresented as perpetrators on television news (21%) compared to arrest reports (28%), and were overrepresented as victims in news stories (43%) compared to crime reports (13%). Furthermore, Whites were overrepresented as officers (69%) on news programs compared to employment records (59%; Dixon & Linz, 2000a).

The aforementioned studies as well as a number of others (for a more thorough review, see Entman, 1992, 1994; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Oliver, 1994; Romer et al., 1998) indicate that Blacks are much more often associated with criminality on television news in comparison to Whites. Conversely, Whites often occupy roles such as officers and victims on news programs. It is possible that the Black association with criminality on news programs may have a number of effects on viewers. Political-communication scholars have suggested that news-media constructions of race and crime may provide a heuristic or shortcut that is used when making crime-policy decisions (Domke, McCoy, & Torres, 1999; Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Gilens, 1999; Valentino, 1999).

Priming Effects of Black Crime News Portrayals

Only recently have media scholars begun to assess whether the portrayals of Blacks as criminals on television news have an impact on perceptions of Blacks and crime-related decisions. The majority of this research has used priming paradigms. In this context, *priming* refers to the process by which recently activated information about a group (e.g., stereotypes) is used in making subsequent judgments of group-related stimuli. This information is part of an associative network of related schemas that are linked in memory. Through spreading activation, the priming of one node in a network spreads to other linked nodes (Domke et al., 1998, 1999; Valentino, 1999).

When a stereotype is activated, it has the potential to bias the way incoming information is processed, usually in ways that are consistent with the stereotype (Hamilton, Stroessner, & Driscoll, 1994). As a result, short-term priming of the association between Blacks and criminality is likely to have an influence on subsequent group-related memory and judgments. For example, Johnson, Adams, Hall, and Ashburn (1997) exposed participants to a newspaper story featuring violent crime. Afterward, they asked participants to evaluate the behavior of a boyfriend (described as either Black, White, or Unidentified) who reacts violently to the unfaithfulness of his fiancé. Participants were more dispositional in their evaluation of the Black rather than the White boyfriend. Johnson, Trawalter, and Dovidio (2000) also found similar priming effects after exposure to violent rap music. Similarly, Oliver and Fonash (2002) found that participants were more likely to mistakenly recall that non-Black suspects featured in a newspaper story were Black.

These studies examined the role of a single exposure to a priming stimulus in a laboratory setting. Frequent priming of an association in memory tends to

make that link stronger and more likely to become cognitively accessible. Over time, repeated exposure to these portrayals in the media may contribute to the formation and maintenance of stereotypes about Blacks (Devine, 1989; Hamilton & Gifford, 1976). Thus, individuals with a more frequent history of exposure to an association may be even more likely to use it in judgments (Devine, 1989; Lepore & Brown, 1997).

Skin Tone and Prior News Viewing as Moderators of Priming Effects

Historically, the majority of social-science investigators have focused on the role of between-category variation in physical appearance (i.e., race) in social judgments. However, there also has been some focus on within-race variation in appearance. Most of this work has focused on skin tone bias. Skin tone bias refers to behavior toward members of a racial category based on the lightness or darkness of their skin. This phenomenon also has been described as colorism or color consciousness. Anecdotal and experimental evidence suggests that Blacks and Whites engage in discriminatory behavior based on skin tone (Maddox, 2004; Maddox & Gray, 2002). Even today, darker skin tone is associated with negative social outcomes (Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Keith & Herring, 1991).

Effects of Skin Tone Bias

In recent years, social psychologists have begun to examine the extent to which within-category variation in physical appearance might impact interpersonal judgments of Blacks (Blair, Judd, Sadler, & Jenkins, 2002; Livingston & Brewer, 2002; Maddox & Gray, 2002). These researchers have found that Blacks with more Afrocentric facial features (e.g., dark skin, broad nose, full lips) are more closely associated with stereotypical or negative evaluations. Maddox and Gray argued that darker skin tone is more typical of the cultural representation of Blacks than is lighter skin tone. Therefore, dark skin is more likely to activate cultural stereotypes of Blacks.

Prior News Viewing as a Moderator

The priming effects associated with between-category differences (e.g., race) and within-category differences (e.g., skin tone) might be moderated by a number of factors. One of these factors includes level of prejudice or racism. Media scholars have found that individual differences in racism toward Blacks moderate the effect of exposure to television news on subsequent judgments. For example, Gilliam et al. (1996) exposed White participants to a crime story in which either a Black male or a White male was highlighted as the perpetrator. They found that participants high in racism were more likely than those low in racism to blame

Blacks for crime and to favor punitive policies when exposed to the Black male perpetrator. Peffley, Shields, and Williams (1996) found that after exposure to a news story featuring either a Black or a White perpetrator, those exposed to the Black perpetrator and who were high in racism judged the Black perpetrator more harshly than the White perpetrator.

In this way, individual differences in attitudes toward Blacks contribute to the effects of priming on subsequent evaluations and judgments. This work suggests that the priming effect of crime news that causes perceivers to judge Black criminals and crime policy more harshly is exacerbated in racists and attenuated in nonracists (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998; Gilliam et al., 1996; Peffley et al., 1996). The current research attempts to extend the media and stereotyping literature by focusing on factors (other than previously held racial beliefs) that might moderate media priming of racial stereotypes on subsequent criminal judgments of Black males. In addition, the current study seeks to expand the study of race and social judgments to include the effects of within-race variation.

Specifically, individual differences in prior television news viewing also might moderate the effects of priming on group-related judgments related to Black stereotypes. Given the overrepresentation of Blacks as criminals on television news (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b), heavy television news viewers should be more likely to access and use the Black criminal stereotype when making relevant race and crime judgments, as compared to light viewers. This should be particularly true after exposure to dark-skinned Black perpetrators, who are more closely associated with the cultural stereotype of Blacks, which includes a propensity toward criminality.

Current Study Objectives

In the current study, we varied the race and skin tone of an alleged perpetrator in a crime story. Participants were exposed to a crime story featuring either a White, light-skinned Black, medium-skinned Black, or dark-skinned Black perpetrator. We then assessed whether exposure to these stories could influence various story-related judgments among viewers. In particular, this study tested three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Television news imagery of a Black criminal will activate preexisting stereotypic associations between Blacks and crime in memory involving violence, aggression, and dangerousness that will influence judgments of the news story.

Hypothesis 2. Exposure to a dark-skinned Black perpetrator in particular will lead to increased activation and use of the stereotype compared to a light-skinned perpetrator.

Hypothesis 3. Heavy television news viewers will be more likely than light viewers to apply the Black criminal stereotype to race and crime phenomena.

Given the overrepresentation of Blacks as violent criminals on television news, more heavy television news viewers have had greater exposure to the Black/criminal association than light viewers. Therefore, through frequency of activation, heavy news viewers have more and stronger cognitive linkages between Blacks and criminality in memory. As a result, associated stereotypes should be more accessible for heavy viewers than for light viewers (Shrum, 1996).

These hypotheses were tested using several dependent measures. Compared to a White perpetrator, exposure to a Black perpetrator should cause viewers to express greater emotional concern about the crime story they have seen. Priming a Black criminal stereotype may or may not also result in more negative trait ratings and recommendations for punishment of Black compared to White perpetrators. This outcome is questionable, given that prior research has suggested that socially desirable responding may influence direct ratings of socially marginalized targets (Devine, 1989). We also assessed ratings of the victim in the study with the expectation that ratings of that individual may indirectly reflect stereotype activation elicited by the perpetrator. Thus, we predicted more favorable evaluations of the victim when the perpetrator was Black compared to when the perpetrator was White. We also expected that participants would find the Black perpetrators more memorable than a White perpetrator. In addition, we predicted that all of these patterns of findings would be exaggerated (a) when the perpetrator had increasingly dark skin tone, and (b) among those participants who reported higher levels of television news viewing.

Method

Participants and Design

In exchange for their participation in the study, 130 undergraduate students (38 male, 92 female) who were enrolled in an introductory Communication Studies course at a large midwestern university received course credit. The sample included 95 White, 15 Black, 10 Asian, and 5 Hispanic participants, as well as 5 participants who indicated multiracial category membership.

Participants were assigned randomly to one of four conditions in which they were exposed to a White, light-skinned Black, medium-skinned Black, or dark-skinned Black perpetrator who had committed a crime. In order to take into account prior exposure to television news that typically features Black suspects, daily television news viewing was assessed by asking participants how many

hours per day they spent watching news programs (taken after completion of the dependent measures). A median split was conducted on this measure, and it was included as a between-subjects factor in the analyses.³ As a result, the experiment used a 4×2 (Perpetrator Race: White, Light-Skinned Black, Medium-Skinned Black, or Dark-Skinned Black \times News Viewing: Heavy vs. Light) between-subjects design.

Procedure

Participants were brought into the 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 with varied skin tone (i.e., light, medium, or dark) or a White perpetrator.⁴ After viewing the news program, participants responded to a number of memory items (included as fillers). They also were asked how they felt about the manipulated crime story and about their perceptions of the perpetrator and victim.

After responding to these items, a "second experimenter" entered the room. Participants were told that because they had signed up for a 1-hr experiment, they would complete the hour by assisting the second experimenter with another task. The second experimenter explained to them that she was "pre-testing" a questionnaire to determine how long it takes to complete the battery of questions. At this point, participants were administered a questionnaire that included information about prior news viewing habits. This variable was subsequently dichotomized and included as the second factor in the analysis. After completing these questions, participants were thanked and debriefed.

³Although the between-subjects nature of the design (along with the relatively moderate number of participants) may present some power issues, we are not concerned about Type II error in this study. This is because the analysis was duplicated with television news as a covariate in a one-way design that yielded more power. The results replicate what is reported here. However, analyzing prior television news viewing as a between-subjects factor facilitates a more parsimonious interpretation and report of the results. Therefore, we restrict our discussion to television news viewing as a between-subjects factor, rather than as a covariate.

⁴Although one could make the argument that asking participants to engage in a memory task when watching the news program makes our manipulation less realistic, we do not believe this is a significant problem. This is largely because prior scholars have documented that television news is used by viewers to understand what is going on around them (McCombs, 1994). Although we agree that television news is not typically attended to with the anticipation of putting the content to memory, countless studies have found that when survey respondents are asked to recount the important issues of the day, they attempt to recall information aired on television news (Lyengar, 1987; McCombs, 1994).

Stimulus Materials

A 15-min news program was edited such that it contained a 22-s crime story about a Black or a White male (perpetrator) sought for the murder of a race-unidentified police officer (victim). The story identified the perpetrator as either a White, a light-skinned Black, a medium-skinned Black, or a dark-skinned Black male. The perpetrator was introduced through the insertion of a photograph shown for 3 s during the airing of the story. The timing of the photo insertion suggested that there was little doubt regarding the perpetrator's guilt. The photo was altered through computer editing so that the featured character would be perceived as authentically White or Black, with the appropriate skin tone.⁵

Pretest and Manipulation Check of Stimulus Materials

A pretest was performed on the altered photos in order to ensure that the characters featured in each picture actually appeared to be White or a light-skinned, medium-skinned, or dark-skinned Black. A separate group of 30 White participants made racial category and skin-tone judgments of the four photographs. Each of the Black criminal photos was rated as looking more Black, compared to the White criminal photo: dark versus White, $t(28) = 10.52, p < .001$; medium versus White, $t(29) = 13.15, p < .001$; light versus White, $t(29) = 6.67, p < .001$.

With respect to skin tone, the dark-skinned Black criminal photo was rated as having a darker complexion, as compared to the medium-skinned Black criminal photo, $t(27) = 5.86, p < .01$; and the light-skinned Black criminal photo, $t(28) = 9.12, p < .001$. The medium-skinned Black criminal photo was rated as having a darker complexion, as compared to the light-skinned Black criminal photo, $t(28) = 5.89, p < .001$. These results suggest that participants perceived the White photo as White, and the Black photos were differentiated by skin tone.

After the news-story manipulation during the bogus memory task, we asked participants to recall the race of the suspects featured in the newscast on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not very likely Black*) to 7 (*very likely Black*) scale. None of the Black photos significantly differed from one another in the extent to which participants remembered them as Black. However, the dark-skinned Black photo ($M = 5.38, SD = 1.42$), medium-skinned Black photo ($M = 5.52, SD = 1.23$), and light-skinned Black photo ($M = 5.44, SD = 1.27$) significantly differed from the White photo ($M = 3.58, SD = 1.46$) in the extent to which participants recalled the suspect as Black.

⁵Similar methods have been used in prior studies to manipulate race (Gilliam et al., 1996). This approach addresses the criticism that differences seen on the outcome measures are a result of other facial features or appearance variables between the Whites and Blacks featured, and not a result of race or skin tone. This criticism is avoided because the same person with the same clothing and facial features is portrayed in all conditions.

Dependent Measures

The dependent measures used in the present study consist of several 7-point Likert-type scale items ranging from 1 (*not very likely, definitely not, disagree*) to 7 (*very likely, definitely, agree*), with some of the scales reversed. One of the measures was designed to assess the extent to which participants felt emotional concern about the manipulated crime story (e.g., “How much did the story make you worry?”; 7 items; $\alpha = .89$).

A second set of items purportedly tested memory for the news story. Embedded in these items were questions about the personality traits of the perpetrator and the victim of the crime. Positive traits include the extent to which participants believed that each character was intelligent, attractive, sympathetic, and friendly ($\alpha_{\text{perp}} = .79$; $\alpha_{\text{victim}} = .82$). Negative traits include the extent to which participants believed that each character was dangerous and threatening ($\alpha_{\text{perp}} = .86$; $\alpha_{\text{victim}} = .63$). Participants were also asked how memorable each character was. Finally, participants were asked to recommend the amount of time the perpetrator should be sentenced to spend in prison and whether or not he should receive the death penalty for his crime.

Results

Overview

The experimental hypotheses concerning the influence of race, skin tone, and news viewing were examined using a 4×2 (Race \times Prior News Exposure) between-subjects ANOVA. Where significant interactions were found, simple comparisons were undertaken using a Holm’s sequential Bonferroni correction method for post hoc comparisons. All statistical tests were conducted at the .05 significance level.

Emotional Concern Elicited by the News Story

The ANOVA for story concern reveals a significant main effect for race of perpetrator, $F(3, 122) = 5.17, p < .01$ ($\eta_p^2 = .11$). Participants who were exposed to a dark-skinned Black perpetrator ($M = 3.84, SD = 1.04$) expressed more emotional concern about the crime story than did those who were exposed to a white perpetrator ($M = 2.91, SD = 1.18$). This main effect was qualified by a significant interaction between skin tone of perpetrator and prior news viewing, $F(3, 93) = 2.86, p < .05$ ($\eta_p^2 = .07$; Table 1).

Post hoc analyses of all pairwise comparisons reveal that heavy news viewers who were exposed to a dark-skinned Black perpetrator ($M = 4.51, SD = 0.79$) were more concerned about the crime story than those who were exposed to a White perpetrator ($M = 2.67, SD = 0.81$), $F(1, 61) = 6.26, p < .01$ ($\eta_p^2 = .24$). This was not the case for light news viewers ($M_s = 3.43$ and 3.08 , respectively).

Table 1

Priming Effects on Emotional Story Concern and Positive Evaluations of the Victim as a Function of Perpetrator Race and Participants' News Viewing Frequency

News viewing	Perpetrator race			
	White	Light Black	Medium Black	Dark Black
Story concern				
Light news viewing	3.08 _a	3.16 _a	3.61 _a	3.43 _a
Heavy news viewing	2.67 _a	3.74 _a	3.51 _a	4.51 _b
Positive evaluations of the victim				
Light news viewing	3.68 _a	3.54 _a	3.90 _a	3.57 _a
Heavy news viewing	2.96 _a	3.96 _b	4.08 _b	4.02 _b

Note. Means in the same row with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

None of the other pairwise comparisons were statistically significant, suggesting that the significant interaction reported is a result of the difference between the White and dark-skinned Black perpetrator conditions. Furthermore, light and heavy news viewers ($M_s = 3.43$ vs. 4.51) only differed in their degree of emotional concern following exposure to a dark-skinned perpetrator, $t(32) = -3.38, p < .01$.

Perceptions of the Perpetrator and Victim

Positive and negative trait ratings. Indexes reflecting ratings of positive (friendly, attractive, intelligent, sympathetic) and negative (dangerous, threatening) traits associated with the perpetrator and his alleged victim were analyzed using separate 4×2 univariate ANOVAs. With respect to the perpetrator, no main effects or interactions for either positive or negative traits were statistically significant ($F_s < 3$). With respect to the victim, a significant main effect of character, $F(3, 122) = 3.76, p < .02$ ($\eta_p^2 = .09$), was qualified by a Character \times News Viewing interaction, $F(3, 122) = 3.59, p < .02$ ($\eta_p^2 = .08$; Table 1).

Follow-up analyses reveal that heavy news viewers rated victims of light-skinned ($M = 3.96, SD = 0.94$), medium-skinned ($M = 4.08, SD = 0.65$), and dark-skinned ($M = 4.02, SD = 0.57$) Black perpetrators more positively than victims of White perpetrators ($M = 2.96, SD = 0.99$). Again, none of the other pairwise comparisons were statistically significant, suggesting that the light-

medium-, and dark-skinned perpetrator conditions were equal to one another. There were no differences in ratings of the victim on negative traits ($F_s < 1$).

Memorability. Participants were asked how memorable the perpetrator and the alleged victim were. Separate analyses of both ratings reveal main effects of character: perpetrator, $F(3, 122) = 3.19, p < .03$ ($\eta_p^2 = .07$); and victim, $F(3, 122) = 4.76, p < .01$ ($\eta_p^2 = .10$). Post hoc analyses reveal that a White perpetrator ($M = 3.23, SD = 1.71$) was perceived as less memorable than a dark-skinned Black perpetrator ($M = 4.38, SD = 1.54$). The victim was perceived as more memorable when the perpetrator was Black with medium skin tone ($M = 4.00, SD = 1.15$) compared to when the perpetrator was White ($M = 2.87, SD = 1.14$).

Punishment of Perpetrator

There were no main effects or interactions in recommendations for time of imprisonment or the death penalty ($F_s < 1$).

Discussion

Overall, the results are consistent with the hypothesis concerning race and skin tone in conceptual priming. However, the results surfaced in a somewhat different pattern than expected. Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted increased priming effects for all Black targets compared to White targets, coupled with a linear relationship between the magnitude of priming effects and skin tone of Black targets. Instead, we found that, compared to a White perpetrator, exposure to a news story featuring a dark-skinned Black perpetrator uniquely exaggerated story-related perceptions. This was true particularly among heavy television news viewers, consistent with Hypothesis 3. In short, race matters—and so does skin tone—in eliciting stereotypical knowledge associated with Black versus White criminals.

To our knowledge, this study is alone in demonstrating differences in judgments based on a causal manipulation of skin tone. It seems that dark skin tone of a Black target was necessary to achieve the threshold toward activating racial stereotypical associations with Black criminals. Still, the results provide mixed evidence that exposure to perpetrators with increasingly darker skin tone will always moderate this effect.

Consistent with the hypotheses, participants who reported higher levels of television news viewing exhibited the most emotional concern after watching a crime story that contained a dark-skinned Black perpetrator. On the other hand, these same participants showed favorable perceptions of the victim when the perpetrator was Black, regardless of skin tone. The results also indicate that all participants, regardless of prior news exposure, found the victim and perpetrator more memorable when the perpetrator was a dark-skinned Black male. Next, we

offer some possible explanations for the pattern of findings in the current study. Following this, we provide a number of suggestions for future research directions and highlight some of the practical implications of the findings.

Direct Evaluation of Perpetrators

Increased stereotype activation among those who reported relatively heavy news exposure did not influence direct evaluations of the perpetrator. In retrospect, our paradigm may have created a difficult test of the hypotheses for several reasons. First, the character in the story was portrayed as the perpetrator, rather than a suspect. Given research suggesting that stereotypes are much more likely to influence judgments based on ambiguous behavior (Darley & Gross, 1983), it is possible that a portrayal of the character as a suspect would have provided sufficient ambiguity to lead to differential direct evaluations of the character.

Second, the use of a single photograph does not control for perceived idiosyncrasies in facial features of the photograph. After all, different people who belong to the same racial category exhibit a wide variety of facial features. The use of a larger sample of photographs as targets portraying a variety of phenotypic configurations would provide a more comprehensive examination of the hypotheses by isolating the influence of skin tone apart from other facial features. Third, while prior research has demonstrated that activation of a stereotype often leads to stereotype-consistent evaluations of a social target, this particular pattern occurs less often when concerns over social desirability are heightened.

As a consequence, researchers looking for the role of stereotype activation on judgments often have resorted to methods where participants believe their judgments cannot be viewed through the lens of racial prejudice (Devine, 1989; Lepore & Brown, 1997; Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 1997) or when responses are made quickly and thus are less subject to conscious control (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995). Prior studies using a similar news paradigm have found evidence for stereotype activation on judgments among those participants who were high in racial prejudice (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998; Gilliam et al., 1996; Peffley et al., 1996). Perhaps the focus on prior exposure to television news in the present study suggests that racial prejudice and high exposure to stereotype-consistent depictions of racial groups are not highly correlated (Lepore & Brown, 1997). Future research should address this issue.

Prior News Viewing as a Moderator of Priming Effects

As a result of long-term activation by prior television news exposure, heavy news viewers were more likely to have a negative emotional reaction to news content than were light news viewers if the story featured a dark-skinned Black perpetrator. Given the overrepresentation of Blacks with criminality on television

news (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Romer et al., 1998), multiple exposure to news programming leads to repeated cognitive activation of this aspect of the stereotype. Several researchers have suggested that frequent activation of a stereotype might lead to chronic activation over time, increasing the likelihood of its use in crime-related judgments (e.g., Devine, 1989; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Higgins, 2000). Thus, prior exposure to television news is another individual-difference factor that may be considered when describing the relationship between stereotypes and judgments.

The problem becomes even more pernicious through consideration of the cognitive processes that favor reinforcement, rather than reconsideration of these images (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Kunda, 1999). Research on illusory correlation processes has suggested that stereotypes can be created and reinforced through biased processing of data, even where no correlation exists (Hamilton & Gifford, 1976; Hamilton & Rose, 1980). However, the work of Dixon and Linz (2000a, 2000b) has suggested that there is a correlation in the data presented through the media, thus strengthening the association even further. As a result, our ideas regarding criminality have become attached to our notions of Blacks (Gilens, 1999; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978; Oliver, 1999). Taking a broader perspective, this linkage supports the notion that other stereotypical depictions in the media may contribute to cultural stereotypes about a variety of racial and ethnic groups.

Future Directions and Practical Implications

The present findings complement prior work that has used crime news as a priming stimulus for race and crime judgments and extend these prior findings into the area of skin-tone variation. In addition, the findings appear to suggest that prior television news viewing is a significant moderator of these judgments. In the current section, we consider some of the limitations of the current research and suggest directions to explore several factors in greater detail.

Further examination of the role of skin tone. There was some evidence to support the idea that variation in skin tone is associated with variation in stereotype activation. Only the dark-skinned Black perpetrator elicited greater emotional concern, as compared to the White perpetrator. However, each of the Black perpetrators led to more positive evaluations of the victim when compared to the White perpetrator. We suggested that these evaluations of the victim represent indirect evaluations of the perpetrator. Assuming for a moment that stereotype activation is influenced by skin tone, one possible explanation of this pattern concerns the influence of stereotype activation with respect to judgments about others versus judgments about the self. Emotional concerns on behalf of the participant may be particularly sensitive to stereotype activation. To the extent that a dark-skinned Black criminal represents a greater threat to participants, emotional

concern would be heightened. This suggests that the more the participant identifies with the victim, the greater the influence of stereotype activation in their evaluation of that victim.

Another possibility is that since the emotional-concern measure came first among the others, stereotype activation simply faded over time. While the general race effect seemed to be present across those measures that found differences, Maddox and Gray (2002) and others (Blair et al., 2002; Livingston & Brewer, 2002) have argued that skin tone is one of the many features that are related to differential perceptions of Blacks. Thus, variation in one feature, albeit an important feature, may lead to less initial activation compared to variation across several features.

Interaction between racism and news viewing. Our focus was on the extent to which prior television news viewing served as a moderator of crime news' priming effect. However, individual differences in racism and news viewing might interact to produce differential activation of stereotypes as a function of race and skin tone. Prior studies have demonstrated this relationship with respect to individual differences in racial prejudice toward Blacks, but none has examined the interaction between the two.

In-group versus out-group membership. Another area that should be examined in future work includes an investigation of how a sample of Blacks would react to the race and skin-tone differences among perpetrators that were examined in the current study. While the current sample included some Black respondents, the size was not large enough to permit an examination of this influence. Other research has suggested that both Blacks and Whites are attentive to variations in skin tone and are aware of cultural stereotypes regarding light- and dark-skinned Blacks (Maddox & Gray, 2002). Furthermore, Whites engage in phenotypic biases that favor less Afrocentric-appearing Blacks (Blair et al., 2002; Livingston & Brewer, 2002; Maddox & Gray, 2002). These results suggest that Black Americans are not exclusively responsible for the various social-outcome differences based on skin tone (Keith & Herring, 1991; Maddox & Gray, 2002).

Future research also should examine the role of in-group/out-group membership within the racial category. Thus, Black participants with light skin tone may react differently, compared to those with dark skin tone. Questions of this nature have not been addressed in the literature, but could provide important insight on the current role of skin-tone bias in the Black community.

Influence of news viewing on social attitudes and judgments. The hypotheses have significant implications for attitudes about social policy. For instance, not only are Blacks more likely than Whites to have punitive crime-policy decisions directed toward them, but this may be exaggerated for Blacks with darker skin tone. These individuals may be even more likely than light-skinned Blacks to receive differential negative treatment by the criminal-justice system based on skin tone.

As mentioned earlier, political-communication scholars have suggested that news-media constructions of race and social policies may provide a heuristic or shortcut that is used when making policy decisions (Domke et al., 1998, 1999; Gilens, 1999; Valentino, 1999). These theories suggest that judgments about race-related social policies may be biased as a result of the misrepresentation of Blacks as criminals. But those with greater exposure to television news may demonstrate more extreme negative biases on policies and attitudes related to Black Americans. The current study suggests that news exposure can moderate story-specific judgments, but future research may explore the role of news exposure on more general social attitudes.

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