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Reducing the Negative Consequences of Television's Racialized Crime Portrayals

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Abstract

Previous research shows that African Americans are overrepresented as criminals and underrepresented as victims within media contexts, relative to real life incarceration and victimization statistics. Frequent exposure to these biased media portrayals can have detrimental effects on viewers, causing them to view African Americans negatively while also instinctively associating Black skin with thoughts of crime and violence. In an attempt to reduce these negative biases, participants were exposed to positive, crime-free television portrayals of African Americans. Relative to participants who watched other types of programming, participants who had been exposed to these positive depictions were expected to demonstrate a reduction in negative biases against Blacks on two separate implicit measures. Contrary to expectations, the positive depictions did not significantly reduce either negative feelings about Blacks or associations between African Americans and violence. These results were likely not significant due to the sample size of only 65 participants. Additionally, longer and more frequent exposure to positive TV depictions of African Americans may be necessary to reduce stereotypes that have been built up over several years of media exposure.

Reducing the Negative Consequences of Television's Racialized Crime Portrayals

Much research within the field of communications has suggested that the media play an important role in the formulation of attitudes and beliefs about various groups who are different than the viewer. Although this type of research has been conducted while examining many different outgroups, African Americans comprise one particular group that has garnered a considerable amount of scholarly attention. The way in which groups are portrayed can have important consequences, as the viewers of this content will use media depictions in order to inform their opinions about the group. When it comes to mass media portrayals of African Americans, research shows that Blacks are overrepresented as criminals and underrepresented as crime victims (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Dixon, Azocar, & Casas, 2003). As a result, viewers come to fear, distrust, and generally dislike Blacks, leading to stereotyping and unfounded negative feelings towards an entire group of people based solely upon the color of their skin (Payne, 2006; Dixon & Azocar, 2007).

Negative stereotyping of an entire group is never considered a good thing, and the fact that the media plays such a large role in its development is problematic. Researchers are particularly concerned with the fact that these stereotypes are so pervasive and intensely ingrained throughout many aspects of American culture. Crime-related stereotypes towards African Americans are thought by many to be "automatic," even to the point where people may not even consciously realize that they are being influenced by their own stereotypes. In a society where people are continually exposed to an association between Blacks and crime, what can be done to help break this association?

It has been well established that negative media depictions lead to negative attitudes and stereotypes (Payne, 2006; Dixon & Azocar, 2007), and research is now beginning to look at what

can be done in order to mitigate or erase the harmful stereotypes created by these negative portrayals. This is not a particularly easy task, as the deeply ingrained nature of the stereotypes makes it difficult to combat. Nonetheless, evidence suggests that it is indeed possible. Research has shown that positive representations of African Americans can lead to more favorable attitudes towards Blacks (Ramasubramanian, 2007), yet much less research has looked specifically at disrupting associations between Blacks and crime. It is one thing for positive representations to lead to generally warmer feelings towards a group, but it is another thing entirely for these representations to disrupt specific, frequently encountered associations. Furthermore, much of the previous research has involved explicit instructions to think about counter-stereotypes. What happens when the portrayal of counter-stereotypes is subtler, and participants are not directly told to think about these depictions while performing stereotype-measuring tasks? Can positive media representations interfere with these associations enough to influence split-second decision-making, such as those made by police officers when they must decide whether someone is holding a gun or a wallet?

The current study aims to answer these questions by using implicit measures to gauge participants' attitudes and association between Blacks and crime. I propose that participants who are exposed to positive, crime-free media representations of African Americans (relative to those exposed to favorable White depictions or a control) will show more positive attitudes towards Blacks and less of an association between Blacks and crime. It is expected that the level of typical television usage will moderate this relationship, such that heavy TV viewers will not be as influenced by the media depictions as light TV viewers. As a result of heavy exposure having made the Black criminal stereotype highly accessible and resistant to change, heavy TV viewers are expected to show more negative bias against African Americans than light TV viewers even

after exposure to positive representations. Furthermore, I expect that the level of real world exposure to Blacks will moderate this relationship. Participants with little exposure should be especially influenced by the media depiction, as they should rely more strongly upon media depictions in order to form opinions than those who encounter Blacks in real life more frequently. The basis for these expectations will be outlined further in the ensuing literature review. In summary, my research hypotheses are as follows:

H 1.1: Regardless of condition, non-African American participants will have a negative bias against African Americans and a positive bias towards Whites.

H 1.2: Exposure to positive, crime-free media representations of African Americans will lead to an increase in positive attitudes towards Blacks amongst a non-African American population.

H 2.1: Regardless of condition, participants will demonstrate having a cognitive association between African Americans and weapons.

H 2.2: Exposure to positive, crime-free media representations of African Americans will lead to less of an association between Blacks and weapons amongst a non-African American population.

H3: General trends for television usage will moderate this main effect, as light television viewers who are exposed to positive representations will show even less bias than heavy television viewers exposed to the same content.

H4: Level of real world exposure to Blacks will also moderate these effects. Participants with less exposure to Blacks will be more positively influenced by the representations than those with frequent exposure.

Since negative media depictions can have very real effects upon the consumers of those images, it is important to understand how positive representations can help to mitigate these effects. As a result of the frequent association between Blacks and crime, police officers, forced to make split-second decisions about the level of dangerousness in a situation, may be more likely to falsely identify Blacks as criminals due to frequent exposure and activation of these

stereotypes. Juries may be more likely to convict a Black defendant simply because his skin color makes it easier for them to see him as guilty. Interactions between Whites and Blacks may elevate more quickly towards aggression or violence if Whites come into the interaction with preconceived notions about Black criminality. If media producers can gain an understanding of how to most efficiently and accurately increase positive associations with African Americans, then they can simultaneously erase the negative stereotypes that lead to these types of situations.

Regardless of what media producers may be able to accomplish in the future, the fact remains that the current media environment is full of harmful African American stereotypes, particularly when it comes to crime and violence. Numerous researchers have examined the ways in which the mass media unfairly and inaccurately perpetuates associations between African Americans and crime, and the results are rather astounding. Across multiple media platforms, associations between African Americans and crime are extraordinarily pervasive (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Barlow, 1998; Oliver, 1994), leading to an American public that instinctively associates the two as well (Payne, 2006; Dixon & Azocar, 2007). Although the current study looks solely at television, the ways in which African Americans have unfairly been linked to crime throughout numerous media contexts serve as the context for why stereotype-reducing media is important.

Of all types of media, television news is perhaps the singular most researched medium when it comes to violent portrayals of African Americans. Americans turn to television news in order to give them accurate information about the world in which they live, and stories of crime often fill large portions of the news hour. Dixon and Linz (2000) analyzed television news reports from stations that serve the Los Angeles, CA area and found that African Americans were less likely than Whites to be portrayed as crime victims and more likely than Whites to be portrayed as perpetrators. According to their analysis, Blacks were twice as likely to be portrayed

as criminals than as victims, particularly for homicides. Homicides are arguably the most violent crimes imaginable, and it is particularly troubling that African Americans are most strongly and consistently linked to the most harmful and fear-inducing crime that there is. Dixon and Linz (2000) compared their content analysis to real life arrest rates and crime reports within the California Department of Justice, finding that the image painted by television news does not match that of the real world. Whites were significantly far more likely to be shown as homicide victims on television (43% of all victims) than is true in real life (only 13% of all victims). Although television victimization rates for African Americans were not statistically different from those of real life victimization rates, Blacks were far more likely to be shown as criminals on television (36% of all perpetrators) than arrest records suggest is true in real life (21% of all perpetrators). Although Dixon and Linz (2000) were simply interested in a content analysis, rather than effects on viewers, it is not hard to imagine how their findings play out within the real world. When African Americans are overrepresented as criminals and Whites are overrepresented as victims – particularly for the worst of all crimes, homicide – the natural response is for Whites to feel that African Americans pose a danger to their own well-being. This perpetuates negative stereotypes towards African Americans and increases irrational fears towards Blacks on behalf of non-African American viewers.

Another study by Chiricos and Eschholz (2002) examined local television news broadcasts serving the Orlando, FL area. In addition to quantitatively analyzing the broadcasts, Chiricos and Eschholz (2002) were interested in the specific ways in which the criminals on television were shown. Using measures of how often perpetrators were shown in the custody of the police or in a mug shot and how often they were accused of having victimized strangers or people from other races, the authors calculated levels of dangerousness for each race shown on

television. Chiricos and Eschholz (2002) concluded that African Americans were the most likely race to be depicted in a particularly dangerous or menacing fashion. Even though Whites were referenced as criminals more often than Blacks, Blacks were almost twice as likely to be shown in the negative glow of mug shot photos than Whites. Again, the research suggests that even though Blacks may not necessarily be overrepresented in comparison to their incarceration rates in all contexts, they tend to be shown as particularly harmful and dangerous when they are referenced, relative to criminals of other racial backgrounds.

In addition to local television news, Dixon, Azocar, and Casas (2003) also examined the ways in which African Americans were portrayed on major network news broadcasts on ABC, NBC, and CBS. These broadcasts were available to viewers all across the country and were not limited to local stories. In this study, Dixon, Azocar, and Casas (2003) found that Whites were more likely to be portrayed as perpetrators than African Americans, although any differences between the two races were reduced – albeit still leading to a significant difference – when only violent crimes were analyzed. In contrast to the study by Dixon and Linz (2000), which found that African Americans were overrepresented as criminals and equally represented as victims, Dixon, Azocar, and Casas (2003) found that Blacks were equally represented as criminals but underrepresented as victims when comparing television portrayals to The Department of Justice's crime statistics. Whites were also significantly more likely to be seen as police officers on television than real life statistics suggest, just as African Americans were significantly less likely to be seen as police officers. Although these results differ somewhat from the previous studies (a result which may be due to the different population involved in this study), their findings still add to racial stereotypes. Although African Americans may be accurately depicted as criminals on network news in comparison to their real life arrest rates, the under-

representation of African Americans as victims and police officers can have very real effects upon viewers. With these portrayals, network news sends viewers a message that African Americans are dangerous, rarely deserving of sympathy, and unlikely to work to uphold the law. As a result, the only connection that viewers can make between African Americans and the law is one in which the law is constantly being broken.

Research findings that link African Americans to crime are not just limited to television news, as reality television shows continually reinforce these stereotypes as well. Oliver (1994) examined reality-based police television shows and found very similar results to the previous study. Oliver (1994) found that Whites were much more likely to be shown as police officers than criminals, just as African Americans were much more likely to be shown as criminals than police officers. Although it is true that America's police force is comprised of more Whites than African Americans, the percentages of each racial group's appearance on television did not match the statistics put out by the Department of Justice or Department of Labor. In comparison to these real life statistics, Blacks on reality-based television shows were underrepresented as law enforcers (17% of real-world police, compared to 9% of television police) while Whites were overrepresented (83% of real-world police, compared to 91% of television police). Additionally, Oliver (1994) found that Black suspects appeared more frequently on television than they do in FBI statistics, although the races were portrayed relatively accurately with respect to their involvement in violent crimes.

Barlow (1998) takes on a more historical approach in order to analyze the connection between the notion of the violent African American criminal and media coverage of crime. According to Barlow (1998), the rise in racialized crime depictions was correlated with the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Barlow (1998) argues that the media, politicians, and

law enforcement officials worked to create a negatively stereotyped environment that would hinder progress from being made within the Civil Rights Movement. According to Barlow (1998), "The criminalization of young African American men played a critical role in the repression, co-option, and fragmentation of struggles for racial justice and equality" (p. 152). By examining the cover stories within *Time* and *Newsweek*, Barlow (1998) found that crime was portrayed primarily as a problem of urban Blacks only once the Civil Rights Movement took center stage. Before then, crime was rarely portrayed with reference to any specific race. It was not until the mid 1960s that newsmagazines began to regularly equate crime with African Americans. According to Barlow (1998), one *Newsweek* article from 1965 literally claimed that, "'In a real sense,' said a former high-ranking Administration official last week, 'to speak of crime today is to speak of Negro crime'" (p. 160).

Although Barlow (1998) was interested in articles written in the 1960s, the notion that the problem of crime and the problem of Black crime is one in the same is not lost on the current media environment. Dixon and Azocar (2007) conducted an experiment to determine how Americans view African Americans and crime. They found that when participants were exposed to a television news story featuring an unidentified suspect, participants were more likely to associate stereotypically Black characteristics with the suspect. Dixon and Azocar (2007) also found that participants were more likely to give a race-unidentified suspect a higher guilty rating after viewing a television show featuring primarily Black suspects (rather than those who viewed shows with primarily White suspects or unidentified suspects). The results of their study suggest that reminding people of crime leads to thoughts of Blacks, just as reminding people of Blacks lead to more intense thoughts about crime and higher guilty ratings. Their finding supports Barlow's (1998) research, even though the historical period in question was several years later.

According to Dixon and Azocar (2007), "Exposure to racialized crime news shapes perceptions of Blacks and race relations and leads viewers to see criminal activity as a Black activity" (p. 245). Based on the results of their study, Dixon and Azocar (2007) suggest that the mere mention of crime, regardless of whether or not race is discussed, conjures up negative feelings towards African Americans as a result of frequent exposure to links between Blacks and crime.

Unfortunately, the effects of the media's linking of Blacks and crime go beyond the creation of harmful stereotypes and associations for viewers. Payne (2006) demonstrated this idea using the Weapons Identification Task (WIT), whereby research participants were asked whether an object was harmful or harmless following exposure to either a Black or White face. According to Payne (2006), people are more likely to misidentify a harmless object as a gun following exposure to a Black face, just as they are more likely to identify guns faster (when the object in question really is a gun) following exposure to a Black face. Even when participants were alerted to the fact that the race of the face would influence their decision, participants still showed this same bias. This suggests that television's repeated pairings of African Americans and crime has led to very real, strong cognitive relations between the two concepts in the minds of many Americans. When people need to make decisions – especially quick decisions, such as the ones that police officers must make on an everyday basis – these relationships that the media has built up are likely to really influence their decisions.

More recently, scholars have turned their focus towards examining how the negative effects caused by stereotyping can be reversed. How can the media or other outlets help to break down this association between African Americans and crime? One of the most common ways in which researchers have attempted to answer this question is by presenting or making salient counter-stereotypical messages, just like the current research project aims to accomplish.

Researchers have examined this in several different ways, and each method provides insight into the ways that stereotypes can be reversed.

Like Payne (2006), other researchers have used versions of the Weapons Identification Task (WIT) to measure both stereotypes and the ways in which stereotypes can be reduced. One study by Plant, Peruche, and Butz (2005) found that participants made more errors in identifying harmless objects vs. weapons at the beginning of a WIT-like shooter task than at the end. Although it is possible that participants simply became more used to the task and therefore made fewer errors as a result of practice effects, the researchers believe that there is more to this reduction of errors. According to Plant, Peruche, and Butz (2005), participating in the shooter task – which was designed to show 50% of Blacks and 50% of Whites with guns in hand – altered people's perceptions because they became more accustomed to seeing both Blacks and Whites holding guns. Thanks in part to the repeated pairings between Blacks and crime within the media, Americans have come to expect that Blacks are violent. Keeping with this expectation, participants began the shooter task by showing a bias against Blacks, whereby they would more readily shoot at defenseless Black targets (believing them to be holding guns) than at defenseless White targets. By the end of the task, however, participants responded similarly to instances where Black faces were paired with both harmful and harmless objects. Plant, Peruche, and Butz (2005) believe that the task itself exposed participants to a world in which Blacks and Whites were equally as likely to be violent, and this was reflected in the lower error rates and decreased stereotyping that occurred towards the end of the task. If the regular media environment exposed people to similar rates of criminality in the way that the shooter task did, then perhaps negative stereotyping could be reduced as well.

Another study by Mendoza, Gollwitzer, and Amodio (2010) found that participants who are told to use implementation-intentions are less likely to show racial bias in a shooter task. In their study, half of the participants were told to repeat the following phrase four times before completing the shooter task: "If I see a person, then I will ignore his race!" (Mendoza, Gollwitzer, & Amodio, 2010, p. 515). Overall, the researchers observed a finding consistent with Payne (2006)'s earlier results – regardless of condition, participants were more likely to shoot at unarmed Black images than at unarmed White images, just as they were less likely to shoot at armed White images than armed Black images. However, Mendoza, Gollwitzer, and Amodio (2010) also found that use of the implementation intention did influence these results, as participants who had repeated that they would ignore race were shown to make fewer errors overall.

Similarly, another study by Payne and Stewart (2008) found that even more specific implementation intentions can also reduce racial bias on a WIT task. In their study, Payne and Stewart (2008) found that participants who were told to repeat the phrase, "Whenever I see a Black face on the screen, I will think the word 'safe'" were less likely than participants in other conditions to show bias against African Americans (p. 1336). These participants had been explicitly told that they were "just as safe interacting with a Black individual as with a White individual" and to keep this in mind while working on the WIT (Payne & Stewart, 2008, p. 1336). After being given these instructions, Payne and Stewart (2008) found that participants were equally as likely to misidentify a tool as a gun following exposure to Black vs. White faces, although they were still more likely to misidentify a gun as a harmless object following a White face rather than a Black face. Although participants were significantly more likely to misidentify a gun as a tool after seeing a White face instead of a Black face, this difference was much less

significant than it had been for the other conditions. Interestingly, there were still significant biases against African Americans in identifying both guns and tools when participants were instructed specifically to "be accurate" when viewing Black faces. Based on their research, Payne and Stewart (2008) believe that automatic associations between African Americans and violence can be reduced, although the strategy used to achieve this goal should be rather explicit and work directly to associate African Americans with safety or other positive attributes.

Other researchers have examined additional ways that the media can reduce stereotyping. According to a study by Ramasubramanian (2007), people who are trained in media literacy and who are exposed to counter-stereotypical images are less likely than their counterparts to endorse the negative stereotypes that are promoted by the media. In her study, Ramasubramanian (2007) found that participants who were taught to be critical of media messages were less likely to express their own stereotypes (measured through a lexical decision task) when exposed to stereotypical images of Blacks engaging in violence than those who were not trained in media literacy. Although exposure to counter-stereotypical images of African Americans also decreased the likelihood that participants expressed stereotypes, this was particularly true among those trained in media literacy. According to Ramasubramanian (2007), counter-stereotypical images can be effective in reducing stereotypes, but the biggest change occurs when people are told to be critical of media images to begin with.

Other researchers have attempted to reduce stereotypes by exposing participants to famous people who also serve as examples of counter-stereotypes. Dasgupta and Greenwald (2001) exposed participants to images of famous Black and White individuals and then attempted to measure stereotypes towards these racial categories using an Implicit Associations Task (IAT) and self-report measures. The researchers found that participants who had been

exposed to images of positive, well-liked African Americans and negative, disliked Whites showed less of a bias against African Americans than people exposed to images of negative African Americans and positive Whites or a control condition. These results remained the same even up to 24 hours after exposure to the images. Again, Dasgupta and Greenwald's (2001) research lends support to the theory that exposure to positive counter-stereotypes can reduce automatic stereotyping in viewers.

Another study by Blair, Ma, and Lenton (2001) used counter-stereotypes in order to reduce harmful stereotypes. Specifically, the researchers analyzed the ways in which imagining counter-stereotypes about women decreases the expression of these stereotypes in a subsequent IAT task. According to Blair, Ma, and Lenton (2001), participants who were told to imagine counter-stereotypical women showed less of a bias against women (as compared to men) on the IAT task than those who imagined either neutral images or negative images of women. Because of these and similar studies, I propose the following hypotheses:

H 1.1: Regardless of condition, non-African American participants will have a negative bias against African Americans and a positive bias towards Whites.

H 1.2: Exposure to positive, crime-free media representations of African Americans will lead to an increase in positive attitudes towards Blacks amongst a non-African American population.

H 2.1: Regardless of condition, participants will demonstrate having a cognitive association between African Americans and weapons.

H 2.2: Exposure to positive, crime-free media representations of African Americans will lead to less of an association between Blacks and weapons amongst a non-African American population.

At this point, it is clear that research shows that the media can be influential in the creation and reduction of racial stereotypes surrounding the nature of crime and violence. Now, it is important to understand the theoretical underpinnings behind this research – how does the

media create such significant, seemingly automatic effects in people? And how might the inclusion of counter-stereotypes decrease these associations? Although there are several theories that explain how and why this occurs, some of the most significant include cultivation theory, information processing, and priming theory.

According to cultivation theory, television constructs a specific image of the world that is then transmitted to the millions of people watching at home. According to Gerbner (1980), "Socially constructed reality gives a coherent picture of what exists, what is important, how things are related, and what is right" (p. 707). This "socially constructed reality" is television, and Gerbner (1980) contends that the world of television tends to focus primarily on similar patterns that repeat over and over again across various television shows and genres. As the content analyses discussed earlier clearly demonstrate, in the world of television, violence and crime – specifically the most dangerous and threatening forms – are frequently associated with African Americans. According to cultivation theory, viewers perceive this picture as constructed by television to be not only the image of the television world, but also of the real world. According to Gerbner (1980), people learn about their own environment from watching television, and when television exaggerates a problem – as is the case with violence – viewers are also likely to exaggerate the problem. In Gerbner's (1980) research, heavy television viewers showed a tendency to be more fearful of crime. When crime is depicted as an African American-propagated phenomenon, they are also more likely to be fearful of African Americans themselves. More recently, Van den Bulck (2004) found that fear of crime and high levels of television viewing were related, lending further support to cultivation theory. Similarly, if television changed and began to show more positive depictions of African Americans, viewers

would believe this new image of the world as shown by television in the same way that they do now.

Another theory that explains how the media influences stereotyped images of crime and violence comes from supporters of information processing and schema theory. According to this theory, the media establishes norms and beliefs about the world that viewers then use to evaluate information and make decisions (Huesmann & Taylor, 2006). According to Huesmann and Taylor (2006), one way that viewers learn schemas about society is through the lens of television. When the image put out by television is one of violent Black criminals, then viewers will believe that this image persists in the real world as well. Subsequently, people will use these media-created "world schemas" in order to evaluate information, make attributions about others, and respond appropriately, such as when a Black man walks toward them down the street. If viewers believe that African Americans are typically dangerous, they might respond with fear or possibly even preemptive aggression in the name of self-defense.

Hilton and von Hippel (1996) note that schemas and stereotypes are similar in that both allow people to easily process information by taking mental shortcuts. It can be cumbersome to individually and independently analyze all situations in the real world or the media, so schemas serve as a way to make generalizations about the way the world works (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Stereotypes operate in precisely the same way, allowing people to use past experiences in order to more easily make assumptions about the present. When people observe media portrayals that are all full of similar characteristics about a certain racial group, these characteristics become part of their stereotype and are then used when encountering future situations. If the media were to diversify their content and show more positive, non-crime related representations of African Americans, stereotypes would be harder to develop because there would not be one

singular representation of what it means to be African American. The same is conceivably true for people who have exposure to African Americans in the real world, as they will rely more on their own diverse experiences than on the image portrayed by television. Viewers would be forced to evaluate situations based upon the facts at hand (i.e. whether someone is or is not holding a gun), rather than allowing their stereotyped preconceptions to color their attitudes and beliefs.

Yet another theory that is important for the short-term effects created by racialized media depictions of crime is priming theory. Researchers in various fields have used priming theory in order to explain how exposure to a construct influences subsequent actions or attitudes. According to Holbrook and Hill (2005), priming is a "product of a change in that items are more easily accessed in memory due to recent and/or frequent activation induced by consumption of media messages" (p. 279). When the media or other sources prime an idea (in the case of the current research, the idea would be African Americans and crime), this idea becomes easily accessible in one's mind. As a result of this accessibility, people are more likely to use this idea in the construction of subsequent judgments. When African Americans are portrayed as dangerous criminals, this primes the connection between these two separate constructs (African Americans and crime or violence) and pushes them to the forefront of one's mind. As a result, when someone sees an African American (as in the WIT task), the connection that has been forged by the media between African Americans and violence rises to the surface (Payne, 2006). Seeing an African American then reminds people of the associated construct of violence, just as seeing violence reminds them of African Americans. The most harmful effects of priming occur following frequent activation, such as the consistent pairing between "Black" and "crime" that occurs throughout television. It is when constructs are frequently paired together that these

thoughts become consistently accessible, leading to stereotyping even when people have not just been exposed to the prime.

Similarly, Dixon and Azocar (2007) point to cognitive accessibility theory in order to expand upon the detrimental effects of frequently activated stereotypes. When frequent exposure to Black criminals highlights the link between African Americans and violent crime, "subsequent exposure to criminality devoid of racial identifiers may be enough to invoke the Black criminal stereotype" (p. 232). If the media presented more positive representations of African Americans that did not deal with crime or violence, the chronic accessibility of this construct should be reduced. As a result, people will be less likely to think about Blacks in relation to crime, which would lead to less racial bias against African Americans. Because of the way that the media's frequent activation of stereotyped images leads to biases in its viewers, I hypothesize that:

> *H3*: General trends for television usage will moderate this main effect, as light television viewers who are exposed to positive representations will show even less bias than heavy television viewers exposed to the same content.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that media consumption is not the only way that people can learn about and be exposed to African Americans. Since real world encounters with African Americans are likely to provide a wider range of experiences than the narrow, largely negative portrayal that is frequently shown in the media, these encounters will likely factor in to one's beliefs about African Americans as well. Therefore, I hypothesize that:

> *H4*: Level of real world exposure to Blacks will also moderate these effects. Participants with less exposure to Blacks will be more positively influenced by the representations than those with frequent exposure.

Methods

Participants

65 non-Black participants completed the study separated into each of the three main

conditions – 24 participants were in the Positive-Black condition, 21 participants were in the

Positive-White condition, and 20 participants were in the neutral Control condition. Three

participants (all from the Positive-White condition) were ultimately excluded due to extreme

outlier scores on the outcome measures, and their data was therefore not incorporated into the

final results and analysis. All participants were students enrolled in an introductory

communications course at a large Midwestern university. In exchange for participation in the

experiment, participants were granted course credit to help satisfy a class requirement.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three main conditions. The sample consisted

of 76.9% females and 23.1% males. Of these participants, 80% identified as White/Caucasian,

10.8% as Asian or Pacific Islander, 4.6% as Hispanic or Latino, and 4.6% as other racial

categories. Participants who indicated in a pre-test questionnaire that they were of Black

American, Black non-American, and biracial descent were excluded from participation in the

study.

Materials

Participants in the Positive-Black condition were assigned to watch either an episode of

The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air called "My Brother's Keeper" or an episode of *The Cosby Show*

called "Rudy's Sick." In the "My Brother's Keeper" episode, the Black main character, Will,

prepares to play in an important basketball game in front of a college scout. Will, who lives with

his affluent family, learns of the difficult past of the other team's star player and purposely lets

him score the winning basket so that he can win the basketball scholarship and support his

family. The episode ends with a discussion between two Black characters of the importance of a

quality education. The "Rudy's Sick" episode follows a Black family as it balances work with taking care of its sick daughter. Featured prominently in the episode are the high-class occupations of the mother and father – a lawyer and a doctor, respectively. The episode also features discussion of the son's good grades at high school. Neither episode includes any references to crime or violence, and both episodes last for approximately 22 minutes.

Participants in the Positive-White condition watched either an episode of *Friends* called "The One Where Phoebe Hates PBS" or an episode of *Seinfeld* called "The Doll." In "The One Where Phoebe Hates PBS" episode, one of the characters expresses her dismay over the fact that all good deeds are selfish because they make people feel good. The character spends the whole episode trying to find a non-selfish good deed, but finds that she cannot help but feel good after making someone else happy. In "The Doll," one character attempts to rectify a past mistake by getting a famous musician's autograph for her friend, while another character prepares for his appearance on a popular late-night talk show. Both episodes are 23 minutes long.

Participants in the Control condition watched a twenty-three minute segment of either *Planet Earth* or *The Blue Planet*. Both shows are nature documentaries that are completely devoid of human characters or any references to human ethnicity or race. In *Planet Earth,* the segment focuses on arctic animals and climates, while *The Blue Planet* segment discusses ocean life surrounding coral reefs. Although regular episodes for both shows are 45 minutes long, participants in this condition watched only a 23 minute segment of the show.

All participants then completed the Implicit Association Test (IAT). In this measure, participants were asked to classify words on a computer based on their membership in various categories (Payne & Stewart, 2008). Participants were first asked to classify words such as terrible, happy, or horrible as either "good" or "bad" as quickly but as accurately as possible.

Participants were then asked to classify faces as either Black or White faces. In the third stage of the test, the first two aspects of the IAT were combined together – either the words "good" and "White" were grouped together, as were the words "bad" and "Black", or the words "good" and "Black" were grouped together while "bad" and "White" were together. Halfway through the task, the words that were grouped together switch – participants who first saw "bad" and "Black" together then saw "bad" and "White" together and vice versa. The computer measured the reaction time of each trial. Shorter reaction times indicate a closer association between the word and its category, just as a longer reaction time suggests a weaker association. If a participant associates "good" with "White" more quickly than with "Black," then this suggests that the participant has a stronger cognitive association between positive adjectives and White faces than with Black faces. Participants completed 146 total trials lasting approximately 5 minutes.

Participants then completed Payne's (2006) Weapons Identification Task (WIT). In this task, either a Black or White face was presented on a computer screen for 0.1 seconds, followed by an object that was displayed for 0.05 seconds. The object was then quickly covered up with a mask, and participants were asked to identify whether the object that they saw was a gun or a harmless tool. Participants indicated their responses by pressing a button on a computer keyboard, where pressing "Z" represented "Gun" and pressing "/" represented "Tool." There were 208 trials of this task, lasting approximately 8 minutes in total.

Procedure

Prior to the participants' arrival, the researcher randomly selected which television show the participants would watch by rolling a six-sided die. Each side of the die corresponded to one of the six possible episodes (two episodes in each of the three main conditions) that could be watched for the experiment. The researcher prepared the room to make sure that the videos were

appropriately cued up on the computer and that the volume was set to a suitable level as to be

loud enough for participants to hear without being audible outside the room's closed door. Due

to images of police officers that appeared alongside Black characters in the opening credits of

The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, the researcher cued up this episode so that it would begin playing

after the opening credits. The rest of the videos were cued up to begin at the very beginning of

the show. Once participants arrived for the study, they were greeted by the researcher and asked

to sit by themselves in a small room equipped with a Dell computer. Participants were told that

the study was designed to measure emotional and cognitive responses to television usage, and

that they would begin by watching an episode of a popular television show on the computer.

Participants were told to watch the episode from the beginning until the end credits and to let the

researcher know when the episode had finished. Participants in the control condition were

informed that they were only going to watch a twenty-three minute segment of the episode,

which actually lasted forty-five minutes in its entirety. A timer was set to go off after twenty-

three minutes, and participants were asked to pause the video and let the researcher know when

the timer went off.

After completion of the episode, participants were told that they would be completing

two cognition tasks. In reality, these tasks were the Implicit Associations Task (IAT) and

Weapons Identification Task (WIT), which were actually meant to measure stereotyping and

associations. To eliminate any possible order effects, the order of the IAT and the WIT were

counterbalanced so that half of the participants completed the IAT first and half completed the

WIT first. After completion of these tasks, participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire

designed to measure demographic information, levels of TV exposure outside of the laboratory,

exposure to diversity in the real world, and political affiliation. The TV exposure part of the

questionnaire was based on a study by Van den Bulck (2004), which was designed to measure participants' viewing frequency (how many days a week they watched TV), viewing volume (how many hours per day), and viewing selectivity (the genres of television that they're watching). After completion of the questionnaire, participants were debriefed as to the true purpose of the study, thanked for their participation, and granted course credit.

Scoring

Scores on the IAT were calculated based on a measurement of the participants' response times. Average response times were calculated based on how quickly people paired "good" with "African American," "good" with "White," "bad" with "African American," and "bad" with "White." Any differences between the reaction time to each of the pairings were noted, representing differences in how easily participants were able to associate positive and negative words with White and Black faces. Using these differences, an "IAT Bias Score" was calculated for each participant in order to determine how biased their responses were against African Americans and towards Whites. This IAT Bias Score was determined based upon the following equation: [(Average reaction time for "White" and "Bad" pairings) + (Average reaction time for "Black" and "Good" pairings)] – [(Average reaction time for "Black" and "Bad" pairings) + (Average reaction time for "White" and "Good" pairings)] = IAT Bias Score. A higher score represents a stronger bias against Blacks, relative to Whites.

Scores on the WIT were calculated based upon error rates, which were determined by the percentage of incorrect object identifications. Differences between how frequently participants made errors identifying guns and tools when preempted by Black and White faces were calculated and compared with one another. Any differences between these error rates were measured, signifying participants' disparity between cognitive associations of violence and race.

Again, a "WIT Bias Score" was calculated for each participant to determine how biased their responses were against African Americans and towards Whites. This score was determined based upon the following equation: [(Average rate of falsely identifying a gun as a tool when preceded by a White face) + (Average rate of falsely identifying a tool as a gun when preceded by a Black face)] – [(Average rate of falsely identifying a tool as a gun when preceded by a White face) + (Average rate of falsely identifying a gun as a tool when preceded by a Black face)] = WIT Bias Score. Higher scores represent greater biases against African Americans and increased associations between Blacks and violence when compared to Whites.

<div align="center">Results</div>

Preliminary Analyses

Several preliminary analyses were performed in order to learn more about the demographics of the participants within each condition. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to make sure that the participants in the experimental conditions did not differ on some key demographic variables that might influence the outcomes. On a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 representing "very liberal" and 7 representing "very conservative," the mean political affiliation across all conditions was relatively moderate, with a slight preference towards the liberal end of the scale ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.58$). As shown in Table 1, this did not differ significantly across conditions, $F(2,62) = .263$, $p = .77$. A similar scale was used to measure exposure to diverse ethnic groups, with 1 meaning "very little exposure" and 7 meaning "a lot of exposure." As shown in Table 2, the average ethnic exposure across all conditions was $M = 4.86$ ($SD = 1.21$) and this did not differ between conditions, $F(2,62) = .227$, $p = .80$.

As shown in Table 3, when it came to television use, the sample again did not differ significantly across conditions, $F(2,62) = .587$, $p = .56$, as participants watched an average of

6.30 hours of television per week ($SD = 7.24$). There was also great variety in the genres of television that participants watched. Overall, 90.8% of participants reported having watched comedy for at least half an hour in the past two weeks, 56.9% watched reality shows, 33.8% watched national news, 26.2% watched local news, 24.6% watched medical dramas, 21.5% watched police procedural dramas, and 13.8% watched educational programming. As shown in Table 4, a Pearson chi-squared test further revealed that there were no significant differences between the three conditions on the number of participants that watched each television genre, $\chi^2(2, N = 65) = 1.09$, $p = .58$; $\chi^2 (2, N = 65) = .82$, $p = .67$; $\chi^2 (2, N = 65) = 3.43$, $p = .18$; $\chi^2 (2, N = 65) = .36$, $p = .83$; $\chi^2 (2, N = 65) = .76$, $p = .68$; $\chi^2 (2, N = 65) = .27$, $p = .89$; $\chi^2 (2, N = 65) = 4.14$, $p = .13$, respectively.

Outcome Measures

First, it was necessary to make sure that there were no differences on the outcome measures between the two different shows that comprised each of the three main conditions. An independent samples t-test was conducted to test for differences between IAT and WIT scores for participants in the two sub-conditions of the Positive-Black condition, but there were no significant differences on either the IAT, $t(20) = .02$, $p = .99$, or the WIT, $t(21) = -1.43$, $p = .17$. Another independent samples t-test was conducted for the Positive-White sub-conditions, and there were no significant differences on the IAT, $t(15) = .66$, $p = .52$, or WIT, $t(15) = .88$, $p = .39$. One more independent samples t-test was conducted to look for differences between the sub-conditions in the neutral condition, but again there were no significant differences on the IAT, $t(18) = .80$, $p = .43$, or WIT, $t(18) = .38$, $p = .71$. Since there were no differences on the outcome measures between any of the pairs of sub-conditions, it is appropriate to group the sub-conditions together and treat them as the same condition for the remainder of the analysis.

It was also important to check to see if there were any observed order effects as a result of completing either the IAT or WIT first. As anticipated, there were no significant differences between participants who completed the IAT first and those who completed the WIT first on either IAT bias scores, $t(61) = 1.67$, $p = .10$, or WIT bias scores, $t(58) = -.18$, $p = .86$. Since there did not appear to be any order effects, the rest of the analysis will not need to take this into consideration.

IAT. It was hypothesized that participants, regardless of condition, would show a bias against African Americans and towards Whites when completing the IAT (H 1.1). Participants were expected to take a longer amount of time when pairing positive words with African Americans than when pairing the same words with Whites. On average, participants across all conditions took 986.15 milliseconds to pair Black faces with positive words ($SD = 304.45$) compared with an average time of 747.77 milliseconds to pair Black faces with negative words ($SD = 148.75$). As seen in Table 5, a paired samples t-test showed that this difference was statistically significant, $t(62) = 7.97$, $p = .00$. Additionally, all participants averaged a response time of 734.62 milliseconds when pairing White faces with positive words ($SD = 133.33$), compared to 995.10 milliseconds when pairing White faces with negative words ($SD = 287.07$). Again, a paired samples t-test showed that this difference was statistically significant, $t(62) = -9.08$, $p = .00$. Therefore, the original hypothesis was supported.

Although all participants were expected to display some bias, it was further hypothesized that participants in the Positive-Black condition would show less bias against African Americans than participants in either the Positive-White or neutral conditions (H 1.2). An ANOVA was conducted to test for differences on IAT bias scores between the three conditions. Overall, participants averaged a score of 498.86 ($SD = 429.69$), indicating that participants were

approximately 499 milliseconds slower when responding to positive words paired with Blacks and negative words paired with White than when responding to negative words paired with Blacks and positive words paired with Whites. These results can be seen in Table 6. However, there were no significant differences between the three conditions, $F(2, 2) = 1.56$, $p = .39$. Therefore, this hypothesis was not supported.

WIT. It was hypothesized that participants, regardless of condition, would show an automatic association between African Americans and weapons when completing the WIT (H 2.1). Participants were expected to misidentify harmless tools as weapons when primed by a Black face more often than they would when primed by a White face. On average, participants made this error 11.25% of the time when primed by a Black face ($SD = 9.78$) compared to 9.52% of the time when primed by a White face ($SD = 8.27$). As seen in Table 7, this difference was statistically significant, $t(59) = 2.45$, $p = .02$. Furthermore, participants were expected to more frequently misidentify weapons as harmless tools when primed by a White face than they would when primed by a Black face. On average, participants made this error 13.62% of the time when primed by a White face ($SD = 10.52$) compared to 11.76% of the time when primed by a Black face ($SD = 10.58$). This difference was also statistically significant, $t(59) = 1.96$, $p = .05$. This supports the initial hypothesis.

Although participants in all three conditions showed this general association between African Americans and violence, it was further hypothesized that participants in the Positive-Black condition would show a weaker association between these two constructs than participants in the other conditions (H 2.2). An ANOVA was conducted to test for differences on WIT bias scores between the three conditions. Overall, participants averaged a score of .04 ($SD = .08$), meaning that they were 4% more likely to make errors when a White face preceded a gun or a

Black face preceded a tool than they were to make errors when a Black face preceded a gun or a

White face preceded a tool. Again, there were no significant differences between the three

conditions, as reported in Table 8, $F(2, 2) = .04$, $p = .96$. The original hypothesis was not

supported.

Television Viewing. It was hypothesized that heavy television viewers would show a

stronger bias against African Americans than light television viewers (H3). However, there was

not a significant correlation between number of TV viewing hours per week and IAT bias scores,

$r(63) = .09$, $p = .51$. There was also no observed significant correlation between number of TV

viewing hours per week and WIT scores, $r(58) = .03$, $p = .82$. These results do not support the

original hypothesis. Because there was no main effect of TV portrayals on IAT and WIT scores,

no analyses were run to see if television viewing moderated this effect.

Ethnic Exposure. It was also hypothesized that participants' levels of exposure to diverse

ethnic groups, including African Americans, would moderate the anticipated main effect (H4).

Since the main effect was not found, this moderation was also not included in the final analysis.

However, correlations were computed to see if there were any relations between ethnic exposure

and bias scores on the IAT and WIT. However, there were no significant correlations between

ethnic exposure and IAT bias scores, $r(63) = .12$, $p = .37$, or between ethnic exposure and WIT

bias scores, $r(58) = -.07$, $p = .59$. Again, initial hypotheses were disconfirmed.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

The main purpose of this study was to see if exposure to positive representations of

African Americans could reduce bias and automatic stereotyping against African Americans. It

was hypothesized that exposure to positive depictions of African Americans would help to

decrease the negative feelings and biases that are typically seen against African Americans on

the Implicit Associations Test (IAT). As expected, participants in all three conditions

consistently took a longer amount of time to pair positive words with African American faces

than to pair negative words with the same faces. However, there were also no observed

differences between the three conditions for the amount of time it took participants to do this.

Contrary to the original hypothesis, participants in the Positive-Black condition did not have an

easier time pairing positive words with Black faces or a harder time pairing negative words with

Black faces than participants in the other conditions. Instead, participants displayed the same

level of bias against Blacks and towards Whites, regardless of the stimuli they watched before

completing the task.

It was further predicted that exposure to these crime-free depictions would lessen the

seemingly automatic association between Blacks and weapons, which was tested using the

Weapons Identification Task (WIT). As anticipated, participants across all conditions were more

likely to misidentify harmless objects as weapons when primed by a Black face than when

primed by a White face. They were also more likely to misidentify weapons as harmless objects

when primed by a White face than a Black face. This indicates a readiness to see violent images

paired with African Americans that is less pronounced with Whites. It was as if participants were

caught off guard when presented with weapons paired with Whites, yet they expected to see

weapons paired with Blacks. However, like with the IAT bias scores, there were no significant

differences between the three television conditions on the WIT bias sores. Again, this does not

support the initial hypothesis, which predicted that participants in the Positive-Black condition

would show less of an association between Black skin and weapons than participants in other

conditions.

When considering the effect of the television portrayals on both IAT and WIT bias scores, it seems as though the positive media portrayals did nothing to help reduce the bias that many non-Blacks have against Blacks. There are many reasons why this may have been the case. Perhaps most importantly, it is very possible that approximately 22 minutes of exposure to positive portrayals of Blacks may not be enough to reduce biases and negative feelings that have been built up over the duration of one's entire lifetime. The African American civil rights struggle has come a long way in the last several decades, but the United States is still rife with racial inequality. This inequality is reflected in both the negative media portrayals that have already been discussed, as well as in general American culture and history itself. As a result, the participants in this study likely grew up in a climate that, for myriad reasons, was not particularly kind to African Americans. It may simply be the case that participants need to be exposed to longer or more frequent positive portrayals in order for biases to become significantly reduced. Twenty-two minutes of exposure to even the most positive depiction possible may simply be too negligible to alter beliefs and cognitive associations that have been continually reinforced by the media and American culture at large.

In addition, it was also hypothesized that general television usage would moderate these anticipated main effects. It was believed that participants with low levels of television usage would be especially influenced by the positive representations of Blacks and would therefore receive especially low bias scores on both the IAT and WIT. Since the media frequently shows African Americans in violent or criminal situations, these stereotypes are likely to be particularly accessible (and, therefore, less susceptible to change) for participants who watch a lot of television. Accordingly, it was expected that participants without high levels of stereotype exposure would be particularly vulnerable to the experimental manipulation. The statistical

analysis did not support this hypothesis, however, as the number of hours of television watched per week was not found to be correlated with bias scores on either the IAT or WIT.

Importantly, the sample contained in this study is not necessarily representative of the average American when it comes to television use. Therefore, the study's results could have been impacted. On average, participants in this study reported that they watched 6.30 hours of television every week. According to Nielsen's 2009 "Three Screen Report," the average 18-24 year old American watches approximately 22-28 hours of television per week. Clearly, the participants included in the present study's sample reported watching much less television than the national average. In fact, only 6 of the study's 65 participants (approximately 9%) reported watching at least 20 hours of television per week.

As a result of this low television viewership, it is highly likely that the media's negative portrayals have not impacted the study's participants as much as they might for people with more typical TV diets. By watching so few hours of television, participants have more or less eliminated a significant contributing source for the creation of bias against Blacks. Consequently, participants who were exposed to positive depictions of Blacks might not show a bias reduction because these portrayals do not radically differ from the images to which they are accustomed. If participants were more frequently exposed to television, however, then the positive Black portrayals would likely represent a more radical departure from the norm, resulting in greater attitude change. The positive portrayals would still be expected to reduce what bias does exist, but the attitude change would be smaller and therefore difficult to detect without a larger sample size. This is particularly true for this particular study's sample, whose TV diet is relatively void of the news programs or police dramas that have been most commonly linked to negative and violent depictions of Blacks.

It was also predicted that exposure to diverse ethnic groups would act as an additional moderating variable for the anticipated main effect. Participants who commonly encounter mixed ethnic groups in their everyday lives might not need to rely on media depictions as much as other people in order to learn about that group. These individuals would be more likely to base their beliefs about diverse ethnic groups on their own personal experiences, rather than relying on media portrayals. Therefore, it was predicted that participants with high levels of exposure to diverse ethnic groups would be less impacted by the television portrayals than participants without this level of exposure. Since there was no main effect of the television portrayals, ethnic exposure could not act as a moderating variable. Additionally, ethnic exposure was not significantly related to bias scores on either the IAT or WIT. Although this was a surprising result, there is a possible reason for this lack of a significant relationship. Just because participants have been frequently exposed to diverse ethnic groups, this does not necessarily mean that those experiences were positive. One would think that having higher levels of exposure to different ethnic groups would increase the chances of having positive encounters with members of those groups, leading to less stereotyping and bias against that group. However, this may not always be the case. In addition, a few bad experiences could serve to reinforce negative stereotypes and taint participants' views towards the entire group as a whole.

Limitations

As with any study, there are several limitations that deserve mention and that could have impacted the end results. The most significant limitation might be the study's sample size of only 65 participants. With only 65 total participants and around 20 participants within each experimental condition, there was not a great likelihood of observing significant differences between the conditions. This idea is further confirmed by a test of power – assuming a 0.5

standard deviation difference between the conditions' mean bias scores on the IAT and WIT, the

study's power was only .51. This means that if there should have been a difference between the

conditions' means in the real world, then the present study had a 51% chance of showing a

significant difference. Ideally, one would want a power level of at least .70, which the study

would have been able to achieve with 100 participants. Therefore, it would be optimal to repeat

the study with at least 100 participants to increase the chance of finding significant differences

between the conditions if a difference should exist in the real world.

     In addition to the number of participants in the study, another limitation has to do with

the sample's demographics. The sample was only 23% male, and it would be interesting to see

how the results would differ if more males were included. In general, males tend to be more

attracted than females to violent media content (Bushman & Stack, 1996). This type of content

could contain depictions of African Americans acting violently, which would further reinforce

the viewer's associations between African Americans and violence. If males are more frequently

exposed to violent media content than females, then there is also a chance that males have been

more frequently exposed to stereotypes linking Black skin with violence or weapons. Future

research should take this into consideration and a greater attempt should be made to recruit males

to participate in the study.

     As with any laboratory experiment, a significant limitation for this study is that it was

performed under conditions that participants were not used to, limiting the generalizability of its

results. Participants were very much aware that they were participating in an experiment, which

could have influenced the way that they responded to the outcome measures. An attempt was

made to mitigate this problem through the use of implicit measures rather than self-reports, but it

is impossible to completely eliminate the issue. Furthermore, participants watched the television

shows by themselves on computers in small rooms rather than on a television screen or in a more comfortable physical environment. With the recent popularity of websites like Hulu and Netflix online streaming, it may not have been very unusual for participants to watch television on a computer, but it is possible that it was still an unusual setting for some people. As a result, this could have influenced their responses.

Future Directions

The results of this study suggest that there is much research to be done on the way that the media can help to reduce automatic stereotyping and bias against African Americans. Due to the limitations involved in the present study, it would be beneficial to repeat the study again in a way that attempts to avoid some of these limitations. If significant results were found after repeating the study, it would also be pertinent see how long the effects of the positive portrayals would last. Researchers could bring participants back into the lab 24 hours after exposure to the initial television show to see if the bias reduction still remains. If so, this would provide even more convincing evidence that positive media representations can play a significant role in decreasing stereotyping against African Americans. Furthermore, the present study used comedy sitcoms as the stimuli to represent positive representations of Blacks. Is there something unique to sitcoms and the use of humor that may strengthen or weaken these biases? It would be interesting to see how participants' responses on the IAT and WIT would differ if they were exposed to positive representations of African Americans in the form of a comedic vs. dramatic television show. Different genres may affect people in different ways, and understanding which genres create the most positive impact would be very important for media producers to understand.

The answers to these questions may have very serious implications for the real world and for achieving racial equality. Importantly, media representations that paint African Americans as dangerous criminals without much explanation of societal context do a disservice to American society. Although it might be important and newsworthy to discuss individual violent offenders or criminals, as the media often does, this type of individualized coverage masks the structural inequality that contributes to criminal acts and incarceration rates for African Americans. Although all violent or criminal acts certainly cannot be blamed on societal-level structural factors, these factors can and do contribute to African American crime. Interracial economic inequality, for example, has been continuously linked to higher crime rates amongst African American populations (Stolzenberg, Eitle, & D'Alessio, 2006). Other societal factors, such as judicial discretion or sentencing enhancements and mandatory terms – sentencing laws that require criminal offenders with certain characteristics to serve increased jail time – further contribute to racial inequality when it comes to the issue of crime. In some states, mandatory terms dictate that convicted criminals who live in public housing receive a harsher sentence (Schlesinger, 2011). Since African Americans are more likely than Whites to live in public housing, African Americans are also more likely to receive a harsher sentence for committing the same crime. Spending more time in jail means that the individual is also removed from society for a longer amount of time, thereby decreasing the chances that he will be able to become a productive member of society upon return (Schlesinger, 2011).

These structural inequalities contribute to the problem of African American crime. Portraying crime as an individual problem and without appropriate societal context – as many media outlets do – allows media consumers to stereotype African Americans as violent without fully understanding the reasons why this may be the case. Taken together, negative, violent

stereotypes of African Americans are especially detrimental because they reinforce harmful

biases while avoiding the complex reasons that these biases may exist in the first place.

Therefore, media producers should be careful to study the ways that these stereotypes can be

reduced. Personal biases and discrimination can be closely linked to structural inequality, and

reducing the individual-level bias could ultimately help to break down the structural

discrimination as well.

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crime. *European Journal of Communication, 19*(2), 239-248.

Table 1

Mean Political Affiliation and Standard Deviations by Television Condition

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Positive-Black	3.71	1.71
Positive-White	3.71	1.52
Neutral/Control	3.40	1.54

Note: Data was collected on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 represented "very liberal" and 7 represented "very conservative."

Table 2

Mean Ethnic Exposure and Standard Deviations by Television Condition

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Positive-Black	4.75	1.39
Positive-White	4.86	0.85
Neutral/Control	5.00	1.34

Note: Data was collected on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 represented "very little exposure" and 7 represented "a lot of exposure."

Table 3

Mean Hours of Television Watched Per Week and Standard Deviations by Television Condition

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Positive-Black	7.11	8.32
Positive-White	6.76	8.13
Neutral/Control	4.85	4.44

Table 4

Percentage of Viewers of Different Television Genres by Television Condition

	Positive-Black	Positive-White	Neutral/Control
Comedy	91.67	85.71	95.00
Local News	29.17	19.05	30.00
National News	25.00	28.57	50.00
Medical Dramas	20.83	28.57	25.00
Reality Shows	50.00	61.90	60.00
Police Dramas	20.83	19.05	25.00
Educational Shows	25.00	9.52	5.00

Table 5

Mean Response Times (ms) for IAT Stimuli and Standard Deviations Across All Conditions

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Black & Good	986.15	304.45
Black & Bad	747.77	148.75
White & Good	734.62	133.33
White & Bad	995.10	287.07

Table 6

Mean IAT Bias Score and Standard Deviations by Television Condition

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Positive-Black	513.18	434.91
Positive-White	533.94	464.81
Neutral/Control	446.29	401.86

Table 7

Mean Percentage of Error Rates for WIT and Standard Deviations Across All Conditions

	Mean	Standard Deviation
False Identification of Tool as Gun		
Black Prime	11.25	9.78
White Prime	9.52	8.27
False Identification of Gun as Tool		
Black Prime	11.76	10.58
White Prime	13.62	10.52

Table 8

Mean WIT Bias Score and Standard Deviations by Television Condition

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Positive-Black	.037	.092
Positive-White	.031	.091
Neutral/Control	.039	.078