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CULTIVATION THEORY: MEDIA EFFECTS TOWARD CONSUMER EVALUATIONS OF THE CRIMINAL COURTS

Lindsey Dale Elliott
Murray State University

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**CULTIVATION THEORY: MEDIA EFFECTS TOWARD CONSUMER
EVALUATIONS OF THE CRIMINAL COURTS**

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Organizational Communication

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of Master of Arts

by Lindsey Dale Elliott

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ABSTRACT

A substantial body of literature connects media effects to consumer perceptions of the criminal justice system. Research on the topic of cultivation theory has highlighted that an increased fear of crime within the general populace, due to an exaggeration of violence and criminal activity in the mass media, has spurred increased support for punitive policing, harsher sentencing, and positive feelings toward capital punishment. However, no research exists to explicate the cultivation of consumer perceptions toward the criminal courts. This study examines the impact of media consumption through television, the internet, and social media on consumer evaluations of the criminal courts. Utilizing a national non-full probability sample of 500 White, Black, and Hispanic/Latino respondents, the study examines media effects across race/ethnicity, as well as across political party affiliation. Findings suggest that race/ethnicity and party affiliation mediate the relationship between media consumption and evaluations toward the criminal court system.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Mass media acts as an information repository for the vast majority of the American populace. It informs the decision-making process and influences viewer predilections toward issues and problems that are viewed as societally important. Media notifies consumers about national and local crime, assists to incentivize criminal justice policy, and helps to alleviate audience inexperience and anxiety by providing consistent and familiar narratives that simplify even the most complicated, heinous, and groundbreaking news stories (Altheide, 1997).

As an institution, the media assists to define contemporary social problems (Altheide, 1997; Kitsuse & Spector, 1973) and frame policy measures related to those issues so as to promote or reject critical government agendas (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018). Simply put, the mass media act to inform citizens toward the prevalence of violent crime. As a result, consuming audiences garner opinions toward crime policies subsequent of presented media messages (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974).

As that most individuals do not obtain firsthand knowledge toward crime or criminal justice, mass media news outlets serve as essential sources for crime-related information (Roberts, Stalans, Indermaur, & Hough, 2003; Surette, 2015). Resultant of this knowledge-buffering effect, consumer overestimations of crime prevalence are common and even influence substantial life decisions such as where one chooses to live

and work (Rader, May, & Goodrum, 2007). Moreover, scholars contend that crime-related media coverage affects public understanding and interest toward punitive crime policies, which includes an increased support for the death penalty (Britto & Noga-Styron, 2014; Enns, 2016; Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2004; Kort-Butler & Sittner Hartshorn, 2011).

Not all media messages are created the same, however. Within the realm of contemporary research, scholars argue that mass media organizations differ in their approach to criminality. Increasing political polarization has culminated into differing media habits (Mitchell, Gottfried, Kiley, & Eva Matsa, 2014), and research shows that media organizations alter presentations of criminality and social policy based on their ideological platform (Mitchell, *et al.*, 2014). Predictably, media platforms which host a conservative audience may explicate the need to curb criminality through increased punitiveness, while progressive media organizations may present crime-related content in a way which incentivizes rehabilitation and policy reform (Beckett & Sasson, 2004).

Consequently, research highlights the importance of examining the effects of media messages. Scholarship in the field contests that the effects of media presentations are profound and contain aspects of an homogenizing nature (Iyengar, 1991; Surette, 2007). Public understanding of social issues including crime control, social policy, legislative reform, and the criminal justice system generally, are affected by sensationalized media with effects most often detrimental to historically vulnerable minority groups (Alexander, 2010; Entman, 1992; Dotter, 2003; Blackman, 2014).

Scholarship within the field of media studies has become quite vast and has explicated numerous outcomes of crime-related media presentations including confidence

in the police, consumer perceptions of minorities, immigration, attitudes toward police and policing, estimations of crime, the penal system, and favorability toward punitive crime policies. Though substantial research has provided analysis on the topic of media, it appears that consumer perceptions toward the criminal courts remains a generally unknown variable within the realm of cultivation. This study will add to cultivation literature by addressing media influence in relation to the judicial system in an attempt to solicit whether media's exhaustive reach (Iyengar, 1991) and problem-creating presentation styles (Altheide, 1997) alter a viewing audience's favorability toward the criminal courts.

The reasons to explore this potential phenomenon are many. Imperatively, it appears that within the context of contemporary problems, ideals of justice are being brought to the mainstream symbolic environment. Criminal justice and its many subsequent facets face scrutiny as questions concerning the penal system, criminal impartiality, racial tensions, and a plethora of other justiciable matters continue to be presented in media platforms which highlight issues related to civil liberties and the legitimacy of the American court system.

As well, a substantial body of research has shown that the mass media have been seemingly proactive to culminate derision within society; utilizing the tool that is pervasive influence to polarize, subjugate, and denigrate minority groups through increased presentations of minority criminal activity and brutality. Historically, televised media has acted as a mechanism for congressional lobby, influencing senators such as Joe Biden and others to vote for Reagan era discriminatory drug policies (Chin, 2002). It seems that only with the introduction of democratic, non-centralized, and independent

media platforms coined as social media, that more prominent and compelling examples of police discrimination have flourished, prompting questions of social, racial, and political justice and the intentions of traditional mass media venues.

Within the complexity that is media influence and academic discussion, the judicial system seems to be a particularly salient topic to be explored within the realm of media studies, as that to date, it appears no scholarship exists to explicate statistical insights between consumer favorability toward the criminal courts and the cultivation hypothesis as a theoretical framework. Furthermore, what little scholarship that does exist between media and the courts highlights an alarming imperative to research this phenomenon, asserting that if the “media continue on their current path toward greater sensationalism, derogating judges, highlighting political decision making, and emphasizing the bitterly partisan and ideological nature of the confirmation process, then we should expect deleterious consequences for [public] opinion [of the court system]” (Johnston & Bartels, 2010, p. 276). Certainly, under such pressurizing conditions, negative public opinion “could lead to support for more fundamental changes to these institutions,” (p. 276).

Surely, the denigration of the penal system has been long substantiated within American media presentations. Highly sensational, entertaining, and negatively oriented news stories continue to flourish within conventional media platforms. Such rampant volatility within mainstream media, where prominent news figures participate in antagonistic and polarizing argument, has shown to decrease trust and support for opposing viewpoints and delegitimize the decisions of judicial officials (Mutz, 2007).

More alarmingly, scholars contend that crime-related media pins the procedures of the judicial system against effective and punitive criminal justice (Doyle, 2006; Eschholz, Blackwell, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2002; Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003), wherein ruthless criminals, murderers, and sexual deviants are provided safe haven behind the lethargic nature of due process and individual civil liberties (Beckett & Sasson, 2004). Indeed, public support for the radical alteration of an incompetent judicial system is predictable under these pretenses, especially as that sensationalist and negative viewpoints of case decisions are most common among popularly consumed media organizations. However, in contrast to mainstream media reporting, official televised media coverage of court proceedings is usually of poor quality and low entertainment value, and often includes television reporters who confound court rulings resulting in decreased viewership (Slotnick & Segal, 1998).

Given the myriad of issues which obfuscate societal knowledge of the criminal justice system, it seems pressing to gain awareness of the degree to which mass media presentations alter consumer favorability toward the criminal court system. Have the long-recognized issues associated with sensationalist portrayals of criminal justice distorted consumer perceptions of the court's legitimacy? Are the criminal courts perceived as a barrier to effective and punitive policing in relation to media presentations that emphasize corruption among judicial officials, lethargy within the penal system, and an overall disgust for the doctrine of civil liberties? This study confronts these complex questions by examining how media exposure influences consumer evaluations toward the criminal courts. Analyzing a non-full probability sample that includes an oversampling of minority respondents, the study suggests that exposure to traditional and new-age media

platforms has subsequent effects on consumer evaluations toward the courts. Specifically, when the population sample is split across race/ethnicity and political party affiliation, analyses establish that a relationship exists between media exposure and favorability toward the criminal courts among respondents.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theoretical framework

To begin, it is important to address how—and why—mass media organizations stylize, format, and present crime-related content. Moreover, it is necessary to explicate how these institutions commodify seemingly random criminal events into consistent and repetitive narratives that blend into their existing ideological prefect. Most importantly, insights toward the resulting consequences of these stylistic and ideological narrative approaches must be fleshed out in order to appropriately predict the potentially deleterious ramifications which media presentations may have on perceptions toward the court system. To appropriately investigate the effects resultant of media consumption, this study begins with the articulation of its theoretical framework: the cultivation hypothesis and subsequent associated theory.

As surmised by Gerbner and Gross (1976), the cultivation hypothesis provides that the mass media play a pivotal role to influence the perceptions and beliefs of a viewing populace. They contend that media programming alters a consumer's understanding of the world around them. In contrast to reality, consumers view the world through an artificial lens, thereby accepting truth as displayed through mass media presentations. The researchers argued that mass media productions foster a 'mean-world perspective' due to the graphic and violent nature of televised productions wherein consumers believe the world to be a much more violent and scary place than it is in

actuality. Gerbner, Eleey, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, and Signorielli (1977) hypothesized that increased consumption of violent depictions will lead media consumers to culminate a fear and distrust toward others.

Furthering their predictions, Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli (1980) argued that the cultivation of viewer perceptions is continually reinforced through a mechanism known as resonance. Researchers defined resonance as an increased appeal of media content by specific audiences which are targeted through media representations of televised material that reflect established consumer predilections. Gerbner's cohort (1980) further argued that resonance acts as a moderator between the individual and televised content selection. Continued viewer consumption of a particular media platform requires the audience to maintain an approved predilection toward the media source; continued consumer preference toward a particular media institution requires that the program include notions of salience, perceived credibility, and trustworthiness (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Moreover, Gerbner and associates (1976; 1980) hypothesized that cultivation occurs passively within the individual; that is, an individual consumes media content and cultivation subsequently occurs. Contemporary scholarship contests that media utilizes a more nuanced approach toward the alteration of consumer preferences, however. Current notions toward resonance and cultivation generally include two primary dimensions: "audience characteristics and message-specific influences on the cultivation of viewers' attitudes and beliefs" (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011, p. 170). The process of cultivation is not passive, but rather occurs through complex and subtle psychological processes within the individual who consumes, evaluates, and stores information (Coenen & Van

den Bulck, 2016). Removed from the notions of passive indoctrination, scholars recognize the importance of measuring intricate and convening factors within cultivation studies: analyses of consumer perceptions must include “the characteristics of the message, of the audience, and of the dependent measure” (Heath & Gilbert, 1996, p. 384).

To explicate the overarching effect of mass media productions, Gerbner and associates (1980; 1998) hypothesized that televised media content alters the universal perceptions of society. Coined as the mainstream, Gerbner’s cohort (1980) argued that media content manipulates the dominant and overarching force of ethics within a society; they contend that mass media productions are “the source of the most broadly-shared images and messages in history. It is the mainstream of the common symbolic environment into which our children are born and in which we all live out our lives” (p. 177). The researchers ascertained that mass media is the primary source of entertainment and information within one’s community; thusly, media content may have profound and homogenizing affects upon a consuming audience.

Commodification of the media message

While the cultivation hypothesis broadly explains how consumer predilections are influenced, the process to do so is reasoned to be much more detailed. While trust and viewer preferences are imperative for successful message influence, scholars contest that success to garner these critical aspects is highly nuanced and multi-faceted. In order to maintain perceptions of official legitimacy, traditional media organizations which display media content present to their audiences an environment that is seen as highly refined,

elite, and sterile; such an atmosphere subsequently connotes a sense of truth and professionalism onto the consumer (Altheide, 1997).

Then, media organizations use formats to assist the legitimacy of their message. Formats assist to increase organizational trustworthiness and apply a general definition of media content presented, allowing viewers to recognize the presentation as ideologically familiar (Altheide, 1985). As defined, formats relay a conceptual understanding to an organization's viewership and imply how a consuming audience should approach the problem presented. In short, formats assist to manipulate audience assumptions and perceptions toward a problem or issue (Meyrowitz, 1985; Schlesinger, Murdock, & Elliott, 1983) and aid in the storytelling process (Beale, 2006).

While formats are necessary to create familiarity and understanding among a presentation's audience, commodification further describes the manipulation of the presented crime narrative. Defined as "the packaging and marketing of crime information for popular consumption" (Beale, 2006, p. 429), 'commodification' assists in the legitimacy of televised media presentations. The frequency of crime-related stories is related to the ease in which each crime narrative is commodified; because of this, crime-related news stories present highly entertaining and episodic narratives which entail dramatic events between individuals (Bandes, 2004).

Subsequent of commodification and formatting, a media programme's ability to set public agenda seems natural and unassuming. The term agenda setting, is the process in which media presentations guide a consuming audience's attention to issues deemed critical by the organization (Perse, 2001). With an agenda firmly set, media organizations then influence viewer predilections toward a specific issue through continual impression,

thereby altering or reinforcing individual consideration toward the problem; a subsequent method of the agenda setting process known as priming (Paletz, 2002). “When combined, [agenda setting and priming] show that the media’s emphasis on crime makes the issue more salient in the minds of viewers[...]which causes the public to perceive crime as a more severe problem than real world figures indicate” (Beale, 2006, p. 442). The effects of agenda setting are most successful when individual consumers lack experience with an issue perceived as salient through the media lens (Altheide, 1997; Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011; Perse, 2001).

Tailoring the crime narrative to the media production outlet subsequent of priming and formatting provides comfort and consistency to an audience through repetition, familiarity, and a sense of the professional environment. However, the commodification process must be further supplemented to increase sensationalism and draw increased viewership. Within this process, mass media organizations stylize, package, and distribute crime-related stories through a method defined as the framing of the media message (Altheide, 1997).

Frames are utilized in order to create highly entertaining narratives which incorporate aspects of realism, ultimately leading to the influence of viewer interpretations of a problem and assumptions of truth. Problems presented to a consumer base are filtered through stylizing frames which indicate to the audience “what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and above all, how it will not be discussed,” (Altheide, 1997, p. 651). Frames determine how problems are presented to an audience and assist to present a highly complex issue as a simplified, episodic, and thematic story with a precise problem and solution (Iyengar, 1991). Crime stories filtered through

frames are subsequently stripped of their complexities and are presented as simplistic, therefore becoming easily interpreted information (Altheide, 1997). The act of framing is to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem, definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

The problem frame

Antiquated into cultivation discourse, the problem frame as theorized by Altheide (1997), is a specific type of framing process which assists media organizations to distribute a simplified narrative of crime that includes the deposition of a heinous act with little context, classifies the perpetrator in derogatory terms, and promotes immediate and punitive justice to the issue. Solutions to heinous criminal activity are most commonly accomplished through demands for increased crime policies and a lessening of protections provided by procedural due process (Altheide, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000; Entman, 1992; Iyengar, 1991). The problem frame simplifies complicated information into a tale of brutality, wherein stories are tailored to provide an easily understandable narrative which includes fictional storytelling aspects coupled with indiscriminate violence (Surette, 2015).

Stories mediated through the problem frame commonly entail egregious actions which are antithetical toward societal morals and ethics, resulting in universal decry and a demand for punitive solutions “that are presumably familiar and uncontested” (Altheide, 1997, p. 654). The purpose of the problem frame is to “produce a discourse of fear that then becomes a ‘resource’ for the audience to draw on when interpreting subsequent

reports” (p. 655). As a result, media crime reports include elements of action and extraordinary circumstances (Snow, 1983), with a beginning that explains the occurrence of the crime, a middle which describes how the story continues to manifest, and an end that includes a detailed synopsis of predictable punitive solutions carried out toward the perpetrator (Altheide, 1997).

Overrepresentation of crime-related media content through the problem frame distorts viewer understanding of real-world crime occurrences and influences consumer perceptions toward a belief that the world is more brutal and dangerous than it actually is (Beale, 2006; Drakulich, 2012; Drakulich & Siller, 2015; Gerbner et al., 1980). The problem frame presents crime as indiscriminate among societal members (Surette, 2015) and that American life is fearful and perilous (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995; Signorielli & Gerbner, 1988). Given that mass media organizations undeniably “play a large role in shaping public agendas by influencing what people think about” (Altheide, 1997, p. 648), it is of no surprise that frequent use of the problem frame obscures consumer perceptions toward complicated issues in the context of society.

Mass media programming and the cultivation hypothesis

In their progenitor work, Gerbner and Gross (1976) hypothesized that media portrayals of crime and violence cultivate a mean-world perspective which consequently produces distrust and fear of others within a program’s viewing audience. The scholars did not distinguish between fiction and nonfiction crime and violence portrayals, arguing that presentations of excessive violence and brutality within mass media productions are generally effective to cultivate fear within an audience. Subsequent research substantiates these claims, progressing that violence presented in fictional entertainment content has

similar affects to nonfictional crime productions (Vergeer, Rutten, & Scheepers, 1996; Vergeer & Scheepers, 1998). Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman (1994) and Rhineberger-Dunn, Rader, and Williams (2008) provide similar conclusions wherein their research showed that fictional crime-related television productions attribute to an increased fear and distrust within a consuming populace.

However, cultivation effects of fictional media entertainment have undergone extensive trepidation as other notable works propose that notions of perceived realism are required for the successful alteration of a viewer's preferences toward an issue (Potter, 1986; Surette, 2007). Similarly, other literature purports that crime-related fictional entertainment lacks correlation when socio-demographic factors are placed within an empirical work (Doob & MacDonald, 1979). Eschholz (1997, p. 45) reported that "no relationship between the viewing of drama programs and fear of crime [existed]" within her studies when controlling for demographic variables, and that "drama programming may actually reduce fear" (pp. 45-46). The scholar subsequently contended that crime fiction entertainment may only be successful in the cultivation of low experience consumers, providing that "[viewers] may substitute the victimization of individuals on [fictional] television for their own low actual victimization risks" (p. 46).

Communication scholarship contests contrarily to these findings, arguing that "nonfiction limits the narrative experience that is needed [for cultivation to occur]" (Coenen & Van den Bulck, 2016, p. 433), and that fictional entertainment is more successful to cultivate viewer perceptions due to nonfictional programming being "less transporting than fictional narratives[...]less [associated with] character identification, and only [providing] limited parasocial interactions" (p. 433). Similarly, Moyer-Gusé and

Nabi (2010) contend that nonfiction viewers are more likely than consumers of crime fiction to experience psychological resistance to an implied message, thereby suggesting nonfiction crime media to be less persuasive than its fictional counterpart. Dvir-Gvirsman (2015) suggests that nonfiction crime media is successful in its cultivation efforts, but only when resonance acts as a mediator between media content and the viewer; that is, media influence occurs when consumers hold opinions that are in line with the implied message prior to media exposure.

Other literature suggests that the disjointed nature of crime-related fictional entertainment may be due, in part, to the ways in which media frames and produces fictionalized crime. With increasing regularity, crime fiction is produced and stylized from non-fiction criminal acts. Known as the ‘ripped from the headlines approach’ (Britto, Hughes, Saltzman, & Stroh, 2007), media productions create sensational and realistic fictional entertainment that is centered upon nonfiction crime stories. This style of story framing may obscure consumer ability to distinguish reality from crime fiction (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011), thus producing successful cultivation parameters within a viewing audience.

As interestingly, it appears that crime-related media may generally be more relevant to consumers who perceive themselves to live in neighborhoods of high crime and/or high ethnic variance (Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003). Defined as the ‘social threat approach,’ scholars contend that “racial composition of place” (Chiricos, McEntire, & Gertz, 2001, p. 323) plays an important role toward an individual’s fear level of crime (Blalock, 1967). Similarly, social threat research posits that there is a link between individual level understanding of nearby criminal danger and a reinforcement of the

perceived threat through crime-related media programming (Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003). Eschholz (1997) reported comparably, stating that “individuals who live in high-crime areas may be particularly sensitive to crime on television because of their direct knowledge of a crime problem in their neighborhoods” (p. 47). Quillian and Pager (2001) further this proclamation, finding that residents living in ethnically heterogenic neighborhoods perceive there to be increased levels of crime when viewing crime-related media.

New-age media and the cultivation hypothesis

Though research emphases have been placed upon traditional media programming such as television, print media, and radio as primary contributors to cultivation effects, scholars recognize these venues of media consumption have declined in viewership significantly in recent years as global information technologies have become a proliferate source of media consumption and personal connectedness (Mitchell & Holcomb, 2016). Theoretical scholarly approaches to the internet and social media platforms contend that these derivatives may act as clones to their traditional media counterparts, dispensing crime-related information and producing an increased fear of crime (Graber, 1996). Empirical research disputes these predictions however, as contemporary scholarship has suggested that internet media users obtain high discretion as to what they consume through internet media platforms and as to how they consume it (Kim, 2008; Rainie, 2010). Research further highlights differences in the way consumers utilize internet media in contrast to traditional media sources, wherein internet consumers have more control to solicit the information which they find relevant while dismissing information unassociated with their immediate intentions (Krimsky, 2007; Mythen, 2010).

Roche, Pickett, and Gertz (2016) similarly find little support for the cultivation hypothesis in the context of internet crime-related media consumption. When researchers surveyed nearly 14,000 participants toward punitive attitudes, victimization, and death penalty favorability, their results “[found] little consistent evidence that Internet news consumption is associated with views about crime and justice,” (p. 226) because “online news content may be less regulated, can be supplemented with an array of additional information sources, and allows for increased user agency” (p. 216). While Roche, Pickett, and Gertz’s (2016, p. 231) most important finding was that their “results [provided] no evidence that Internet news consumption is positively associated with anxiety about crime, or support for getting tough with criminals,” others contend that cultivation of consumer perceptions within new-age media is indeed occurring.

Recognizing that “trends in news consumption have[...]shown dramatic changes over the past two decades,” Intravia, Wolff, and Piquero (2018, p. 966) utilized a dataset that included the survey responses of nearly 250 undergraduate students from a large midwestern university. Measuring for attitudes toward police legitimacy, the cohort tested the dependent variable against multiple venues of media exposure including social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In the study’s bivariate measure (Spearman’s Rho), researchers found marginal support for social media applications, and in the study’s disaggregated ordinary least squared regression (sex, race, prior contact to law enforcement), the consumption of social media was once again found to be “marginally associated with positive attitudes toward police legitimacy” (p. 974).

While neither study is conclusive, these research efforts firmly impress the need to include new-age media platforms within subsequent cultivation research. As

importantly, new-age media use continues to flourish among U.S. citizens, and is especially prevalent among minorities. In a study recently released by the Nielson Report (2020, p. 10), it was found that Latinos “are 57% more likely to use social media as a primary source of information” over traditional news programming and that recent social media usage has increased 71% in the Latino population. The Pew Research Center (2018) concluded similarly, finding that “three-quarters of U.S. Latinos get their news from internet sources[...]including social media” on a typical weekday. Indeed, mobile platform use for news consumption has drastically increased in recent years for minority members. Insights are similarly comparable for the United States as a whole, wherein the “majority of U.S. adults (82%) get news online” (Pew Research Center, 2014)

Moreover, as cultivation continues forward into a more contemporary nature, it is imperative that new-age media variables overcome traditional antiquated limitations. Intravia, Wolff, and Piquero (2018) recognize that questions related to social media consumption only included “overall time spent consuming the various media platforms” (p. 976) which may have been cause for their meager findings. In direct relation to social media consumption, future research must ask “respondents specific content-related questions regarding media usage (i.e., how much respondents are exposed to stories and news reports about policing)” (p. 977).

Media presentations of crime and violence

Where scholarship toward the internet and new-age media cast uncertainty upon cultivation effects and crime-related content, research of traditional media programming firmly identifies the not-so-inconsequential outcomes of media crime presentations. This is largely due to the prevalence of crime presentations throughout traditional media

sources. In fact, crime is the most widely presented media content in the United States, and it is the most common leading story on news broadcasts (Klite, Bardwell, & Saltzman, 1997). Crime stories are the most preferred topics by news and local media providers (Jewkes, 2015; Reiner, 2002; Surette, 2015), with violent crime and homicide constituting disproportionate airtime when compared to other criminal activities (Britto, et al., 2007; Eschholz, Mallard, & Flynn, 2004). News media stories frequently depict violent crime as a random act (Chiricos, Eschholz, & Gertz, 1997), occurring most commonly among strangers (Beale, 2006; Britto, et al., 2007), wherein offenders are deemed ruthless and capable to harm anyone (Surette, 2015).

Though crime-related content has always been a substantial contributor to news media presentations within the United States, such expansive coverage of criminality became even more proliferate throughout media productions in order to maintain consumer interests and bolster diminishing revenue in the oncoming wave of information technology (Altheide, 1997; Beale, 2006; Dotter, 2003; Dowler, 2003). In agreement, other scholars have contended that in order to compete with fictional entertainment media, televised news media has subsequently become highly sensationalized (Chermak, 1994; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). As a result, crime-related news caters toward sensationalist, dramatic, and extraordinary stories filled with entertainment value and suspense (Britto, et al., 2007). Unsurprisingly then, crime-related media outcompetes all other news media content (Beale, 2006), and in similar relation to local news sources, national and popular news entities such as ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC, and FOX news media outlets devote the majority of airtime to issues related to justice, criminality, and punitiveness (Beale, 2006; Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011).

Other research further explicates the ubiquitous nature of crime-related mass media content, finding that “media conglomerates that own television networks have been able to capture two-thirds of the primetime viewing audience (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011, p. 185). This is due to the monopolized media market, wherein a small number of elite corporations own the majority of cable television channels (Cooper, 2005). The subsequent conglomeration of media venues “has led to a lack of diversity in media content and an overreliance on violence as a focal point for much of the programming created” (Rosenberger & Dierenfeldt, 2020, p. 5). Though there are more selections of media content than have ever previously existed, ubiquitous audience intended messages related to criminality are presented across all consumer audiences (Gerbner, et *al.*, 1980).

Media presentations of minority members

Indeed, crime and violence saturate mainstream televised media (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), and while media presentations of crime do not necessarily contain the likeness of a minority perpetrator or include minority suspect representation disproportionately when compared to the FBI Uniform Crime Reports (Entman, 1992; Eschholz, 1998), “when violent crimes, robbery, or felonies are the focus, Black suspects are shown in disproportionate numbers” (Eschholz, Mallard, & Flynn, 2004, p. 165). Though researchers have found that minority crime offending is not excessively represented in relation to real world figures (Chermak 1995; Entman, 1992), a study conducted by Eschholz, Chiricos, and Weitzel (1998) proffered that 69% of survey respondents believed that Blacks were more frequently shown as perpetrators than Whites on televised programming. Despite having equitable, and perhaps meager

criminal representation in crime-related media, Blacks are disproportionately and most commonly viewed as dangerous criminals in society (Eschholz, Mallard, & Flynn, 2004).

To more appropriately explain this problem, scholars defined the phenomenon as ‘racial typification’ (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002), an issue subsequent of crime media representations which implies that the common occurrences of crime are subsequent of ethnic minorities. The framing of media stories contributes a critical role toward this phenomenon as well: when compared to official statistics, Dixon and Linz (2000) found that crime-related news media commonly overrepresented Blacks as lawbreakers in relation to Whites and Latinos. This is particularly salient for violent crimes, wherein Black suspects are most frequently represented as criminals rather than defendants (Entman 1990; Entman, 1992). However, scholars have contrarily found that compared to official statistics, Blacks are overwhelmingly underrepresented toward their involvement in nonviolent crimes (Gilliam, *et al.*, 1996), which suggests to viewers that Blacks are perpetrators of violent crime.

Though crime-related media does not overrepresent the depiction of Black men as criminal offenders, news media depictions of crime commonly associate that young Black males and crime are inexorably linked (Chiricos, Welch, & Gertz, 2004; Entman & Rojecki, 2000). In fact, Black males make up the majority of criminal presentations of any other minority member in news media (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002). Likewise, when compared to other minority groups, news media programming disproportionately portrays Blacks in threatening contexts which connote criminality and violence (Entman, 1990; 1992; Entman & Rojecki, 2000).

In regard to the portrayal of Black suspects in crime-related news media, Entman (1992) and Entman and Rojecki (2000) assert that Black suspects are most commonly presented with a threatening facial expression and posture, dressed in clothing that implies low socioeconomic status, displayed with alleged crimes highlighted in derogatory terms, and portrayed with an exaggerated emphasis toward their continued resistance to law enforcement. Similarly, Blackman (2014) finds that compared to White perpetrators, presentations of Black criminals imply an incongruence with societal expectations and that something should be done about the committed criminal act. In contrast to Whites, Black suspect presentations most commonly include a ‘guilty until proven innocent’ connotation (Entman & Rojecki, 2000).

Empirical work on the topic of race and crime contends that “racialized portrayals of crime may be particularly salient for White media consumers who live in areas with larger African American populations” (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018, p. 684). Eschholz and her cohort (2003) contend similarly, arguing that a perceived social threat may affect salience toward racialized media programming. Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, and Davies (2004) report parallel findings, stating that ethnic variance in neighborhood compositions acts as a tuning device for White media consumers. Indeed, Black suspect portrayals within media presentations influence where members of the prevailing majority choose to live and work (Rader, May, & Goodrum, 2007), ensuring continued segregation and fear among racial affiliations.

It is clear that Black suspect representation in the media has led to fear and distrust in the African American population (Entman, 1990; Entman, 1992; Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 1980). Racial

typification has consequently muddled societal understandings of crime frequency and criminal brutality, leading to rampant overestimations of crime occurrence and prevalence of heinous violence (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018; Dotter, 2003; Gerbner et al., 1977). These issues have subsequently flooded into the political arena, prompting support for substantial punitive measures (Chiricos, Welch, & Gertz, 2004), often with lasting effects, that have been intentionally orchestrated to curb minority criminality. Indeed, the American mainstream media has inextricably conjoined race and crime, marring social and political landscapes so feverishly that “today’s prevailing criminal predator has become a euphemism for young black male” (Barak, 1994, p. 137, see Chiricos, Welch, & Gertz, 2004, p. 363).

Media presentations of the criminal justice system

Along with the myriad issues associated with media portrayal of minority perpetrators, presentations of heroism and righteousness have further convoluted societal understanding of the criminal justice system in its entirety. Ordinarily, media productions represent aspects of the criminal justice system in a manner which highlights effective pursuit of criminal syndicates through punitive and excessive force (Doyle, 1998). This is especially common for media representations of police officers, wherein righteous public servants are impeded by procedural due process and must subsequently overcome the barriers of civil rights in order to bring justice to a morally impetuous perpetrator (Eschholz, Blackwell, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2002; Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003). These public servants are usually valorized as hardworking and morally credible individuals at constant odds with aspects of the criminal justice system (Eschholz, Mallard, & Flynn, 2004). Excessive force and punitive criminal policy are the usual

marketed explications toward effective policing (Doyle, 2006). With little deviation, punitive police officers and reduced judicial barriers usually culminate in catching the villain (Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003).

Contrary to the glamorized portrayals of law enforcement officials, the courts are commonly depicted to be at odds with noble criminal detectives, often depicted as lethargic and incompetent vestigial appendages of the criminal justice system (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018; Beckett & Sasson, 2004). While unrestrained police members are presented as the most effective tool to curb brutal criminality, the judicial system is often viewed as an ineffective, often corrupt, and flawed organization that provides undeserving leniency to ruthless criminals through the unnecessary loopholes that are civil liberties (Jewkes, 2015). Media presentations most commonly depict excessive punitiveness as the answer to criminality (Rhineberger-Dunn, Rader, & Williams, 2008), while judges and the court system stand in opposition to virtuous justice (Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003).

Media effects toward crime policies

Naturally then, it seems mass media presentations of crime, violence, and minority groups have gravitated toward punitive policy preference with increasing viewer support. Ample scholarly work contends that crime-related media presentations affect criminal policy understanding and interests. More concerning is the reality in which criminal policies have become increasingly more punitive due to the increased salience of crime (Garland, 2001), further energized through racial typification subsequent of media presentations (Chiricos, Welch, & Gertz, 2004); that is to say, the media depict crime as an important topic to be discussed (Altheide, 1997; Entman, 1992; 1993) and, that it is a

symptom of Black men (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002; Entman, 1993; Chiricos, Welch, & Gertz, 2004)

Indeed, the frequency of crime-related narratives in the mass media assists consuming audiences to shape understandings of crime prevalence and thus draw preferences toward criminal justice policies (Beale, 2006; Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018; Drakulich, 2013; Surette, 2015). Such a distorted reality produced from crime-related content affirms societal conceptualizations of criminality and purports a need to curb criminal intent through increased punitive crime policies (Altheide, 1997; Altheide & Snow, 1991; Goffman, 1974; Iyengar, 1991; Snow, 1983). Other literature asserts similarly, wherein researchers suggest that crime-reality programming may impact individual policy understanding and opinions about the criminal justice system which may subsequently bring about support toward punitiveness (Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Iyengar, 1991). Dotter (2003) furthers this proclamation, claiming that policy advocacy from crime-related media content has resulted in tailored police practices, racist punitive crime legislation, and increased incarceration of minority members.

Moreover, crime-related media increasingly caters to politically charged rhetoric, furthering assertions that criminal justice and crime are political issues related to party affiliation (Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, & Wright, 1996; Jewkes, 2015). Relative to the politicized nature of crime, scholarship contends that increased media attention which depicted Black America as a drug-den fueled tough-on-crime justice policies that affected Black communities directly and exclusively (Gordon, 1994). Others claim similarly, asserting that media representation of Black drug use influenced the White community to uptake interests toward punitive crime policies with increasing frequency (Chin, 2002),

and that Black deviance as depicted through mass media venues rallied intense support toward extremely punitive crime policies such as 3-strike-laws, minimum mandatory sentencing for drug crimes, and propositions toward life imprisonment for drug distribution (Alexander, 2010).

Media effects toward the court system

Subsequent of these findings, it appears that sensationalized media incite society's most punitive interests through an exaggeration of criminal brutality and crime prevalence. In turn, this has led to an increasingly harsh criminal justice system. However, the need to prevent heinous criminal acts through increased support for punitive policies is not the only aspect of the criminal justice system to bring about such effects consequent the media lens. The judicial system too, has undergone extensive sensationalist rhetoric, resulting in coerced court decisions and a reduction in the validity of objective impartiality and the doctrine of civil liberties (Oswald, 1994).

Of the judiciary, the trial courts have been the most notable example of media attention and ensuing consequential outcomes (Oswald, 1994). The judge as an official position, has historically enjoyed the pleasure of being perceived by society as an almost mythic role within the criminal justice sphere (Johnston & Bartels, 2010), antiquated into society's legal understanding as objective and impartial. However, with the introduction of the media in high profile cases, this perception has waned. Contemporary media sources, such as news entertainment talk shows and political radio are far "more concerned with entertainment value than restrained reporting" (Johnston & Bartels, 2010, p. 263). Given the nature of sensationalist rhetoric, perceived negative aspects of the judicial system have been brought into the mainstream environment wherein assessments

of objective impartiality have been replaced with skepticism toward “the political nature of judicial decision making” (p. 263).

More problematic are the tendencies for judicial decisions to be influenced by negative media reports. In controversial cases that elicit emotional responses from community and political members, increased media scrutiny may erode the validity of a defendant’s Sixth Amendment right to a fair trial by a jury of their impartial peers (Oswald, 1994). Subsequent of consistent rhetoric that may “provide the public with a case different from the courtroom version [through presentations] of the evidence in a biased fashion or stressing the sensational aspects of the case” (Oswald, 1994, p. 405), the defendant’s constitutional guarantee to a fair trial is abundantly less likely, given that an unpopular verdict could incite riots (Koon & Dietz, 1992). Consequentially, it seems the media have created a self-fulfilling perversion of the judicial system: the nature of the courts is conveyed as political and biased through the media lens; in turn, judicial decisions are forced to become political and biased in order to maintain citizen approval and legitimacy. In an effort to avoid the diminishing of its validity through sensationalized scrutiny, the court system effectively diminishes itself through the discontinuity of civil liberties.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, sensationalized rhetoric appears to weaken the validity of court decisions. In a study conducted by Johnston and Bartels (2010), it was found that “higher levels of exposure to sensationalist[...]media sources predict more negative attitudes toward the court” (p. 273). Utilizing two separate nationally representative datasets, the researchers tested consumer favorability toward the court system against sensationalized media exposure in a linear regression model. Far from banal, the findings

suggested that individuals who consume sensationalized stories about the courts were less favorable toward judicial decisions. Such a finding implies that “the declining long-term support [of the legal system] leaves the courts on shaky grounds in terms of their protection from fundamental alterations in the face of negatively viewed decisions” (p. 277). As that the court system possesses neither the power to appropriate nor sanction, it relies on the approval of the people to maintain legitimacy and enact policy. Thus, in the face of continued negative media attention, the validity of case decisions and the implementation of policy may see increased trepidation in future court proceedings (Rosenberg, 1991).

Justification for current study

Given that research which explicates media effects toward crime, minority representations, and policy understanding and support exist to such ample degree, it is surprising that little empirical work has been produced in an effort to understand media effects toward the courts. Though the criminal justice system has been investigated exhaustively, it appears that few other works exist to provide a robust demonstration of consumer perceptions toward the criminal court system. This study aims to address this gap. In an effort to further understand how the mass media affect viewer predilections, our research will attempt to bridge the chasm between media presentations of criminal justice and outcomes of favorability toward the courts.

While research provided within the literature review highlights the importance of race/ethnicity and media consumption to establish cultivation effects, these factors have only been utilized within a limited scope. This empirical work attempts to overcome two concerning limitations within previous cultivation research. First, this study employs data

that includes an oversample of Black and Hispanic/Latino respondents which will allow for a stronger comparison across race/ethnicity. Recent studies have presented compelling evidence that cultivation effects within minority members must be reconsidered; however, due to data limitations the prospective phenomenon of minority cultivation is widely debated.

Eschholz and associated (2002) have argued that Black consumer opinions of the criminal justice system may be so poor that media presentations would do little to persuade this consuming demographic (i.e., ‘the floor hypothesis’), and that subsequent testing of racial demographics in relation to cultivation may result in similar findings. Unequivocally, Callanan and Rosenberger (2011) found that no relationship existed between any media variable and Black or Hispanic confidence in law enforcement when a series of ordinary least squared regressions were disaggregated by race/ethnicity in a study which included a nationally representative sample of more than 3000 survey responses. However, recent scholarship confirms the importance of controlling for the socio-demographic factors of respondents; failure to do so may result in the overestimation of media effects (Callanan, 2012; Callanan & Rosenberger, 2015; Chiricos, Eschholz, & Gertz, 1997). In any case, scholars have heightened the imperative for studies which include the influence of media consumption on attitudes toward the criminal justice system to “simultaneously consider the influence of respondent characteristics,” (Rosenberger & Dierenfeldt, 2020, p. 8).

Second, cultivation research has predominately tested traditional media formats such as television, print media, and radio. While the academic community recognizes that profound transitions have been made in regard to media sources and consumption

preferences, appropriation of new-age media venues in cultivation research has admittedly been lethargic. Although new-age media sources represent some of the most utilized venues of news information content, lagging just behind television (e.g., representing the second and fourth most consumed sources nationally; see Shearer, 2018), cultivation research has only recently transitioned to include these variables. To provide a more robust approach toward contemporary media effects, this study will utilize traditional and new-age media to gauge whether favorability toward the court system is affected through consumption of the most commonly utilized media platforms.

Hypotheses

Traditionally, representations of the criminal justice system have been positive as that the media has most commonly received its information from law enforcement officials (Motschall & Cao, 2002). However, this trend appears to be less conclusive in relation to the courts, as that what little scholarship exists on the matter contends that the judicial arm of the criminal justice system is usually portrayed as slow, corrupt, and arbitrary through the media lens (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018; Beckett & Sasson, 2004; Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003; Jewkes, 2015). Given that the portrayals of the judicial system are presented in such a negative fashion, it is anticipated that:

Hypothesis 1: Television and televised media consumption will be negatively correlated with favorability toward the criminal courts.

Furthermore, scholarship contends that internet subject matter is likely too broad to produce any cultivation effects in relation to internet media consumption and attitudes

toward the criminal justice system (Intravia, Wolff, Paez, & Gibbs, 2017; Roche, Pickett, & Gertz, 2016). Similarly, it is speculated that:

Hypothesis 2: Hours spent toward internet consumption will not be significantly related to favorability toward the criminal courts.

Though research provides that there is no linear relationship between hours of internet consumption and criminal justice (Intravia, et al., 2017), Intravia, Wolff, and Piquero (2018) have suggested that consumption of social media platforms is associated with positive attitudes toward law enforcement. Given that the judicial system is often portrayed as a barrier toward effective policing within traditional media entertainment (Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003), it is argued that if law enforcement is positively related to social media consumption, then:

Hypothesis 3: Using social media as a daily news source will result in a negative relationship with favorability toward the criminal courts.

Previous works have garnered that minority member perceptions are not affected to the same degree as Whites by televised presentations of criminal justice (Eschholz, et al., 2002; Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011). Consequently, the study predicts that:

Hypothesis 4: The association between media consumption and favorability toward the criminal courts will be more significant for White consumers when the model is disaggregated by race/ethnicity.

Subsequently, the study asserts that:

Hypothesis 5: The association between media consumption and favorability toward the criminal courts will be less significant among Black consumers when the model is disaggregated by race/ethnicity.

Furthermore, it is expected that:

Hypothesis 6: The association between media consumption and favorability toward the criminal courts will be less significant among Hispanic/Latino consumers when the model is disaggregated by race/ethnicity.

Research contends that contemporary conservative and moderate news platforms explicate the need to curb crime in a punitive manner more prevalently than their left-leaning counterparts (Mitchell, et al., 2014). However, scholarship contests that within televised media, the criminal courts are often viewed as barriers between punitive policing and crime control. Thus, the study contends that:

Hypothesis 7: Favorability toward the criminal courts will result in a negative correlation between Republicans/Independents and media consumption when the model is disaggregated by party affiliation.

Lastly, literature provides that liberal news programming more commonly presents media stories which explicate the need to dispel excessive force and increase civil liberties in contrast to conservative news outlets (Mitchell, et al., 2014). Given that emphasis is often placed on adjudication rather than punitive force within these media venues, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 8: Favorability toward the criminal courts will result in a positive correlation between Democrats and media consumption when the model is disaggregated by party affiliation.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

The study will utilize a dataset collected by the Survey Research Lab in the Department of Sociology at Kent State University. The data is titled, “Attitudes toward Crime, Courts, and Law Enforcement,” and consists of 1500 responses which includes an oversample of non-white survey participants. From the respondents, 500 identified themselves as White, 500 identified themselves as Black, and 500 identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino. Survey questions are oriented toward consumer perceptions toward the judicial system, the police, punitive attitudes, fear of crime, and victimization; as well, the survey includes a battery of media exposure questions. Data collection was conducted between March 21 and April 8, 2016. The survey used non-full probability sampling from a national panel.

Participants for non-full probability sampling self-select themselves into a potential response category through a survey vendor. Members of the potential response category are contacted through email wherein the survey is conducted. This survey approach resulted in a response rate of 48% and includes a sampling method that is not a true random sample; however, research surmises that this approach produces data with demographic characteristics similar to traditional approaches of fully random sampling (Braunsberger, Wybenga, & Gates, 2007; Simmons & Bobo, 2015; Yeager, Krosnick, Chang, Javitz, Levendusky, Simpser, & Wang, 2011).

Dependent variables

To explore whether media effects drive consumer perceptions toward the criminal courts, this study includes the use of a single dependent variable. The survey question asks respondents, “What is your favorability toward the criminal courts?” The dependent variable utilizes a 10-point Likert scale where a respondent’s selection of 1 indicates that they are “unfavorable” to the criminal courts, and a selection of 10 indicates that they are “favorable” to the criminal courts.

Media variables

Previous cultivation studies have been admittedly limited in the scope of their research due to a lack of contemporary media variables which have become exceedingly prevalent within the context of society. This study includes traditional media variables related to cultivation theory while simultaneously including new-age media platforms. Thus, this study will include the following media variables: Crime Drama T.V. consumption, Crime Reality T.V. consumption, Fox News, CNN News, Television consumption, Facebook, Twitter, and Internet consumption.

“Crime Drama T.V.” consumption refers to the frequency of viewing dramatic crime fiction shows such as *American Crime Story*, *Breaking Bad*, *CSI*, and *NCIS*. “Crime Reality T.V.” consumption refers to the frequency of viewing realistic crime shows such as *Forensic Files*, *COPS*, *Unsolved Mysteries*, and *The First 48*. “Crime Drama T.V.” and “Crime Reality T.V.” are rated utilizing a 7-point Likert scale. A selection of 1 indicates that the respondent never watches television shows of this genre; a selection of 2 indicates consumption of less than once a month; a selection of 3

indicates consumption of once a month; a selection of 4 indicates consumption of two or three times a month; a selection of 5 indicates consumption of once a week; a selection of 6 indicates consumption of three to four times a week; lastly, a selection of 7 indicates daily consumption of this media genre.

The variables “Television” and “Internet” each rate a respondent’s use of either platform in hours per day. The “Television” variable asks respondents to gauge how many hours per day they spend watching television. The “Internet” variable asks respondents to gauge how many hours per day they spend on the internet. Fox News, CNN News, Facebook, and Twitter are all dichotomous variables which are specifically related to a respondent’s daily source of news media consumption. Each asks respondents whether the platform in question is utilized as a daily news source. A selection of 0 indicates that the respondent does not utilize the variable as daily news source; a selection of 1 indicates the use of the variable as the respondent’s daily news source.

Fear, crime, and victimization variables

Previous scholarship contests that direct experience with crime occurrence (Dowler & Sparks, 2008), law enforcement (Bradford, Jackson, & Stanko, 2009), and holding a high fear of crime (Dowler, 2003) affect cultivation parameters. Accounting for these individual experiences, three variables which categorize fear of crime, experience with crime and law enforcement, and victimization are present within this study. “Fear of Crime” is measured using a 10-point Likert scale to assess the degree of fear a respondent has toward the possibility of a crime event occurring. Responses range from ‘Not at all Fearful’ (0) to ‘Very fearful’ (10).

Experience with law enforcement, labeled as “Arrest,” is a dichotomous variable wherein respondents answer “No” (0) or “Yes” (1) as to whether the individual or a member within the immediate household has ever been arrested. Fear of victimization, labeled as “Victimization,” includes a combined six measures which assess respondents’ fear of victimization within their immediate neighborhood. The questions integrated into the variable ask: 1. “How likely is it that a home in your neighborhood will be broken into while the occupants are away?”; 2. “How likely is it that a home in your neighborhood will be broken into while the occupants are at home?”; 3. “How likely is it that someone in your neighborhood will be attacked by someone with a weapon?”; 4. “How likely is it that someone in your neighborhood will have their car stolen?”; 5. “How likely is it that someone in your neighborhood will be robbed or mugged?”; 6. “How likely is it that property in your neighborhood will be vandalized?”. Each question is measured used an eleven-item scale. An answer of “No” was recorded as 0; responses range from 1 to 10 and indicate an increase in the respondent’s feelings toward the likelihood of victimization. The total is then divided by ten to reflect the original measure.

Control variables

Ample work suggests that socio-demographic factors impact an individual’s attitude toward issues of criminal justice. Gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, household income, and party affiliation have been argued to alter an individual’s perception toward police, the criminal justice system, and crime and criminality. These control variables are utilized within the regression.

“Gender” has been coded as a dichotomous variable; 1 indicates the respondent is a “Male” and 0 indicates the respondent is a “Female.” “Age” ranges from 18 to 92; 18 was the minimum allotted age to participate in the study. “Race” has been categorized into dichotomous variables: “Black” (1 – 0), “Hispanic/Latino” (1 – 0), and “White” (1 – 0); a selection of 1 indicates that the respondent is a member of the prescribed race. “Education” was measured using a 5-point gradation scale, where respondents could select “Less than Highschool” (1) up to “Graduate of Professional Degree” (5). “Household Income” was measured using a twelve-point gradation scale which ranged from “Less than \$15,000/Yearly” (1) to “Greater than \$300,000/Yearly” (12). Party affiliation was coded into three separate dichotomous variables and provided selections of “Republican” (1 – 0), “Democrat” (1 – 0), and “Independent” (1 – 0); a selection of 1 indicates that the respondent is a member of the prescribed party.

Analytical approach

To establish whether news or entertainment media is significantly attributed to favorability toward the criminal courts, Ordinary Least Squared (OLS) regression is utilized. The study’s sample is then split across race/ethnicity to determine whether this association differs across White, Black, and Hispanic/Latino respondents. Lastly, the study’s sample is split across party affiliation to determine whether the association of media and favorability toward the criminal courts differs across Republican, Democrat, and Independent respondents. In order to appropriately compare across a split sample, the comparison of regression coefficients (COC) test as described by Paternoster, Brame,

Mazerolle, and Piquero (1998)¹ has been utilized. Paternoster's cohort (1998) argued that traditional Z-tests often favor rejection of the null hypothesis, thus leading to false positives. The comparison of regression coefficients test is uncompromisingly stringent and more adequately ensures the prevention of incorrect estimations.

¹ Equality of Regression Coefficients $Z = (b_1 - b_2) / \sqrt{(SEb_1^2 + SEb_2^2)}$

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Of the sample, Table 1 shows approximately thirty-four percent of respondents are White, thirty-three percent are Black, and thirty-three percent are Hispanic/Latino. Democrats (61%) make up the majority of the sample's political affiliation, while Republicans (17.4%) and Independents (22%) present moderate figures. Favorability toward the criminal courts is relatively high for the sample population (6.43 out of 10). However, favorability toward the criminal courts varies significantly across race as Table 1.1 shows, where Whites (6.71) and Latinos (6.70) have considerably higher favorability toward the courts than Blacks (5.87). Table 1.1 also provides that between parties, Republicans (7.14) present the highest favorability toward the courts as compared to Democrats (6.32) and Independents (6.41).

Of entertainment media, the population sample provides a mean of 3.82 in relation to Crime Drama T.V. consumption. As a whole, the sample watches crime dramas one to three times a month. The sample also provides a mean of 4.32 in relation to Crime Reality T.V. consumption. In aggregate, the sample consumes crime reality entertainment more often than crime drama television, watching crime reality between two and three times a month, up to once a week. When the sample is split across race and party affiliation, the mean of Crime Drama T.V. and Crime Reality T.V. is comparable to

the aggregate sample, where Blacks (3.68), Latinos (3.79), and Republicans (3.80) watch crime dramas more often than Democrats (3.65), but not as much as Whites (3.98) or Independents (4.13). In relation to Crime Reality T.V. viewing, Blacks (4.14), Latinos (4.29), and Democrats (4.18) consume crime reality shows similar to that of the aggregate sample, while Whites (4.51) and Independents (4.67) consume this crime genre considerably more often. Republicans (4.04) view crime reality programming less than any other demographic.

Thirty-four percent of the aggregate sample indicated that Fox News was a daily source of news information, with Whites (36%) and Latinos (36%) selecting that they consume the program in higher proportions than Blacks (31%). CNN News showed to house thirty-three percent of the aggregate sample as a daily news source, with Blacks (37%) selecting the program more than Whites (30%) or Latinos (32%). The sample indicated that on average, a respondent watches television 4.77 hours a day. When the sample is split, Blacks (5.74) and Democrats (5.27) showed to consume television considerably more than Whites (4.4), Latinos (4.24), Republicans (4.54), or Independents (4.21).

In relation to new-age media platforms, forty-one percent of the sample indicated the use of Facebook as a daily source of news information. Across race, Facebook was selected more frequently by Latinos (44%) and Whites (41%) as compared to Blacks (39%). Across party affiliation, Democrats (43%) and Republicans (41%) selected Facebook as a daily source of news information more frequently than Independents (37%). Only eighteen percent of the aggregate sample indicated Twitter as a source of daily news. Blacks (19%) and Latinos (19%) showed to utilize Twitter more frequently

than Whites (15%). Across party affiliation, Democrats (21%) utilize Twitter most commonly versus Republicans (16%) and Independents (16%). The aggregate sampled indicated daily Internet use to be 6.34 hours. Across race, Blacks (6.93) utilize internet the most compared to Latinos (6.22) and Whites (5.91). Across party lines, Democrats (6.51) and Independents (6.25) utilize the internet more often than Republicans (5.91).

Approximately forty-two percent of the sample is male. Across race, approximately forty-eight percent of White respondents are male, thirty-nine percent of Black respondents are male, and forty-five percent of Hispanic/Latino respondents are male. Across parties, approximately forty-two percent of Democrats are male, fifty-one percent of Republicans are male, and fifty percent of Independents are male. The mean age of the sample is 44.64. Age varies greatly between race and party affiliation, with Whites (48.35) being considerably older than Blacks (44.01) and Latinos (41.48); across parties, Republicans (48.42) are noticeably older than Democrats (44.71) and Independents (43.93).

The mean education of the sample is 3.35, indicating that respondents have an education level between some college and college completion (undergraduate). The mean does not widely vary across race or party affiliation, with Whites (3.31), Blacks (3.33), and Latinos (3.41) holding comparable levels of education. Similarly, Democrats (3.36), Republicans (3.41) and Independents (3.44) show to have comparable education levels.

The mean household income is 4.79, indicating that respondents make between \$35,000 and \$60,000 yearly. When split, the sample yields small variations across income, with Hispanics/Latinos (5.02) making more yearly than Whites (4.91) and

Blacks (4.45). Republicans (5.38) make more than Democrats (4.73) or Independents (4.70).

Table 1

Descriptive characteristics of the sample.

N = 1352

Variable	Description	Range	Mean	SD
<i>Dependent Variables</i>				
Criminal Courts	Favorability toward the Criminal Courts 1 = Unfavorable...10 = Very Favorable	1 – 10	6.430	2.544
<i>Media Variables</i>				
Crime Drama T.V.	Scale of viewing <i>American Crime Story</i> , <i>Breaking Bad</i> , <i>CSI</i> , and <i>NCIS</i> . 1 = Never, 2 = < Once a month, 3 = Once a month, 4 = Two or three times a month, 5 = Once a week, 6 = Three to Four times a week, 7 = Daily	1 – 7	3.820	2.007
Crime Reality T.V.	Scale of viewing <i>Forensic Files</i> , <i>COPS</i> , <i>Unsolved Mysteries</i> and <i>The First 48</i> . 1 = Never, 2 = < Once a month, 3 = Once a month, 4 = Two or three times a month, 5 = Once a week, 6 = Three to Four times a week, 7 = Daily	1 – 7	4.320	2.095
Fox News	Primary News Source 0 = No, 1 = Yes	0 – 1	.340	.475
CNN News	Primary News Source 0 = No, 1 = Yes	0 – 1	.330	.471
TV (Hours)	Consumption of TV in Hours 0 – 24 Hours/Day	0 – 24	4.770	3.879
Facebook	Primary News Source 0 = No, 1 = Yes	0 – 1	.410	.493
Twitter	Primary News Source 0 = No, 1 = Yes	0 – 1	.180	.384
Internet (Hours)	Consumption of internet in Hours 0 – 24 Hours/Day	0 – 24	6.340	4.253

Table 1 (Continued)

Variable	Description	Range	Mean	SD
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Gender	Male = 1, Female = 0	0 – 1	.424	.500
Age	Current Age of Respondent	18 – 92	44.640	16.077
Black	Black = 1, Other = 0	0 – 1	.331	.471
Latino	Latino = 1, Other = 0	0 – 1	.331	.471
White	White = 1, Other = 0	0 – 1	.337	.473
Education	1 = Less than Highschool, 2 = High School Graduate, 3 = Some College, 4 = College Graduate, 5 = Graduate or Professional Degree	1 – 5	3.350	1.007
Household Income	1 = < \$14,999, 2 = \$15-24,999, 3 = \$25-34,999, 4 = \$35-44,999, 5 = \$45-59,999, 6 = \$60-74,999, 7 = \$75-99,999, 8 = \$100-149,000, 9 = \$150-199,999, 10 = \$200-249,999, 11 = \$250-299,999, 12 = > \$300,000.	1 – 12	4.790	2.388
Democrat	Democrat = 1, Other = 0	0 – 1	.606	.500
Republican	Republican = 1, Other = 0	0 – 1	.174	.379
Independent	Independent = 1, Other = 0	0 – 1	.220	.414
<i>Experiential Variables</i>				
Fear of Crime	Fear that a crime will occur 0 = Not at all fearful... 10 = Very Fearful	0 – 10	3.200	2.776
Arrests in Household	Arrest of member in household	0 – 1	.021	.144
Victimization	Fear of Victimization in Locale 0 = No, 1-10 = Level of Crime Severity	0 – 10	2.066	1.583

Note: Abbreviation SD = Standard Deviation

From: "Attitudes Toward Crime, Courts, and Law Enforcement"— Social Research Lab, Kent State University; 2016

In aggregate, the sample produced a mean of 3.20 in relation to fear of crime,

indicating that respondents are not very fearful that crime will occur. The mean does not vary widely when split, though Whites (2.8) show to have the lowest fear of crime

compared to Blacks (3.3) and Latinos (3.5). Independents (2.86) are the least fearful of party affiliation when compared to Republicans (3.23) and Democrats (3.7).

The sample presents that slightly more than two percent of respondents have been arrested. Across race, Whites (3.2%) show to have been arrested the most compared to Blacks (1.6%) and Latinos (1.6%). Across party lines, Republicans (1.7%) and Democrats (1.6%) have been arrested the most while Independents (.09%) are the least arrested of the demographic. The sample produced a mean of 2.066 in relation to fear of victimization, with Whites (1.859) being less fearful of victimization than Blacks (2.192) or Latinos (2.066). Democrats (2.202) are the most fearful of victimization among party affiliations, while Republicans (1.936) and Independents (1.953) show to be slightly less fearful of victimization within their locale.

Table 2 presents a series of OLS regressions testing the relationship between selected media variables and favorability toward the criminal courts. Model 1 provides a regression of the socio-demographic controls in relation to favorability toward the courts. Perhaps unsurprising, the model provides that being “Black” ($p \leq .001$) is negatively related to one’s favorability toward the criminal court system. Opposite the relation of Blacks and the courts, “Education” ($p \leq .001$) shows to have a positive relationship with favorability toward the court system. Similarly, claiming “Republican” as one’s party affiliation shows to have a positive relationship with favorability toward the courts.

Model 2 regresses the socio-demographic controls and experiential variables. When accounting for individual experiences with law enforcement, victimization, and fear, the demographic variable “Black” slightly drops in significance while “Education” and “Republican” variables remain constant. The experiential variable “Arrest” shows to

be statistically significant in the sample; interestingly, individuals who have been arrested present a positive relationship with favorability toward the criminal court system.

Table 1.1

Descriptive characteristics of the sample disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity and Party Affiliation.

Variable	White Mean (SD)	Black Mean (SD)	Latino Mean (SD)	Democrat Mean (SD)	Republican Mean (SD)	Independent Mean (SD)
<i>Dependent Variables</i>						
Criminal Courts	6.710 (2.497)	5.870 (2.589)	6.700 (2.459)	6.320 (2.508)	7.140 (2.532)	6.410 (2.483)
<i>Media Variables</i>						
Crime Drama T.V.	3.980 (2.062)	3.680 (2.020)	3.790 (1.928)	3.650 (1.971)	3.800 (2.063)	4.130 (1.997)
Crime Reality T.V.	4.510 (2.109)	4.140 (2.110)	4.290 (2.054)	4.180 (2.102)	4.040 (2.091)	4.670 (2.044)
Fox News	.360 (.480)	.310 (.463)	.360 (.480)	.320 (.466)	.520 (.501)	.310 (.461)
CNN News	.300 (.461)	.370 (.484)	.320 (.468)	.390 (.487)	.300 (.459)	.280 (.450)
Television (Hours)	4.360 (3.490)	5.740 (4.134)	4.240 (3.835)	5.270 (4.186)	4.540 (3.619)	4.210 (3.471)
Facebook	.410 (.493)	.390 (.488)	.440 (.503)	.430 (.496)	.410 (.493)	.370 (.484)
Twitter	.150 (.362)	.190 (.395)	.190 (.395)	.210 (.405)	.160 (.363)	.160 (.371)
Internet (Hours)	5.910 (3.909)	6.930 (4.318)	6.220 (4.471)	6.510 (4.276)	5.910 (4.198)	6.250 (4.291)
<i>Control Variables</i>						
Gender	.482 (.500)	.394 (.489)	.447 (.497)	.420 (.494)	.507 (.501)	.497 (.501)
Age	48.350 (16.266)	44.010 (16.219)	41.480 (14.970)	44.710 (16.086)	48.420 (15.728)	43.930 (15.841)
Education	3.310 (1.051)	3.330 (.964)	3.410 (1.004)	3.360 (.994)	3.410 (1.044)	3.440 (.990)
Household Income	4.910 (2.520)	4.450 (2.308)	5.020 (2.292)	4.730 (2.321)	5.380 (2.299)	4.700 (2.536)
<i>Experiential Variables</i>						
Fear of Crime	2.844 (2.704)	3.265 (2.805)	3.514 (2.782)	3.400 (2.874)	3.165 (2.761)	2.865 (2.515)
Arrest	.032 (.175)	.016 (.126)	.016 (.152)	.026 (.160)	.031 (.172)	.009 (.095)
Victimization	1.859 (1.516)	2.192 (1.673)	2.066 (1.543)	2.202 (1.649)	1.936 (1.573)	1.953 (1.422)

Note: Abbreviation SD = Standard Deviation

From: "Attitudes Toward Crime, Courts, and Law Enforcement"—Social Research Lab, Kent State University; 2016

Model 3 regresses the socio-demographic controls and experiential variables with media sources added to the model. Within the full model, the variable “Black” ($p \leq .001$) increases in significance while the variables “Education” and “Republican” remain constant. The variable “Arrest” drops significance as media sources are added to the model. There were no significant relationships found among media variables when the sample population remains in aggregate.

Table 2

OLS regression of favorability toward the criminal courts.

***N* = 1352**

Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Control Variables</i>	<i>Control Variables</i>	<i>Control Variables</i>
Male .233 (.143)	Male .267 (.150)	Male .159 (.156)
Age .006 (.005)	Age .006 (.005)	Age .007 (.005)
Black -.620 (.179)***	Black -.568 (.189)**	Black -.683 (.198)***
Latino .076 (.164)	Latino .110 (.181)	Latino .088 (.186)
Education .256 (.076)***	Education .309 (.079)***	Education .313 (.083)***
Income -.002 (.032)	Income -.030 (.034)	Income -.047 (.035)
Republican .559 (.189)**	Republican .556 (.194)**	Republican .531 (.203)**
<i>Constant</i> 5.307***	<i>Experiential Variables</i>	<i>Experiential Variables</i>
<i>R</i>² .044	Fear .027 (.040)	Fear -.001 (.042)
	Arrest 1.121 (.481)*	Arrest .473 (.558)
	Victim -.009 (.007)	Victim -.011 (.007)
	<i>Constant</i> 5.361***	<i>Media Variables</i>
	<i>R</i>² .054	Crime Drama .077 (.047)
		Crime Reality .038 (.046)
		Fox News .259 (.167)
		CNN News .283 (.169)
		T.V. (Hours) .014 (.024)
		Facebook -.025 (.171)
		Twitter .342 (.212)
		Internet -.003 (.021)
		<i>Constant</i> 5.659***
		<i>R</i>² .073

Note: Standard Errors in parentheses.

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$

Table 3

OLS Regression of favorability toward the criminal courts disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity.
 Paternoster's et al., (1998) comparison of regression coefficients is included within the model.

<i>N</i> = 1352	White (<i>n</i> = 459)	W vs. B	Black (<i>n</i> = 444)	B vs. L	Latino (<i>n</i> = 449)	W vs. L
Control Variables						
Paternoster's et al., (1998) COC Test (One-Tailed: <i>Z</i> = 1.645)						
Male	-.303 (.250)	-1.594	.322 (.302)	0.662	.440 (.267)	-2.031
Age	.008 (.009)	-0.074	.009 (.010)	0.707	.011 (.010)	-0.223
Education	.179 (.128)	-1.255	.442 (.166)**	0.645	.286 (.140)*	-0.564
Income	.066 (.051)	1.120	-.031 (.070)	0.663	-.233 (.062)***	3.724
Republican	.163 (.267)	-1.500	1.343 (.740)	0.400	.532 (.322)	-0.088
Experiential Variables						
Fear	.104 (.071)	1.569	-.058 (.075)	0.687	-.034 (.071)	1.374
Arrest	-.332 (.800)	-1.108	1.123 (1.042)	0.624	1.211 (1.119)	-1.122
Victim	-.032 (.012)**	-1.187	-.011 (.013)	0.707	.009 (.013)	-2.317
Media Variables						
Crime Drama T.V.	.081 (.074)	0.929	.190 (.091)*	0.660	.044 (.080)	1.147
Crime Reality T.V.	.146 (.075)*	1.968	-.083 (.089)	-0.630	.006 (.074)	1.442
Fox News	.635 (.271)**	1.755	-.097 (.317)	0.658	.247 (.277)	1.001
CNN News	.320 (.275)	-0.063	.582 (.311)	0.677	-.063 (.286)	0.965
Television (Hours)	-.013 (.043)	-0.526	.019 (.043)	0.690	.031 (.041)	-0.740
Facebook	-.775 (.279)**	-1.243	-.238 (.330)	0.646	.837 (.279)**	-4.086
Twitter	1.011 (.376)**	1.645	.131 (.381)	0.669	-.006 (.343)	1.998
Internet (Hours)	-.062 (.034)	-2.258	.060 (.042)	0.648	.025 (.034)	-1.809
Constant	7.003***		4.087***		5.128***	
R²	.151		.102		.095	

Note: Standard Errors in parentheses

Note: *W* = White; *B* = Black; *L* = Latino

p* ≤ 0.05; *p* ≤ 0.01; ****p* ≤ 0.001

Table 3 displays the results of an OLS regression testing the association between selected media variables and favorability toward the criminal courts across race/ethnicity. Between each column display are the results of Paternoster's et al., (1998) comparison of regression coefficients test. An emboldened *Z*-score represents a statistically significant variance across race/ethnicity. Only the results found significant by the comparison of regression coefficients test are explained, as that failure to reach the base one-tailed score

($Z = 1.645$) between race/ethnicity demographics indicates that there are no significant differences across the split sample.

Of the control variables, high earning Hispanics/Latinos have a significantly stronger negative association toward the criminal courts when compared to Whites ($p. \leq .001$; $Z = 3.724$). This was the only statistically significant control variable presented across race/ethnicity as that the comparison of regression coefficients test found no significant differences across “Black Education” or “Hispanic/Latino Education” when comparing across split sample. Of the experiential variables, White victims of crime showed to have a significantly stronger negative association toward the criminal courts when compared to Hispanic/Latino victims of crime ($b = -.032$; $Z = -2.317$).

Racial and ethnic differences were substantial when looking at the association between media consumption and favorability toward the criminal courts. Watching “Crime Reality T.V.” is positively associated to favorability toward the criminal courts for White viewers when compared to Black viewers of crime reality shows. Using “Fox News” as a source of daily news is also positively associated to favorability toward the courts for Whites when compared to Blacks. Using “Facebook” as a daily news source presented a very strong association between White and Hispanic/Latino users ($Z = -4.086$). For Whites, Facebook resulted in a negative association with favorability toward the criminal courts; Facebook use for Latinos, however, resulted in a positive association with the criminal courts. When used as a daily source of news for Whites, Twitter presented a significant positive association toward the criminal courts when compared to Black and Hispanic/Latino Twitter users.

Table 4 displays the results of an OLS regression testing the association between media variables and favorability toward the criminal courts across political party affiliation. Between each column display are the results of Paternoster's *et al.*, (1998) comparison of regression coefficients test. An emboldened Z-score represents a statistically significant variance across party affiliation. Only the results found significant by the comparison of regression coefficients test are explained, as that failure to reach the base one-tailed score ($Z = 1.645$) between party demographics indicates that there are no significant differences across the split sample.

Of the socio-demographic controls, Black Democrats showed to have a significantly stronger negative relationship toward the courts versus Black Republicans ($p. \leq .001$; $Z = 2.224$) and Black Independents ($p. \leq .001$; $Z = -2.234$). Hispanic/Latino Independents presented a positive relationship toward the criminal courts when compared to Hispanic/Latino Democrats and Hispanic/Latino Republicans. "Education" among Democrats failed to meet statistical variance across the split sample when the comparison of regression coefficients test was applied. In relation to the experiential variables, Republicans presented a positive relationship between the criminal courts and "Fear of Crime" compared to both Democrats and Independents. Of the selected media variables, only "Internet" presented a significant relationship between party affiliation and the criminal courts. More hours spent on the internet presented a negative relationship between Republicans and the criminal courts when compared to Democrats and Independents.

Table 4

OLS Regression of favorability toward the criminal courts disaggregated by party affiliation. Paternoster's et al., (1998) comparison of regression coefficients is included within the model.

N = 1233	Republican (246)	R vs. D	Democrat (697)	D vs. I	Independent (290)	R vs. I
<i>Control Variables</i>			Paternoster's et al., (1998) COC Test (One-Tailed: Z = 1.645)			
Male	.263 (.364)	0.532	.175 (.215)	0.675	-.109 (.362)	0.725
Age	-.002 (.013)	-0.745	.009 (.007)	0.007	.009 (.013)	-0.598
Black	.531 (.745)	2.224	-1.230 (.268)***	-2.234	.111 (.537)	0.457
Latino	-.095 (.367)	0.658	-.404 (.293)	-2.587	.889 (.405)*	-1.800
Education	.182 (.178)	-0.297	.245 (.116)*	0.314	.170 (.209)	0.044
Income	-.005 (.079)	0.404	-.043 (.051)	0.882	-.123 (.075)	0.002
<i>Experiential Variables</i>						
Fear	.206 (.102)*	2.328	-.066 (.057)	0.244	-.096 (.109)	2.023
Arrest	-.769 (1.191)	-1.175	.862 (.714)	1.307	-1.738 (1.857)	0.439
Victimization	-.024 (.018)	-1.068	.002 (.010)	0.047	-.003 (.019)	-0.802
<i>Media Variables</i>						
Crime Drama T.V.	.024 (.104)	0.485	.084 (.067)	0.057	.013 (.105)	0.074
Crime Reality T.V.	.009 (.103)	0.531	.074 (.066)	-1.693	-.136 (.105)	0.986
Fox News	.100 (.367)	-0.424	.286 (.241)	-0.333	.434 (.373)	-0.638
CNN News	-.006 (.397)	-0.893	.377 (.225)	0.358	.218 (.399)	-0.397
Television (Hours)	.005 (.056)	-0.338	.027 (.033)	0.655	-.019 (.062)	0.287
Facebook	.631 (.381)	1.493	-.043 (.242)	0.577	-.430 (.394)	1.936
Twitter	.188 (.547)	-0.116	.259 (.277)	0.017	.571 (.511)	-0.512
Internet (Hours)	-.099 (.046)*	-1.875	.005 (.031)	2.415	.035 (.049)	1.994
<i>Constant</i>	7.746***		6.291***		5.291***	
<i>R²</i>	.089		.091		.077	
<i>Note: Standard Errors in parentheses.</i>						
<i>Note: R = Republican; D = Democrat; I = Independent</i>			<i>*p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01; ***p ≤ 0.001</i>			

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION & LIMITATIONS

Several general limitations within existing cultivation literature have been overcome within the current study. First, utilizing data which oversampled Blacks and Hispanics/Latinos provided for an in-depth comparison across race/ethnicity. This form of research is seldom undertaken within the realm of media studies, primarily due to the inherent limitations of nationally representative data sets. This study is also one of very few to encapsulate both traditional and new-age media measures to assess the role of cultivation and consumer perceptions toward the criminal courts. Additionally, the study entailed represents the only known work to explain the relationship between the cultivation of viewer attitudes and the criminal court system, and the first to evaluate this association across race/ethnicity.

As well, this research also included comparisons across political party affiliation, an important demographic control to incorporate when considering individual perceptions between the court system and media influence (see Johnston & Bartels, 2010; Roche, Pickett, & Gertz, 2016). Dissimilar to Johnston White and Bartels (2010), this work finds that there are statistical differences between Republicans and Democrats/Independents in their perceptions of the courts when analyzed in the aggregate sample (Democrats and Independents were the excluded groups). When selected as the mediating variable however, party affiliation showed little difference between favorability toward the criminal courts and media exposure, with the exception of internet use.

The results suggest that *Hypothesis 1* is simply not supported. Analysis from the aggregate sample found no statistical relationships between television or televised media consumption and the dependent variable. This is not surprising however, as that media presentations of crime tend to have a greater impact on White viewers than minority members (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011; Dowler & Zawilski, 2007; Eschholz et al., 2002; Rosenberger & Dierenfeldt, 2020). As that there is an oversample of Black and Hispanic/Latino respondents, White consumer cultivation within the aggregate sample has been handily suppressed.

When the sample is split across race however, televised media consumption is positively related to consumer favorability toward the courts. This finding is specifically present among White media consumers, where “Crime Reality T.V.” and “Fox News” consumption resulted in higher levels of favorability toward the criminal courts in relation to Black consumers. Some scholars have argued that crime reality programming (such as *Forensic Files*, *Cold Case Files*, *The First 48*, *Unsolved Mysteries*, and *COPS*) incorporates aspects of perceived realism in comparison to other forms of crime-related programs, thus influencing audience perceptions of crime and criminal justice to a greater degree (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2015; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010; Potter, 1986; Surette, 2007)

In contrast to traditional media portrayals of an often corrupt and lethargic judicial system as described within the literature review, the study suggests that televised media exposure leads to positive evaluations of the criminal courts. This is particularly the case for White Fox News consumers, wherein positive evaluations of the criminal courts are strongly associated with the media variable when compared to Blacks ($b = .635$; $Z =$

1.755). As that Rosenberger and Dierenfeldt (2020, p. 18) suggest, “[Fox News] is known for an extremely punitive and pro-policing approach to the criminal justice system.”

Thus, it is entirely plausible that positively presented depictions of a punitive criminal justice system subsequently promulgate positive evaluations toward the criminal courts.

With the exception of Republican internet use, the results provide support for *Hypothesis 2*, as hours spent toward internet consumption were not significantly related with favorability toward the criminal courts in the aggregate sample or when split across race. These findings remain in line with previous scholarship (see Intravia, Wolff, & Piquero, 2017; Roche, Pickett, & Gertz, 2016; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004); thus, cultivation theory may not be entirely supported in the context of internet exposure, or simply “the internet may be related to the public’s opinions on crime and justice in different ways than traditional media outlets” (Roche, Pickett, & Gertz, 2016, p. 232). As well, scholars largely recognize the sublimity that is the internet; the messages an internet consumer is exposed to are widely varying and without precise message-oriented internet media questions, it appears difficult to quantify any connection between the internet consumer and crime-related messages. The current study found a significant negative relationship between internet use and favorability toward the criminal courts among Republicans when the sample was split across party affiliation. Theoretically, two primary causes assist to explicate this finding, as detailed below.

First, as reasoned within their study, Roche, Pickett, & Gertz (2016, p. 227) stated that when comparing subsamples of the population, “given the number of models estimated, one would expect to identify some statistically significant relationships simply by chance.” However, it is entirely possible that heavy internet use among Republicans

reduces favorability toward the criminal court system. Second, based on their overview of the differential reception thesis (Carragee, 1990; Eschholz, et al., 2003; Fiske, 1986; Gunter, 1987; Perse, Ferguson, & McLeod, 1994), Roche, Pickett, & Gertz (2016) argue that consistent media messages may impact certain subgroups of respondents differently in relation to others, stating that “media messages [may have] dissimilar effects on persons depending on their backgrounds, experiences, and social environments” (p. 226). Given this, due to distinct ideologies largely shared among political subgroups, it is possible that consistently portrayed messages on the internet may have a compounding effect. Confoundingly, Roche, Pickett, & Gertz (2016) find similar, though inconsequential, statistical findings in their own work in relation to media exposure and political affiliation, thus the researchers argue for an expansion of differential reception research based upon an “ideology hypothesis” (p. 231) which may assist to “suggest that political ideology may be the primary audience trait that moderates the relationship between Internet news and attitudes [toward the criminal justice system]” (p. 231).

Furthermore, stories of police misconduct or wrongdoing are circulated heavily throughout the internet. The significant relationship of Republicans and heavy internet use may be associated with an increased awareness of especially high-profile reports of police brutality. Traditional media presentations of police wrongdoing have been associated with negative attitudes toward law enforcement (Jefferis, Kaminski, Holmes, & Hanley, 1997; Lasley, 1994; Weitzer, 2002). With this knowledge, it appears reasonable to theorize that heavy circulation of improper policing throughout the internet may result in negative attitudes toward the criminal justice system, thus reducing favorability toward the criminal courts as a reverberating effect. Moreover, as that

Republicans (7.746) hold the highest favorability toward the criminal courts as compared to Democrats and Independents when all independent variables are accounted for, it seems prescient that such high favorability would be reduced from the portrayals of police misconduct in circulation on the internet.

The findings of the study suggest that *Hypothesis 3* is partially supported. The models indicate that consumption of Facebook as a daily source of news is negatively associated with White consumers and positively associated with Hispanic/Latino consumers when compared utilizing Paternoster's et al., (1998) comparison of regression coefficients test. Even when controlling for political ideology, which gratuitously affects news and advertisement selections for consumers on social media platforms (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015), the relationship still exists across the split sample. Furthermore, Twitter shows to be positively associated with White consumers when compared with Blacks and Hispanics/Latinos; a similarly intriguing finding given that political ideology has been controlled for within the model.

A positive association between social media and the criminal courts is not entirely surprising, however. Intravia, Wolff, and Piquero (2018) found that heavy social media use increases consumer confidence in law enforcement officials. With this understanding—tangent to the theoretical interpretation garnered in relation to the positive relationship found between White consumers and Fox News programming—a positive association between media exposure and the criminal courts may “reflect a general positivity toward the police in the types of news circulated on [social media]” (Rosenberger & Dierenfeldt, 2020 p. 19); that is, media messages which increase police perceptions among a consuming audience may have similar effects toward the courts.

Subsequent of differential reception research, scholars within the field of communication and mass media communications have long recognized “that [media consumers] are subjects as well as objects and that they actively participate in the construction of meaning of [media] messages” (Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003, p. 396). Within this subset of communication research, social scientists have brought about four widely researched hypotheses which have been developed to explain “audience traits or circumstances that could inform the relationship between [media] and [the dependent variable]” (p. 396). The differential reception hypothesis includes: substitution, resonance, vulnerability, and affinity.

In association with differential reception research, the vulnerability hypothesis as expanded upon by Skogan and Maxfield (1981), contends that “[certain individuals] would be more responsive to media messages about crime, in part because of their presumed greater vulnerability to the possibility of victimization. In effect, the vulnerability position seems to argue that vulnerability leads to fear, which increases one’s attentiveness to media representations of crime” (Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003, p. 397). In this study, a significant negative relationship was found for Whites who consume Facebook as a daily news source ($b = -.774$; $p. \leq .01$) when compared against Hispanic/Latinos but not Blacks. This may be due, in part, to the use of Facebook as a platform for protestation among millions of Black Americans seeking racial equality and increased civil liberties under the banner of Black Lives Matter (BLM).

Resultant of Facebook’s use as a public forum for protestation and Black collaboration, White Facebook consumers may have felt vulnerable during periods of high insurrection and increased police/protestor violence. From 2013 to 2016, tens of

thousands of protests occurred, with 2016 experiencing the largest number of BLM protests, and violent riots, to date (Turan, 2021). Frequent protestation was subsequent from police killings of unarmed Black men and women such as Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Darren Wilson, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Meagan Hockaday, Deborah Danner, and Alton Sterling. Subsequent public access to Facebook's livestream platform, millions of consumers were given the opportunity to watch large-scale Black protests in Baltimore, Maryland following the police killing of Freddie Gray, and in Oxnard, California, following the police killing of Meagan Hockaday (Davis, 2016). Later in July of 2016, Facebook Live was used to video the murder of Philando Castile, an unarmed Black man shot by Minnesota Police Officer, Jeronimo Yanez while Castile's four-year-old daughter and fiancée, Diamond Reynolds were in the vehicle.

While Blacks have been historically accustomed to vulnerability within the United States, White Facebook consumers may have felt unusually vulnerable during periods of mass protestation, leading to a reduction in their evaluations of the courts due to external pressures that weigh on their sense of moral permanence within the criminal justice system. Brought about from widespread unrest and civil disobedience as consistently portrayed within Facebook news media, White consumers may have been dissimilarly affected as compared to Blacks and Hispanics/Latinos within the consuming populace (Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003; Gerbner, *et al.*, 1980; Roche, Pickett, & Gertz, 2016). Indeed, White media consumers likely experience divergent effects when consuming media messages consistent among all audiences (Callanan, 2012; Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011; Chiricos, Eschholz, & Gertz, 1997; Eschholz, 1997; Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003).

Moving forward, this study's research provides insights toward media effects on race congruent with previous literature (Eschholz, et al., 2002; Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003), that Whites are affected by the media to a higher degree than other race/ethnicity demographics. In support of *Hypothesis 4, 5, and 6*, the model presents that White evaluations toward the criminal courts are influenced significantly more through media presentations than are Black or Hispanic/Latino evaluations of the court system. Eschholz, Chiricos, and Gertz (2003) argue that White evaluations of criminal justice may be more enriched through media presentations because the demographic largely lacks direct experience with the criminal justice system. As a response to the lack of real-world experience, White media consumers form indirect understandings of the criminal justice system through the media lens, and thus uptake evaluations toward the criminal courts in relation to media presentations of punitive law enforcement.

Polarized reasoning can be stated for the lack of significant findings between minority members and media presentations toward the criminal justice system. Minority members have been argued to have more direct experience with law enforcement and criminal justice (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011), and thus are not influenced by media presentations to the same degree as Whites. In fact, this study found no statistically significant findings among Black media consumers when compared across the split sample using Paternoster's et al., (1998) coefficients test. Unsurprisingly, Blacks may hold significantly different evaluations of crime through the media lens as compared to Whites (Dowler & Zawilski, 2007; Eschholz, et al., 2002; Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003; Gerbner, et al., 1980; Roche, Pickett, & Gertz, 2016).

Further, scholars recognize that traditional media presentations of crime do little to affect minority groups as that they are more likely to have direct experience with law enforcement and are thus more likely to maintain negative opinions about the criminal justice system (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011; Eschholz, et al., 2002). Subsequent of such direct experiences, this study's lack of findings among minority members may be indicative of their poor opinions toward the criminal justice system. Known as the 'floor effect' (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011; Eschholz, et al., 2002), scholars hypothesize that "the media do not have any effect on [minority] viewers' attitudes because their opinions of the [criminal justice system] are extremely low" (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2001, p. 182).

Still, the study did present significant findings related to Hispanic/Latino respondents in relation to new-age media platforms. Though, across traditional media venues there were no significant effects. Such a finding between Hispanic/Latino respondents' evaluations of the criminal courts and Facebook is somewhat unsurprising, however, as that nearly 75% of Hispanic/Latino Americans utilize social media platforms as a daily source of news (Pew, 2018). Given that social media news feed algorithms greatly affect which topics certain demographics consume (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015), it is reasonable to predict that, even when political affiliation is accounted for within the model, homogenizing ideology-driven information is consistently displayed among the Hispanic/Latino audience, thus driving evaluations toward a certain issue, e.g., the criminal courts.

Finally, the study's findings provide that *Hypothesis 7* and *Hypothesis 8* largely remain in question. Few significant results were found when the sample was split across

party affiliation among any media venue; however, some interesting insights remain to be discussed. First, the only statistically significant finding to result from the disaggregation of party affiliation was Republican use of the internet, rated in hours. Tangent to the argument made from Roche, Pickett, and Gertz's (2016) analyses, this finding may indicate that party affiliation acts as a moderating variable between the individual and internet media exposure. Thus, party affiliation may dictate the consumer's "choice of websites, their selection of content on those sites, and their reception and retention of criminal justice information from that content" (p. 231).

Second, while failing to meet the prescribed standard of statistical significance ($p \leq .05$), valuable insights were made toward new-age media consumption and the courts when party affiliation acted as the mediating variable. Specifically, Republican use of Facebook as a daily news source was nearing statistical significance within the model ($p \leq .09$) and is shown to be statistically different in comparison to Independents ($Z = 1.936$) and nearly approaches statistical significance compared to Democrats ($Z = 1.493$) when Paternoster's et al., (1998) comparison of regression coefficients test is utilized. A limitation of the study, these findings point toward the need to specifically ask "respondents specific content-related questions regarding media usage (i.e., how much respondents are exposed to stories and news reports about [criminal justice])" (Intravia, Wolff, & Piquero, 2018, p. 977), rather than soliciting time spent consuming online content or simply promulgating social media news platforms into dichotomous variables.

Despite its contribution to cultivation literature, the current study suffers from limitations that oblige discussion. First, the dependent variable, "How favorable are you toward the criminal courts?" is very broad. The measure provides no indication to how

participants should answer the question in relation to their personal or political proclivities. While it was found that respondent favorability toward the criminal courts was positively associated with Fox News, a network known for its extremely punitive approach to criminal justice (see Mills, 2017), it is theoretically plausible that respondents with opposing viewpoints would solicit similar responses to the dependent variable. Simply, respondents consuming conservative media sources could feel strongly toward the criminal courts as that they believe them to be in line with punitive criminal justice; on the other hand, some respondents who consume progressive forms of media may feel strongly toward the criminal courts as that they believe them to be in line with ideals of rehabilitation and lenience (Mitchell, et al., 2016). In short, the dependent variable lacks a qualifying marker (e.g., “How favorable are you toward *punitive* criminal courts?”) that would assist respondents to gauge their evaluations of the courts more appropriately. This appears to be a legitimate discrepancy within the study, as that based on previous literature of the penal system, scholarship suggests that a positive linear relationship exists between punitive criminal justice preferences and media exposure (Rosenberger & Callanan, 2011).

Furthermore, the measure utilized to test internet consumption on favorability toward the criminal courts is too broad. Within the study, internet consumption is measured as the number of hours respondents spend online per day. As a result, the variable provides neither an explication of how respondents are spending their time on the internet nor gives insight into what content they choose to consume. Though previous literature has found a relationship between television consumption measured in hours per day and perceptions toward the criminal justice system, the internet may be too

substantial to cultivate homogenizing preferences among internet consumers. While television content is produced by a small number of media organizations (Cooper, 2005), the internet remains a largely decentralized platform wherein consumers have immense autonomy to select an unlimited number of resources to peruse.

In addition, though the data utilized in this study is unique due to an oversample of minority respondents that allowed for comparisons across race/ethnicity, it is not a nationally representative sample. Thus, the findings within the study cannot be generalized among the population at large. Future research in relation to evaluations toward aspects of the American court system would benefit from nationally representative data.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The limitations notwithstanding, the results from the current study highlight that in contrast to the ways in which traditional media venues historically depict the judiciary—a corrupt appendage of the criminal justice system which provides undue safe haven to ruthless criminals and acts as a barrier to effective policing—televised media presentations of crime and criminal justice show to have an overall positive association with individual evaluations toward the criminal courts. As well, new-age media platforms present similar findings, providing that perceptions toward the courts are largely positive among consumers using Facebook and Twitter as daily news sources. Though an exception to this finding exists among White Facebook consumers, it seems plausible that this anomaly acts as a statistical snapshot in time; a quantitative insight into a tumultuous and long overdue turning point in the history of the United States which subsequently spurred immense feelings of vulnerability within the White community, a demographic that otherwise shows to have positive evaluations of the criminal courts.

Moreover, the current study further solidifies the way that race/ethnicity mediates the association between media and the criminal justice system. The findings suggest that certain media venues, specifically Crime Reality T.V., Fox News, Facebook, and Twitter, are associated with evaluations toward the criminal courts differently when split across racial divides. Within this work, it is found that Whites are more likely to be affected by these venues when compared to minority respondents. Indeed, this finding underscores

the imperative for research to continue assessing media consumption and perceptions of the criminal justice system that includes the preponderance of racial/ethnic characteristics within the sample.

Finally, the study finds that internet consumption is negatively associated with favorability toward the criminal courts among Republicans when the sample is split across party affiliation. As well, marginal support is found among Republicans' use of Facebook even when compared against Independent Facebook consumers. This suggests that new-age media platforms may be cultivating homogenous preferences among consumers and that political ideology moderates this perceived relationship. If so, further exploration and an expansion of the differential reception hypothesis may be needed to account for these plausible occurrences.

APPENDIX A.
SURVEY QUESTIONS

Items from the 2016 Center for Social Research Lab; Kent State University

Favorability toward the Criminal Courts

Dependent Variables:

COURT1: *“On a scale from 1 – 10, with 1 being unfavorable and 10 being favorable, how favorable are you toward the criminal courts?”*

1. *Unfavorable*
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. *Somewhat Favorable*
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
10. *Favorable*

Media Variables:

Media 9, Crime Drama Television:

“How often do you consume crime dramas like American Crime Story, Better Call Saul, Breaking Bad, Orange is the New Black, Criminal Minds, NCIS, CSI, and Law and Order: SVU?”

1. *Never*
2. *Less than once a month.*
3. *Once a month.*
4. *Two or three times a month.*

5. *Once or twice a week.*
6. *Three to four times a week.*
7. *Daily*

Media 8, Crime Reality Television:

“How often do you consume crime-reality television shows like Forensic Files, Cold Case Files, The First 48, Unsolved Mysteries, and COPS?”

1. *Never*
2. *Less than once a month*
3. *Once a month*
4. *Two or three times a month.*
5. *Once or twice a week*
6. *Three to four times a week.*
7. *Daily*

MEDIA 10_1, Fox News:

“Which of the following do you watch as a source of daily news? (select all that apply)”

1. *Yes, Respondent selected this response*
2. *No, Respondent did not select this response.*

MEDIA 10_2, CNN News:

“Which of the following do you watch as a source of daily news? (select all that apply)”

1. *Yes, Respondent selected this response*
2. *No, Respondent did not select this response.*

Media 7_3, Facebook:

“Which of the following do you watch as a source of daily news? (select all that apply)”

1. *Yes, Respondent selected this response*
2. *No, Respondent did not select this response.*

Media 7_6, Twitter:

“Which of the following do you watch as a source of daily news? (select all that apply)”

- 1. Yes, Respondent selected this response*
- 2. No, Respondent did not select this response.*

MEDIA 2, Television:

“On an average day, how many hours do you watch T.V.?”

Number of Hours _____.

MEDIA 1, Internet:

“On an average day, how many hours do you spend on the internet?”

Number of Hours _____.

Demographic, Ideology, and Individual Experience Variables:

GENDER: *“What is your gender?”*

- 0. Female*
- 1. Male*
- 2. Other*

AGE: *“Are you 18 years of age or older?” “What is your age in years?”*

Please state your age _____.

RACE: *“What race do you consider yourself to be?”*

- 1. White*
- 2. Black/African American*
- 3. Hispanic/Latino*

Respondent answers were separated into dichotomous variables.

EDUC, Education: *“Which of the following best describes your education?”*

- 1. Less than High School*

2. *High School Graduate*
3. *Some College or Technical School*
4. *College Graduate*
5. *Graduate or Professional Degree*

HINC, Household Income: “*Below are some income categories. Please choose the category that best describes the total annual income of the household. Please include your personal income, as well as the income of others living in the household.*”

1. *Less than \$14,999.*
2. *Between \$15,000 and \$24,999.*
3. *Between \$25,000 and \$34,999.*
4. *Between \$35,000 and \$44,999.*
5. *Between \$45,000 and \$59,999.*
6. *Between \$60,000 and \$74,999.*
7. *Between \$75,000 and \$99,999.*
8. *Between \$100,000 and \$149,999.*
9. *Between \$150,000 and \$199,999.*
10. *Between \$200,000 and \$249,999.*
11. *Between \$250,000 and \$299,999.*
12. *Above \$300,000.*

VOTE6: “*What is your Party Affiliation?*”

1. *Democrat*
2. *Republican*
3. *Independent*
4. *Other: Please Specify _____.*

Respondent answers were separated into dichotomous variables.

Fear of Crime:

*“For the next set of questions, please rate how fearful you are that certain crimes will happen to you. **On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 equals not at all fearful and 10 equals very fearful...**”*

- FER_1** *How fearful are you that your home will be broken into while you are away?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*
- FER_2** *How fearful are you that your home will be broken into while you are at home?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*
- FER_3** *How fearful are you that you will be attacked by someone with a weapon?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*
- FER_4** *How fearful are you that you will be raped or sexually assaulted?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*
- FER_5** *How fearful are you that your car will be stolen?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*
- FER_6** *How fearful are you that you will be robbed or mugged?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*
- FER_7** *How fearful are you that your property will be vandalized?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*
- FER_8** *How fearful are you for the safety of your loved ones (i.e. spouse, partner, children, or other family members)?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*

Arrest:

*“Have you **ever** been arrested by the police?”*

1. *Yes*
2. *No.*

8. *Don't Know*

9. *No Answer*

Victimization:

“The next questions ask you about how you feel about crime in your neighborhood. Using a scale of one to ten, where one equals not at all likely and ten equals very likely, please rate the likelihood that the crime will happen in your neighborhood.”

[QUESTIONS FOR VIC_1 TO VIC_7 ARE ASKED IN RANDOM ORDER]

VIC_1 *How likely is it that a home in your neighborhood will be broken into while the occupants are away?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*

VIC_2 *How likely is it that a home in your neighborhood will be broken into while the occupants are at home?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*

VIC_3 *How likely is it that someone in your neighborhood will be attacked by someone with a weapon?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*

VIC_4 *How likely is it that someone in your neighborhood will be raped or sexually assaulted?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*

VIC_5 *How likely is it that someone in your neighborhood will have their car stolen?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*

VIC_6 *How likely is it that someone in your neighborhood will be robbed or mugged?*
 98. *Don't know*
 99. *No Answer*

VIC_7 *How likely is it that property in your neighborhood will be vandalized?*
 98. *Don't know*

No Answer

End.

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